

## History of Engelwood

You may have heard the name Engelwood and wondered where exactly it is and what place it holds in our local history. For the past 30 years, Engelwood has referred to an 1100-acre unit of Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy, but its history goes back much further. Engelwood was a ski area in the 1950s and 60s, and a planned residential development in the 1980s. The name derives from the name of the Engelhardt family, who settled in the southwest corner (Sections 28 and 29) of Farmington Township in the late 1800s.



1878 map of Farmington Township

### Early History (prior to 1864)

The U.S. government acquired land from Indian tribes in Wisconsin primarily through a series of treaties, where tribes like the Ojibwe (Chippewa) and Lakota (Dakota) ceded large portions of their land to the federal government in exchange for designated reservation areas, with key treaty years being 1837, 1842, and 1854. Wisconsin became the 30<sup>th</sup> state in 1848. German, Irish, and

French immigrants quickly settled the Farmington area in the 1850s and 1860s, while Native Americans were forced to move further north into the wilder areas of Polk County.

### **Brickyard of Henry Bretag (1864-1889)**

Henry Bretag, a German immigrant, purchased 80 acres of land in Section 28 in the Township of Farmington in 1864. The land was all virgin forest, and the soil was mostly clay of the type which made good brick. He established a brickyard in 1866 and built a home and several farm buildings from the bricks. Bretag lived on his farm until 1889 when he sold it and the brickyard to his son-in-law, Charles Engelhardt, who had been raised on the adjoining farm of his father, Carl F. Engelhardt.

### **Brickyard of Charles Engelhardt (1889-1906)**

Charles Engelhardt expanded the brickyard into a commercial operation, purchasing special equipment to streamline the brick-making process. A horse-powered brick machine packed the clay into wooden molds. The bricks were then removed from the molds, placed on pallets, and dried in the open air. The dried bricks, weighing approximately five pounds each, were moved by wheelbarrow to the kiln and stacked to a height of 10 to 12 feet. Cordwood could be thrown in from each side of the kiln during a firing, providing a uniform source of heat. There would be at least one firing per year, sometimes two.

The bricks were sold to settlers in the area to build their homes, chimneys, smokehouses, silos, and even a cheese factory or two. The first recorded sale of Engelhardt bricks was in February 1891 to Joseph Dehmer for 15,000 bricks at \$7.50 per thousand for the construction of his home on what is now 280<sup>th</sup> Street in Farmington Township. He hauled the bricks from the kiln to the building site with a sled and horses. The Dehmer home is still standing today, as are many other homes and structures built of Engelhardt brick, including the buildings at the Engelhardt farm. The Engelhardt brickyard was closed in 1906.





Scene from Charles Engelhardt's brickyard in 1906. Left to right are Charles Engelhardt, Bessie (Engelhardt) Abajian, a hired man, Laura (Engelhardt) Burfiend, Mrs. Charles Engelhardt, another hired man, Guy Engelhardt, and Gordon Keeley (a cousin).



Brickyard and farm buildings of Charles Engelhardt in 1905. Left to right are Bessie Engelhardt, cousin Gordon Keeley, Laura Engelhardt, Guy Engelhardt, Rose (Mrs. Charles Engelhardt), a hired man on a hay rake, Charles Engelhardt on load of hay, and another hired man.



The Charles Engelhardt family. Front row, seated: Rose Bretag Engelhardt and Charles Engelhardt. Second row, seated: Guy Engelhardt, Gordon Keeley (cousin), Elizabeth Engelhardt. Standing: Laura Engelhardt. Year unknown.





The Charles Engelhardt farmhouse, constructed of brick from the Engelhardt brickyard.

