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The ski school meeting place at the Sun Valley Resort's Dollar Mountain in the 1950s. Photo courtesy of Sun Valley Resort.

The Hanover–Sun Valley CONNECTION

DARTMOUTH SKIERS HEAD TO IDAHO

BY Lisa Densmore Ballard

As you shovel snow from your sidewalk in Hanover, consider Austrian Count Felix von Schaffgotsch, who picked the spot where Sun Valley is located. On his first attempt to travel there, the snow was so deep he had to wait several days for the plows to clear the roads and rails. Upon learning of the Count's snow delay, an executive with von Schaffgotsch's employer, the Union Pacific Railroad, remarked, "The railroad spends millions getting rid of snow; now we're going to spend millions to play in the goddamn stuff."

In November and December of 1935, Count Felix von Schaffgotsch toured the West at the request of W. Averell Harriman, chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad. Harriman hired the Austrian to find a suitable location

for an exclusive destination ski resort. About to give up after six unsuccessful weeks spent visiting such early ski meccas as Mount Rainier, Mount Hood, Yosemite, and Jackson Hole, as well as Park City and the canyons around Salt Lake City, von Schaffgotsch, over drinks with the state of Idaho's director of highways, got wind of the remote hamlet of Ketchum, Idaho, in the Sawtooth Mountains, but the railroad tracks were buried in snow. He finally made it to Ketchum by bus, and he declared it the perfect site.

A year later, the luxurious Sun Valley Lodge opened, attracting the rich, the famous, and the stars of the Dartmouth Ski Team. Eighty years later, travelers from Hanover to Sun Valley still risk blizzard-related delays, but it remains a big draw. >>>



Above: Americans Sally Neidlinger and Andrea Mead with Norwegian Stein Eriksen and Austrian Christian Pravda at the 1953 Harriman Cup. Photo courtesy of Sun Valley Resort. Opposite, top: Skiers enjoy the powder on Dollar Mountain above the Sun Valley Resort (1946). Photo courtesy of Sun Valley Resort. Below, from left: John Litchfield, a Dartmouth graduate and early Sun Valley ski school director, skiing at the resort. Photo credit: film, *Passion for Snow*. Averell Harriman, founder of the Sun Valley Resort, rides the first-ever chairlift. Photo courtesy of Sun Valley Resort.

TRANSCONTINENTAL CONNECTION

In the 1930s, Hanover was a hotbed of skiing and the place where many early innovations in the sport took place. Until then, the skiing was mainly Nordic (cross-country and jumping). Many of the top competitors of the era matriculated at Dartmouth College, which already boasted two Winter Olympians: John Carleton, who competed in the first Winter Olympics in 1924 in Chamonix, France, and Charlie Proctor, who competed in the 1928 Olympics in St. Moritz, Switzerland.

