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Maine as a Winter Resort

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"Maine as a Winter Resort"



ADDRESS

At the Semi-Annual Session
of the

MAINE STATE
BOARD OF TRADE

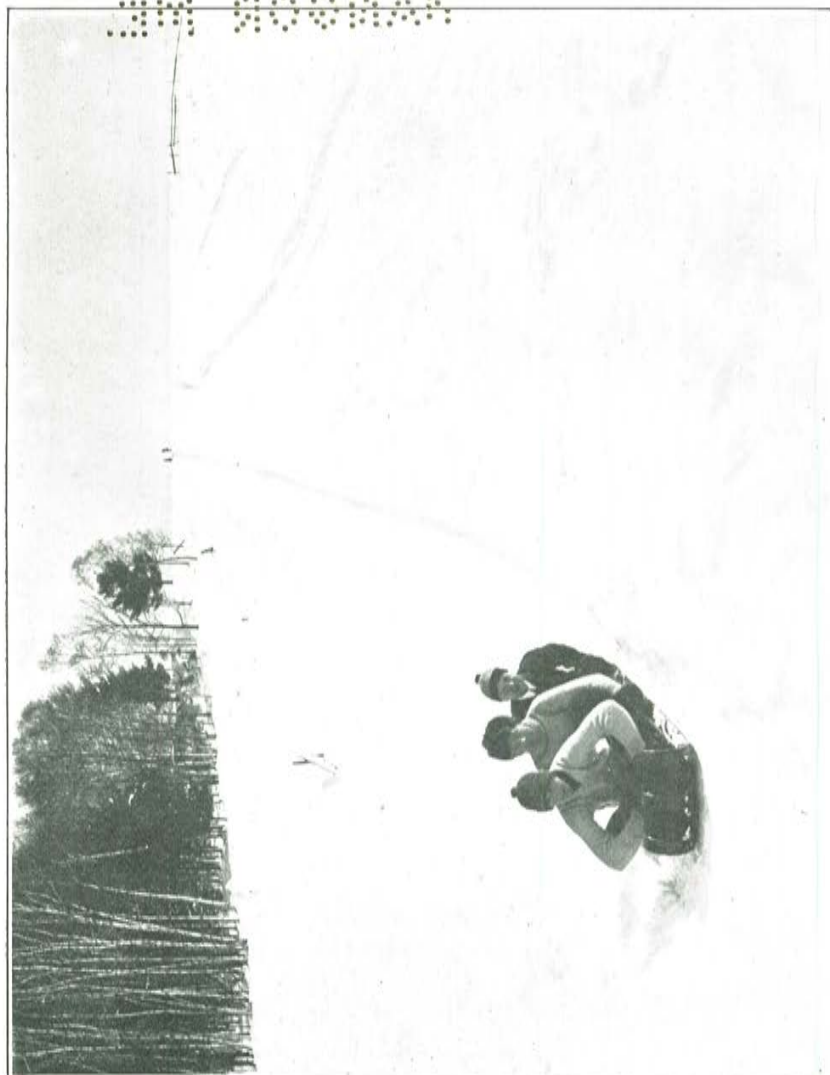
Lewiston, March 11, 1915

BY

ARTHUR G. STAPLES

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TOBOGANNING IN MAINE

MAINE AS A WINTER RESORT

In the introduction to a recent magazine article, entitled "Dartmouth, A Winter College," I find the following sentence: "This is the story of a liability that became an asset."

I would like you to bear this phrase in mind for it is the text of what I have to say in response to a request by your committee to look into the subject of Maine as a Winter Resort.

Winter, the world over, used to be a business liability. It was the close time on business in general. People hibernated like the bear or the squirrel, and travel ceased except for business of extreme unction. We marked off a portion of our summer gain for winter's loss. We who lived in northern countries were objects of pity to those who lived in warmer climes, regarded by them much as we regard the Eskimo—hyperboreans, clad in furs and eating fat, if not blubber. Winter had its death grip on life, on revenue, and on pleasure.