### **Guy Engelhardt and the Farming Years (1906-1975)**

During all the years the brickyard was in business, Charles Engelhardt also operated a family farm, which was known as Plenty Wood Farm. A 1914 map of Farmington Township shows that in addition to the original 80-acre farmstead, Charles owned 360 acres across the road in Section 28. When Charles died in 1918, his son Guy (born in 1898) took over the farm. Guy married Beulah Hillskotter in 1928, and together they operated the farm until they retired in 1975. The dust bowl years of the 1930's forced many area farmers to sell their livestock due to lack of feed. The Engelhardt farm's location on the St Croix River allowed Guy to graze his livestock near the river and to cut hay on the islands.



Guy Engelhardt, circa 1927.

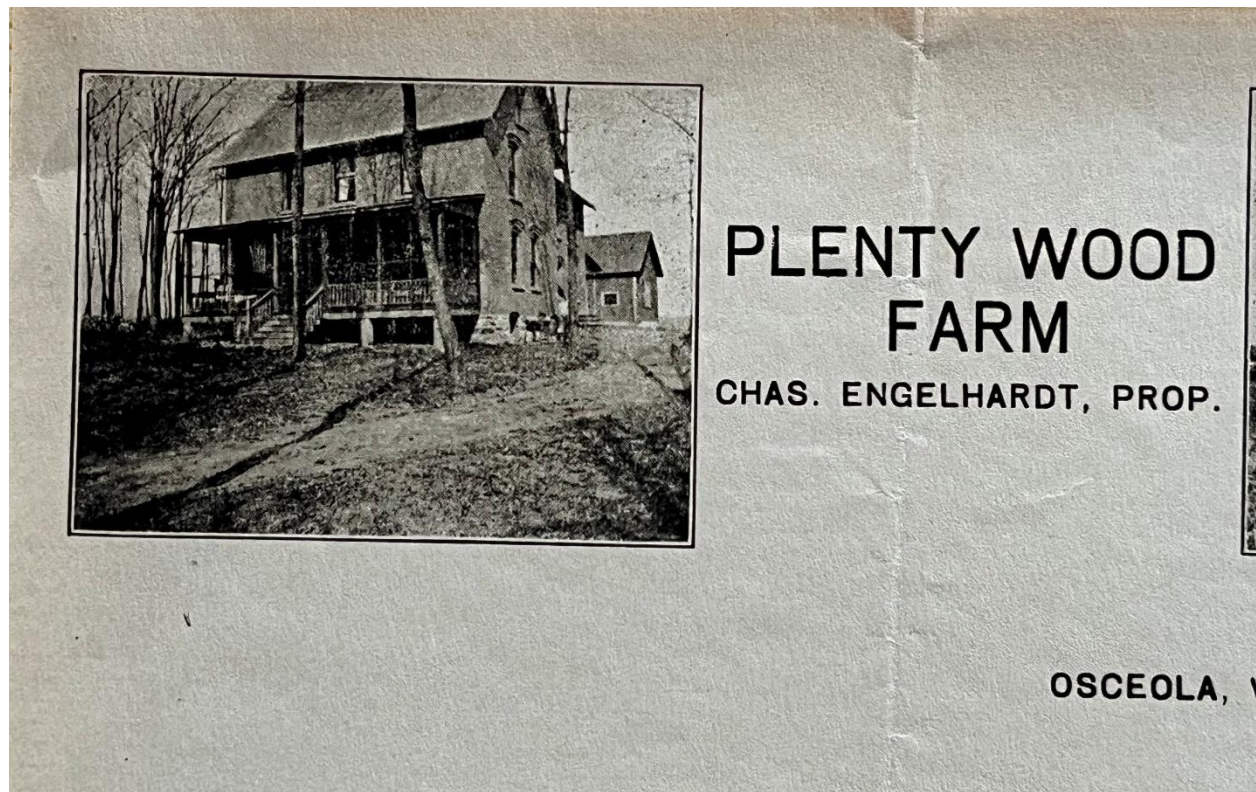




Sheep on lawn of Engelhardt home



Engelhardt home in the background



Letterhead from Plenty Wood Farm



Beulah and Guy Engelhardt



Engelhardt home in the 1960s or 1970s



## Engelwood Ski Area (1954-1967)

In 1954, Everett and Lucille Trulson, a couple from Minneapolis, began looking for some land where they could set up their very own ski area. They stumbled across the farm of Guy Engelhardt. Although covered with wooded pastureland, its steep slopes and ravines had the potential to be perfect for skiing. The Trulsons signed a two-year lease agreement with Guy and Beulah Engelhardt for the “purpose of erection and maintenance of ski slides” on the bluff and ravine portion of the Engelhardt farm closest to the St Croix River. The agreement gave the Trulson’s the right to clear the steep slopes for ski runs, construct one or more towlines, and build a chalet. The rent was \$100 per year, plus \$7 per cord for any hardwood timber that was removed. The Trulsons did not have a lot of money, but they weren’t afraid of hard work. Everett did much of the clearing and excavating work himself. The Headwall run was so steep that the bulldozer had to be lowered down the slope by cable. The Trulson family stayed in a camper near Engelwood parking lot on weekends and during the summer months.



