

The
Tip
of the
Mitt
Journal



FEBRUARY 2024

‘Bump Jump’ing history

Among the many names for the one-runner sled,
Petoskey holds “bump jumper” dear

by **Richard A. Wiles**

Brought to you by



Newspapers, community photos, genealogical research at www.gwood.us



'Bump Jump'ing history

Among the many names for the one-runner sled, Petoskey holds "bump jumper" dear

By Richard A. Wiles

The use of a man-made sled to move over snow has a long history in North America. The first ones were made of animal hide, bone and wood. The most likely use of such sleds was to provide a means of transportation for humans or for hunted game and/or goods. Eventually, people started using sleds for leisure activities such as sliding down hills or racing. One of the earliest sleds was the wooden toboggan invented in 1860. By the late 1800s, sleds were popular as children's toys and what was once made individually by



Flexible Flyer

"The sled that steers"

Look for this trade mark



On every sled

LANDIS & CO.

45 N. Third Street,

PHILADELPHIA

National Archives

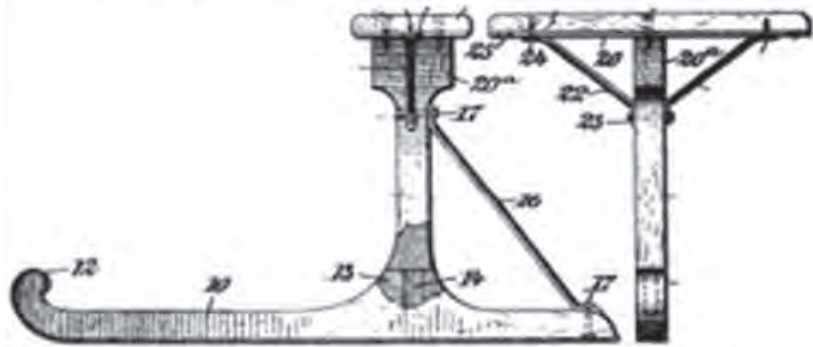
craftsmen became mass-produced. These sleds tended to be made of wood with two or three metal runners. However, the most daring of sleds to ride was and is the one-runner device with a seat known as a snow bike, jack jumper or bump jumper.

The exact origin of the one-runner snow sled is unknown. It has been suggested that French-Canadian loggers in the Green Mountains of Vermont in the mid-1800s invented primitive jack jumps as a mode of winter transportation. Others claim the origin was by loggers in Europe where they were known as skiboks. What is known is that the first patent for a type of bump jumper in the United States was issued to Warren F. Clark and Peter T. Perrault of North Adams, Massachusetts, in August of 1904. They registered their device using the name "coasting device." Warren was 18 years old and Peter only 10 years old. Warren was the son of a weaver and Peter the son of a shoemaker.

The name the two young men gave their invention was "snow bike." It was made of wood with a single runner, a stem and an attached seat. It was nothing different from other snow jumpers of the time period. They, however, were the first to patent the design. What made their design unique was the metal reinforcing bar from the wooden stem to the wooden runner and the two-metal grip bars from the wooden seat to the stem. These were bolted on, not nailed. The stem was morticed into the runner.

Local newspaper accounts of the device quoted the two inventors as saying "In the use of our device, which

768,977. COASTING DEVICE. WARREN F. CLARK and PETER T. PERRAULT, North Adams, Mass. Filed Feb. 23, 1904. Serial No 194,699. (No model)



Claim.—1. In a coasting device, the combination with a runner, of a standard rising therefrom, a seat carried upon the upper end of the standard, and a reinforcing-bar interposed between the standard and seat.

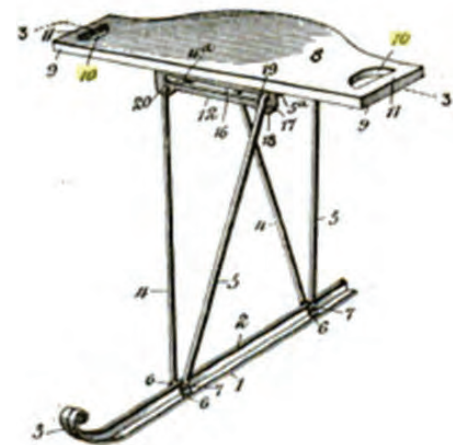
2. In a coasting device, the combination with a runner, of a standard rising therefrom, a seat carried upon the upper end of the standard, a reinforcing-bar interposed between the standard and seat, braces fixed to the standard and contacting with the under side of the bar, and securing means extending through the brace and bar into the seat.