R.N.
There has been a change in the attitude of the world toward winter within the past two generations, that is one of the most remarkable social phenomena of the period. The change began in Northern Europe, in Scandinavia and especially in the Swiss and Germanic countries. It developed along two lines: first, fashion, which substituted the athletic man and woman for the weeping willow variety predominating in 1870 or thereabouts; second, efficiency, which nowadays is everywhere turning waste into valuable by-products. Winter was a waste season in the hotel business of Switzerland and certain parts of Germany. Those canny people who are the best inn-keepers in the world, saw the waste and made it a by-product of enormous value. From Europe, the idea crossed the sea and lodged in Canada, where in 1882-1885 we had stupendous winter carnivals which brought enormous income to hotels and trans-

portation lines, and which still continues to enrich the Canadian hotels. The idea has been 30 years crossing the border into Maine. It is here to-day ready to do for New England what it has done for Switzerland and Norway. In other words, it rests with us, as a business community in the broadest sense, to turn the old-fashioned depreciating liability of winter into a blooming asset, and to force it to pay dividends on our thousands of frozen lakes and ponds; on our trackless winter forests, and on the majesty of our snow-swept hills and mountains. That's the problem—how shall it be solved? How have others solved it? What have we done already, and what remains to be done, to remove the big item from the wrong side of our business ledger and set it up on the right side, not only in cash, but also in self-esteem, in physical development and in the healthful pleasures of the people.

SWITZERLAND AN EXAMPLE

For the best example of this conversion of a liability into an asset, we turn to Switzerland. Here is a country of one-half the area of Maine, about 16,000 square miles to our 33,000. The average temperature of Switzerland varies but little from that of Maine. According to consular reports of recent date, the hotel business of Switzerland previous to the devastating European war was rising \$100,000,000 a year, which, according to the U. S. consul in Berne, just about offsets Switzerland's deficit in the balance of trade against her. Of this, over \$25,000,000 per annum was undoubtedly winter resort business. The publicity office of the Swiss Federal railway at Berne, list this year nearly 400 hotels, which are open for the winter season in 60 world-renowned winter resort centers, these hotels having over 15,000 rooms and 24,521 beds, accommodating approximately each day 25,000 guests (one to a bed) besides nearly 100 lesser resorts in the Bernese Oberland and in places more remote from the railway, making a total accommodation of visitors of not less than 30,000 people day by day in the winter resorts of that country. Consider the names of these resorts, Adelboden, Grindewald, Wengen, Davos, St. Moritz and scores of others. In Davos alone

there are 30 hotels and 37 Pensions open in the winter, besides the largest skating rink in the world. Every resort of any importance has also a visitors' club, toboggan runs, public ice rinks, winter carnivals managed as civic enterprises, public bands or orchestras, in the service of sport, guides and teachers of winter games, and a publicity bureau which floods the world with the most artistic posters and literature that is devoted to any enterprise in the world. The number of travelers who visited Swiss resorts in 1913 was 500,000. The city of Lucerne alone registered 187,000 tourists at her hotels in 1913. Over \$160,000,000 was invested in hotels in Switzerland. The income to the hotels alone, taken over their counters, so to speak, was forty million dollars in 1913, the year before the war. The amount earned by Swiss employes was \$5,470,000 in that year. Add to this the amount paid for transportation, souvenirs, couriers, guides, clothing, etc., and the sum reaches that estimated by the U. S. consular service.

Behind this effort to convert winter into a profit-making asset stand the Federal railways of Switzerland, owned and operated by the Swiss Confederation, maintaining as a national institution, agencies at New York, London, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Paris. As an indication of the importance ascribed to this industry, we may note that the Swiss Congress of 1910 enacted yet further legislation to popularize winter sports and to increase the publicity of Swiss tourist attractions.