Near left: Guy Engelhardt and Everett Trulson. Everett’s brother, Willard, was also involved in the business. Below left: Carving ski runs out of wooded slopes.



The Trulsons called the ski area Engelwood, a combination of the Engelhardt family name and the name of their farm, Plenty Wood. You often see Engelwood spelled Englewood, which is an English/Dutch term that means wooded nook. Englewood is the name of numerous towns in the United States, but the correct spelling for the ski area is Engelwood.



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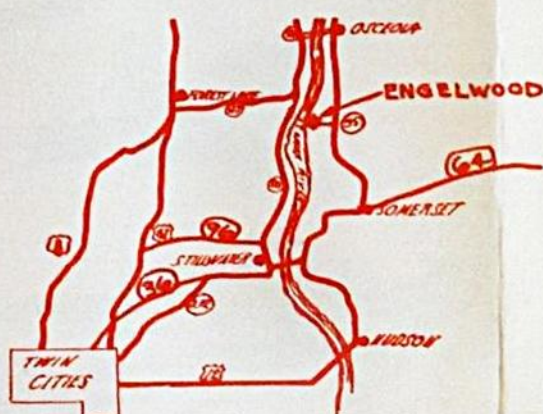
We are  
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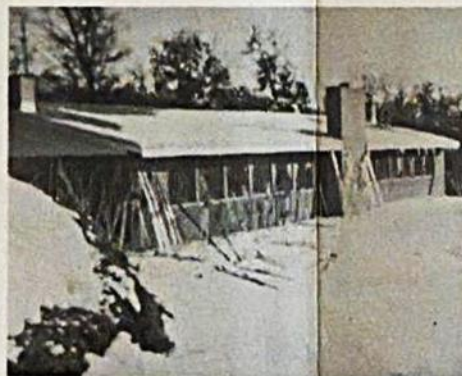
*Owned and Operated by*  
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Engelwood Ski Area brochure from the 1950s



Engelwood sign that was located on Highway 35



Alva Engelhardt Nelson grew up on her parents' farm across the road from the Engelwood parking lot. She became good friends with the Trulson daughters and would go skiing every weekend the ski area was open. Things were quite primitive in those early years. There was no outdoor lighting, so everything would shut down at dusk. There was no indoor plumbing, just an outhouse. There was no grooming equipment; people would pack down the slopes with their skis. There were, however, loudspeakers that blared Swiss mountain music across the hills. The mood was very festive and friendly. Alva doesn't ever remember paying to ski. Alva's mother (Eunice), sister (Iris), and neighbor (Beulah Engelhardt), and the wives of the Trulson brothers (Evelyn and Lucile) served food in the chalet – mostly hot dogs, hamburgers, and hot cocoa. Alva's dad, Ralph, spent a lot of time pulling cars out of the ditch on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the township road between Highway 35 and the ski area. Neighbors like Vern, Ernie and Otto Springer, and Richard and Paul Bierbrauer, ran the rope tows.



