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## Asario Autio

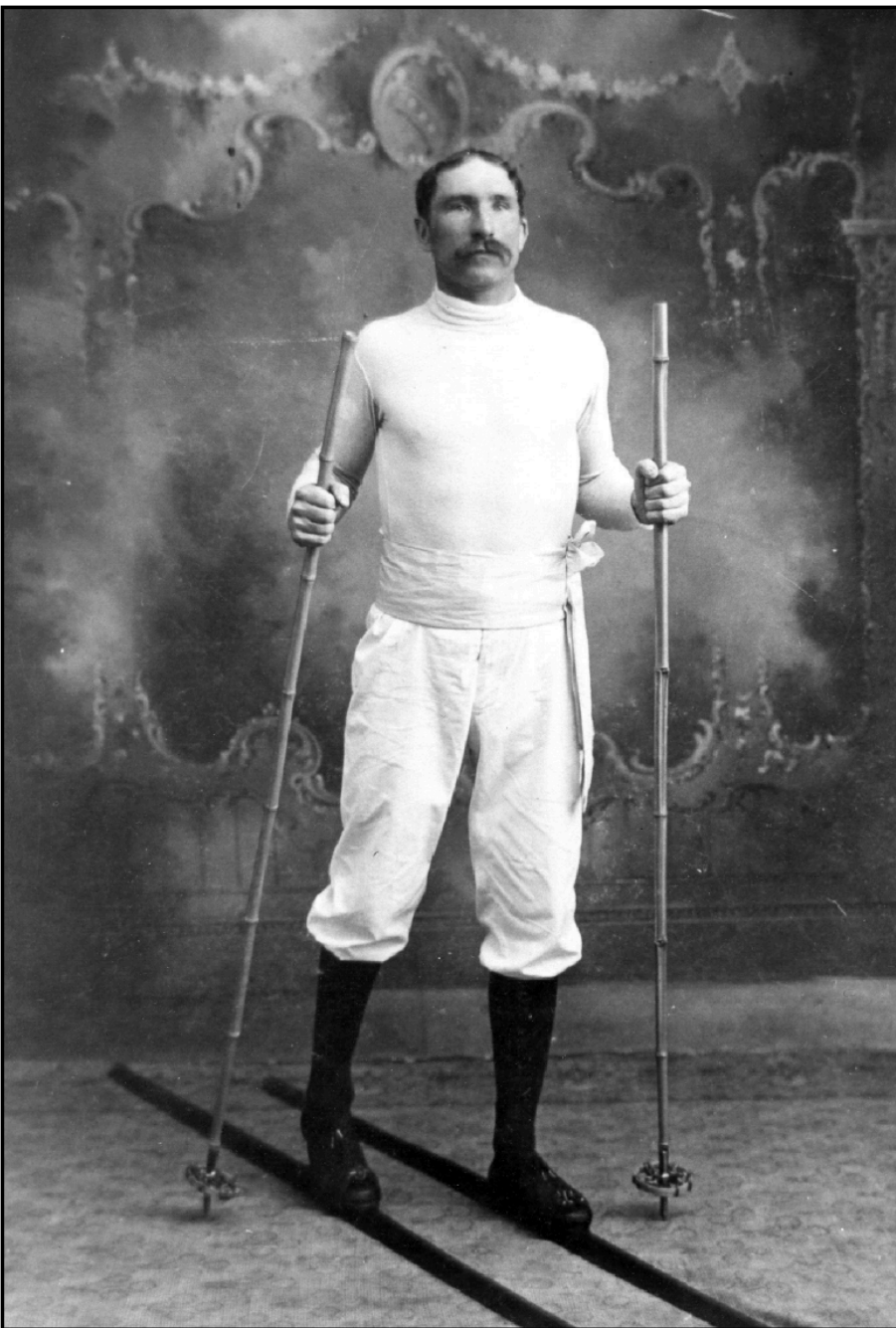
Born: 1870? Died: ?

*Relatively little is known of Asario Autio except that he was an "Iron Man" on cross-country skis.*

A native of Finland, Asario Autio was the National Champion of Finland for several years in the late 1800s and 1890s. He was World Champion on at least one occasion during this same time period. Good record keeping in the 1890s was not one of skiing's strong points, and the records on cross-country skiing are quite sparse. However, cross-country skiing in this era was dominated world wide by the Finns. It was not unusual to have 2000 starters in every race in Finland, and a rare occasion when anyone but a Finn would place higher than 20<sup>th</sup> place in competitions. Autio must have been quite a skier.

Lured to the shores of America, like many Europeans in the late 1890s and early 1900s, Asario Autio brought his skis with him. He settled in Ely, Minnesota, where he dominated the cross-country courses in the Minnesota area.

In 1907, Asario Autio entered the first National Ski Association sanctioned National Cross-country Championships in Ashland, Wisconsin, and won easily, thereby becoming champion. He was the first person awarded the Gale Cotton Burton Memorial Trophy and was posthumously awarded the National Ski Association's



Bronze Plaque in 1966 for his cross-country feats.

Autio apparently had an ego that matched his skiing prowess, as indicated by the following account in the *Ely Miner* on February 22, 1907, describing a ski race sponsored by the Ely Finnish Athletic Club: "Asario Autio won first prize covering the seven miles in 45 minutes and 45 seconds." The article concluded: "A. Autio, winner of the men's race, who resides in this city and claims to be the champion ski racer of the world, is anxious to meet anyone in the United States for a purse of \$100.00 or over, the number of miles to be covered to be named by the party accepting the challenge."

Not one to stand on his laurels, Asario not only declared himself World Champion, but also issued an open challenge to anyone for a race. Not above "making a buck" on his reputation, he obviously put his money where his mouth was. It is not known if he had any takers (after all \$100.00 in 1907 was quite a sum of money), but no one can fault him for trying.

Asario Autio seemed to fade away after a while, and although some "old timers" were able to recall him, none knew what eventually became of the self proclaimed "World Champion."

Asario Autio was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1966.