

Making Tracks: the History of the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club

The Chalet: From White Elephant to Community Centre

As the excitement of the World Cup faded, the WCCSC had a monstrous piece of real estate to finance and – naturally – the club was more interested in skiing than property management. Much of the troubles around financing the chalet fell on Sandy Johnston, who served as the club's president from 1983-1985. However, the difficulties preceded his term as president.



Credit: Yukon Archives, 90/51, #339.

On 29 April 1982, Kenneth Gabb, the manager of the ski chalet, wrote ski club president Walter Henkel announcing the termination of his employment. Gabb stated that upon taking the position he was led to believe that the chalet was financially stable. However, his letter stated that the chalet was “in the red to the approximate amount of \$50,000.00 to \$60,000.00.” Additionally, the physical infrastructure of the chalet had serious problems: “There were two serious problem areas in the Chalet at this time. One was the lower entrance way, the construction of which allowed for -40° air, which was prevalent at this time to enter the area above the ceiling and freeze the sprinkler heads and the hot water pipes running to the heater. The other was a similar problem on the upper floor from the corner of the kitchen to the main door and beyond. The construction of the upper area allowed the cold air to enter the soffits and travel across the space

between the roof joists into the area above the ceiling. This also led to frozen sprinkler heads, a problem that was not solved until the advent of warm weather during the latter part of April.” Gabb concluded: “a program of austerity is required by the Chalet/Ski Club until outstanding financial commitments are met.”

Members of the WCCSC began exploring options to ensure that the chalet was financially viable. One option considered was passing the ownership of the building over to a new owner. This may have been either a developer, the Yukon Government, or the City of Whitehorse. However, by taking such an action, the club faced the possibility of placing their ski trails in jeopardy. The possible link between the building and the trails was the source of great stress in the club as members were uncertain as to whether the building went under, the trails would go along with it. Moreover, there was a fear that if another organization were to take control of the chalet, the trails would inherit a new function as a skidoo race course. The club also sought a liquor license for the chalet in order to draw in revenue. However, they faced great opposition from the Downtown Hoteliers’ Association. Furthermore, the presence of a banquet hall and restaurant was an impediment to a proposed City of Whitehorse takeover of the chalet, as the city did not wish to compete with private businesses.

How the Curling Rinks came to Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre

What appeared to be the most feasible option at the time was finding other groups that might be interested in using the building so the ski club could draw rent in order to finance the chalet. Consequently, during the early and mid-1980s, numerous organizations made use of the chalet. The organizations that found temporary homes in the chalet were the Yukon Archery Association, the Yukon Dog Musers Association, and the Whitehorse Rapids Speed Skating Club. Some old timers with the ski club may remember a speed skating oval where the stadium now is. This led to the creation of a chalet management committee. However, these organizations had an ephemeral presence at the chalet.

As the ski club was soliciting various interest groups to rent out space in the chalet, plans were underway to develop a curling facility in Takhini. However, the WCCSC saw an opportunity to solve their financial woes. In the fall of 1984, the ski club president Sandy Johnston suggested to mayor Don Branigan that it would be unwise to create a separate facility for the curling rinks, stating that a curling rink in Takhini with a banquet room would duplicate the services already offered by the ski chalet as well as other businesses around town. Additionally, Johnston saw the wisdom of consolidating numerous sports facilities under one roof (similar to the case of the Canada Games Centre today). Nevertheless, the city insisted that Takhini was a better option for the curling rinks. But the ski club found an ally in the Yukon Division of the BC Hotel Association, who believed that the ski chalet would be the optimal location for the rinks. However, the hoteliers maintained their concern about tax dollars being used to subsidize the banquet facilities at the chalet. In 1985, possibly because of the potential of creating yet another

white elephant with the establishment of yet another sports facility, the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon Government agreed to put the curling rinks next to the ski chalet. As a result, eight sheets of ice were added to the facility and the Mount McIntyre Recreation Association was born.

From the Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre Association to a City-Run Chalet

Although the Mount McIntyre Recreation Association was formed as a result of the curlers moving into the chalet, over the years it came to be composed of numerous other interest groups that made use of the facilities such as a darts club and a bingo organization. Meanwhile, the restaurant and bar continued to operate. However, eventually the bar service and banquets became less profitable and the chalet ended up “in the hole.”

As the Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre fell “in the hole,” the users of the chalet – including members of the WCCSC – began to feel the pinch. In the fall of 2003, it was reported that the association fees would increase from \$5 per member over eighteen years of age to \$20. This meant that the ski club would have to pay an additional \$7500.

In 2005, the Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre was finally taken over by the City of Whitehorse. The WCCSC assumed responsibility for the wax room and paid rent to the city. With the facilities under the city’s control, the ski club had greater certainty over how much it would be paying in rent each year.