Alva Engelhardt Nelson and Guy Engelhardt in front of chalet. Guy learned to ski at age 60.

Ray Burris, who grew up across the river in Marine on St Croix, recounts how his parents would drive him across the frozen river (at the Marine Landing) in the morning and drop him off at the Engelwood parking lot. He would ski all day, then often ski the river back home to Marine. Ray would usually ski for free in exchange for helping out at the ski area. He skied all the runs, including Headwall. He remembers well the rope tows, which were really hard on gloves.

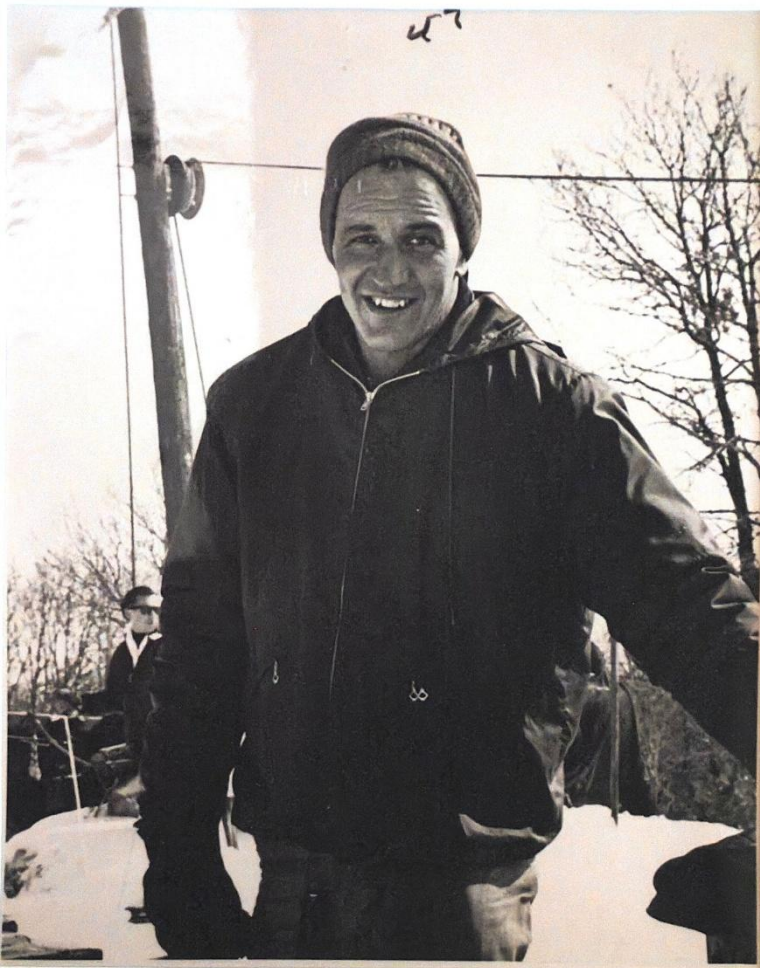




Interior of the Engelwood chalet



Engelwood patch



After several years of operation under the Trulson family, Arnold Kustritz, an electrician from St Paul with a passion for skiing, bought out the ski business. The lease was extended to 15 years, through 1971. The new agreement gave the tenants the right to clear additional land and open ski runs as necessary for the successful operation of the business. Rent for this period was \$150 per year.

Lack of reliable snow cover over several seasons led to the decision to invest in snowmaking equipment. Four-inch irrigation pipes were installed on the hills. Snow guns were made from scratch. Water came from the river. There were many setbacks as the pumps and pipes would often freeze up and burst, but snow did get made. Arnold and his brother-in-law, Jim Solum, and a mechanic, John Bentz, built their own T-bar and J-bar lifts near the chalet. Much of the equipment was secondhand or repurposed. A used Bombardier tractor from Canada was bought to groom the slopes. Matt Kustritz, son of Arnold, still has the Bombardier, and it still runs!





