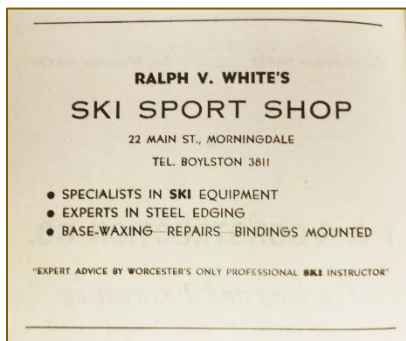


JENNY FLAGG HILL

By
Gordon Hastings

Yes, indeed there was a Jennie Flagg! More to follow...

Ralph White owned Ralph White's Ski Shop on Main Street in Morningdale, a section in the southerly part of Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts. It seemed odd because Boylston was far from being seen as a skiing mecca in the 1940s and 50s. Ralph was indeed a skiing pioneer in Worcester County. My family did ski on at the old Stark Farm on Green Street but on a very limited basis. Long wooden skis with leather straps to hold a pair of overshoes was the extent of the equipment.



SKI SHOP ADVERTISEMENT
In "The Victory Revue -1946"
BHSM Archives Collection

On a fall day in 1952 my father and I visited Ralph White's Shop to upgrade my skis and boots when we heard the unimaginable news. "They are building a ski tow on Jenny Flagg Hill," announced Ralph White. "So that's what's going on there," Dad said. He drove by the Central Street site every day on his way to work.

The Worcester Ski Club was indeed constructing a rope ski tow on Jenny Flagg Hill which rose up 625 feet from Central Street just east of Rocky Pond Road on Longley Hill. Under the leadership of Ski Club President Evelyn Burns on August 14, 1950 the club purchased the land upon which the ski area was being developed from Raymond Fuller. The land was part of the former James Longley farm and was used as pasturage. This accounts for the fact that the intended wide ski slope facing north was relatively clear of trees.

A power house containing a V-8 gasoline engine and a gigantic pulley mechanism was installed in a building mounted atop cement pillars at the crest of the hill. The remnants of the old engine house remain to this day. Easiest access to view the relic is to walk in moving north from Stiles Road.



JENNY FLAGG HILL SKI TOW MECHANISM FROM THE 1950S

*The equipment was housed in a wooden building mounted on cement posts and contained a V-8 engine as the power source.
Photograph Courtesy of Howard Drobner*

The three-inch rope tow line was constructed on the east side of the slope using utility poles with pulleys along the tops. In addition, flood lights were installed on the poles in anticipation of night skiing. The thick rope was threaded along the pole top pulleys, around the flywheel in the engine house then completing a loop at a large pulley mounted in cement at the base of the lift line.

While the tow was being constructed a warming hut was built atop a sharp upward incline facing the ski slope. It was sparse indeed containing only two wood stoves and a long bench facing the hill. I recall that in the 1950s, heavy snow winters in Boylston began around Thanksgiving with frequent big storms through the end of March. The ski tow began operation during the winter of 1952.

WHO WAS JENNIE FLAGG?

Jennie Lind Flagg, the eighth of nine children born to Levi Lincoln Flagg and Caroline Elizabeth Barnes, was born 9 May 1859 at Boylston, Massachusetts. She never married. For most of her life, she had resided on the Flagg farm in Boylston. In later years, she went to live in Shrewsbury with her niece Viola Stewart and Viola's husband Hiram Harlow. Jennie, died on 26 February 1951 in Worcester at the age of 81 years. Jennie Flagg was interred in the Levi L. Flagg family lot in section #3 of Pine Grove Cemetery in Boylston.

On April 30, 1909 the Estate of her father Levi Lincoln Flagg represented by executors Arthur and Walter Flagg both of Boylston transferred the property to their sister, Jennie Flagg, who later in 1938 at age 78 years sold the land to a Raymond Fuller. Fuller sold the acreage 12 years later in 1950 to The Worcester Ski Club. Thus, the *Jenny Flagg Hill Ski Area* was born. Yes, the Ski Area's namesake was indeed a member of a large Boylston family.



JENNIE LIND FLAGG
(1859-1951)

*Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc.
Photograph Collection #1976.119.13*

Worcester Ski Club

Evelyn Burns as its president headed the Worcester Ski Club and was instrumental not only in creating but in operating Jenny Flagg Hill. I recall her arriving with cash box in hand and stapling a tow ticket to my wool jacket. To the best of my recall, children were charged fifty cents and adults a dollar. The area operated a regular schedule on Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Night skiing was sporadic depending who from the Worcester Ski Club was available to put the lights on and climb to the top to start the engine. There was no snow making or slope grooming equipment. After a frequent big snow storm volunteers, myself included, would line up across the base of the hill and side step their skis to the very top packing the snow into a smooth skiable surface.

