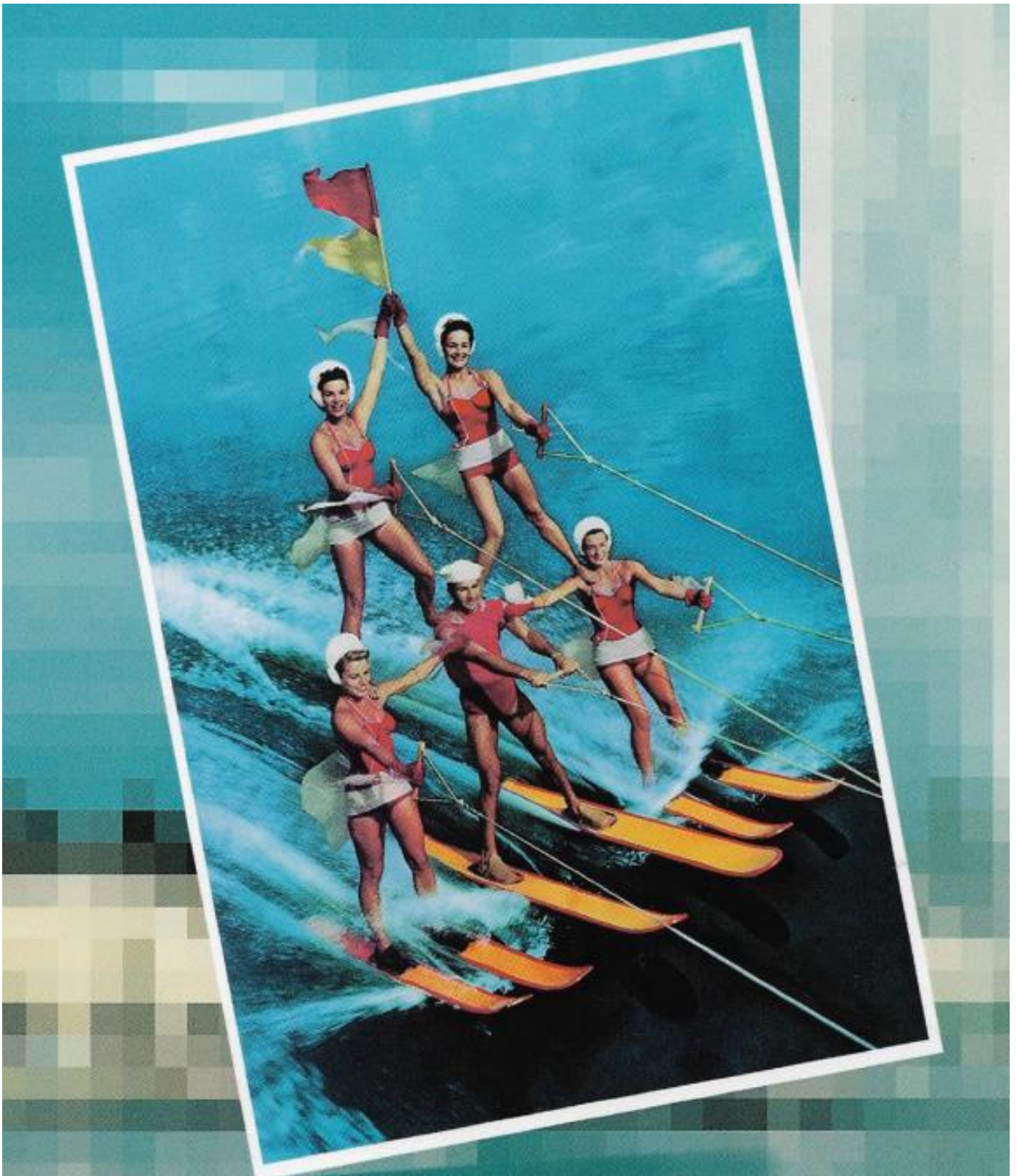


100 years of Water Skiing

1922 - 2022

The Early Years

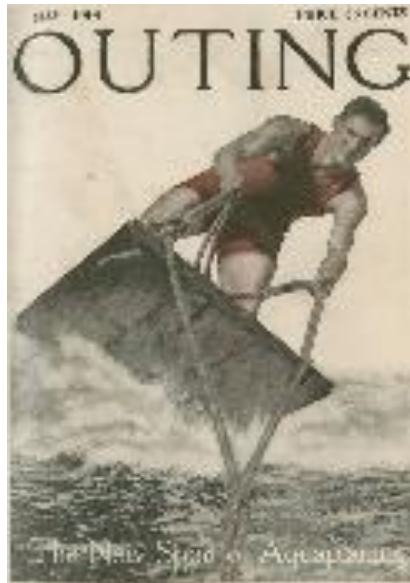


Some stand out moments and highlights of skiing, before it reached Ireland.

Early
20th
century

Aquaplaning

Water skis derived from the aquaplane, a wide riding board towed by a motorboat. Aquaplanes were most popular in the United States, France, and Switzerland, the areas in which water skiing first became popular.



The Aquaplane

A REAL JOY RIDE

A brand-new water sport has come into existence. So thrilling are the sensations produced by the **Aquaplane** that it will be found in use in connection with nearly every motorboat, launch and yacht capable of 8 miles an hour or better. The **Aquaplane** gives birth to an exhilaration that is not far short of speed intoxication. Get an **Aquaplane** and learn what fun really is. The **Aquaplane** will last forever, and the price is only \$2.50. Send for our Circular—Tells how to enjoy the **Aquaplane**.

THE AQUAPLANE CO. (Not Inc.)
Room 315, Roanoke Bldg. Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating: Aug, 1911, p 102

(8 miles an hour that gives birth to exhilaration that is not far short of speed intoxication! WOW!!)

1922
First recorded water skier

Two brothers, Ralph and Ben Samuelson, are credited with inventing water skiing on Lake Pepin, Lake City, in Minnesota, U.S.A. in 1922. It all begun with a hypothesis that if snow skiing was possible, then skiing over a body of water at high speed was also possible. Ralph, aged 18, first tried barrel staves