Bombardier snow groomer



Homemade snow gun for snowmaking

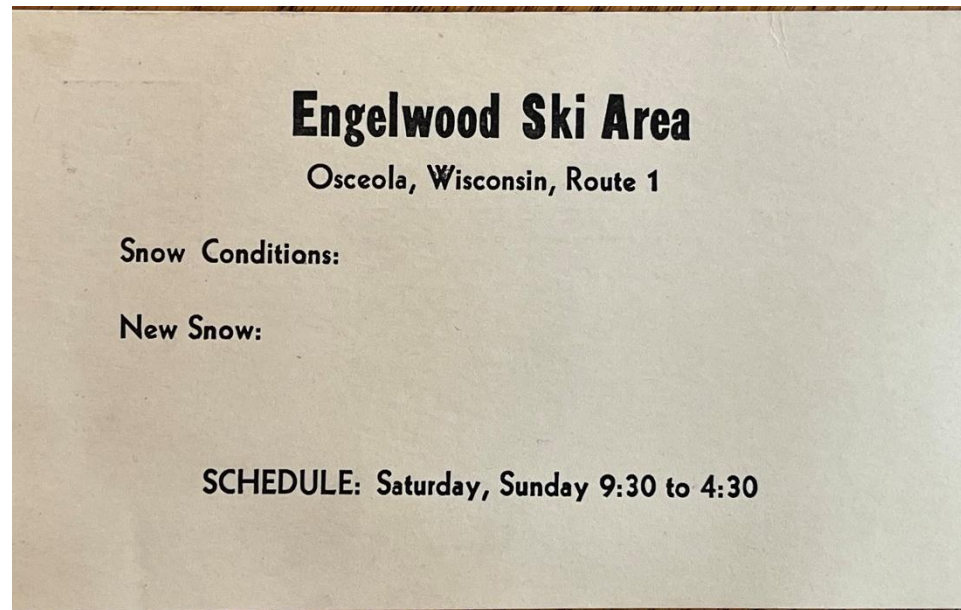
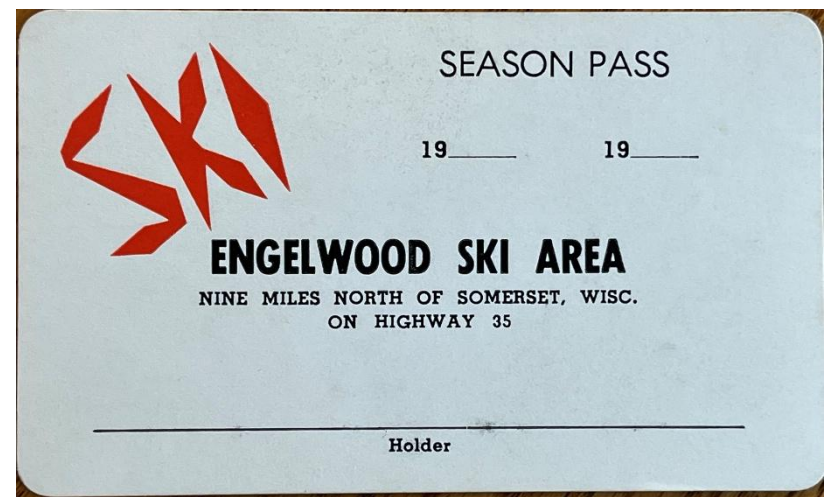
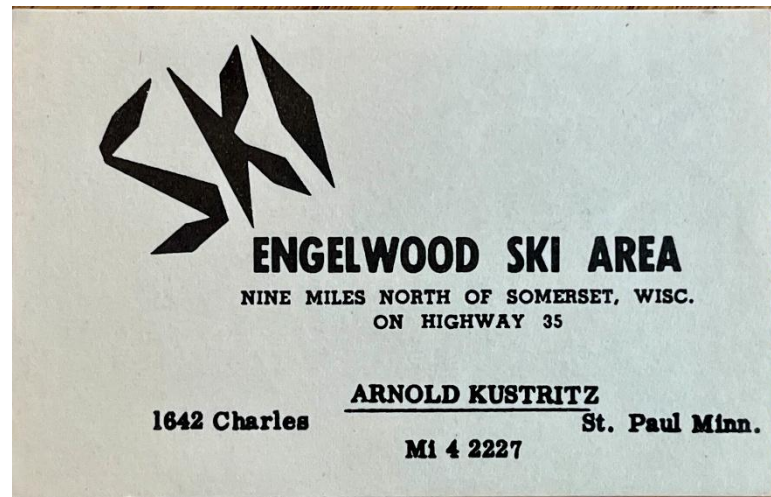
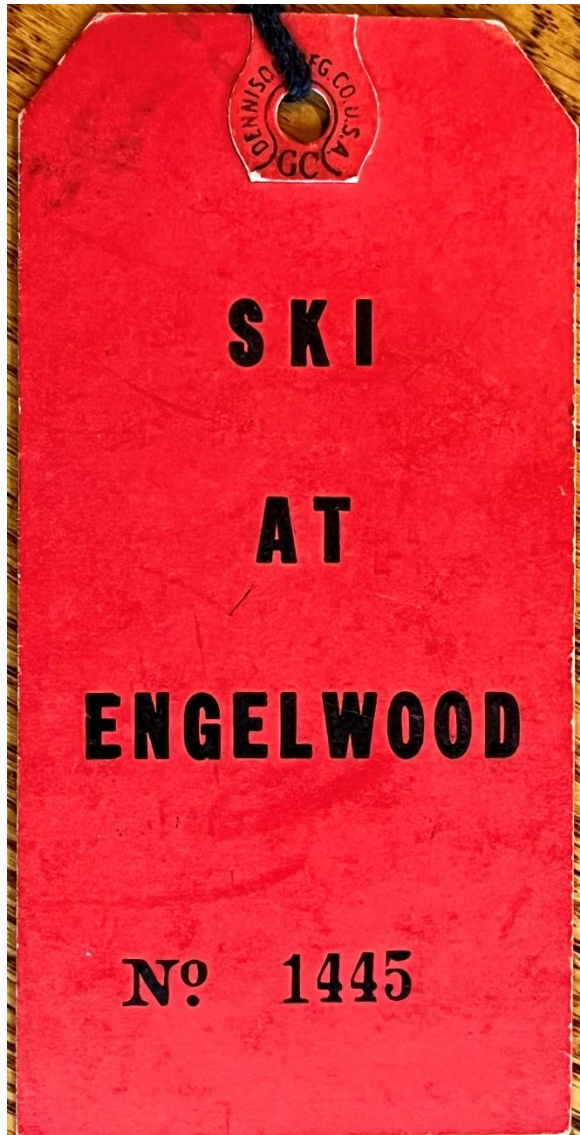