Norway presents an example of lesser size, but not less endeavor. Here, this winter, over 80 large hotels, housing from 8,000 to 10,000 people, besides numberless pensions, are opened for winter guests. The Norwegian State Railways are responsible for the issue of advertising material of gorgeous coloring and throbbing eloquence. The very waterfalls are frozen. You are on the roof of the world. Such sunlight as they have (and it is very little in winter if one should mention it) is superior to any other sunlight in the world. The winter air of Norway makes valetudinarians vigorous. The lakes—such lakes! The hills, so gentle, yet so precipitous; the forests, so deep and mystic, yet so safe and secure. It is so cold and stimulating, yet so

warm and luxurious. Her scientists write of the unique constituency of the atmosphere; her doctors praise her climate; her eminent writers are describing her carnivals of sports, while the Scandinavian Travel Bureau on Broadway, New York, assiduously distributes the literature and seeks to entice the resident of this even more beautiful country to quit this winter paradise for theirs.

St. Moritz in Switzerland with its Cresta Run, its bobsleigh contests, its thirty hotels, some of them beautiful, its fashion and its wealth, has not a thing to offer that Poland Spring, or Bethel, or Kineo, or the Rangeley Country of Maine cannot give. But Switzerland and Norway are doing business and we are not. They are converting a waste into a by-product; we are not. They are converting a liability into an asset; we are not—except in one or two instances, of which I now propose briefly to speak.

TWO EXAMPLES IN NEW ENGLAND

Here, in New England, we have two examples of success in the development of winter resort business and of winter sports. One is the Mansion House at Poland Spring, which illustrates the results of genius and ability in hotel management, and the other is Dartmouth College, which has become the winter college of America, and which illustrates the social and sociological side of the subject.

The Mansion House at Poland Spring is the old home-
stead of the Rickers. Fifteen years ago as we sat by its broad fireplaces with the flames leaping to the old brick arches, and as we looked out on the great white outdoors, we were apt to say: "Some day people will come here winters." In those days, here and there, was a guest who lived the year around in Poland Spring luxury. But they were few. To-day, go to the Mansion House at Poland Spring and see! Or, better still, try to secure a room and entertainment there, in the climax of the season from Christmas to March 1. They have turned away 700 guests from Poland Spring this winter, because they were unable to accommodate them. The arrivals at the Mansion House in December, January, and February, 1914-1915, numbered 760. The number of meals served to guests in these three



HORSE RACING

FANCY SKATERS

COASTING

winter months was 16,568; the average length of stay of each guest was $7\frac{1}{4}$ days. The total number of days board by these winter guests this year was 5,523. The income in the month of February alone from winter resort guests at the Mansion House has increased over 50 per cent. in two years for the single month. What has done it? Here's the answer: Efficient hotel keeping, increased attraction, liberal advertising and a growing faith in the superior restorative powers of the winter climate of Maine. This latter is important. It is now universally admitted that the person who comes to Maine and enjoys a vacation in winter returns to his work in better physical condition than the person who goes to Florida or to Southern climes where the enervating condition of the atmosphere brings him back to his summer in the North constitutionally weakened. Countless instances of severe illnesses are of recent record due to the premature return from the South into our Northern spring weather, whereas, those who return from a Maine winter to the cities are hardened by their outdoor life, and in condition to take up work anew. It is a matter of national health. The day will come, therefore, when every room in all the hotels on Ricker Hill will be filled all winter. There will be but one season, coming and going, and winter as well as summer, will pay her toll to pleasure and health. Following the course adopted by European hotels, the Rickers have built winter gardens, open air skating rinks, and glorious toboggan slides. They have maintained winter sports, such as horse racing on nearby ponds, and by cultivating the Open, have made this resort the favored retreat of the tired people of the great cities, who ask no questions as to price, so long as they find comfort, peace, rest, and change amid the glories of the incomparable winter resort of the world.

