

**It Takes a Village:
Skiing in America from the Ground Up**

by

Katherine B. Jurczyk

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Professor Kimberly Sims

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Abstract

Ski areas are often the keystones to the economic growth and prosperity of their communities, and as such they provide a unique and incredibly useful lens for studying local history. No place in America boasts a richer ski heritage than the Mt. Washington Valley of New Hampshire, where, in the early twentieth century, the groundwork was laid for the future of the sport in North America. This thesis evaluates the transformation of the region from summer playground for city-dwellers to the nation's winter tourism epicenter in light of the unique, community-based methods used to promote the fledgling sport of skiing. This study argues that the development of the sport in America was not solely grounded in technological innovation or the personal appeal of a few influential role-players. It grew out of a collaborative community effort that facilitated the fusion of people and cultures across continents and left a legacy that permeates the region, the sport, and the industry it created.

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On the morning of May 14, 1938, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler received a cable from the Taconic Hiking Club of Troy, New York. The club's members, distraught at the reports that Austrian ski instructor Hannes Schneider had been imprisoned by the Nazis, appealed directly to the Führer for the release of the famed "skimeister." "As skiers," the cable read, "we object to the treatment Mr. Schneider has received. In the name of the good sportsmanship shown by the German athletes in the last Olympic Games, we ask that you grant him his freedom."¹

Procuring Schneider's release from his captors was no simple feat, but with the aid of a prominent American businessman, the sympathy of European, American and Japanese newspapers, and the support of skiing communities worldwide, Schneider was finally released ten months after his initial arrest, "with the understanding that he was to leave the country immediately."² With travel permits issued by Gestapo head Heinrich Himmler, arrangements were made for Schneider and his family to emigrate to the United States. Within a day of his arrival in New York on the *Queen Mary*, he stood atop the single ski slope at Cranmore Mountain, the fledgling resort that, under his guidance, would become the hub of winter tourism in the East. Schneider surveyed the scene before him: the mountains were smaller than he was accustomed to, the excited bystanders spoke a language he was just barely beginning to understand, and he hadn't slept in two days. Nevertheless, the February morning was nearly perfect, with impossibly blue skies

¹ "Ask Skier's Release." *New York Times*, May 15, 1938. p. 26.

² Virginia Katherine Frank, "Hannes Schneider: His Life and his Contributions to Skiing," (MA Thesis, Smith College, 1957) 62.

and fresh powder snow. Schneider turned to his young son. “Well, Herbert,” he said, “It isn't St. Anton, and it isn't the Arlberg, but we're going to love it here.”³

“Here,” was North Conway, New Hampshire – a village nestled in the heart of the White Mountains and the birthplace of American skiing. By the time of Schneider's arrival, the stage had been set in the northern New England region for what would become one of the greatest confluences of power, position, and personality ever to affect the sporting world. The American ski industry – an industry unsurpassed in scope and popularity by those that predated it in Europe – can claim a sporting heritage as rich as any other in the United States. From his position high atop Cranmore's slopes, Schneider stood poised to witness not only the industry's birth, but also the rebirth and revitalization of the entire community in the valley below.

This study will illuminate the accomplishments of skiing's earliest proponents in America in the context of their shared goals for skiing and their communities. The goals behind their commitments to the sport of skiing were unique among those affiliated with the sport in its early years, many of whom saw and attempted to use its attraction as a means of increasing their own personal prestige and influence. They have been previously recognized for the achievements that contributed to the development of a popular industry. However, their shared vision, which laid the foundation for the future of an entire community, has not been given its due. The story of skiing's start in America is, most importantly, the story of a partnership of ideas that inspired an entire community to reinvent itself, securing its own self-sustaining, prosperous future for generations.⁴

³ Herbert Schneider, interview with Jeff Leich, 26 January 2006, North Conway, NH. Transcript. The New England Ski Museum.

Historiography

In the burgeoning genre of sporting history, Alpine skiing represents somewhat of an anomaly. Unlike many other examples in the popular field – in which sporting culture is often explored or represented as a metaphor in relation to the world at large – there is a prevailing outlook among ski historians that prizes nostalgia over context. It may be due in part to the sport’s primarily Austrian and Swiss originators, who often decried innovation in favor of the “purity” and “tradition” of the sport, stalling its evolution at numerous points in its history as well as imbuing followers with a sense of righteous pride and zealous regard for their forbears. The current historiography also tends toward hagiography, idealizing the historical actors and events. A reinterpretation of skiing’s early twentieth century developments, particularly in the American context, is required.

American skiing’s existing historiography thoroughly chronicles the post-World War II development of the sport and its growth in popularity, but it largely focuses on the technical innovations that fostered the continued spread of the mass winter tourism industry. This approach is not without merit – individual skiers often link their own ability to the quality of their equipment, and the technology of the sport weighs heavily on skiers’ minds – but it is an especially restrictive focus where a discussion of the roots of the ski industry is concerned. In *The Story of Modern Skiing*, John Fry asserts that the “formal” ski industry is “a result of the trade shows beginning in the 1950s,” and entirely driven by “the process of getting ski equipment to the consumer.”⁵ He discusses the

⁴ For clarity, the use of the term “Eastern Slope region” in this paper refers to the region of New Hampshire encompassing much of Carroll County, including the towns of Conway, North Conway, Bartlett, and Jackson, so called because they are bordered on the east by the high mountain slopes of the Presidential Range. The Eastern Slope Ski Club, the Eastern Slope Ski School, and other similarly named groups discussed in this paper all derive their names from this term, which has since fallen out of use. The region is now commonly referred to as the Mount Washington Valley.

⁵ John Fry, *The Story of Modern Skiing*. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006), 249.

different periods of “domination” by European and American equipment companies, the effects of inflation, and the “revolutions” of plastic and fiberglass on ski manufacturing. This common approach to the ski industry ignores the localized roots of what is truly a much broader concept. The “ski industry” involves much more than manufacturing and sales – to a large extent, it can be argued that anything that impacts the livelihood of the residents of skiing communities is in some way a part of the ski industry.

Fry, Roland Huntford, and many members of the small group of skiing historians whose scholarly articles have lent to this study also have the habit of attributing credit for progress within the sport to sole individuals. None have addressed the successes of the early ski industry in New England from a community standpoint. But Fry does argue that Americans, amenable to change in a way unmatched by their European counterparts, are responsible for skiing’s continued progress – for better or for worse.⁶ This study will complement Fry’s existing, comprehensive one by further illuminating the goals and motives behind the outbreak of skiing fever in America.