At left: The front and back of a brochure from the mid-60s. At this point, Engelwood had a T-Bar and a J-Bar, although most runs were still served by rope tows. Some of the slopes had snowmaking equipment. According to the map, the most difficult runs were Headwall (of course), Piper, Short Swing, and Duchess.



Left: Ralph "Ram" Matson, director of Engelwood's ski school for most of its history, taught kids from 6 to 60+. Here he is teaching the Austrian "short swing" technique to his 6-year-old son, Mark, and 62-year-old Guy Engelhardt.





Above: Lift ticket, business card, season pass, and postcard for snow conditions.

By the mid-60s, Engelwood had become “obsolete” in Arnold Kustritz’s own words. The rope tows needed to be upgraded to T-bar lifts or chair lifts, and the ski area lacked a so-called “expert” hill with a greater than 300-foot vertical drop. Arnold bought 166 acres of land from Henry Zorn just south of Engelwood that he thought had the best ski hill in Wisconsin or Minnesota. Engelwood was closed after the 1966-67 season. Arnold made plans to open a new ski area on his land to be called Mt. Somerset. It was to have four open slopes, a four-place 2,000-foot chair lift, and a toboggan slide, and was scheduled to open in 1969. The slopes had already been cleared when the St Croix National Scenic Riverway was established on October 2, 1968. Restrictions were put in place that did not allow for ski areas in the riverway corridor. Work was halted on the Mt. Somerset project. The original Engelwood ski area was sold to a group of investors who were not interested in operating a ski area.

