

## America's First Ski Book

"Any skidor, novice or expert, will tell you that skeeing is the most exhilarating, most fascinating, most healthful and most delightful of all winter sports," wrote Theo Johnsen.

Johnsen was a carpenter and a boatbuilder. When he married a Swede, he learned about skiing. He shifted his Portland based boat company over to making skis. The problem was, not many people skied. To promote the sport, and his company, he wrote "The Winter Sport of Skeeing." Published in Portland, Maine in 1905 this was the first ski book in North America. This book taught people what the sport was, how to dress for it and how to do it. Of course, he included a catalog of his equipment.

Johnsen made beautiful, and expensive, skis. The problem was that not enough people wanted to ski or spend money on expensive skis. A few years later, in 1914, Martin Strand, another ski maker, wrote "The average young American is a sort of hot house plant, who does not care to spend much time out of doors, as the cheap show houses and pool rooms seem to be more attractive. They do not want to spend enough money on a pair of skis so that cheap skis are the only ones that have sold in any quantity in this country."

Theo Johnsen was a few decades early, his business folded after just a few years. But his legacy laid the foundation for the sport.

The Ski Museum of Maine has a "Made In Maine" exhibit which includes a wonderful collection of Theo Johnsen artifacts. We have the original book as well as some of the copper plates used to print it. We have salesman's samples, 18" models of his skis. If you were in Salt Lake, Minneapolis, or any other city, you could look at the catalog, look at the model and decide what you wanted. Johnsen would then ship you the skis. We also have in our exhibit the only known intact pair of his skis, or skees as Johnsen would have said.

"As the experienced skidor dashes down the crusted hillsides with the speed of the wind, there comes to the sport an added exhilaration and excitement that positively knows no equal," wrote Johnsen.

Theo Johnsen may not have been a good businessman, but he had a passion for the sport of skeeing.