Previous biographical works and evaluations of contributions by early actors like Hannes Schneider will also be crucial to this study, although they are limited in number and scope. Most of the biographical literature – including a valuable master’s thesis by Virginia Katherine Frank – dates from the mid-1950s, and was likely inspired by the great skimeister’s sudden passing from a heart attack in 1955. As Frank writes, Schneider’s death “brought a great awareness to the skiing world of debt owed him, for his activities had left an impression on almost every aspect of the sport.”⁷ The result, of course, falls in line with skiing writers’ tendencies towards glorifying the nostalgic past

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Frank, 1.

without making a substantial argument about it in the process. Regardless, Frank's study makes excellent, valuable use of personal interviews, counting on the memories of a number of people with important roles in the story of early American skiing, including "Herbert Schneider, Hannes's son; William Clapp, an American friend during the latter part of Schneider's life; Alice Klaer, a friend for twenty-five years in Austria and America; Joan Towne, a former instructor for Schneider at Cranmore mountain,"⁸ and more. Additional sources also tell the personal stories of others – like visionary shop owner Carroll Reed and businessman Harvey Gibson – whose roles in the development of the sport in America were vital to its success, but delve little beyond basic biography.

Other scholars of ski history, including John Allen, Morten Lund, Tom Eastman, and others who have contributed immensely to the preservation of ski history with many scholarly articles, tend to embrace a very narrowly focused method. For example, in Allen's article "1924: The Birth of Modern Skiing," the author describes a pivotal year in the development of skiing as an organized sport. The significance of 1924, he argues, lies in the formation of the first formal ski racing clubs and the first international ski organization. Yet, "like any turning point," he concludes, "the new ways, new ideas, [and] techniques...began to surface prior to the moment."⁹ Such prior moments are often glossed over in ski history, requiring further investigation.

The history of skiing appears to be affected both positively and negatively by the high regard its researchers hold for their subject. The result is a collection of history that is comprehensive, but at times too narrowly focused – fitting for a sport that is at once an artistic form of individual expression, and a commercial enterprise of epic proportions. In

⁸ Frank, 5.

⁹ E. John B. Allen, "1924: The Birth of Modern Skiing," *Collected Papers of the International Ski History Congress*. (International Skiing History Association: 2002): 240.

the small community of skiing historians, authors often prefer to regard individual elements of skiing history as entirely attributable to either one actor or one event. In the case of early skiing in America, this means neglecting the confluence of ideas that profoundly shaped the way Americans ski, think about skiing, and remember ski history. Most notably, existing ski histories have not yet addressed the specific case of skiing in New Hampshire in light of the community-centered approach of the sport's earliest proponents.

This study will focus on the backgrounds, goals, and achievements of these influential role-players, and argue that the outcome of their shared efforts to encourage and promote skiing on the community-level did more for the spread of the sport and the growth of entire regions than, as previous studies have suggested, the appeal of fame and shrewd business skill alone. American ski areas should reclaim the ideals of the fledgling ski industry and promote them in a twenty-first century context, in order to avoid falling victim to the economic ups and downs that will undoubtedly continue to threaten their success.

Skiing's Modern Beginnings

Modern alpine ski technique came into being primarily through Austrian influence. Russian and Scandinavian immigrants are thought to have been the first to ski in America, but the sport could not truly develop until cultural forces abroad precipitated its transformation from a mode of transportation to a form of recreation. It is particularly important to note skiing's path to rural Austria, because the Austrians' embrace of skiing as a "way of life," imbued with their cultural history, attitudes, and social standards,

would both mirror and affect the New Hampshire communities where the American ski industry began.

Despite Austria's mountain landscape, skiing was not organic to the Alps. Skiing as sport was first revealed to Austria and the world en masse when Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen published the phenomenally popular *On Skis Across Greenland*, his account of a six week journey across Greenland's polar ice cap, in 1890. Having successfully completed one of the last great feats of exploration, Nansen understandably shot to fame, but in a somewhat unexpected manner. His instant celebrity was less about Nansen the explorer as it was about Nansen the skier, and the result was a seminal moment for skiing. "On the one hand," Roland Huntford reflects on Nansen's achievements, "he had turned polar exploration into a branch of sport; on the other, through polar exploration, he had taken skiing out of the northern mists and revealed it to the outside world."¹⁰ *On Skis Across Greenland* was truly the first exposure of skiing to the masses, and the publication of a German translation in 1891 was the catalyst that set the wheels of modern alpine skiing in motion.

Matthias Zdarsky, of Lilienfeld, Austria, was among those gripped by "Nansen fever." His personal fanaticism for the sport heralded Austria's early embrace of skiing for recreation. Thirty-three years old in 1891, he had previously been an art student in Munich, an engineer in Zurich, and an accomplished gymnast.¹¹ In short, he was entirely predisposed to the combination of skiing's artistic and athletic charms. Zdarsky ordered a pair of skis from Norway without ever having seen a skier in his life, and his first attempts at use on the steep slopes near his home were disastrous. The reason quickly

¹⁰ Roland Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion: The Dramatic History of Skiing*. (London: Continuum Press, 2009), 140.

¹¹ Huntford, 231.

became clear – the skis were nearly twelve feet long, similar to those Nansen would have used to cross Greenland but impossible to turn and far more suited to gentler Scandinavian terrain. Zdarsky instantly recognized that if he wished to ski in Austria, he had to abandon what little he knew of the Norwegian style. He resolved to discover a new method, and what he produced after six winters of study and experimentation was the origin of Alpine skiing as we know it – the first system for controlled-speed continuous turns on steep slopes.¹²

Instruction would prove to be the key to skiing's immediate future. Zdarsky published the first true "how-to-ski" manual, *Lilienfelder Skiing Technique: A Guide for Everyman to Master the Ski Completely in a Short Time*. The book was a pioneering work, and the first to specifically describe the physics of skiing in a simplistic way meant to aid beginners. Zdarsky took it upon himself personally to spread his method, and may have instructed as many as 20,000 skiers at Lilienfeld over two decades. He taught his students free of charge, and his system may be regarded as the prototypical ski school, "designed for the rapid inculcation of minimum technique."¹³

But minimum technique was all Zdarsky felt was required of the sport. He hated speed, and his method was devoted solely to keeping it at bay. He was implacably opposed to racing, and he believed that there was truly no possible improvement to his method. He was fanatical and dictatorial. He craved recognition, but could not tolerate opposition. Despite his breakthroughs, his influence would stagnate by the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹² Fry, 94.

¹³ Huntford, 234.

Still, Zdarsky's initial contribution is invaluable: many of his pupils felt that the sport could blossom far beyond his set of limitations, and they traveled further into the Alps, beyond Zdarsky's reach, in search of the ideal place to hone their craft. They found it in the Arlberg.

The Arlberg

As Fry has noted, "the decade of the 1890s brought about changes as momentous as the technical innovations that revolutionized skiing seventy years later in the 1960s." It was at this time that the first formal techniques of downhill skiing were developed, the first instructional literature was published, and ski clubs were first formed. "Thousands of utilitarian years of skiing as winter transportation suddenly gave way to skiing as winter diversion, a sport."¹⁴ It was into this mix that Johann-Baptist Schneider – later known to millions as "Hannes," and alpine skiing's most-loved ambassador – was born in the Arlberg region of Austria.