Engelwood was a popular and well-loved skiing destination during the heyday of small-scale, family-owned ski businesses in the 1950s and 1960s. All that remains of it are remnants of the towlines and the memories of the folks who skied there. Most of the ski runs have reverted to woodland.





Above: Scenes from the 1960s

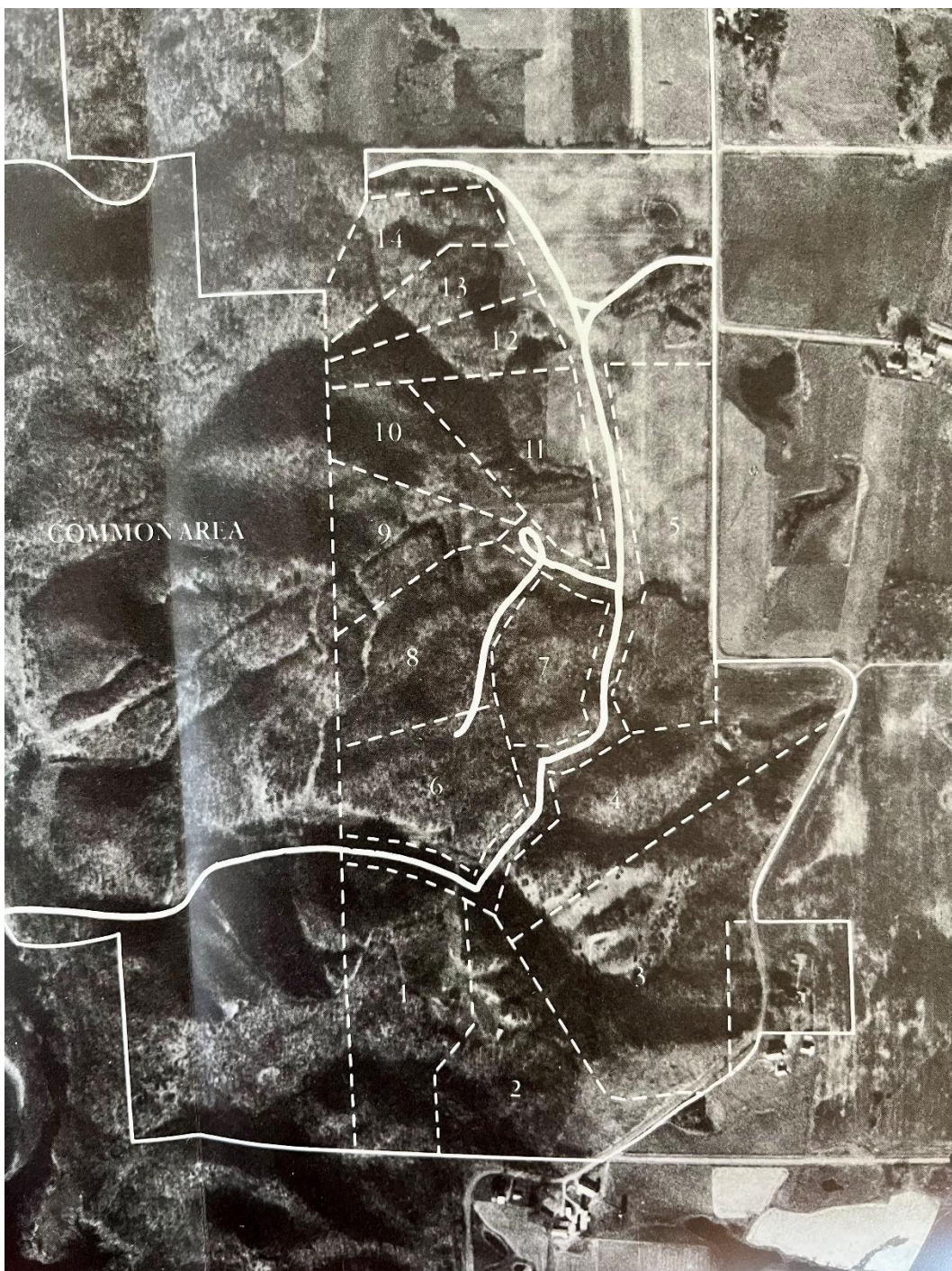


Relics of Engelwood Ski Area.  
Rope tows were powered by running a rope around the tire rim of an old car or truck that was set up on blocks.



## Cottonwood Land Company and the Engelwood Association (1960-1995)

David Preus and Rod Shearer, friends and business partners with ties to the St Croix, began buying up farms and woodland along the river in the late 1950s, with the idea of creating a membership association of vacation homes that would preserve the natural beauty of the area as much as possible. Over the years the Cottonwood Land Company (the name of David's and Rod's business) acquired 1700 acres of contiguous land along the St Croix River in Farmington Township. Among the parcels they acquired was the farm of Guy Engelhardt and the old Engelwood ski area. In 1968, with the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Federal government bought approximately 300 acres of riverfront property from Cottonwood. David and Rod planned to divide the remaining acreage into 55 lots over 1100 acres (called the Engelwood Association) and preserve the 300 acres around the old ski area as common ground for the private use of the association's landowners. Roads were constructed and 14 lots were mapped out as part of phase 1.



Perhaps the idea was a bit ahead of its time as the planned development failed to attract the necessary buyers. The owners, deeply in debt from their nearly 40 years of land acquisition, started to look at other options to help gain some return on their investment. In addition, having grown to love the land, they were interested in protecting as much of it as possible.