for skis, then snow skis, but sank. Before long he realized that with the boat's top speed of less than 20 mph, he needed skis with more surface area to help him stay on top of the water. He bought two eight-foot-long, nine-inch-wide pine planks at a local lumberyard, softened one end of each in his mother's wash boiler and curved the ends up by clamping them in vices. He fastened a leather strap in the middle of each ski to hold his feet in place, bought 100 feet of sash cord to use as a tow rope and had a blacksmith make him an iron ring, four inches in diameter, to serve as a handle, which he insulated with tape. Ralph first succeeded on June 28 by starting off wearing skis while standing on top of an aquaplane board, and then slipping one foot and then the other into the water. He experimented with different positions on the skis for several days until 2 July 1922 and discovered that leaning backwards in the water with ski tips up and poking out of the water at the tip was the optimal method. His brother Ben towed him behind a 24-foot boat powered by a 24-horsepower inboard motor, and they reached a speed of 32 kilometres per hour (20 mph). For the next fifteen years, Samuelson put on skiing exhibitions at Lake City and other areas.





Ralf Wilford Samuelson (1903 – 1977)





Ralph Samuelson, the first Water Ski Pioneer

Lake City celebrates its water-skiing heritage each summer by having Water Ski Days during the last weekend of June. As a tribute to water skiing inventor Ralph Samuelson, a monument hugs the shores of Lake Pepin just off highway 61.