The region that skiing pioneer Hannes Schneider called home before his unexpected emigration across the Atlantic has a long and complicated history, and one that lends itself to a further investigation of the social and cultural attitudes that would come to play such a large part in the development of the sport of skiing. The longstanding culture of the area doubtlessly affected Schneider's later insistence on community cooperation and his belief that skiing could provide an economic lifeline, first to the Arlberg, and, later, to New Hampshire.

The region's inhospitable climate and treacherous topography would define it in many ways over the centuries. In mountainous western Austria, the Arlberg mountain

¹⁴ John Fry, The Story of Modern Skiing. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006), 5.

range casts a long shadow over the villages that lie on either side of the Arlberg Pass, the only means of travel between Austria's westernmost states of Vorarlberg and Tyrol.¹⁵ Although settled in antiquity, the Arlberg remained almost entirely isolated for centuries. What developed – unsurprisingly – was a “contentious relationship between the region and outside authority,” and the attempts of Viennese administrators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to draw Vorarlberg and Tyrol closer to the central government were never much appreciated by the Arlbergers.¹⁶

In addition to a fiercely independent streak, their isolation also fostered a venerated tradition of community cooperation. The world's oldest charitable organization, the Brotherhood of St. Christoph, was founded in the Arlberg in 1386 by a young shepherd who had witnessed firsthand the incredible danger of the Arlberg Pass in winter. Heinrich Findelkund built a shelter high on the pass, and spent the long winters seeking out stranded travelers and guiding them to safety. According to his own biographical notes, Findelkund's shelter saved fifty lives in its first five years, and he was recognized by Pope Boniface VIII for his efforts. At the Pope's request, “Findelkund and his helpers wandered throughout Europe in the summer months to collect money for the maintenance of the shelter,”¹⁷ which came to be known as the Arlberg Hospice. By the time of his death around 1415, he had garnered “the financial and prayerful support of some 2,000 members,” in Italy, Bohemia, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.¹⁸ All were welcomed into the Brotherhood of St. Christoph, named for Findelkund's village in

¹⁵ “The Arlberg” is a multi-state region, taking its name from a mountain range that constitutes the border between two Austrian states, Vorarlberg and Tyrol. Thus, the towns and villages along the mountain range, regardless of which state they belong to, are considered part of “the Arlberg.”

¹⁶ William D. Bowman, “Regional History and the Austrian Nation,” *The Journal of Modern History*. 67, no. 4 (December 1995): 879.

¹⁷ Gerda Werner, *History of the Brotherhood of St. Christoph*. Online publication.
< <http://www.bruderschaft-st-christoph.org>>

¹⁸ Krista Dana, *The Alps* (Edison, NJ: Hunter Publishing, 2004), 54.

the Arlberg. The organization funded the upkeep of the Arlberg Hospice, and would later provide support for the Arlberg's neediest families.

The legacy of the Brotherhood of St. Christoph and the dangers of the pass would weigh heavily on the minds of Arlbergers over the centuries. Schneider, born in 1890 on the Vorarlberg side of the pass in Stuben, would have witnessed the characteristic cohesiveness of Arlberg communities up close from an early age. The 1890s marked a period of slight unrest in the little village of Stuben. In the decade prior, the community had thrived while the Arlberg railroad was being built, but the economic decline following the end of construction resulted in bitter times for the already sparse population. Schneider's family farmed, but during the long winters his father was in charge of packing the snow around the railroad tunnel to keep it open to travel – a laborious task in which nearly the whole community had to participate.

Despite what should have been a rather ordinary existence of rural life and farm chores, "Schneider was not ordinary, even as a boy."¹⁹ His curiosity, perhaps stifled at times by the monotony and isolation of his tiny village, was often piqued by visitors to Stuben. Although "it was against all odds that he would even learn that there was such a thing as skiing for sport to begin with," in the winter of 1898-99, one visitor left behind a lasting impression.²⁰

Victor Sohm, of Bregenz, Austria, was the son of a wealthy Austrian banker and a former pupil of Zdarsky. At twenty-nine, Sohm traveled through western Austria with a companion in search of superb snow on which to practice the new sport, and he found it in Stuben.

¹⁹ Lund, 2.

²⁰ Lund, 3.

Sohm booked a room at Stuben's single small hotel, and spent a day climbing up and taking runs down a slope outside the village. Late in the afternoon, Schneider, all of eight-years-old and with a number of other village children, caught sight of the visitors climbing the hill behind the church on their skis. Schneider's companions laughed and mocked the skiers, whose foolish endeavor must have been quite the uncommon amusement. But Schneider was entranced. When Sohm retired to his room for the night, he left his skis outside the hotel, leaning against the wall. Proving from an early age his own ingenuity that would later be so essential to the progress of the sport, Schneider carefully laid one ski on the ground and measured the length and width of the skis by hand, determined to somehow procure his own pair. He took the measurements to the local carpenter, a Herr Mathies, who complied with the boy's odd request. Schneider struggled terribly at first, unable to keep them on his feet. In his haste to measure Sohm's skis, Schneider had forgotten to get a good look at the bindings. Schneider's mother eventually found the solution, fashioning bindings for her son out of the netting from a kitchen sieve.²¹

For a year, Schneider skied alone, as often as school and farm chores would allow. He knew nothing of technique – only speed. Although the village boys found his hobby laughable, he eventually enticed the carpenter's son, Albert Mathies, to try the sport. Mathies found it exciting, and had his father make a second pair. The carpenter also improved each set of bindings by adding a leather strap for extra safety. Schneider's father also helped improve upon their methods, sharing with his son a trick learned from years spent digging out the Arlberg pass with crude wooden shovels after a storm: to prevent wet snow from sticking to their shovels, the men would apply a coat of paraffin

²¹ Herbert Schneider. Interview with author. North Conway, NH, January 5, 2010.

wax. Mathies and Schneider did the same to their skis, and were ecstatic to find that they easily slid down the slopes in all snow conditions.

Speed was the boys' only goal, and neither knew how to turn or stop. Schneider's mother, terrified of what could happen on the snowfields high above town, allowed them to ski down a hill behind the Schneider home, directly into the barn, and into stacked bales of hay. It was, for a time, their most efficient way of stopping.²² Sohm returned in 1900, and, impressed with Schneider's dedication and natural ability, took him under his wing. With Sohm over the next five years, Schneider analyzed the fundamentals of skiing technique, and the two came to a conclusion about the different schools of thought among skiing's pioneers: "the Zdarsky technique ignored the whole spirit of the sport by encouraging a skier to progress slowly and cautiously down a slope rather than ski with boldness and adventure...skiing at such a snail's pace was not skiing at all."²³

Meanwhile, On January 3, 1901, a group of six visitors signed the guest book at the old Arlberg Hospice. Their entry reads, "Delighted by nature, enthralled by the sport, filled with the necessity to create a modest meeting point in the Arlberg for friends of this noble pleasure...[we felt] compelled to found the Ski Club Arlberg!" The world's first ski club, with which Hannes Schneider would be closely associated after 1907, was thus founded in the headquarters of the world's first charitable organization.²⁴

Schneider left school at fourteen and continued to work with Sohm on the pursuit of a technique that would allow deliberate, unlimited speed. He began to race regularly, rarely losing, and his reputation in the Arlberg region as the local boy who could beat any

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Frank, 30.

