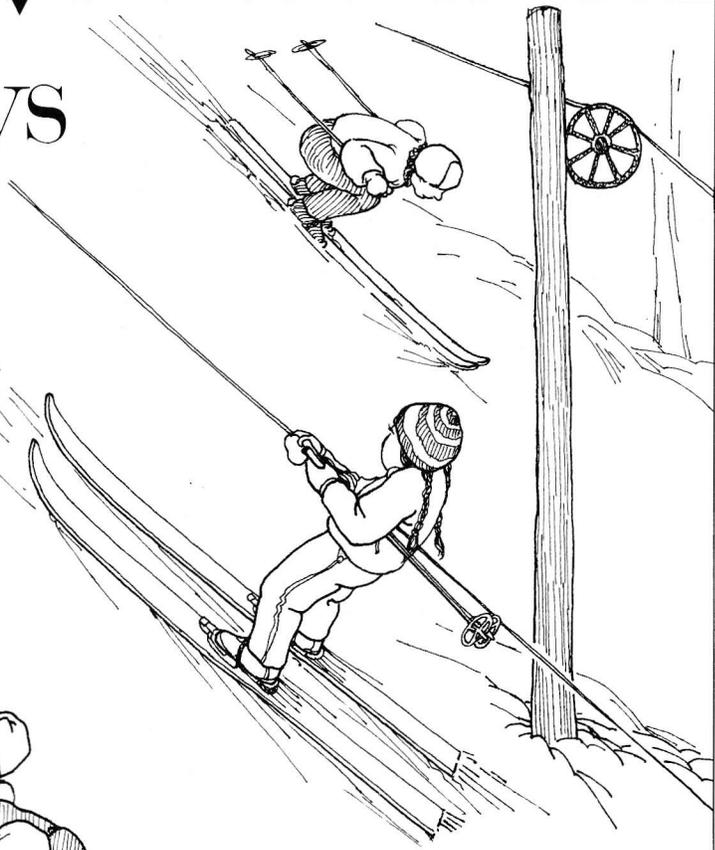
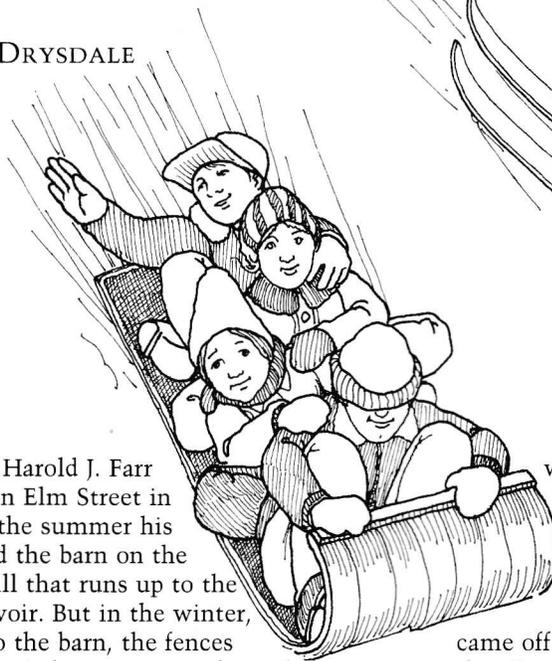


Our Yesterdays on Farr's Hill

Skiing for Free Because A Farmer Liked Kids

By M. DICKEY DRYSDALE



FOR 50 YEARS, Harold J. Farr ran a farm on Elm Street in Randolph. In the summer his cows grazed behind the barn on the steep and scenic hill that runs up to the town's north reservoir. But in the winter, the cows went into the barn, the fences came down, and Farr's farm was transformed into Farr's Hill, a magic place of thrills and spills for two generations of Randolph children.

It just so happened that the east-facing slope of the hill, the length, breadth, and steepness of it, made it an ideal ski slope, small enough to be served by a short rope tow yet precipitous enough to daunt any but the most daring.

And it just so happened that Harold Farr loved having kids around, loved seeing them active and learning, and cared not a whit for his own time and expense.

As a result, for 30 years, Farr operated an extraordinary community resource — a ski hill that was open to everyone, every weekend and during school vacation weeks — all for free. Adults sometimes dropped a contribution in the box — a quarter, maybe — but for us children, it was absolutely free.

It is believed that Harold Farr started his ski tow in 1936, only two years after the first ski tow in North America opened in Woodstock. He ran it until Pinnacle Ski-Ways opened in Randolph in 1966. In gratitude, Pinnacle — a now-defunct small ski area begun by a community corporation — named its practice slope after him.

The ski slope was not Harold Farr's first offering to neighborhood children. For 10 years, a big skating rink

was next to the Farr home, and children from all over trooped to it on winter afternoons.

Farr also built a hair-raising toboggan chute perhaps 1,000 feet long, all the way from the reservoir past his barn, filling in with rough rock construction where necessary. Toboggans came off that hill so fast, remembers one of the riders, that "we could jump all the way over Elm Street."

Yet it was the skiing that lingers in the memories of hundreds. Even those close to him don't remember what attracted Farr to the infant sport of downhill skiing. Nor can they explain just how he knew how to construct a ski tow — except that dairy farmers then, as now, were expected to know how to do about anything.

By the time I came along in the early 1950s, Farr was powering the tow — it climbed a slope about 500 feet long, with a vertical drop of maybe 200 feet — from a gasoline motor housed in a little shed attached to his barn. A skiing day would find him at the engine controls, ready to stop the lift in a moment if necessary, his face uplifted as he watched the steady ascent of the skiers — no more than three on the rope, please. Or his twinkly eyes would survey the line of maybe 25 kids shouldering and edging each other in a perpetual mini-drama to see who could forge his way first through the line.

All day long he would stand there, almost motionless, from early morning until it was too dark for safety. In the snow with his rubber barn boots, visored hat, and weatherbeaten denim jacket, all day, all day during the sunny springlike days and all day, too, during the blustery northers when we kids turned blue with the cold.