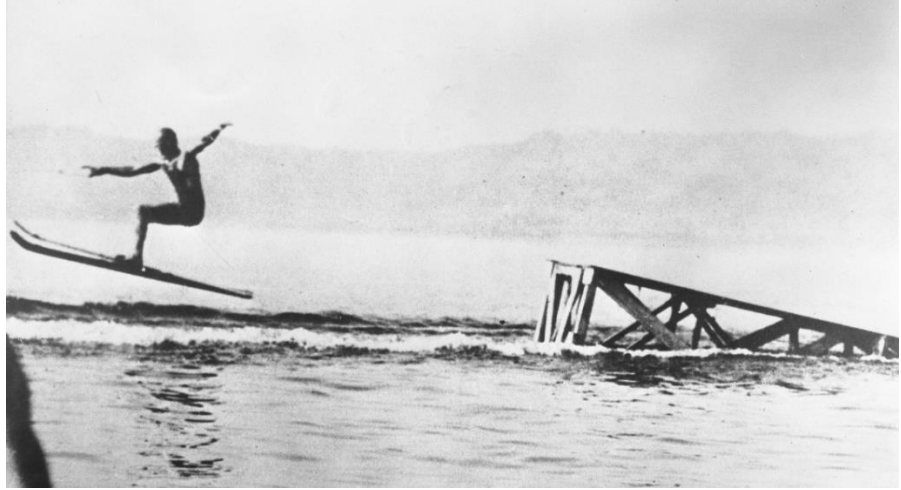
Mono skiing

Ralph found a job in Florida with a boat livery and skied during the intermissions of speedboat races. In the middle of one exhibition, he hit a large yacht wake, which wrenched one of the skis from his foot. He was able to finish on the other one, and thereafter he incorporated slalom skiing into his routine. Mono skiing and slalom skiing were born.

1925

Jumping and speed skiing

In the summer of 1925, Ralph Samuelson greased a 4-foot high, 16 foot long, semi-submerged ramp with lard, launched himself from the ramp on water skis, and became the world's first water ski jumper.



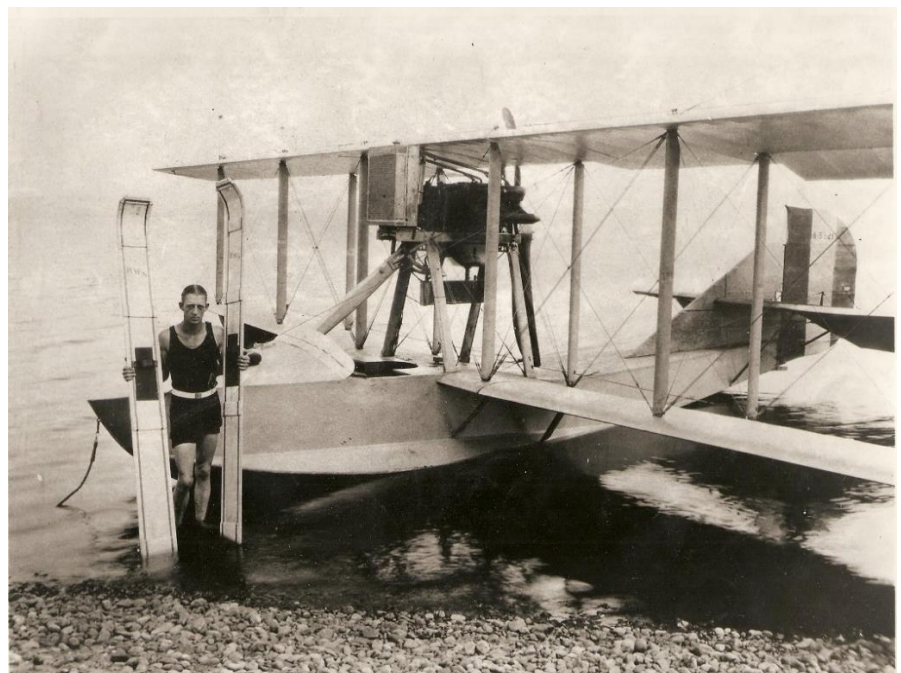
Ralph Samuelson was the first person to water ski off a ramp

// Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

Later that same summer, Ralph also became the first person to speed ski by successfully skiing behind a World War I Curtis Flying Boat at 80 miles per hour.