3. In a coasting device, the combination with a runner, of a standard rising therefrom, a seat carried upon the upper end of the standard, a longitudinal reinforcing-bar secured to the under side of the seat, and a grip-bar fastened near each end of said seat.

1904 Coasting Device, U.S. Patent Office

is commonly called a snow bike, one places himself upon the seat and, grasping both ends, raises the feet from the ground and slides along the runner, maintaining a balance in a vertical position. It will be seen that it is unnecessary during the coasting to apply the feet to the ground, and therefore the wear and tear upon children's shoes is largely saved."

Soon following the publication of the Massachusetts snow bike in a newspaper, the mention of a "Vermont skipper" in the March 15, 1905, edition of the St. Johnsbury, Vermont, newspaper, the Caledonian. According to the article "... this snow sled device



1914 Coasting Device, U.S. Patent Office

has a single steel runner two inches in width, a quarter of an inch thickness and three feet in length, attached to a board 6 x 14 inches by two iron braces. The whole thing is about the height of

4 - Bump Jumping history



Vermont Skipper, Vermont Historical Society

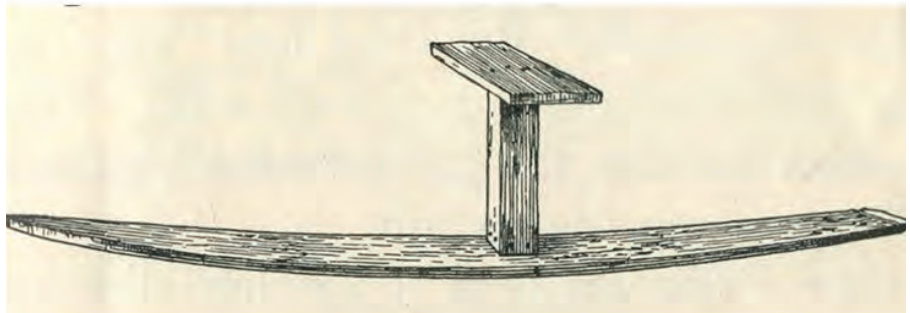
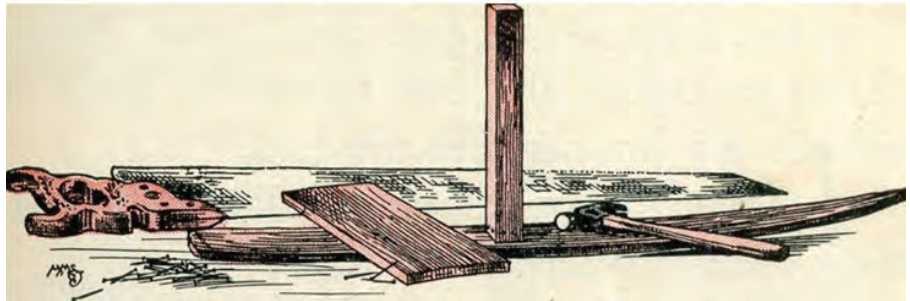
a milking stool . . . balancing oneself is in much the same manner as the bicycle rider maintaining his balance.”

By the year 1905, New England had given the world the terms “snow bike” and “Vermont skipper” as names for a one-runner snow sled. The first United States patent for a coasting sled had been issued in 1887 to Samuel Leeds Allen of Philadelphia. He soon improved his design and offered the famous Flexible Flyer sled that could be easily steered. Children’s coasting sleds had been in existence for many years prior to his patent, though none were steerable. Allen invented his snow sled for the benefit of his children and not for profit. He was an inventor by heart, though his occupation was a salesman.

The next patented one-runner sled was awarded to William Jansen Roche in May of 1914. Roche was a manager of a farm implement company in Meadville, Pennsylvania, which was located in the northwestern part of the state near Lake Erie. It was an area known for its heavy winter snowfalls. Roche’s patent listed his invention as a coaster sled. It was comprised of a single runner with legs attached and hinged



Walter C. Pritchard of the W.C. Pritchard Co.. Photos courtesy of Adams Grist Mill Museum, Vermont



Barrel stave jack jumper, image courtesy of Peter & Polly 1914

to a seat so that the legs could collapse. That made it easier to transport. It featured two holes in the seat for fingers to grip, making it easier to hold onto while sledding down the hill.