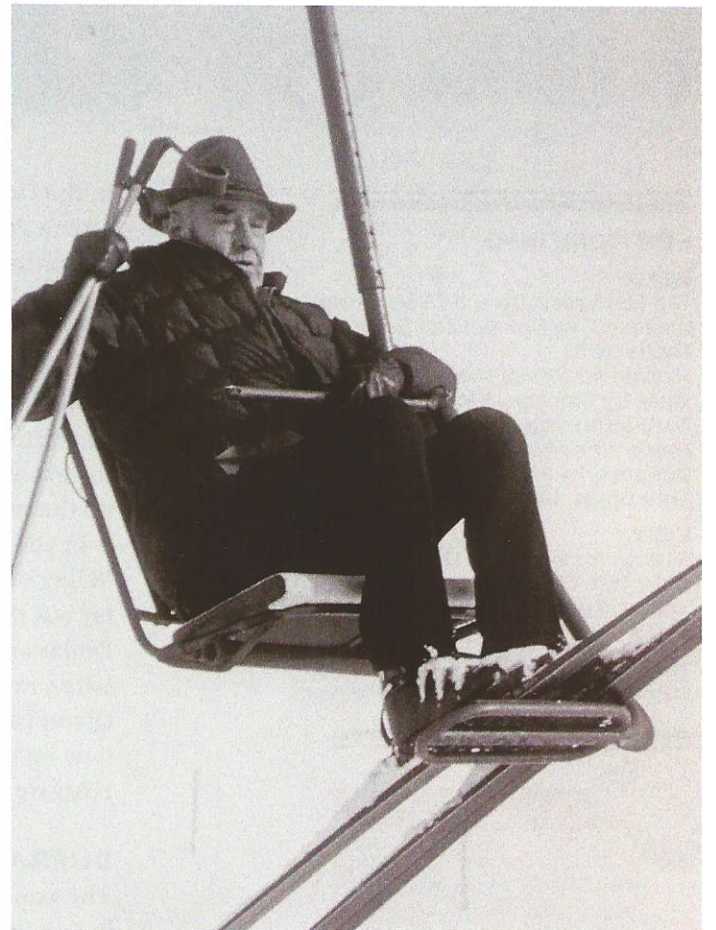
Dartmouth hosted the first slalom race in the United States during its 1925 Winter Carnival, then the first US downhill championships at Mount Moosilauke in 1933. Four years later, legendary Dartmouth coach Walter Prager and Olympian Dick Durrance, the top racer on the Dartmouth Ski Team and in the United States at the time, set the first giant slalom course in the US in Tuckerman Ravine on Mount Washington. It was an exciting time of growth and innovation with Proctor and Durrance among the more influential in the sport. Given

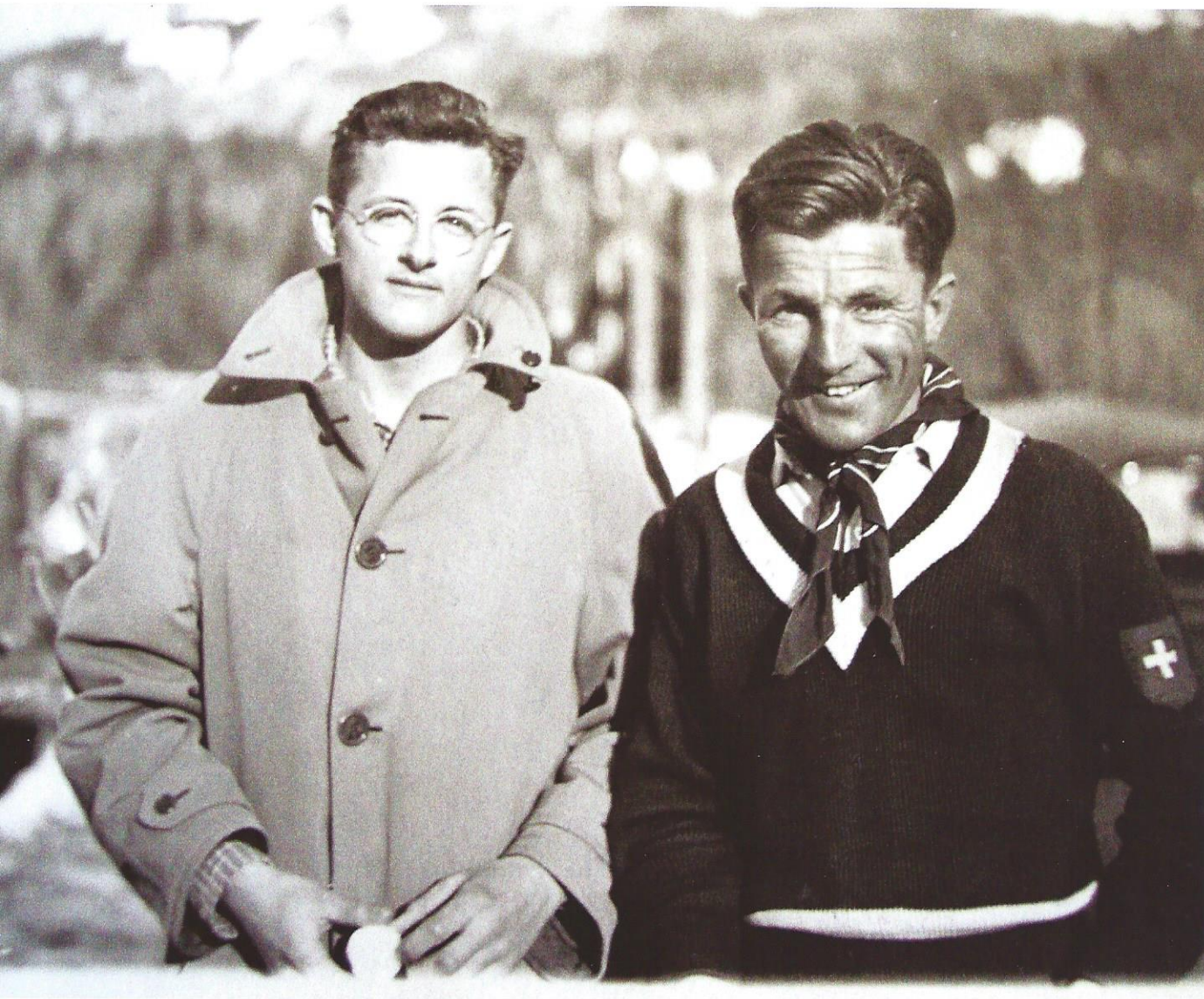
Harriman's desire for Sun Valley to be the most-prestigious winter resort in the country, it's no coincidence that he hired Proctor to help develop the ski resort and Durrance to expand it.