Dartmouth College illustrates the social side of the possibilities of winter in New England. This institution has been made over into a winter college in the best sense of the word by formation of the Dartmouth Outing Club. This club has converted the college from an isolated stick-by-the-fire institution to the finest example in the world of an outdoor college. Time is lacking for me to tell the

story. It is told in full in the *Outing Magazine* for January, 1914. "A winter playground for six months in the college year," says the writer, "is what Dartmouth men would make of the New Hampshire mountain trail from Hanover to the ancient college grant just under the Canadian border. There is no other outdoor movement like it in the history of educational institutions. Undergraduates and alumni bless the latitude of 43.40; while reconstructed skeptics declare that four years at Dartmouth without the tonic which nature puts into the wind and sky, a personal knowledge of the snow-clad hill tops and the odor of the hemlocks and the pines, are four years wasted."

Dartmouth's work gives great impetus to New Hampshire's development as a winter resort state. It is advertising New Hampshire, the world over. The Dartmouth Outing Club's idea of a chain of camps for outdoor life, is being reproduced elsewhere in that state. The moving picture film is reproducing New Hampshire winter sports and especially those of Dartmouth for the delectation of the millions. New Hampshire hotels are consequently opening more and more for winter guests. New Hampshire's snow belt between the Green, Franconia, and White Mountains, running North to Canada, is ideal; comparable only to the snow belt of Maine, which runs almost due North from any point 30 miles inland, clear to the Canadian border. As the first president of the Dartmouth Outing Club made the club, routed out the lazy, maintained a publicity bureau for New England and the West, shouldered the financial burdens and never failed to be on hand to lead the line, so will it be some day in Maine college and Maine communities, where all, together, will be out on the winter trail.

WHAT'S TO BE DONE FOR MAINE

A few days ago I asked Mr. E. P. Ricker of Poland Spring what must be done to make Maine a great winter resort State. His answer was "Supply plenty of comfortable, cheerful inland hotels, and then advertise. We have the climate! We send people home in better health and better fitted for the duties of life. The sports, the games,



WINTER IN A MAINE SAP ORCHARD

the outdoor diversions develop of themselves. The first requisite is more good hotels."

Mr. Holman D. Waldron, general passenger and ticket agent of the Maine Central railroad, who has just issued a little booklet entitled "Winter Sports in Maine and the White Mountains" writes: "We have done a moderate amount of advertising, but have no statistics of business. The Mansion House at Poland Spring is the only point where there is marked success. While Maine possesses every natural advantage for winter tourist travel, the hotels in my opinion must offer greater attractions than now; or in other words, must cater, as Poland Spring does, especially to winter guests, by toboggan slides, ice skating rinks, and the furnishing of every possible means of outdoor diversion to guests. Maine hotels and transportation lines should get together and develop this traffic, and you may be sure the Maine Central railroad will be ready and willing to do its part."

A letter from Col. F. E. Boothby, formerly president of the Maine State Board of Trade, dated at a famous winter resort in Florida, where he now is, says: "The success of Poland Spring could be duplicated in Rangeley, Moosehead, Dexter, Dover, Foxcroft, Bingham, as it is being duplicated in a measure in Bethel."

And now finally, as an adjunct to the business side, there should be a civic movement in Maine to make this State as a whole a winter resort. This I believe to be basic. We have 1265 hotels, sporting camps, boarding houses (pensions) in Maine, with a capacity according to the Maine Central railroad's official figures, of 70,000 guests. Here each summer nearly 500,000 guests are entertained, leaving with us \$35,000,000 in cash. How many hotels were open in Maine the past season for winter guests? Only sixteen. There should be ten times that number within three years. Bar Harbor should be a great winter resort. The whole State should be a winter resort. But we can't expect business as such to do it all. It is not altogether a commercial proposition. The town officers and the city fathers from the sociological and civic side must see the point also.