## **Standing Cedars and Engelwood (Early 1990s-present)**

In the early 1990s, David Preus of the Cottonwood Land Company and his wife, Topsy, learned of two local CSA farmers, Rick Hall and Verna Kragnes, who had successfully purchased a large tract of land three miles north of Engelwood with the goal of protecting it from development. David and Topsy decided to reach out to them to see if they would be interested in also purchasing the Engelwood property for the same purpose. This initial conversation was the spark for the idea of a land trust, which led to the creation of Standing Cedars.

Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy was incorporated in 1994 with the purpose of protecting the 1116-acre Engelwood property from development and the long-range goal of establishing a greenway to protect the land adjacent to the St Croix National Scenic Riverway between Osceola and the Polk/St Croix County Line. The land would be protected by placing conservation easements on it.

The Engelwood property was purchased by Standing Cedars in October 1995 with approximately 75 percent of the funding coming from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund and the remainder coming from local fundraising efforts. The 1116-acre tract is known as the Engelwood Unit.



Above: Celebrating the closing on the Engelwood property by Standing Cedars in October of 1995. Rick Hall and David Preus are holding the shovel in the right-hand photo.

The Standing Cedars Engelwood Unit was dedicated as Wisconsin's 600<sup>th</sup> State Natural Area in 2009.



The entire Engelwood property is managed for the benefit of the community and is open to the public for non-motorized recreational activities 365 days a year.







For more information about Standing Cedars or to read past newsletters, please visit their website: [standingcedars.org](http://standingcedars.org)

Emmalyn Kayser and Cody Fitzpatrick are the present stewards of the original Engelhardt farm and buildings. They operate Foxtail Farm CSA.

The Osceola Historical Society thanks Alva Engelhardt Nelson, Matt and Lori Kustritz, Ray Burris, Emmalyn Kayser, and Dan Guenthner, who provided materials and information for this History Wall Display.



For a closer look at some Engelhardt bricks, check out the bench at the west end of the historic Osceola Depot.