Crowds gather in Lake City to watch Ralph Samuelson water ski behind the World War I Curtis Flying Boat // Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



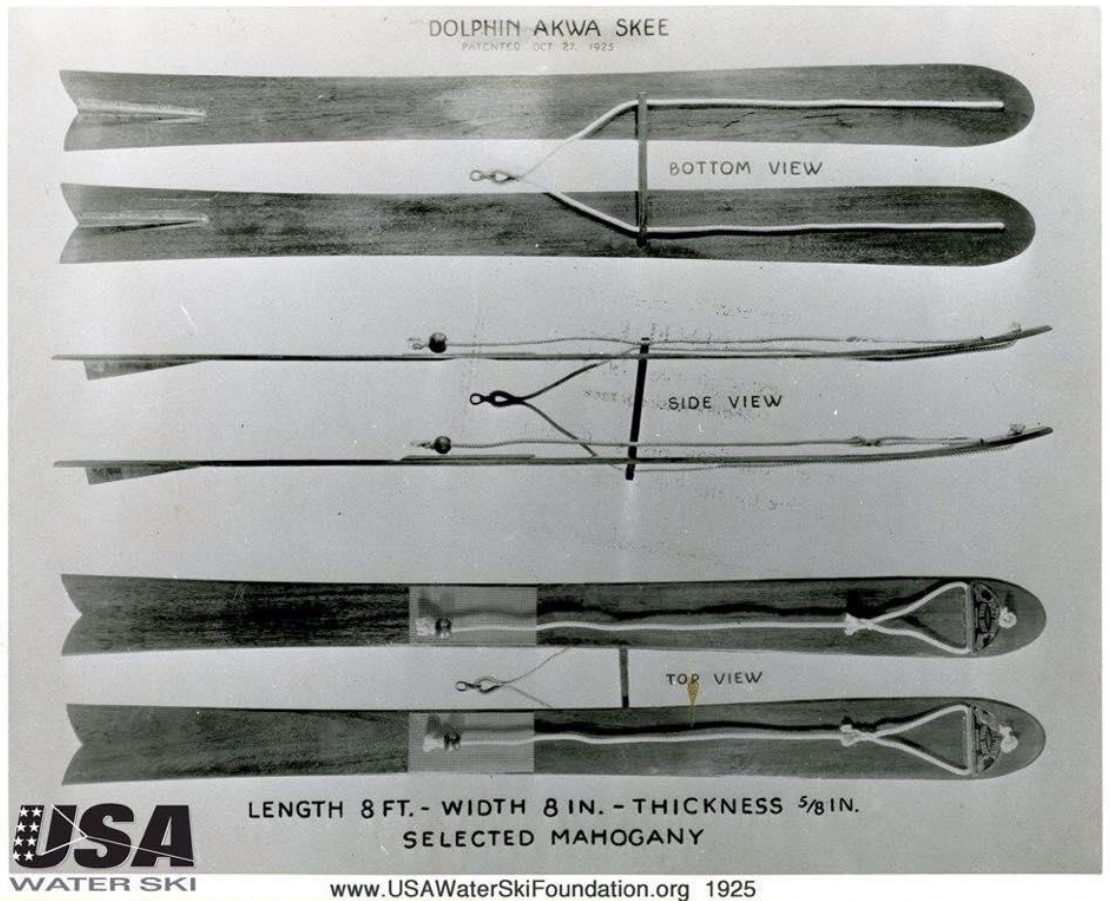
The Lake City post office has a ten foot by ten-foot mural of Samuelson being pulled behind the aeroplane in 1925 gracing its lobby.

1925
1st Patent
for skis

Fred Waller of Huntington, New York, a prolific inventor submitted the first patent for water skis, which he constructed out of kiln-dried mahogany and marketed as “Dolphin Akwa-Skees.



Fred Waller



www.USAWaterSkiFoundation.org 1925



Sport Model

Safety Model

Speed Model

A photo from an Ad for Fred Waller's Dolphin Akwa-skees. They were the first patented water skis, 27th October 1925.



The very early water skis were attached directly to the boat and the skier holding a rope attached to the ski. So, you want to take a spin thru the slalom course? Well, easy, just pick one up, tuck it under your arm and swerve away... Jane Osborn-1936.



No handles and hair still dry! Neat trick

1928

Dick Pope Snr

Dick Pope Snr is accredited as the first person to successfully jump a wooden ramp and go a distance of 25ft.



Note the rope was connected to the skis and the bindings appear to be shoes.

