

[Home](#)

Letters: Kathleen Harriman outfitted the 1948 U.S. women's team



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Letters: Kathleen Harriman outfitted the 1948 U.S. women's team



There is an interesting postscript to the article about bringing fashion to the Olympics (“Halston on Netflix: How Fashion Came to the Olympics,” July-August 2021). It involves Sun Valley and Kathleen Harriman, the daughter of the resort’s founder, Averell Harriman, who brought high fashion to the 1948 St. Moritz Olympics, well before Halston or Levi Strauss did so many years later.

(Photo above: 1948 U.S. Women's Ski Team in uniform; Utah Ski Archives)

Table of Contents



Featured Articles:

[Sunshine on My Shoulders: A History of Ski Music and Song](#)

By Charlie Sanders

[Catching up with Kari Traa](#)

By Aimee Berg

[Northland Skis: Fire and Feud in St. Paul](#)

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Sun Valley played an important role in getting American skiers ready to compete in St. Moritz. Sun Valley hosted the 1948 Olympic tryouts “in a style that has surely never been equaled,” and paid for accommodations for the 40 men and 20 women skiers competing for Olympic berths, according to the 1948 American Ski Annual.

Kathleen Harriman was not only a fixture at Sun Valley, often accompanying her father to official events, she was an outstanding racer. She was on Bennington College’s ski team and won an Eastern Ski Championship. Kathleen and Gretchen Fraser were good friends, often skiing together at Sun Valley.

Kathleen Harriman Mortimer (in 1947, she married Stanley G. Mortimer, heir to the Standard Oil fortune) was in charge of the women’s uniforms for the 1948 Olympics. Drawing on her father’s contacts, according to the book *Gretchen’s Gold*, Kathleen collected a wardrobe designed by Fred Pickard of Pickards of Sun Valley. Jantzen did the grey-worsted gabardine ski suits. There also were poplin parkas with fur trim plus hand-knit sweaters by Marjorie Benedickter. Most impressive were wool alpaca coats, long black après-ski skirts and pure silk scarfs decorated with delightfully drawn skiers that Max Barsis—Sun Valley’s official watercolorist and cartoonist-in-residence—had dreamed up. As the ski suits did not come with belts, Gretchen added her own belt with the buckle she had won in the initial California Silver Belt race at Sugar Bowl in 1940.

There is no record of who paid for the Sun Valley inspired wardrobe for the 1948 U.S. women’s team, but the U.S. Olympic Committee, with a limited budget, certainly did not. One suspects that a small part of the vast Harriman or Mortimer fortunes paid for the fashionable outfits at St. Moritz.

*John W. Lundin
 Seattle, Washington*

*John W. Lundin is a lawyer, historian and author, and is one of the founding members of the Washington State Ski and Snowboard Museum (WSSSM). His book, *Skiing Sun Valley: a History from Union Pacific to the Holdings*, received a 2021 Skade award from ISHA. His most recent book, *Ski Jumping in Washington State: a Nordic Tradition*, was the companion to an exhibit on ski jumping at the National Nordic Museum in Seattle, co-sponsored by*

By Greg Fangel and Paul
 Hooge

Departments:

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By Ron LeMaster

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By Jeff Blumenfeld

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By Seth Masia

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[Letters: Kathleen Harriman outfitted the 1948 U.S. women's team](#)

[Short Turns: Bash for Cash, Les Arcs honored](#)

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[Remembering Gian](#)

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WSSSM, which John helped organize.

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Correcting the Record

The book review of Skiing Sun Valley (Media Reviews, July-August 2021) contains an error by the reviewer. The book did not include a misspelling of Marilyn Monroe.

[Franco Kasper, Mike Wiegele, Rupert Huber, Kip Pitou](#)

[Ads from the Past: Stowe, 1961](#)

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In "Seven Decades at Belleayre," also in the July-August issue, a trail on Mt. Greylock was misidentified. It is the Thunderbolt Trail, not the Thunderbird Trail.



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