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## Joseph B. Ryan

Born: 1906 Died: 1950

Information Submitted by J.H. Carruthers, Chairman,  
Historical Committee

*The founder of the Mount Tremblant Ski Area, Joe Ryan lived only 12 years of his dream, but Tremblant stands as a living monument to his vision.*

Joe Ryan first saw the view from atop Mount Tremblant by chance. As Lowell Thomas told it, "Lowell, Jr. and I had been skiing down at St. Sauver and had heard of even better fun up at a place called Greyrocks in Ste. Jovite.

"There we met the Wheelers, Harry and Tom, who owned the inn and Tom agreed to fly us over to Lac Tremblant so we could climb Tremblant on skis. A young fellow named Joe Ryan overheard our conversation and asked if there was room for him to come along.

Thus it was in February 1938, that Joe Ryan stood atop of Mt. Tremblant on an unbelievably beautiful sunny day. Rime shimmered on the branches of trees and below lay the rounded hills and frozen lakes of the Laurentians. It must have struck Joe Ryan at that moment that he had found what he had been aimlessly searching for through his adult life.

Others had seen the same view and knew the mountain was ideal for alpine skiing for it was from this same summit that members of the Red Bird Ski Club of McGill University in Montreal had run the first Quebec Kandahar down a ranger's trail to the frozen lake below in March of 1932.

However, Joe had something at that moment that others did not; he suddenly saw in reality the intangible he had long been seeking. Joe had the personal wealth to gamble on his plans and visions and he had the aggressive drive and business acumen of his grandfather, Thomas Fortune Ryan, who had amassed a fortune two generations earlier in Philadelphia.

The rest of the Ryan story is well documented history. Acquiring title was complicated by the fact a portion of the land was Crown Land and Provincial Park property. This entailed trips to Montreal and Ottawa and when Ryan's proposals met resistance with officialdom, a staunch ally came forward in the form of Father Hector Deslauriers, the Curé of the Village of Lac Mercier now known as Mount Tremblant.

The good father cited the depressed economic situation of the area. Working men of families were without work or livelihood. This plea along with character assurances from Wall Street financier Ben Smith as to Joe's integrity and personal wealth convinced a skeptical officialdom to give their blessing to the venture.

In October 1938, a scant eight months since Joe Ryan stood atop Tremblant with Lowell Thomas, ground was broken. It is not known whether the good Pere Deslauriers or Joe Ryan laid down the priority in hiring. Married men with families, first; married men without families, next; and then single men and boys. By the end, nearly the entire village of Lac Mercier was flailing away to clear timber for the ski runs. United States Steel designed the erection of the first chairlift in Canada.

A ski area strictly by itself can be a rather bleak place without some definite focal point or base station. Ryan corrected this by creating a typical French Canadian Village at the base. Since he was starting from scratch, the village could have symmetry and grace. In all, over 90 buildings went up.

Thus Ryan with his newly acquired wife Mary, who was to live the Tremblant dream with him, started a search for a church whose architecture would fit the new village. The search ended on L'Isle D'Orleans in the St. Lawrence River, one of the earliest French settlements in Canada. The ideal church was photographed, sketched, and reproduced perfectly right down to its hand hewn pine pews, in the new ski village. Fittingly, Father Deslauries became pastor of what became La Chapelle du St. Bernard at the foot of Mount Tremblant.

When the dust finally died down, runs like the Flying Mile, the Kanahar, Taschereau and the Nansen were a reality along with a network of connecting trails. Mount Tremblant officially opened in 1939 to the great pride and satisfaction of everyone who had seen the dream to reality.

In 1948, when the north of the mountain was opened, Lowell Thomas was there for the event and Ryan remembered the first day they both stood atop Tremblant ten years earlier. A new trail was christened on the north face of the mountain – The Lowell Thomas Run.

Joseph B. Ryan was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1977.



*Joseph Ryan with his wife Mary*