It is not known whether Mr. Roche actually manufactured his coaster sled in any quantity. What is known that while Walter Pritchard of Adams,

Massachusetts, certainly did not invent the design for a jack jumper, he did manufacture them for over 40 years at his factory, the Walter Pritchard Company. He was a blacksmith by trade and built his snow sled out of wood with a metal strap attached to the bottom of the wooden runner. The January 2020 issue of Vermont Country Magazine carried an article titled

United Press
Full Lined Wire
Service

The Petoskey Evening News

Weather
Much colder tonight.

VOL. 47, NO. 198

PETOSKEY, MICHIGAN, WEDNESDAY, FEB. 3, 1928

PRICE THREE CENTS

WINTER CARNIVAL OPENS TOMORROW

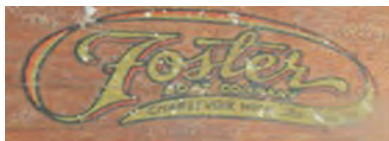
“Innovations and Inventions Both On and Off the Slopes” in which it stated Pritchard hand-made the devices from 1915 until 1953 when he sold his business. He shipped them all over the United States.

Pritchard’s device had a wooden runner (with metal strap) of 31 inches with a seat height of 18 ½ inches. The seat was also made of wood 18 inches long with a 6- to 8-inch width. Whether these snow sleds were called skiboks, coaster sleds, skip jacks, snow scooters, snow jumpers, jack jumpers, ski bobs, skippers or bump jumpers, they were common as children’s toys by the 1920s in snowy areas such as Vermont, New York and Michigan.

Former *Petoskey News-Review* editor Jim Doherty wrote in his Feb. 16, 1976, weekly column titled “Looking ‘Em Over,” that he had received a letter from a gentleman in Massachusetts with a sketch of what he said was a 1906 Vermont scooter. It had the same dimensions of similarly named snow sleds. The man wrote, “When I read a recent article in Ford Times about Petoskey’s winter carnival bump jumping contests, it reminded me back to when I lived on a small farm in Concord, Vermont. I did some bump jumping using (a device shown in) the attached sketch. When the local general store had an empty flour or sugar wooden barrel, we kids split it up into individ-



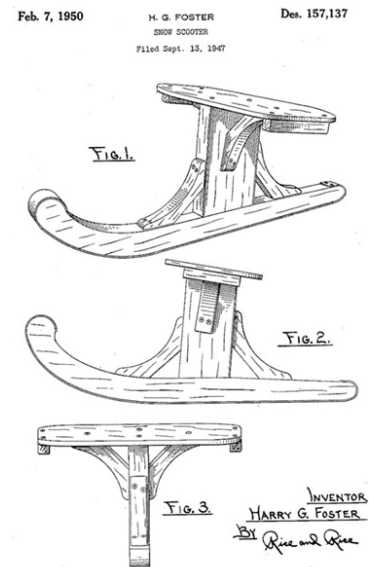
1949 Petoskey bump jumper. Photos courtesy of Little Traverse Museum



Foster Boat Company bump jumper. Photos, image courtesy of Charlevoix Historical Society

ual staves, assembled it by nailing the pieces together. We sanded the bottom smooth and tried to make it slippery. It was light and worked fine on crusted snow or following deep tracks.”

The first public mention of any type of a one-runner snow sled in the Tip of



the Mitt area came in relationship to the annual Petoskey Winter Carnival. It originated in February of 1927 as a downtown merchants’ winter promotion of the city. They formed

40 Compete in National Bumper Races



NATIONAL BUMPER CONTEST champs. Left to right: Marvin Mulholland, junior downhill; David Mathews, bantam obstacle; Gary Shanley, junior obstacle and Alan Wright, who was in a tie with Mulholland in junior downhill. (News-Review photo by Jim Doherty)

Bump jumping coverage from the Feb. 4, 1957 Petoskey News-Review



NATIONAL CHAMP — Gary Shanley, Petoskey, rides over a bump in yesterday's bump jumping contest. He beat out the field in the junior division obstacle contest.

(News-Review photo by Jim Doherty)

the Petoskey Winter Club and called their first annual event the Petoskey Winter Sport Carnival. The first year's events took place within the downtown section of the city, as well as what was known then as the City Park (later renamed the Petoskey Winter Sports Park). The idea for a winter carnival had come from Houghton, Michigan, in the Upper Peninsula where Michigan Technological University (then the Michigan Mining School) students had organized a carnival in 1922. It quickly grew into a large event and so did the Petoskey Winter Carnival.