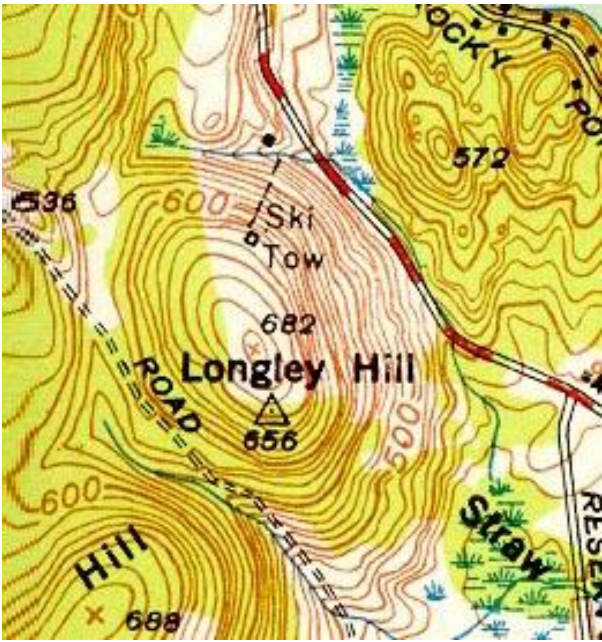
And so it was, Boylston had its own ski slope, rope tow and all. You skied down to the base of the tow line, reached for the heavy rope, grabbed hold and were yanked forward at a rapid clip on your way to the top. For the timid there was a half way drop off. If the person ahead of you fell down you had to let the rope slip through your clenched hands, waiting until they got out of the way!



BOYLSTON'S JENNY FLAGG HILL EVENT
The Evening Gazette
Friday February 21, 1958

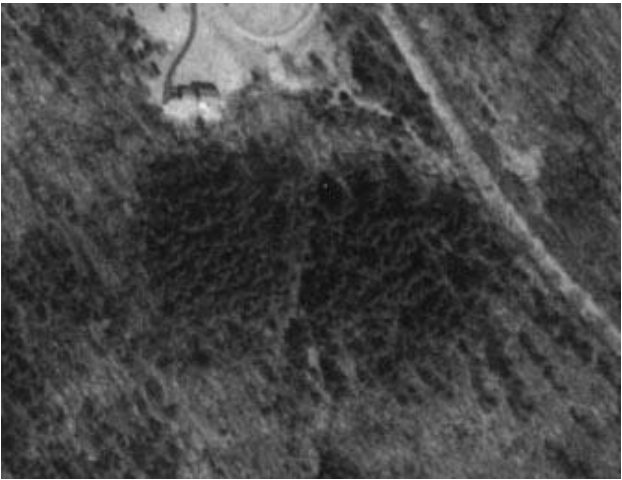
There were never any lift lines. Even on a busy Sunday there were less than 100 skiers and there was no concession or rest rooms. Skiers brought their own coffee. The slope was used mostly by Worcester Ski Club Members. However, Boylston folks that I recall skiing at Jenny Flagg Hill were Ralph White, Nancy and Bob Jarvis and Alden Brandt.

Jenny Flagg Hill operated until the late 1950s. Like many long forgotten local rope tows, it succumbed to larger more sophisticated areas with newly advanced T-Bar, J- Bar and chair lifts. By the end of the decade, brush was reclaiming the slope, the warming hut decaying in disrepair and the engine house reverted to a rusting hulk.



TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP DEPICTING THE
JENNY FLAGG SKI TOW
1950

Located on the northern slope of Longley Hill, Boylston



Aerial Photograph showing remainder of old ski trail
through the wood line just below the cul-de-sac.
2025

Central Street is to the right.

WHO CURRENTLY OWNS JENNY FLAGG HILL?

On April 23, 1963, Evelyn Burns purchased the property from the Worcester Ski Club with an agreement that the property, buildings and equipment would be sold. In an ironic twist the 14.8-acres formerly known as Jenny Flagg Hill, as of August 22, 2011 is owned by the Town of Boylston.

On a personal note, thanks to my learning to ski at Jenny Flagg Hill, three generations of Hastings children are all accomplished in the sport. If you or someone you remember skied Jenny Flagg Hill in Boylston, please share your experience with me at ghhbcast@gmail.com .

Acknowledgements

Ancestry.com
Advertisement for White Ski Shop, Archives Collection, “The Victory Revue -1946”, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, MA.
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Ski Area Photographs by Howard Drobner, Boylston, Massachusetts