²⁴ Christof Thöny, "The Arlberg Skiing Club," *Journal of the New England Ski Museum* 64 (Winter 2006): 12.

of Europe's finest racers grew. By 1907, Schneider was offered a position as the ski instructor in residence at the Hotel Post in St. Anton, just to the east of the Arlberg pass and his hometown of Stuben. Just as Stuben had suffered economically with the completion of the railroad twenty years before, "St. Anton lost its historic function as a staging post on the road across the Arlberg Pass...[it] had been reduced to the railway station at the eastern end of the tunnel; an obscure stop on the line between Paris and Vienna. Ever since, in a quest for survival, the village had been looking for a new rôle to replace the old one."²⁵ Schneider accepted. Like the shepherd who guided travelers over the mountain pass, he had found his calling. Both would long be remembered for their service to the community – although Schneider would guide them down the mountains, not up.

The St. Anton Model: Instruction and Industry Roots

Schneider soon discovered that although interest was growing in the winter sporting potential of the region, there were still only a handful of winter guests at the Hotel Post each year. For the first few years of the Hannes Schneider Ski School's existence, Schneider had virtually unlimited time to ski by himself, carefully analyzing his technique and experimenting with untested methods. His racing success continued, and word began to spread. By 1910, visitors to the Hotel Post had doubled, and by the following year, two more instructors were brought on to assist Schneider. Schneider's discovery of a system of turns that could enable a skier to progress in skill level naturally over time – dubbed the "Arlberg technique" after the region itself – proved to be the death knell for all other theories of alpine skiing. He had followed "in the wake of

²⁵ Huntford, 336.

Zdarsky, but without Zdarsky's limitations. Schneider had devised the first coherent system flexible enough to cope with all Alpine terrain and with unrestricted speed. In that sense, he opened up the Alps."²⁶

They did not remain open for long. The ski school's progress came to an abrupt halt in 1914, when Schneider and all of his instructors enlisted in the Austrian army at the onset of the First World War. As a First Sergeant, Schneider met a general who had been his pupil at St. Anton. The general made mention of Schneider's level of expertise and instructional experience to Army officials, and Schneider was promptly put in charge of ski instruction for the troops of the Austrian Army. It would be on a glacial plateau in the Italian Alps during wartime that Schneider truly developed the skills that would make him capable of teaching the masses how to ski.

Schneider completely disregarded the existing army code for skiing instruction, a pattern that had been adopted from Zdarsky and which Schneider believed unsuitable for Alpine skiing, particularly in a military context. He trained the troops in the Arlberg technique, hardly any differently than if they had been students in St. Anton, and in so doing earned himself the disapproval of the Army officers who had appointed him – until, that is, they saw how efficiently the soldiers came down the slopes.

Schneider's experience as a military ski instructor would prove invaluable in the years ahead. It "taught him above all how to manage large heterogeneous groups and quickly turn absolute beginners into passable skiers,"²⁷ and, as Frank notes, "the situation permitted him to experiment with various types of class organization and all levels of skill."

²⁶ Huntford, 337.

²⁷ Huntford, 338.

The Hannes Schneider Ski School at St. Anton had encountered moderate success in the years before World War I, but after starting over in 1917, it seemed to grow bigger almost effortlessly – an expansion no other school could match in the twenty years between the end of the war and Schneider’s next great trial, the German annexation of Austria in March of 1938. At its height, the school had over forty instructors, many of whom would emigrate or travel extensively to the United States.

The astonishing success of Schneider’s years in St. Anton benefited from a number of factors, chief among them the technique and the teaching system and, of course, the favorable factor of the superior snow and climate of the Arlberg region. But the key was always overwhelming amount of community support and nearly universal acceptance of Schneider’s influence. Schneider’s technical innovations – the knees-bent “crouch” style, the “Stem Christiana” and “snow plow” turns, and more – are notable, but less impressive when regarded in context with the incredible way he managed to influence, through community-building and instruction, the feverish spread of the sport worldwide.

Across the Atlantic: The Mount Washington Valley

History in the White Mountains, as in the Arlberg, shares an intimate link with geography. Whereas other American colonies were ideologically founded, New Hampshire “had no original charter or strong-willed proprietor to shape the destiny of the settlement.”²⁸ The first Europeans to settle in the area were fortune-minded and adventurous. They chose the northern wilderness, despite its many hostilities, in order to cash in on the burgeoning timber trade, and they did so in what was effectively “a

²⁸ Nancy Coffey Heffernan and Ann Page Stecker, “New Hampshire: Crosscurrents in Its Development” (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 15.

political and economic free-for-all.” That early environment left its mark, and “makes the history of the state colorful and gritty and provocative.”²⁹

“The White Mountains in the northern part of New Hampshire,” Jeremy Belknap wrote in 1789, “have, from the earliest settlement of the country, attracted the attention of all sorts of persons.”³⁰ New Hampshire’s natural resources such as timber would prove over the centuries to be crucial to its economic success, but the natural beauty of the White Mountains would also prove to be a valuable resource all their own.

“A romantic imagination,” Belknap suggested, “may find full gratification amidst these rugged scenes.” Long before skiing and winter sport redefined the region, such inspired romantics would make the towns and villages of the White Mountains into one of America’s first vacation destinations. In the mid-nineteenth century, dozens of artists flocked to the Whites – particularly the town of North Conway – inspired by the region’s natural dichotomy: like the Arlberg, and despite the ever-encroaching marks of civilization, it was a wilderness that was as starkly beautiful as it was dangerous, untamed, and rogue. Many were pioneers of the American landscape painting genre, and “it is no exaggeration to say that the art of this period played a pivotal role in establishing the White Mountains as a beloved vacation destination for a middle class that was just beginning to discover the pleasures of tourism.”³¹

The coming of the railroad all but ensured the new public perception of New Hampshire as a place to be visited. When railroad service was introduced in 1851, “the region entered a “Golden Age” of hotel development. Soon a Bostonian could leave

²⁹ Heffernan and Stecker, 16.

³⁰ Jeremy Belknap, “Description of the White Mountains of New Hampshire,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 2 (1786): 42.

³¹ Christopher Johnson, “This Grand and Magnificent Place: the Wilderness Heritage of the White Mountains.” (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006), 107.

home in the morning and have supper in the White Mountains; by 1887 rail service made the trip from New York City possible in eleven hours.”³² Simple country inns and luxurious grand hotels seemed to spring up overnight, and the railroads promoted them in turn.