Water skiing gained international attention in the hands of famed promoter, Dick Pope, Sr., often referred to as the "Father of American Water Skiing" and founder of Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven, Florida. While away serving his nation during World War II, his wife **Julie Pope** had added a water ski show, to Cypress Gardens, their lakeside botanical theme park, to entertain area troops. On his return from war Dick embraced the idea and cultivated a distinct image for his theme-park,

creating newsreels featuring the daredevil skiers of Cypress Gardens on Lake Eloise. In no time, Winter Haven was the water sports centre of the United States. Photographs of the water skiers featured at the park began appearing in magazines worldwide in the 1940s and 1950s, helping to bring international attention to the sport for the first time.



Dick Pope Sr

The impact of Dick Pope on Florida tourism cannot be understated. Through his efforts, the image of Florida as playground for sun and fun spread around the world. He is credited with single-handedly re-vitalizing Florida tourism after the difficult times of the Great Depression and World War II. Cypress Gardens helped to establish central Florida as the dominant area in the world for theme parks. The park operated until 2003 when it was replaced by LEGOLAND Florida Resort.



Cypress Gardens in the 60s with Dick Pope playing the piano.



1928

1st Ski Shows

Show skiing as an organized activity was born in 1928 in New Jersey. That year an entrepreneur named **Frank Sterling** signed a contract with the Atlantic City Steel Pier to produce a water sports show on a motorized device called a skiboard. Skiboards were forerunners of the present-day motorized skimobiles, with flat bottoms and deck approximately 3 ½ feet wide, 6 feet long and 8 inches deep. Ten horsepower direct-drive motors were locked in straight forward position, and after pulling the rope to start the motor you stood up with rope handlines and steered like an aquaplane by leaning your weight from side to side. Events soon showed that the skiboard was unsuited to the water conditions, so he switched his performers to a new form of activity — water skiing.

		<p>In 1932, the first two "official" ski shows were hosted at the Atlantic City, New Jersey, Steel Pier and at the Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago.</p> <p>Although not specifically a 'ski show', check out. Blimps Pulling Water Skiers (1932) Sporting History on YouTube</p>
1932	Skis & 1 st ski school	<p>Don Ibsen thought he invented the water ski in 1928. His first pair of water skis was made of boxwood with a small block of wood fastened to each ski. Over these blocks was placed the arch of each foot and in this way the ski was controlled. After a little time, he decided to attach tennis shoes to them. It didn't ruin his fun in later years when he discovered that a Minnesota kid named Ralph W. Samuelson beat him by six years. But Samuelson didn't bother to teach anyone. In 1932 Ibsen started a ski school. And there was no shortage of students. In 1934 he sold his first pair of water skis for \$19.95 under his name and kept at it until the mid-1970s.</p> <p>Don Ibsen was looking for a way to promote the fledgling sport and his products. In 1937, he recruited a few local skiers and they put on a show at Seward Park in Seattle. He named the troupe the Ski-Aquatic Follies. His costuming was a hallmark of his Ski-Aquatic Follies, which he took on the road throughout the West.</p> <p>It wasn't long before they were on the road most of the summer when Ibsen then realized some sort of training facility was needed in order to replace skiers who left the show to pursue other interests. In 1939, Ibsen and two friends, Bill Schumacher and Bob Schmidt, created what is believed to be the first water ski club in the United States — the Olympic Water Ski Club.</p>



Don Ibsen

1939

AWSA

Organised competitive water skiing began with the formation of the American Water Ski Association by a small group of enthusiasts living in New York state. The first national championships were held that year at Jones Beach, Long Island, New York. The slalom course at the tournament was a string of pointed buoys set in a straight line. The skier had to ski around each to the end of the course. In tricks the skier was required to remove one ski and hold it above their head, plus a side slide or two.

JONES BEACH-1939



Bruce Parker 1st National Champion at Long Island, NY.

1946

UISN/ IWSU

L'Union Internationale de Ski Nautique (UISN) (International Water Ski Union) was formed 27th July during a series of powerboat races in Geneva by **Albert Schmidt**, SUI (1st President) and **Andre Coutau**, SUI along with skiers from France, Belgium and Switzerland, who had entertained the crowd between races with a display of water skiing.

