

Olaf Jonnum: Class of 2009



Olaf Albert Olson Jonnum was born on April 20, 1884, in Beitstad, Norway, the third of six children (four boys and two girls). After taking up the sport of ski

jumping at an early age, he eventually cleared space for a practice ramp near his family's farm, trudging back up the hill between repeated passes. Although details are sparse, Olaf achieved considerable ski-jumping success in Europe; stories passed down through his descendants indicate he won a world championship, although family has not been able to confirm this.

At age 20, two years after the death of his father, Olaf emigrated to the United States, settling at first in Starbuck, Minnesota, before relocating 200 miles northeast to Marble. He was followed shortly afterward by "Shorty" Milgaard, a close friend and future business partner.

In 1905, he authored a pamphlet titled "*Skisporten og Skiens Behandling*" ("The Ski Sport and the Care of Skis Under Rainy Conditions"), featuring his opinions on jumping technique and training, as well as equipment preparation; an English translation followed two years later. Among his declarations: "It will not be possible to increase jump distances to any significant degree in the future; the law and forces of nature do not allow it."

Olaf became an early member of the Itasca Ski and Outing Club, delivering the organization's first Class A National Championship at age 23, during a 1907 tournament in Ishpeming, Michigan. Tall, strong and loquacious, he earned a reputation as a character, as well as a couple of colorful nicknames: "The Norwegian Teddy Bear" and "Bull Moose."

Unusually itinerant for his day, Olaf soon started a homestead in McKenzie County, North Dakota, shuttling between the property and town by cross-country skis, carrying building supplies on his back. He would farm the homestead during the springs and summers, then relocate back to Minnesota in the autumns to work as a steam-shovel operator in the Iron Ranges.

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Olaf's involvement with ski jumping soon extended beyond merely competing, as he began managing a Captain Henricsen, who a period newspaper article described as "the only man in the world turning a perfect somersault on skis." Henricsen and an Irish ski jumper named Barney Riley traveled to state fairs and performed on a mobile, metal, illuminated ramp that the article described as being "100 feet high and 160 feet long with a landing platform 100 feet long." A \$500 prize was offered "to any man in the world who [could] duplicate Mr. Henricsen's feat."

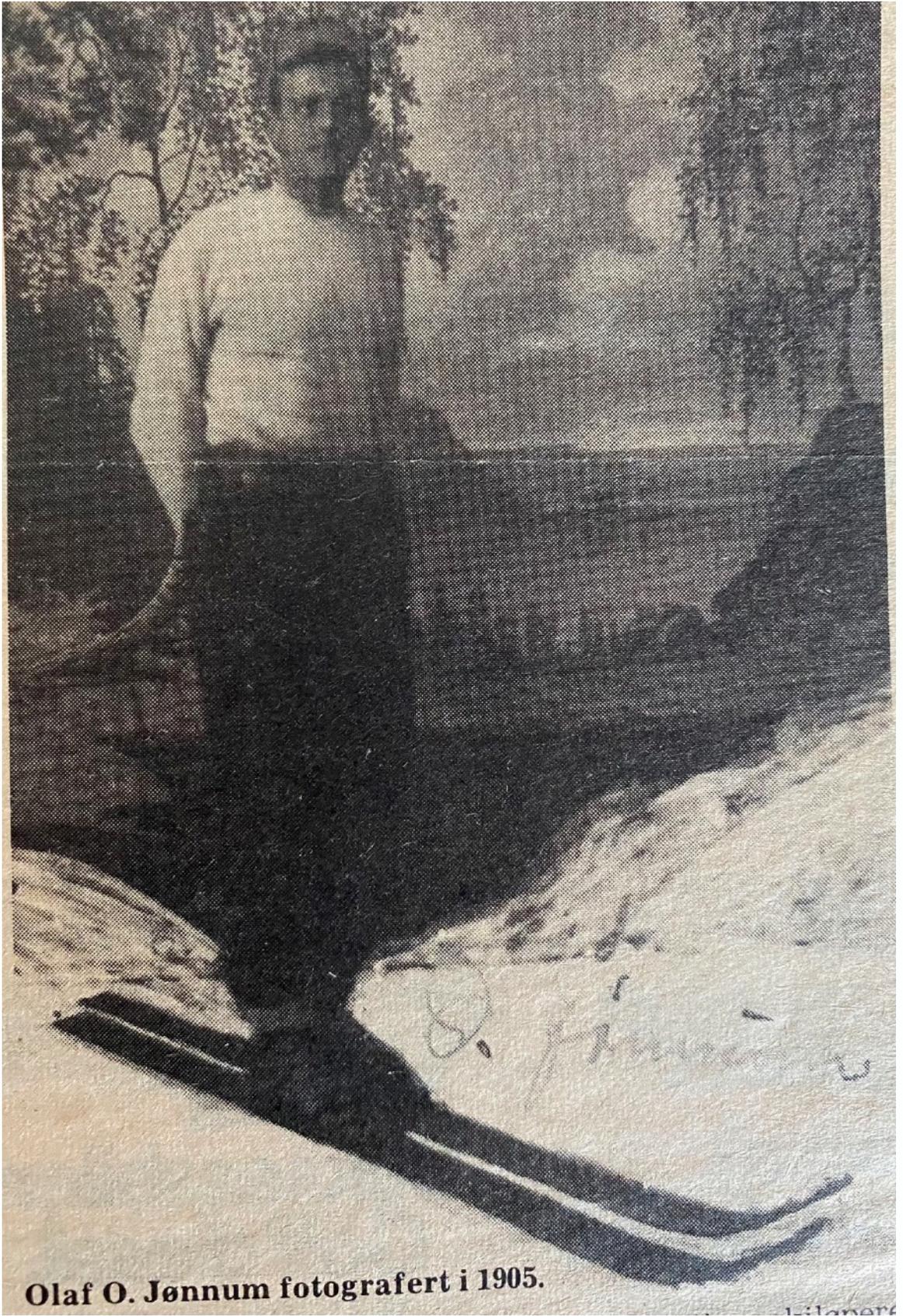
On September 24, 1909, in Duluth, Olaf married Nettie Theoline Nelson, a Wisconsin native of Norwegian descent. Their first child, Lillian Junita, was born in 1910, and son Orlando "Ole" Albert Ingvald followed in 1914. By the time Nettie gave birth to their third child, Norma Naomi, in 1923, Olaf had briefly moved the family to Williston, North Dakota; he also began working a steam shovel in the town of Nevada, Missouri.

Norma would die of pneumonia at around age 12, by which time Olaf had once again moved his family, this time to the town of Pittsburgh, Kansas, for a mining project on which he partnered with Milgaard, also enlisting the assistance of son Ole (by then a young man).

Ole's wife, Ethel Anderson, was from North Dakota. On one visit to the Anderson farm, Olaf was assisting with harvesting, operating a haying machine that was a bit cramped for his rangy physique. When the machine began malfunctioning, Ethel's brother Norvel advised him to jump to safety. "How can I *yump* when I got no place to stood?!" Olaf sputtered in exasperation, a retort that is still laughingly quoted by his progeny.

Olaf settled in Pittsburgh, Kansas, in his later years, though he made at least three trips back to Norway by ship. On January 16, 1961, he passed away at age 87, at his daughter Junita's home in Brandon, Minnesota. He was buried in Williston, North Dakota's Riverview Cemetery.

Ole and Junita both eventually moved with their families to Southern California, where their descendants still reside.



Olaf O. Jønnum fotografert i 1905.

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