In 1901, the opening of the Mount Washington Hotel at Bretton Woods, marked both a culmination and a turning point for tourism in the White Mountains. “In the White Mountains up to this point, the primary appeal had been to middle class visitors...the Mount Washington was different because it set out to attract the growing cohort of millionaires who lived within a day’s travel of the mountains.”³³ The Grand Hotels experienced a steady decline over the early twentieth century, due in part to economic upheaval as well as a sort of backlash to the principle. Although initially enthralled with the concept when it was new, many visitors began to question the benefits of travelling to the mountains simply to stay indoors.

Boston native Carroll Reed was among those who sought such an unmediated mountain experience. Reed was the first to conceive of a public ski school in America, and he was the first to embrace the potential for a wholly American ski school – one run by and for the benefit of the local community. His original idea for a school, born out of his own concern for the well-being of others following a horrific accident, included the goal of encouraging local participation from the very start.

Twenty-nine years old in 1934, Reed never properly learned how to ski and never sought professional instruction – not that there was any to be offered in New England at the time anyway. Nevertheless, he and fellow Boston-based ski enthusiasts – many of

³² Heffernan and Stecker, 178.

³³ Johnson, 145.

whom developed an attraction to the sport over the course of European travels – formed a ski club: The White Mountain Ski Runners. “My group skied mostly up in Pinkham Notch,” he later noted. “We just skied in those days. We didn’t have any conception of style.”³⁴ Reed and his cohorts honed their admittedly flawed technique from their mistakes, of which there were many. Their choice of Pinkham Notch was not arbitrary. Although skiing had yet to really make its mark on the area, a small network of trails had been cut in the early thirties – a consequence of the depression and the development of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Several divisions of the CCC had been sent to the White Mountains, and cut trails throughout the region in addition to their other projects.

The network of trails in Pinkham Notch connected Appalachian Mountain Club camps with hiking shelters high on the mountains, and among them, the Wildcat trail on Wildcat Mountain was the longest, steepest, and the most intriguing for skiers. Later used for the infamous Wildcat Race, it would also be the most notorious. In the late afternoon of April 21, 1934, Reed and his companions climbed the Wildcat’s rise of 2,000 vertical feet for their final run on a day spent exploring the newly cut trails. Reed descended first, recalling later that the soft, spring snow of the early morning had turned to ice as the temperature dropped at the end of the day. At a spot later called “Carroll’s Corner,” a brook crossed the trail, but in the late evening the already tricky spot was nothing more than a patch of ice. Reed hit the ice at full speed, careening off the trail and into a tree. When his companions found him, his back was broken and he was paralyzed from the waist down.³⁵

³⁴ Morten Lund, “Carroll Reed: More than a Retail Legend,” *Ski Magazine*, November 1986.

³⁵ Jeff Leich, “The Wildcat Trail.” *Online Journal of the New England Ski Museum*, January 21, 2006. <<http://www.skimuseum.org>>

Reed's accident would have momentous implications for the future of skiing in the White Mountains. It enabled him to develop the idea, that, upon later cooperation with Harvey Gibson and Hannes Schneider, would lay the foundation for the origins of the American ski industry and revitalize the region that he adopted as his home. Reed spent nineteen weeks in North Conway's Memorial Hospital, and while he recovered – eventually regaining the feeling in his legs after being operated on by a surgeon brought from Massachusetts General Hospital – he read an article in an issue of “Appalachia,” the journal of the Appalachian Mountain Club. “Ski Schools of Europe” by Tom Cabot, an early American ski racer, described in detail the popularity of European ski schools, focusing on the largest and most famous school in the world – The Hannes Schneider Ski School in St. Anton, Austria. Cabot even suggested that ski schools would, in time, find a foothold in the United States. Reed, with plenty of time on his hands to mull over the idea, began to think that the time for a ski school in the Eastern Slope region had arrived.³⁶

Reed felt that a ski school in the area could accomplish two major goals: “If others could learn to ski properly,” he noted, “than perhaps the risk of skiing accidents similar to his would be lessened.”³⁷ Furthermore, the sport needed the influx of knowledgeable instructors from Europe in order to continue developing. This growth, in turn, had the potential to transform the local mountain villages, culturally and economically. Reed's plan was thorough and inspired, but his ability to implement it was hampered by the year and a half of recovery he still required.

³⁶ Carroll Reed, Interview with E. John B. Allen. Transcript. The New England Ski Museum.

³⁷ Tom Eastman, “Carroll Reed: Eastern Slope Region Ski School Visionary and Ski Shop Entrepreneur,” *Collected Papers of the International Ski History Congress*. (International Skiing History Association: 2002), 23.

Reed's quest was finally made possible in 1936 by the Eastern Slope Ski Club, the organization that, perhaps more than any other, made the spread of skiing in New England possible. Reed enlisted the support of the year-old club, founded in 1935 in the North Conway home of Reed's own doctor, Memorial Hospital Chief of Staff Dr. Harold Shedd. The Club, one of the earliest in the country, "was devoted to promoting skiing in the region, and its members enthusiastically threw their support behind Reed's ski school proposal."³⁸ A fellow member of the White Mountain Ski Runners, Mary Bird, suggested that Reed write to Hannes Schneider. Bird had skied with Schneider in St. Anton the previous year, and Reed – who certainly lacked the ability to instruct skiers himself – knew that he could do no better than to procure an instructor from Schneider's world-famous school.

Schneider agreed to send Benno Rybizka, an iron-fisted disciplinarian of an instructor, but a flawless skier and, most importantly, the only member of his staff who was fluent in English. The beginning of skiing as a community enterprise in America immediately followed. Rybizka's cost for the season was one thousand dollars, and to finance the endeavor, Reed needed the support of nearly every innkeeper in the region. "In those days," Reed remarked in 1983, "[the villages] virtually hibernated in the winter and there weren't that many inns open."³⁹ Reed had to somehow convince them that the lure of ski lessons with an Austrian instructor from Hannes Schneider's school would draw enough visitors over the course of the season to warrant staying open through the winter months. Many became "members" in Reed's school, paying Reed upfront one dollar for every room that they rented, a fee that would allow any guests to take ski

³⁸ Eastman, 25.

³⁹ Reed, quoted in Eastman, 25.

lessons at a fifty cent discount off the standard lesson price. The memberships allowed Reed to hire Rybizka, and he arrived in December of 1936.

To assist Rybizka, Reed recruited local boys, many of whom had never skied, to be trained as instructors in the Arlberg system. The ski school gave six thousand lessons on the slopes of the town of Jackson in its first year of operation – a year remembered in the region as almost snowless. Reed proved his point: in spite of the poor weather, the fascination of the ski school kept the inns full throughout the winter.

The Eastern Slope Plan

While in New York to meet Benno Rybizka prior to the start of the first season of the Eastern Slope Ski School, Reed, at the suggestion of Dr. Shedd, paid a visit to Harvey D. Gibson. A native son of North Conway, Gibson's role in reinventing the community where he was raised is often written off purely to the financial success he achieved as a magnate of the business world. While his status as president of the Manufacturer's Trust Company in New York indisputably enabled him to be the financier needed to get the projects related to skiing off the ground in New Hampshire, his personal desire to uplift his hometown and his hands-on dedication to the project over the course of his life is what truly helped the plan to succeed.