Public skating rinks should be maintained by town authorities in every community. Go to Germany and see what they do. In every German city public ice skating rinks are maintained in perfect care by the city, solely for public health and amusement. There, all the world meets for a penny or two admission. Public bands are playing and life is gay. Suppose we tried it in Maine. Instead of leaving children to skate into the air holes of our rivers to disappear forever, wouldn't it be better to supply them safe public resorts with music and sports?

Is the cost prohibitive? The cost is practically nothing. Suppose each college in Maine took the outdoor life seriously, or even maintained a skating rink like that of Poland Spring, or like that which Bates College has just opened up, and the great game of hockey were really played in Maine as it is in Canada. Any person can make an outdoor skating rink at small expense. Level a place and if the soil is sandy, floor it with common tarred paper, cover the paper with earth for a few inches, flood it and you have a fine rink. Let every one of us get to work. We need individually to begin to create an atmosphere of outdoor enjoyment in winter. From small beginnings we can pass to the establishment of outdoor sports as an institution. I know it may look difficult at first to popularize winter sports, but I do believe that if public ice rinks were established by public money and made the scene of festivals and games, there would be a beginning in Maine of public recognition of outdoor life that would reconstruct winter into a season of better business and fuller enjoyment.

OUR MAINE WINTERS

It is often said we cannot have a winter resort without a winter. Some people have said that the old-fashioned winter has disappeared from Maine. It is not so. U. S. meteorological observations in various sections of Maine give not the slightest hint of anything of the kind. Our winters vary only in degree, not in kind. We are in a snow belt of 45's. Our State runs like an incisor tooth into Canada. Much of Aroostook is north of Quebec. Kineo, which will



A SCENE AT THE MANSION HOUSE, POLAND SPRING

some day be one of the greatest winter resorts in the world, is north of Ottawa, and along side of Montreal. The town of Dexter, Maine, is on the same parallel of latitude as the border line between Canada and Northern Vermont. If there is anything which the weaver of fancies can say of the Alpine winter that we cannot say in truth of the winters in Maine, I cannot discover it, save in the attitude of the people themselves. We have just begun to talk about Maine as a winter resort. This is perhaps the first public discussion of it; whereas, the Swiss have been telling of it in all the florid beauty of their pamphlets and posters for more than a decade. Through pure publicity, they have made the bob-sleigh run at St. Moritz famous throughout the world. They have spent thousands and thousands of dollars on these marvelous coasting runs, which are miles in length, kept constantly iced, protected from the sun by artificial shade along the turns. They have spent more than a hundred millions of dollars upon their hotels. Five thousand guests at a time is nothing unusual at St. Moritz in the height of the season. They have done all that capital and brains and a community of interests can do—and they charge you well, but they cannot beat our winter, and they have nothing to surpass the glories of the hills, the mountains and the forests of our inland Maine.

Our sun is as bright as theirs; our skies as blue, our snow as clean and pure, our hills as steep, our air as rich in ozone and in life. Yes, our winter in Maine is as wondrous in beauty as that of the Alps or of Norway. We have the winter; we have always had it; we always will have it. The day will never come to Maine when, from Christmas almost to Easter, there will not be the crisp frosty dawns, so familiar to all of us, when the sled runners cry aloud as they pass down the road. There is nothing else in all the world so beautiful as a mid-winter day in Maine, with its dawn full of protest, its noon blazing in the sunlight, its sunset golden on the gleaming western hills, and its nights, with the snows glistening to the moon, and the pathway of the old country road stretching from your feet away into glory. This is the land of all the best of the white gods of winter. It is for us to appreciate it; to foster it; to spread about the truth

concerning its health-giving properties; to convert its ancient liability and loss not only into a present asset but an increasing gain; to help it build up and invigorate new races of men and women, who shall stir and energize mankind. We must learn to love winter, talk of its beauties when we are at home or abroad, to describe truthfully its poetry and its loveliness. Then, with big and beautiful hotels, with civic sports and other increasing devotion to outdoor life, we shall see winter do its proper share towards enriching us commercially, as well as physically and spiritually.