One of Sun Valley's early claims to fame was the installation of the first-ever chairlift, which began carrying skiers up its slopes in 1937. Proctor helped design the chairlift that was based partly on the J-bar at Oak Hill, which the Dartmouth Outing Club (DOC) had installed two years earlier. The J-Bar at Oak Hill was the first ski lift with an overhead cable



One of Sun Valley's early claims to fame was the installation of the first-ever chairlift, which began carrying skiers up its slopes in 1937.





Dartmouth Olympian John Litchfield (left) and coach Walter Prager. Photo credit: film, *Passion for Snow*.

FOR MORE INFO

READ:

The Sun Valley Story, a 75-year history of the resort, by Van Gordon Sauter (Mandala Media, 2011)

Passion for Skiing, the Dartmouth skiing story, by Stephen Waterhouse (History of Dartmouth Skiing Project, 2010)

Man on the Medal, the biography of Dick Durrance, by John Jerome (Dick Durrance Enterprises, 1995)

VIEW:

Passion for Snow, the Dartmouth skiing story, film/DVD produced by Stephen Waterhouse and Lisa Densmore (History of Dartmouth Skiing Project, 2013)

TRAVEL:

Sun Valley Resort, www.sunvalley.com



ONLINE EXTRA

Find a list of our favorite NH/VT ski areas at www.hereinhanover.com.

in the United States. It was modeled after a Panamanian banana conveyor, but rather than sharp hooks to transport sacks of fruit, it had smooth wooden bars that skiers could lean against as the J-Bar pulled them uphill. Sun Valley's chairlift was an adaptation of the J-Bar, with higher towers and a seat that carried skiers up the mountain in the air.

In addition to his work on Sun Valley's chairlift, Proctor helped lay out the resort's first ski runs on Dollar and Proctor Mountains. The latter, renamed for the Dartmouth Olympian and Hanover native, is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

DURRANCE'S IMPACT

The same year the chairlift debuted in Sun Valley, the resort held the in-

augural Harriman Cup, the first major international alpine skiing competition in the United States. Dick Durrance won three of the first four Harriman Cups, shocking the self-assured European competitors. Understanding the value of associating such a prominent ski racer with the resort, Averell Harriman offered Durrance a summer job as a photographer.

Harriman also realized how beneficial having a number of athletic, hard-working, well-mannered Dartmouth Ski Team members around could be. He sent Friedl Pfeifer, an Austrian ski instructor in Sun Valley at the time, on a recruiting trip to Hanover. Pfeifer hired Ned Jacoby, Bob Skinner, Joe Duncan, Hal Hillman, and John Litchfield to work on the summer trail crew alongside Durrance, who, in addition to his photo duties, was

given the opportunity to design some of the first trails on Bald Mountain. Durrance, who had learned to ski above tree-line in the Alps, cut the trails exceptionally wide rather than skinny and winding. He wanted to create an open feeling similar to skiing in Europe. The innovation has served as a model for ski trails ever since.