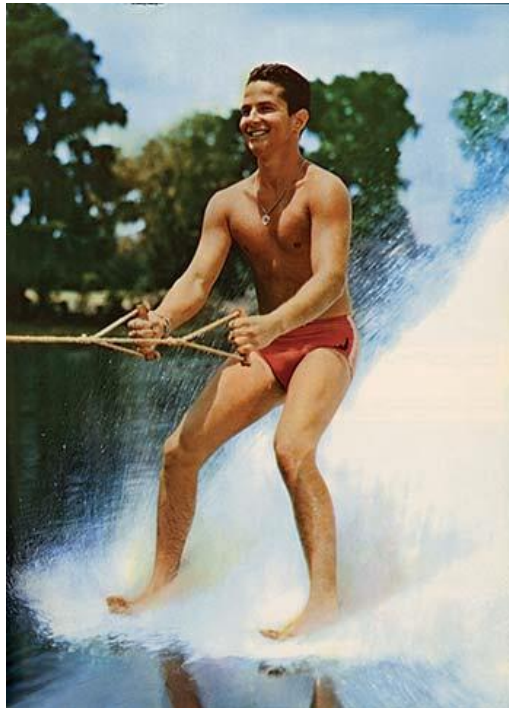


Andre Coutau

1947

1st
Barefooter

Dick Pope, Jnr was one of the first people to successfully barefoot water ski.



Dick Pope Jun. at Cypress Gardens

In 1952, he became the first person to successfully complete a 540 jump off a ramp.



Dick Pope Jr in 1949 jumping with double handles.

At the 2nd World Water Ski Championships, held at Cypress Gardens, USA in 1951, he won men's slalom and was the overall men's champion.

1948	Joining together	The American Water Ski Association was admitted as a UISN/ IWSU member.
1949	1 st World Champs	The first World Water Ski Championships were held at Juan-Les-Pins on the French Riviera, France and included competitors from France, Belgium, Switzerland & USA.



Ponton de départ aux premiers Championnats du Monde 1949 à Juan-les-Pins

Year	Place	Slalom	Trick	Jump	Overall
1949	Juan-les-Pins, France	Christian Jourdan, France	Pierre Guoin, France	Guy de Clercq, Belgium	Christian Jourdan, France
		Willa Worthington United States	Madeleine Boutellier France	Willa Worthington United States	Willa Worthington



Willa Worthington was also the first freestyle water skier and had a unique and creative approach to her sport. In the 1950s, Willa invented swivel skiing, a style of water skiing that became hugely successful around the world, which combines the moves of ballet with water skiing by using swivel bindings on the ski.

1950

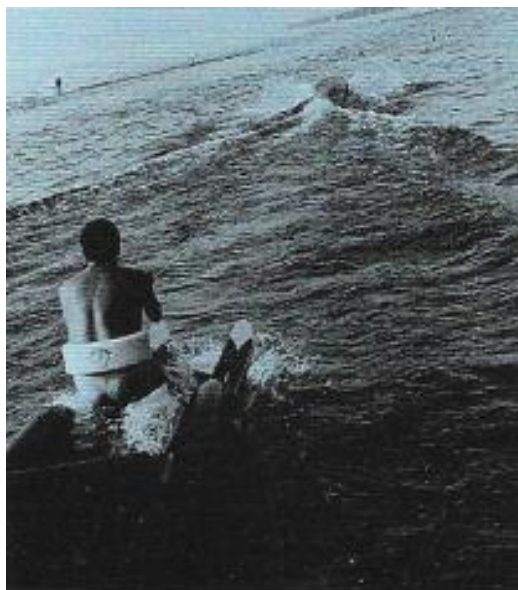
WWSF

America, Canada, Mexico and Argentina all resigned from the UISN/ IWSU and formed the World Water Ski Federation (WWSF).