Reed's plan for the Eastern Slope Ski School was not the first Gibson had heard; Averill Harriman, a future U.S. Secretary of Commerce and business associate of Gibson's, was putting together "the first true purpose-built resort... conceived as a destination in its own right" at Sun Valley, Idaho.⁴⁰ At the time, Harriman was Chairman

⁴⁰ Huntford, 377.

of the Union Pacific Railroad. “He persuaded his fellow directors that the U.P., hungry for prestige and passengers, should build a resort,” and Sun Valley opened in 1936.⁴¹

Gibson knew of Harriman’s plan, but he preferred Reed’s – he saw Sun Valley as a wholly manufactured place, and a draw to keep the railroad man’s pocket’s full. In New Hampshire, skiing had developed around the towns; towns had not been developed for the purposes of skiing.

After watching his daughter take a lesson at Reed’s Jackson school that winter, Gibson came to believe that skiing could take hold in the entire valley. He purchased Lookout Mountain in North Conway, renaming it Cranmore, and began the process of increasing the size and scope of Reed’s ski school. In 1938, Reed sold the school to Gibson, and a second branch was opened at Cranmore. “Selling the ski school wasn’t my idea,” Reed later explained,

as it was proposed to me at a club meeting that summer by [Eastern Slope Ski Club directors] Dr. Shedd, Noel Wellman, and Joe Dodge. It was a blow to me at first, but then, after considering it, I realized that it was absolutely for the best. And Mr. Gibson was a great guy to do business with...They wanted me to sell the school and let it be owned by the community...and that’s why I sold it to him. I knew it would be good for the community.”⁴²

Gibson and the Eastern Slope Ski Club continuously maintained that the entire operation remain a community endeavor. “Our aim,” Dr. Shedd wrote in October 1938, “is to establish a regional school which will continue to serve the communities.” And, demonstrating the region’s independent streak, “It is undesirable to build up a topheavy foreign staff at the expense of our local boys...we are aiming towards an American

⁴¹ “Ski Fever.” *Time*, January 13, 1947.

⁴² Eastman, 26.

school at some future time.”⁴³ Similarly, when Harriman advised Gibson “to build the best possible uphill tramway available” to transport skiers to the top of Cranmore’s trails, likely expecting Gibson to install of version of Harriman’s own overhead chairlift, Gibson refused. He instead hired local Bartlett mechanic George Morton to come up with something entirely new. Morton invented the “Skimobile,” a lift that featured sixty cars that ascended a wooden trestle, pulled by a cable under the track. The new invention was one of the huge draws when Cranmore opened for business in the winter of 1938.

Trouble Abroad

Hannes Schneider’s fame had taken off in Europe after World War I. The little town of St. Anton became the playground of royalty, world-famous for the ski school and its brilliant, charismatic director. It enjoyed “the zenith of its reputation in the 1930s: reigning monarchs, stars from Hollywood and Berlin, industrialists and financiers all came to the Arlberg in order to learn the technique of the Skimeister.”⁴⁴

However, Schneider’s greatest assets in St. Anton – the same qualities that would allow him to have such a marked impact on skiing in America – were the independent spirit of the region and the unequivocal support of everyone in his community. As Nazi power in Germany grew steadily in the lead-up to war, this would spell disaster for Schneider and St. Anton.

Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg “realized that Austria had nothing to offer the world in industry or exports and he foresaw possible national prestige and financial gain in skiing.” Schuschnigg’s enthusiasm for the sport brought him often to St.

⁴³ *Dr. Harold Shedd to Mr. John Boehm*, October 21, 1938. The New England Ski Museum.

⁴⁴ Christof Thöny, “Hannes Schneider: Skiing Pioneer.” *Journal of the New England Ski Museum*, 65. (Summer 2006): 12.

Anton, where he became friendly with Schneider. Schuschnigg “was seriously interested in creating a national office, Minister of Sport, and wanted to Schneider to fill it.”⁴⁵

Schneider was not politically-minded, and as such was determined to keep politics out of his school. But his documented friendliness with Schuschnigg, who opposed National Socialism and supported Austrian sovereignty, and his known irritation with the growing Nazi presence in Austria, cast Schneider in an unfavorable light.

That the entire Arlberg region supported Schneider in everything that he did only served to fabricate an even more threatening image of Schneider. As one 1936 article described them, “the Tyroleans strive to please the ski master, anticipating his every wish with obvious joy in being able to serve him in some slight fashion.”⁴⁶ This attitude was also seen in the German mountain films of Dr. Arnold Fanck, many of which starred Schneider alongside aspiring actress Leni Riefenstahl. The films were incredibly popular in Germany, and while they certainly aided the spread of the sport of skiing, they were also another sign to German officials that Schneider’s popularity rendered him a formidable force that they would somehow have to stifle in order to subdue the Arlberg region.

Within hours of Germany’s formal annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938, Schneider was arrested at his home in St. Anton. After a period of weeks in the public jail in Landeck, Austria, he was taken across the border to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, where he remained under house arrest for another eight months.

⁴⁵ Frank, 51-52.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Bowker, “Official Program of the Second Annual National Winter Sports Exposition and Ski Tournament.” Boston, Massachusetts, Nov. 29 – Dec. 6, 1936. The New England Ski Museum.

Release and Arrival

Benno Rybizka, by 1938 the director of the “Eastern Slope Ski School at Cranmore Mountain, American Branch of the Hannes Schneider Ski School,” had the ear of Harvey Gibson. Although he knew his actions might cause him to lose the prestigious role of ski school director, he explained to Gibson the situation the great skimeister was in. Gibson resolved to use his banking connections to get Schneider out. As he later recounted, “I was chairman of the American Committee for the Short Term Creditors of Germany, a position in connection with which I could wield considerable influence – of course within the bounds of reason, and only to the extent that my conscience would allow.”⁴⁷ After consideration, Gibson’s conscience allowed him to buy up German loans in American banks in Philadelphia in New York, and to use them as a bargaining chip in persuading the Nazis to release Schneider. After months of negotiation, he was successful, and Schneider and his family arrived in February of 1939.

His arrival coincided with the first winter following the reorganization of the Eastern Slope Ski School. In November, Gibson had explained the endeavor in a memorandum to new ski school instructors:

“The school was originally owned entirely by Mr. Carroll Reed. However, during the past few months the school has been sold to a newly formed group representing all of the communities served by the school. Whereas it was formerly a private enterprise, it is now a community project, in that any profits which may result from the operation of the school will each year be used entirely for the further development of slopes and trails in the Eastern Slope region.”⁴⁸

The extent to which the community embraced this new identity is also seen in the “Eastern Slope Ski Club Bulletin,” the first issue of which was sent to Club members in February 1939, only days before Schneider’s arrival:

⁴⁷ Harvey D. Gibson, “An Autobiography,” North Conway, NH: Reporter Press, 1951.