Other Dartmouth skiing legends, including Percy Rideout, Steve and David Bradley, and Charlie McLane, worked on Sun Valley's trail crew in the summer and taught skiing there in the winter. In 1940, Steve Bradley shot the whimsical film, *Sun Valley Ski Chase*, featuring his brother and Dick Durrance. Originally created as a promotional film for the resort, it would eventually be recognized as one of the most important historic American ski films ever produced.

MODERN DRAW

Many Dartmouth skiers who worked for Sun Valley during its early years became as notable in skiing as their

employer. For example, Litchfield was Sun Valley's ski school director before co-founding Aspen with Rideout and Pfeifer. Hillman was credited with the first skiing descent of Hillman's Highway in Tuckerman Ravine. Joe Duncan, a captain in the 10th Mountain Division, died in Italy during World War II. A mountain near Sun Valley is now named in his honor. And Steve Bradley became known as the "Father of Snow Grooming" with his invention of the Bradley Packer-Grader.

While all this was long ago, Sun Valley continues to attract ski champions, moguls of industry, movie stars, and folks from Hanover. In 1983, just after the NCAA championships, I visited Sun Valley for the first time with several of my teammates on the Dartmouth Ski Team. We were excited to visit the famous winter destination and looked forward to relaxing after an intense competition season, enjoying the snow and having fun.

I remember soaking in the Sun



The author samples a modern-day slalom course on Bald Mountain at the Sun Valley Resort. Photo courtesy of Lisa Densmore Ballard.

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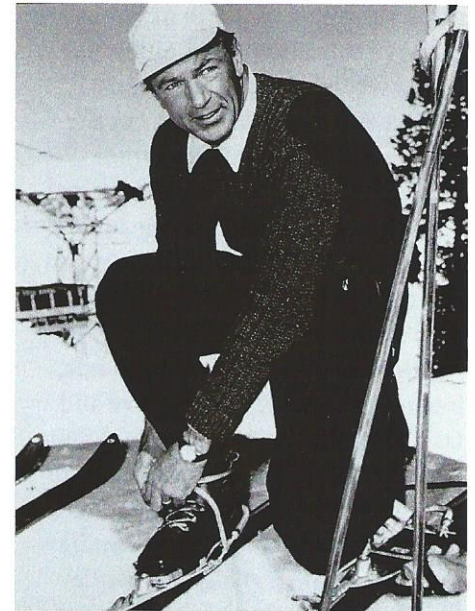


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Gary Cooper at Sun Valley.

Valley Lodge's signature hot tub, which could easily hold 50 people. Thick puffs of steam obscured the other guests who lounged around the sizeable circular pool. Afterward, we listened to big band jazz in the Duchin Lounge and gawked at Gretchen Fraser's 1948 Olympic gold medal, the first won by an American, which was on display in a glass case in the main dining room. Photos of Gary Cooper, Marilyn Monroe, and Ernest Hemingway adorned the hallways.

I've returned to Sun Valley almost every year since then, sometimes to compete, sometimes to host events, and—like my first visit—to have fun and enjoy the snow. The ownership of the resort has changed several times since Harriman's day, but whoever controls this Western skiing mecca continues to spend millions, adding luxurious lodges, state-of-the-art snowmaking, and other upgrades. There are more medals from more Olympians on display and more historic photographs on the walls. And, inevitably, I sit next to a Dartmouth grad or two on the high-speed lifts that whisk skiers to the top of Baldy. ←

A 1983 graduate of Dartmouth College and longtime resident of Hanover, freelance writer/photographer Lisa Densmore Ballard looks forward to competing in Sun Valley again this winter at the 2015 US Alpine Masters Championships, where she hopes to add to her 80 national masters titles. To ski with Lisa at one of her "Your Turn" women's ski events, go to www.LisaDensmore.com.



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