

Skidoo Encyclopedia Article

Skidoo

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Though commonly associated with the "roaring twenties," the popular catch phrase, "23 Skidoo," actually originated around the turn of the twentieth century. Its origin has been accredited to two contemporaneous sources: *The Only Way*, a Broadway adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, and telegraphic code. In the last act of the aforementioned play, an old woman solemnly intones the number of victims on their way to the gallows, with special emphasis on number 23, the play's protagonist. The cry, "23!," was soon taken up by Broadway habitués. In telegraphic code, 23 is an abbreviation for "Away with you!" Skidoo, a derivation of skedaddle, was soon added to "23" for the edification of those who had not seen the play or were unfamiliar with telegraphic code. For the next 20 years, the expression, or one of its variants, was commonly heard amongst students and young sophisticates, where it ordinarily meant "Get lost!," but was frequently used without any precise meaning. By the end of the 1920s, "23 Skidoo" had fallen out of common usage, but has since proved more enduring than other catch phrases of the period.

Further Reading:

Mathews, Mitford W. *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951.

Partridge, Eric. *A Dictionary of Catch Phrases, American and British, from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day*. New York, Stein and Day, 1987.