⁴⁸ Harvey D. Gibson, “Memo to Austrian Skiers En Route to America.” 15 November 1938. The New England Ski Museum.

“The youth of this region is being trained to be your guides and instructors in the future. Through the generosity of public-spirited citizens...boys and girls of 12 to 16 years of age (who) have sent to the Junior Fund Committee a personal letter have received skis, poles, harness and shoes. In addition, the School Boards have allowed the students of the 8th, 9th, and high school grades to have one afternoon a week in each village of the region in classes taught by a trained instructor of the Eastern Slope Ski School. This movement has been sponsored by the Club.”⁴⁹
The promotion of skiing for the good of the community and the future of the

region had clearly been planned before Schneider’s arrival, and his prior experience in Austria doing just that only strengthened the endeavor. Schneider immediately set to work improving Cranmore, suggesting the “[extension of] the Skimobile to the summit of the mountain, widening the slopes, and summer manicuring the terrain so it could be skied with a minimum of snow cover.” He also insisted “on clearing, then raking and seeding Cranmore’s slopes so they resembled the hayfields of his native Arlberg region.”⁵⁰ He maintained the same iron discipline that characterized the Arlberg school, but, as Arthur Callan later explained, his methods were even more effective than Rybizka’s:

“Everybody thought the world of him. He’d bend over backwards. He had the same kind of iron hand as Benno did only in a little softer way – he didn’t reach out and snap your neck, you know, he just patted you on the shoulder and by the time he took his hand off your shoulder, fingerprints were left there.”⁵¹

Followers of skiing predicted that the school in North Conway would grow under Schneider’s influence to the same proportions as it had experience abroad. They were correct; Schneider was an immediate success. Special snow trains of the Boston and Maine Railroad brought as many as three thousand skiers on weekends, while cars and buses came from all directions. By January of 1946, there was a waiting list of two

⁴⁹ “The Eastern Slope Ski Club Bulletin,” February 10, 1939. The New England Ski Museum.

⁵⁰ Jeff Leich, “Early Ski Grooming in New England.” *Collected Papers of the International Ski History Congress*. (International Skiing History Association: 2002), 135.

⁵¹ Arthur Callan, Interviewed by E. John B. Allen. Transcript. The New England Ski Museum.

thousand names for hotel reservations in the region. North Conway had changed from an inconsequential summer resort into the nation's busiest ski center. What had been "ski grounds" in the thirties became ski resorts, and collectively began to form a ski industry.⁵²

Hannes Schneider's new start in America served as a just reward for a lifetime spent dedicated to the development of the sport of skiing and its instruction. Born into a peasant farming family, Schneider was a passionate idealist, for whom something done unenthusiastically was not something worth doing. His technical contributions to the sport include a revolutionary method called the "Arlberg Technique," named for his equally innovative and pioneering ski school at St. Anton am Arlberg, Austria. In addition to his technical innovations, Schneider also may be regarded as having done more for the popularization of skiing than any other individual in the sport's history.

Disaster Avoided

The accomplishments of Schneider, Gibson, and Reed in New Hampshire are even more remarkable when considering what transpired abroad during the war. In Germany and Austria, skiing developed even more intensively into a sport for the masses after National Socialism's ascent to power. The Nazis implemented large-scale tourism initiatives, including one weekend called "strength through joy" that offered inexpensive travel opportunities for blue-collar workers and their families to ski in the mountains of

⁵² Leich, 139.

central Germany and the Alps. “The weekend saw numerous special trains transport large groups of skiers to ski destinations, and skiing finally became a people’s sport.”⁵³

However, “the political and military events of the winter of 1941-42 represented more than just a change in the course of the war, they also cut deeply into the social and cultural life of Germany and affected the continued development of skiing.” After a sudden, sharp cold snap literally froze the German army on the Eastern front, creating a logistical crisis, Reichssportfuhrer Hans von Tschammer und Osten – National Socialist Head of Sports – asked German and Austrian skiers to give up their ski equipment:

“ I turn with special urgency to you, my skiers. You in particular have the equipment that our soldiers need so desperately. Most of you have had to save for your ski equipment. No one loves this sport more than you do. And so it may seem difficult at the moment for some of you to part company with this sport for a while by giving up your equipment. But comrades, what does this mean compared with the sacrifice our soldiers are making? Some of our comrades stand among them. Who wouldn’t want to give up his best ski equipment this winter in the knowledge that it eases the task of German soldiers? [Those on] the front are risking their lives. With weapons in their hands they are defending the happiness and peace that our homeland possesses. The Fuhrer has called us, and his call is being carried with joy. For this cause German skiing will give everything it has.”⁵⁴

Only 15,000 skis were immediately donated, and three days later, a ban on “transport for all skiers on all modes of transportation” was issued. Travel to ski areas with one’s own equipment, either on public or private transportation, was no longer possible. On New Year’s Day, Tschammer cancelled all “ski events, training courses, competitions, and championships scheduled for this winter,” including the world championships scheduled to be held at Garmisch-Partenkirchen – the same German resort

⁵³ Lorenz Peiffer, “The Nazi Party’s Campaign “Skis for the Eastern Front” in the Winter of 1941-1942.” *Collected Papers of the International Ski History Congress*. (International Skiing History Association: 2002), 223.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

town where the Nazis considered forcing Hannes Schneider to reopen his school.⁵⁵ More skiers caved under the added pressure, parting with their most prized possessions – 1,567,691 pairs of skis and 203,406 pairs of boots were turned in. Approximately 900,000 pairs of skis were put into service.⁵⁶

By the same winter in northern New England, the region was already completely revitalized barely five years after the ski industry had begun to lay down its roots. The Boston and Maine railroad line was bringing up to 3,000 skiers a weekend to North Conway, and what had previously been “the boarded up hotels and locked gasoline pumps in nearly every summer vacation town of central and northern New England during the winter months of the 1920s and early ‘30s” had given way to “198 establishments prepared to lodge 7,320 people.”⁵⁷

At war’s end, skiers lacked equipment, especially the boots needed to use the skis. And it was impossible to think of replacing them when the German economy had collapsed and raw materials were scarce. For a generation, skiing was merely a ghost of its former self. “The “Skis for the Eastern Front” campaign was a heavy mortgage on skiing’s infant development,”⁵⁸ but one that, thanks to the advantageous planning and connections of a group of civic minded individuals, one that American skiing would not have to pay.

⁵⁵ E. John B. Allen, “Politics, Money and Sport: the Case of Hannes Schneider.” *Collected Papers of the International Conference Hannes Schneider, St. Anton am Arlberg, 2005*. The New England Ski Museum.

