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## John Jay

Born: 1915 Died: 2000

Information submitted by Otto Lang in a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame

*John Jay was the great, great, great grandson of John Jay, Secretary of State under George Washington, who later become the first Chief of Justice. His contribution to the popularity of skiing has been immense and unique. Through his films, he has been heard and seen by millions of skiers and many non-skiers and potential converts, holding their attention, bewitched and captivated by his commentary.*

Already, while a young student at St. Paul's John requisitioned the family's movie camera to demonstrate graphically to his parents, why he preferred to spend his spring vacation skiing instead of coming home. He figured, if one still picture was worth a hundred words, a moving picture would speak for itself even more eloquently. Out of this labor of love, emerged his first commercial venture, a film commissioned by the Canadian Pacific Railroad Co., entitled SKIS OVER SKOKI. It featured the spectacular winter scenery of the Canadian Rocky Mountains near Banff and some of the most exciting skiing action sequences seen, with white plumes of fluffy powder snow billowing in the wake of speeding skiers.

Buoyed by the success of his first film ever made, he put into work a more ambitious project and while still at Williams produced and photographed a film called SKI THE AMERICAS. It covered the skiing scene of both North and South America and again contained spectacular action footage, as rarely seen before. Released during the winter of 1939/40, this film proved to be a great success and an innovative form of entertainment by using as a theme the virgin snowfields and slick race courses, populated by skiers of both sexes and all ages.

With the outbreak of World War II, John enlisted with the newly formed 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division of the U.S. Army, as a member of the Intelligence Branch. According to John, they looked upon their skis as "torture boards" and implements invented by the devil himself. Fortunately, John was joined by a small but very select group of Swiss, Austrian and American ski instructors and racers. They were the cream of the crop and became an inspiration to John. From here on he was "hooked" on this sport and would leave an indelible imprint on skiing in America.

At first he produced a number of training films, beginning with how to put on one's ski boots, hold the poles and wax the skis, before going into the more intricate maneuvers of how to make those dammed things turn and more important, how to stop. It provided John with a wealth of experience and an insight into the hilarious situations arising from a bunch of city slickers and southern country boys learning the finer points of this sport.

After rising in rank from buck private to Major, he was commissioned to write the official history of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, which had covered itself with glory and honor during those final convulsions of World War II. These skier-soldiers were instrumental in spearheading the advance of the Allied forces and beat back the crack mountain troops of their Nazi enemies from their own heavily fortified mountain strongholds. John Jay was in the midst of it as a faithful and eminently qualified historian of all these events. Many of these brave ski troopers lost their lives. Some were badly wounded and others returned home unscathed. John was one of them and ready to start a career in civilian life. His experience in filming gained through his stint with the 10<sup>th</sup> and the pictures he made before, while still in college, came in very propitiously

John Jay films packed auditoriums. People laughed so hard that it hurt. Tears rolled down cheeks and the audience howled. It was truly a "happening" and John built a lifetime career out of it. Year after year he came up with a new show covering the world with his Bell & Howell Eymo camera, in search of new scenic vistas of extraordinary beauty, new ski resorts, the "beautiful people" with their extravagant attire, comedy situations, the drama of downhill and slalom racing and some of the most breathtaking images of jumpers soaring off one of those giant ski-flying hills in Europe. All this laced with delightfully dry and spicy New England humor.

He has written innumerable articles for magazines and published books. One of them: *Ski Down the Years* is a classic.

John Jay was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1981.

