



Tracking Our Snowmobile History

Snowmobiling – a popular winter activity today – has deep roots in Otsego County history. The first U.S. patent for a snowmobile-like machine was granted to Ray Muscott of Waters, Michigan in 1916. He called his invention a Motor Sleigh and received a Canadian patent the previous year. We don't know if any of these motor sleighs were actually built.

Mr. Muscott worked as a telegraph operator and at some point was the station agent in Waters for the Michigan Central Railroad. He died in Cheboygan in 1945 at the age of 57.

Discover ♦ Learn ♦ Share

This photo was featured in the Gaylord Centennial supplement to the Herald Times in 1981. The caption claimed it was one of the first snowmobiles. It was essentially an open car body on high runners powered by a gasoline engine attached to a rear-mounted propeller. The photo was taken in 1916 in front of the newspaper office when it was located on North Otsego Avenue. One source identified the men as Walt Murray and Bill Chalker. It was front page news on January 21, 1916,



Lester Lunden purchased a similar snow machine in St. Ignace. He brought it across the straits on a boat and then drove it to Gaylord on US 27.

Discover ♦ Learn ♦ Share

Here's another interesting forerunner of today's snowmobile. The photo was taken by local photographer J. Stutesman and is included in Jan White's on-line postcard collection. Here's the [Link](#).



The homemade "Ski mobile" with a propeller on it is thought to be from the 1930s. No information about the 6 men in the photo but the location is identified as where Bob and Stan's Service station would later be. It is now the location of Dunn's office supply store on South Otsego Avenue..

Discover ♦ Learn ♦ Share

Travis Hewitt shared this photo of an early snowmobile or a motor toboggan. His great grandfather, Leo Norton, is in front driving the contraption. The man in the middle is identified as Leo "Yink" Marlatt. The third person is not identified. Do you know his name?

What year do you think this photo was taken? We know Leo Norton was born in 1904 and died in 1979. With those parameters and photos found on the Internet of similar snow machines, we're guessing the 1940s or 50s.