⁵⁶ Peiffer, 223

⁵⁷ Albert S. Carlson, “The Ski Geography of New England,” *Economic Geography*, 18, no. 3 (July 1942): 309.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

A recent survey covering forty geographic areas across the country found that New Hampshire ranked notably high in “social capital.” According to the survey, “citizens of the state from all backgrounds and social classes trusted each other; they believed they could make a difference in their communities; they trusted their local institutions; and they worked together on civic projects...with a reputation for “rugged individualism” and private initiative, New Hampshire revealed a surprising capacity for community spirit and cohesiveness.”⁵⁹ In that light, perhaps the Eastern Slope region of New Hampshire provided the only setting similar enough to the Austrian Arlberg for the ideals of skiing’s early promoters to be fully realized when they could have been forever destroyed by war.

That the Eastern Slope plan was unique is easily discernable when compared with the first example of a “ski resort” model in the United States. Peckett’s-on-Sugar-Hill, a country inn in Franconia, New Hampshire, was the first to offer ski instruction to their guests, at the bequest of the inn-owners’ daughter, Kate, who had spent a Christmas skiing in Switzerland. Peckett’s “existed in a aura of power, unspoken but understood.”⁶⁰ Their guests included presidents, chief justices, Rockefellers, and Vanderbilts. In short, Peckett’s summed up what many people have falsely come to believe: that the essential makeup of American skiing has always been private enterprise for the rich and privileged. A brochure provided by Peckett’s to their exclusive clientele even suggested that taking a ski lesson at Peckett’s could increase one’s appeal abroad: “Having been through the course,” it promised, “you will improve enough [so that] when you are in Switzerland,

⁵⁹ Heffernan and Stecker, 220.

⁶⁰ Allen Adler, “That Peckett Mystique,” *Collected Papers of the International Ski History Congress*. (International Skiing History Association: 2002), 17.

you will derive full pleasure from Alpine skiing and add to the credit of the American sportsmen, appearing there as a competent skier.”⁶¹

The appeal of Peckett’s grew when the inn obtained the services of Otto Lang, an instructor from Schneider’s school in St. Anton and the first of his disciples to bring the Arlberg technique to the United States. But their reach was limited, and intentionally so. Peckett’s-on-Sugar-Hill catered to “a small group of city dwellers who enjoyed Winter vacations,” and was commonly found in the social notes of the *New York Times* – one 1936 headline, for example, reads “Herbert H. Deans Entertain at Tea, Fourteen Visitors in White Mountains Attend Party at Sugar Hill.”⁶² Ski instruction at Peckett’s was available only to guests, and guests were typically only those worthy of mention in high society.

The Eastern Slope model was the antithesis to Peckett’s, and for that reason took off in 1939, the same year that Peckett’s was forced to close their doors. The original idea began with Carroll Reed, a Bostonian of no notable family or wealth, who skied for the thrill of it, not the mention it might garner in the *Times*. Today, Franconia is home to state-owned ski area Cannon Mountain, but the real attractions lie on the other side of the Presidential Range, where the entire community embraced skiing and set about making it what Schneider called “a great thing for the people.” In the Mount Washington Valley today, the towns of Pinkham Notch, Jackson, Glen, Bartlett, Intervale, Kearsarge, North Conway, and Conway, are home to Cranmore, in North Conway, Black Mountain in Jackson, Attitash and Bear Peak in Bartlett, and Wildcat in Pinkham Notch. Peckett’s, despite their early mystique and their claim as the first ski resort in America, is no more,

⁶¹ Adler, 18.

⁶² “Herbert H. Deans Entertain at Tea, Fourteen Visitors in White Mountains Attend Party at Sugar Hill.” *New York Times*, August 19, 1936. p. 24

while the others, despite changes and economic ups and downs over the years, have begun celebrating their seventy-fifth anniversaries. Without the community focus established and maintained early on, they all could easily have gone the way of Peckett's.

Reed's original ideas, Gibson's influence, and Schneider's innovations and instructions came together in the late 1930s to foster something unique in the sporting world. Their decisions turned a region already ripe for change into the first epicenter of American skiing.

Future Opportunities

Today's tumultuous economic climate, combined with the phenomenally expensive technical innovations ski areas must now be able to afford to remain viable, present many questions about the future of skiing. "Skiing for the people," as Hannes Schneider originally envisioned it, appears threatened. The ancestry of the industry is the colorful history of the sport itself, but "many perceive that public awareness and preservation of skiing history has not kept pace with the growth of the general ski industry...within the ski industry there is a vital need for greater promotion of and access to the ideals of ski history in the context of the twenty-first century."⁶³

These longstanding ideals can be traced back to innovators like Reed, Gibson, and Schneider, and the foremost of them – an outlook intended to both involve and uplift the local community – needs to remain a priority for the ski industry. Today, many American ski areas are owned by conglomerates that own multiple resorts in different areas of the country, sometimes even on separate coasts. As a result "the number of veteran

⁶³ Gary Schwartz, "Skiing History: A Vision for the 21st Century." *Collected Papers of the International Ski History Congress*. (International Skiing History Association: 2002), 285.

employees has shrunk at a time when [ski areas] increasingly treat knowledge of their history and intellectual capital as assets.”⁶⁴ Corporate owners often dictate ski area policy with a heavy hand, and community participation has all but disappeared.

John Fry’s argument that American skiers are those most directly responsible for the changing scene of the ski industry, for better or for worse, is nowhere more applicable than to this problem. In contrast to the problems American ski areas are facing, Austrian resorts that recovered after the Second World War have maintained their strong community traditions: In St. Anton, a locally controlled company “is the main owner and operator of all 85 interconnected lifts in the vast Arlberg region. It also leases the slopes from various local owners. The company is primarily owned by two families, with a small number of local shareholders.”⁶⁵ There are also property restrictions in the Arlberg that “help keep growth in check and preserve a close community, where those who have made and maintained the resort aren’t driven out by spiraling real estate costs.”⁶⁶ These areas are not at risk of losing their histories, because their community ownership has guaranteed that their traditions will live on.

In the United States, each individual ski area will bear the responsibility of preserving its unique character by preventing the loss of its history. The areas are not simply companies; they are cultural and social institutions of their communities. Individual areas should consider writing or commissioning their own scholarly histories to ensure that they do not lose sight of the original goals of their founders, many of whom explicitly embraced community-centric and environmentally friendly approaches long

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Jay Cowan, “Strength in Tradition.” *Ski Magazine* 65 no. 2 (Oct 2000): 95.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

before current trend towards greater corporate responsibility. The oldest ski resorts in the United States – Black Mountain and Cranmore in New Hampshire, Sun Valley in Idaho, and a select few others – will be celebrating their centennials within the next fifteen years. Many others are also approaching milestone anniversaries. The completion of a scholarly history for each individual area will not only preserve the history and contributions of each on paper, but will also have the potential to be applied as a marketing tool. With deeper understandings of their own histories, ski areas will be able to enrich the experiences they offer skiers with knowledge of, access to, and appreciation for the past.

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