

## Col. George Emerson Leach

Born: 1876 Died: 1955



*Col. George Emerson Leach was never a nationally ranked skier, but was a tireless worker for the sport of skiing. He represented the National Ski Association as a delegate to the first International Ski Congress where the by-laws and rules governing international skiing were hammered out. This resulted in the formation of the Federation of International Skiing, commonly known as the F.I.S.*

George Emerson Leach was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1876, moving to Minneapolis to finish high school. He attended the University of Minnesota and became an insurance agent. Leach, a National Guardsman, then joined General McArthur as a major in the Mexican Border Wars, later serving in France as Commander of the 151<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery during World I. It was no empty honor when Col. George Emerson Leach, Mayor of Minneapolis, known as the “Ski Capital of America,” was named to manage the 1924 United States Olympic Ski Team. He represented the National Ski Association of America during the International Ski Congress scheduled to coincide with the First Olympic Winter Games set for Chamonix in France. N.S.A. leaders

believed that great benefits for skisport in North America could flow from the Olympics and the Ski Congress and that by selecting Colonel Leach they had found a man well-suited for both roles.

Several of the U.S. Ski Team picks had only recently been reinstated to amateur ranks because the N.S.A.’s professional class had been outlawed two years previously. It was important to skiing’s growth in America that the nation be represented by talented sportsmen who would voice their views when it came to making important decisions during the Ski Congress. Colonel Leach’s able leadership was demonstrated in the written records.

Until the 1924 Winter Olympics, the European ski leaders looked somewhat askance at the sports development in America. Back in 1910, the N.S.A. apparently had been committed to send a delegate to the first International Ski Congress held in Norway and, while time became too short to complete necessary arrangements, the N.S.A. Ski Annual of 1911 commented:

No international contest outside those held at Holmenkollen have as yet been held, but beginning with this coming winter, every year will see the best European skiers compete for world’s honors. The skiers compete under amateur rules, but a professional class will also be on the program; so some day, we shall be able to find American names among the participants in Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Norway or Sweden, wherever the meeting may be held, and why not in America?

Fourteen years later, Colonel Leach became destined to lead the N.S.A. into the world-wide idolized skisport movement through the medium of the Olympic Winter Games. On February 2, 1924, the Federation of Internationale de Ski was formally founded – at which time the National Ski Association of America became officially a participating member. As reported in the N.S.A. 1925 Year Book, it was expected “that this action will eventually result in a complete revision of ski rules, ski methods, and the program of skiing in this country.”

It was perhaps appropriate that the way was paved by Col. George Emerson Leach, whose numerous World War I and other decorations included Order of the Knight of St. Olaf from Norway. Like the ski jumps that dot the skyline of Minneapolis, the city’s four-time mayor was a longtime hallmark of American show sports.

Colonel George Emerson Leach was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1969.

