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Harry Wade Hicks

Born: 1872 Died: 1960

Harry Wade Hicks was called on to assist the War Department in the development and formation of the 10th Mountain Division during World War II. He gave unselfishly to all phases of skiing.

Wherever in North America cross-country ski racing and ski touring trails lead off to adventure, there can be found old-timers who recall Harry Wade Hicks, a founder and one-time president of the United States Eastern Amateur Ski Association. Younger generation skiers tracking the same snows can be thankful for Hicks' untiring efforts as secretary of the Lake Placid Club which placed the sport on an organized basis beginning in 1904.

Perhaps some older generation skiers best remember Hicks as director of the 1932 Olympic Winter Games at Lake Placid; when the community mortgaged itself for years to come in order to stage events which materially aided skiing's development throughout the United States and Canada. Too, he served as chairman of the New York State Committee on Skiing and helped make the Whiteface Ski Area a reality at Lake Placid. His work with the National Park Service in developing recreational areas throughout the country, and with the National Ski Association in nordic, alpine and intercollegiate skiing also gained him renown.

Already well-experienced in ski matters, Hicks was at Saranac Lake, New York, in 1922 when the USEASA was organized, and he served as president in 1926-27. While among the prime movers for development of recreational downhill facilities, and never losing sight of the growing interest in downhill and slalom competition, Hicks had a particular passion for the exhilarating joys of cross-country skiing, and in 1937 wrote: "Wilderness or cross-country skiing for pleasure is still in its infancy. Those who choose this type of skiing enjoy the invigorating crisp air, the stimulation of hard exercise, the physical afterglow and the conversation while traveling. They revel in the beauty of nature as revealed in fascinating shadows, half frozen brooks, snow banks of infinitive variety and beauty, blue skies overhead, glistening mountain peaks and the dark greens of conifer forest."

His "Cross-Country Skiing," a survey prepared at the request of the NSA and published in the 1939 American Ski Annual, remains to this day a forceful forecast of things to come. It was developed from communication exchanges with ski leaders from coast to coast, with Hicks observing: "It seems certain that downhill as distinguished from touring skiing will continue to attract a host of skiers, but when the competitive age period has passed hosts of those who now turn to downhill skiing will take up the richer recreational vacation activity of touring and mountaineering in the those areas adapted to these forms and so abundant in most parts of the United States and Canada."

Hicks also was an authority on the relationship of competitive winter sports serving as an attraction, both directly and indirectly, contributing to community welfare. His "Community Organization for Winter Sports," published in 1936, has been considered by many as the definitive last word on the subject. It covered all phases of skiing, hockey, skating, skate sailing, ice beating, curling, tobogganing, bob-sledding and coasting. Hicks described the social benefits: "A community program of winter sports in an area with stable snow and ice conditions should be the means of attracting into the open air throughout winter as many of its citizens, old and young, as the combined activities of open air recreation in spring, summer and autumn. The goal thus defined if attained will contribute much to the health and happiness of all in the community. Winter is friendly to those who know its joys and contributions of Good."

Harry Wade Hicks was numbered among the many great outdoorsmen spawned in the Adirondacks of Northern New York State. Through ski sport development and the written word he erected his own lasting monument.

Harry Wade Hicks was elected the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1969.



Photo by Dove Jones

Harry Wade Hicks receiving a special gift from Larry Briggs, president of the USEASA, at the time the association voted him honorary life membership at its meeting of October 24-26, 1952, held at Lake Placid.