By 1932, the fifth annual Winter Sports Carnival attracted thousands of people, including the Governor of Michigan. The first mention of a one-runner snow sled in the Petoskey area came during the 1933 sixth annual winter event. The Emmet County Graphic's Feb. 2, 1933, issue mentioned that a "one-runner jumper" contest would take place at 2 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 3, the first day of the three-day carnival. How they got to Petoskey has long been debated. Some have contended that these sleds came from Frankfort, Michigan, that year. Some contend that a blacksmith from Frankfort had been making them for several years to be used by local youths. He had several extra ones in 1933 and brought them to Petoskey to exhibit and sell.

However, according to Enoch Giles, who was the owner of Petoskey's Giles Restaurant in the 1960s, the first one-runner snow sled to ap-

pear in town came from East Jordan in the 1920s. He told reporter Ken Bakewell in the Feb. 10, 1972, Petoskey News-Review that “. . . one-runner sleds were the big winter sport of East Jordan kids in the valley behind the high school . . . it was Bill Parks Jr., son of Dr. William Parks, who was the first one to have a one-runner sled in Petoskey in 1927. Rex Crawford also had one in 1929. I had one and so did my brother in 1930 . . .”

The term “one-runner jumper” was used to describe the unique sled in Petoskey’s carnivals from 1933 until 1940. That was the year a newspaper description of a racing contest called it a “snow jumper sled.” In 1941 through 1948, the term used to describe the racing contest was simply “jumper riding.” Finally, contrary to what many have believed, the 1949 winter carnival was the first time the name “bump jumper” was used and documented. This term, unique to Petoskey, has stayed.

The first known commercially produced Petoskey bump jumper came after World War II. Foster Boat Works out of Charlevoix, Michigan, added bump jumpers to its manufacturing line-up sometime during that era. Their bump jumper had a 26-inch runner with an attached metal strap. The 7-inch wide seat was 13 inches from the runner. It is not known when the Foster Boat Company began marketing their snow sleds as bump jumpers, however, Harry Foster, owner of the company, took out a patent in February of 1950.

The origin of the bump jumper term being exclusive to Petoskey came in the

late 1940s with the addition of small bumps made out of packed snow at various spots on the hillside course at the Winter Sports Park. The bumps added to the thrill of the experience and also made riding the snow sled more challenging. One of Petoskey’s most skilled bump jumpers, Guy Wagar, was quoted in a November 1991 Snow Country article as saying, “You’ve got to hold onto the seat and use your feet as out-riggers to help keep your balance. You can achieve maximum speed by leaning back to cut wind resistance and leaning in to bank turns.”

What Wagar failed to mention was the number of back problems that resulted from those who were frequent users of the sled. Petoskey chiropractor Grant Born received many patients who had bump jumped!

Petoskey’s Winter Sports Park held its first National Bump Jumper contest in February of 1957. The event was organized by Petoskey city recreation director Don Huddle in his first year on the job. Forty contestants entered the various contests such as the Downhill Speed Run, the Bantam Class and Junior Class Run and an Open Class Run. The course was quite tricky, and 11 riders were not able to stay on their sled until the finish line.

The course set up for the first National Bump Jumpers Contest contained several small snow hills and one large one that sent the rider up into the air as much as 25 feet. It was quite dangerous so, within a few years, it had to be removed due to insurance liability. Some 67 riders participated in the 1958 competition. In 1959, the race course

included slalom gates much like in downhill skiing contests.

Over the years, beginning with the 1904 coasting device patent issued to the two boys in Massachusetts, some 40 or more patents were taken out by various individuals. These patents contained such names as snow scooter, jack jumper, coaster sled, ski sit, skip jack, and snow skipper. No patent was ever issued for a device called bump jumper. A trademark was issued in 1977 to a person in Petoskey who used Bump Jumper, Inc., while a copyright protects original works of authorship, such as literary, musical and artistic works. And, a patent gives the holder the right to exclude others from making, using or selling a particular invention without the inventor’s consent. The trademark is a “word, phrase, symbol and/or design that identifies and distinguishes a source of a particular set of goods from another.”

Petoskey’s winter bump jumping contest continued off and on throughout the years and is still held today during the annual Winter Carnival in February.



Courtesy of Little Traverse History Museum