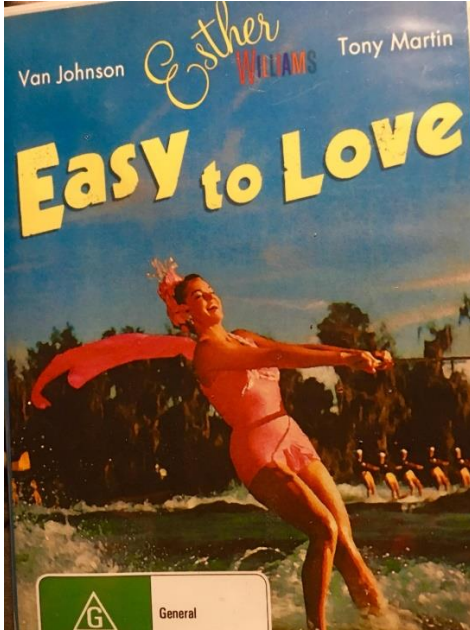

1950s

1st cable ski

A cable ski was in operation in Helsinki during the 1950s, it was claimed to be the first in the world. The inventor was **Kauko Kolma**, a Finnish construction foreman and water skier.



*The forerunner of Cable Ski :
underwater cableski in Geneva 1959*

<p>1952</p>	<p>Skiing hits the big screen</p>	<p>Fred Waller, who had submitted the first patent for water skis in 1925, later invented the cinema widescreen motion picture system, and in 1952 "This Is Cinerama", the first feature film released in the panoramic format, water skiing at Cypress Gardens, Florida, was a prominently featured subject.</p> <p>Another film in 1953 featuring water skiing was 'Easy to Love'.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div> <p>Willa Worthington (right) won 8 national championships, 3 world championships plus many other national titles. She revolutionized water skiing by introducing elements of ballet and dancing to music.</p> <p>She doubled for cinema swim queen Esther Williams in the MGM water musical, "Easy to Love." Williams could swim fast, but on water skis she was no Willa Worthington. Besides, Willa's smile was made for Hollywood. More importantly, she became a great attraction in the water ski shows at Cypress Gardens in Florida for many years.</p> <p>*Check out britishpathe.com - Willa Worthington Winner of Women's National Water Skiing Championships 1949</p>
<p>1952</p>	<p>The end of the flat ski</p>	<p>Skis were still flat boards, curved upward at the front. They were easy to stand on but difficult to manoeuvre. When a skier tried to turn, the skis tended to slide away, break, or pop backward, hitting him or her in the head.</p> <p>This annoyed Jannette Burr of Seattle, an active tournament water skier during the 1940s. Like many early devotees of the sport (including Fred Waller), Burr was a snow skier first. She spent 1951 in Austria, where she met a manufacturer of snow skis. For her wedding the following year, he sent her a pair of his new banana-shaped skis, which were tapered, allowing more speed and sharper turns. Jannette's father, Wally Burr, a woodworker, copied the Austrian ski in his basement. That was the end of flat based water skis. Other ski makers came to Burr's shop to learn from</p>

him; eventually his apprentices went out on their own, beginning Seattle's dominance in water ski manufacture.



Wally Burr

1953 Distance skiing On the 26th May 1953, **Frankie Beddor** set the world's record for non-stop distance covered on water skis. He skied from Memphis to Greenville on the Mighty Mississippi, a distance of 229 miles. The elapsed time was 9 hours and 10 minutes.

1953 (or shortly after) How it was back then.



Inner tube buoys and double handles were common although the switch to a single handle had already begun. Round slalom buoys were introduced at the 1960 Nationals in Minneapolis. The inner tubes were tied in quarters and had a nasty habit of catching skis if they were hit head on, sending the skier flying! (Jack Ostberg practicing on Bald Eagle Lake.)

1955 WWSU formed The UISN/IWSU (15 Federations) and WWSF (4 Federations) both dissolved and formed the World Water Ski Union (WWSU)
William Geneux, SUI (1st President)
Andre Coutau, SUI Secretary General

1956 1st established skiing in Ireland The Lakeside Hotel, Killaloe, started offering the new and exciting activity of 'water skiing'.
 (See Irish ski history docs for further details, achievements, and records.)

Postscript - Let's not forget he was way ahead of the rest



Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century drawing, 'Skis with which one can walk on water'!



If you enjoyed this, then for more history and details of the people, clubs, records and achievements of skiing in Ireland, check out the History section in the Irish Water Ski Federation web site.

A collection of World Stamps celebrating water skiing.

