



Donner Summit Historical Society

December, 2009 issue #16

Newsletter

**“Sugar Bowl takes its place this Winter among this country’s  
and Europe’s most complete and modern Winter resorts.”**

from Sugar Bowl publicity December, 1939

# Sugar Bowl Opens, 1939

Superman had just left the bad guys tied up in Lois Lane’s care. He had then changed into his Clark Kent disguise and joined the police in answering Lois’ call for help. Roos was selling Dobbs BEAV-ARE hats packed in “fine travel cases” for \$10 each. The Dow was at 148 and one million shares were being traded daily. The Nazi fleet was massing at Jutland and the pocket battle ship Graf Spee, had just fought a battle with the British off Montevideo. A new washer with a wringer was on sale for \$34.50 at McNally’s in San Francisco. A 1937 Cadillac Deluxe touring sedan with black finish and chrome trim, six wheels with heavy duty white side tires, and a radio was for sale for \$975 (originally \$3,000). The Finns were fighting the Soviets and winning some major battles, “Finns have stopped the Soviet Dead in Bitter Icy Fighting.” Finnish relief was a worthy cause. The chief liquor enforcement officer for Los Angeles was indicted on 23 counts of bribery in a liquor license racket. You could have buoyant health and energy to spare with Globe A1 Wheat Cereal. Smart giving for Christmas included “electrical gifts.” With an electrical gift you could “express sentimental thoughtfulness in a practical way.” The new California orange and black license plates were coming out soon. A five pound box of chocolates was available at MacFarlane’s for \$1.98. Milkmen in San Francisco were going to start work at 7 AM instead of 5 AM. Poland and the Nazi invasion were in the news. A cabinet model Philco radio phonograph with an automatic record changer could be purchased for \$110.00. The San Francisco Chronicle was soliciting funds for the “neediest families.” “Destry Rides Again” was playing starring Marlene Dietrich and Una Merkel (no mention of Jimmy Stewart). “Four Wives” was playing starring Claude Rains and Priscilla Lane. Social clubs were donating food baskets and children were collecting tin foil. There was good skating on Donner Lake. For the first time the State Highway Department would aim for “organized clearance of the roads” with the addition of radio communication between plows and headquarters.

A daily newspaper was a nickel and the Sunday edition was a dime.

In this issue:

Sugar Bowl Opens, Sugar Bowl Scrapbook, Getting to Sugar Bowl, Catching a Spy at Sugar Bowl, The Silver Belt, what else what happening in the world

January: Snowball Special, Hitler's Last Soldier in America, .....

People didn't like the New Deal. People loved the New Deal.

In December, 1939 Sugar Bowl also opened for the first time along with the first ski lift in California. Unfortunately in Mid-December there was only an inch or two of snow on the ground, "The only skiing to be had in that region is at the top of the ski lift at the Sugar Bowl...and the ice in the rink has been almost all melted away by the rain and high temperature." It was not until January 6-7 that there was good skiing on Donner Summit and by Mid-January there was six feet of snow on the ground. The unpredictability and early lack of snow was probably the reason that the advertised star studded gala originally scheduled for early January was canceled.



Those who are interested in history field trips and who have been to Sacramento to see Old Sacramento and the Railroad Museum have probably missed out on the State library at 900 N Street just a block from the Capitol. The State library has a wealth of resources: books, rare books, computers, and publications. It is the publications collection that can be really interesting. It includes almost all of the newspapers and magazines ever published in California. They are all arranged by County and on microfilm. Some of the microfilm reading machines have copying capabilities. Some of what you have read in this issue came from the State library.

State Library – 900 N Street in Sacramento just a few blocks from the State Capitol.  
Closed two Fridays a month.

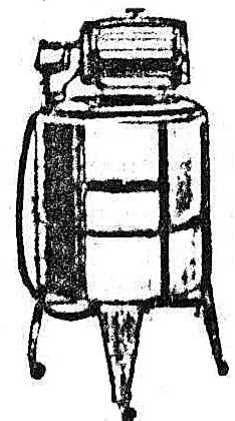
editor:  
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### WASHING MACHINES

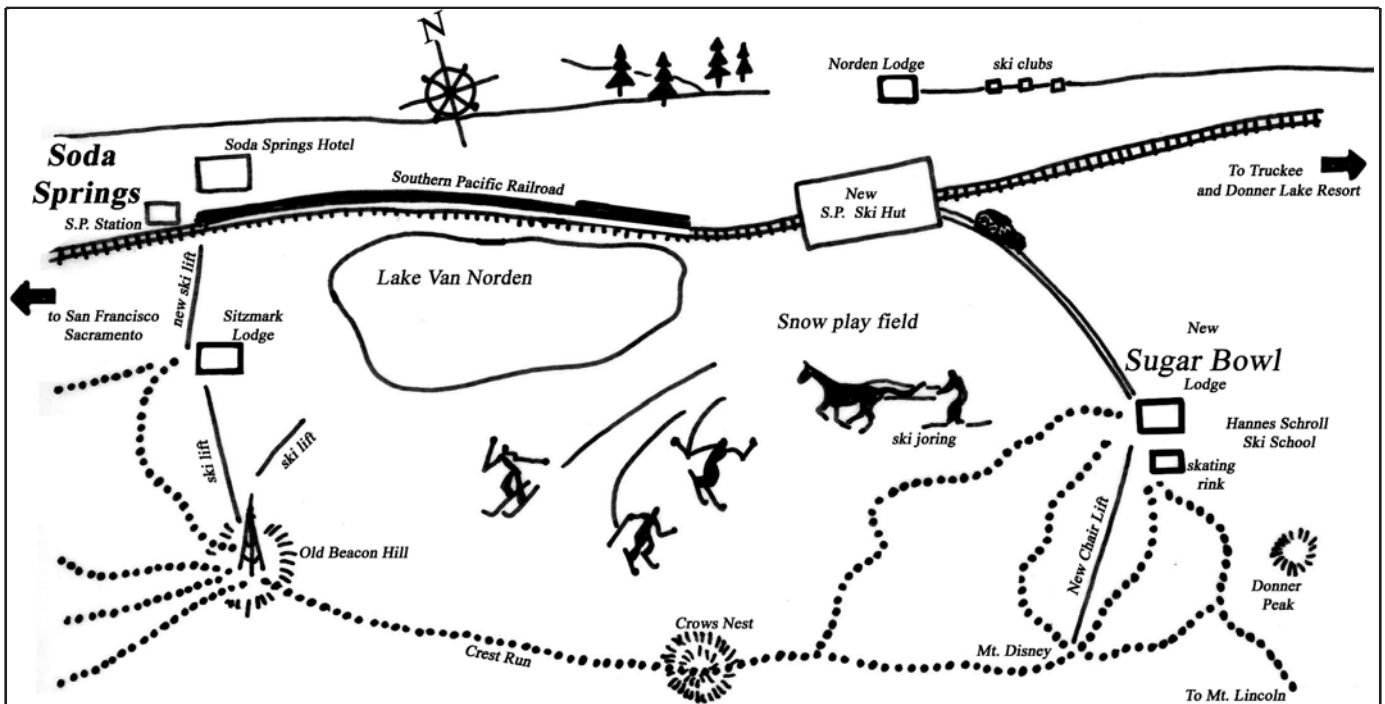
Washer  
Sale  
\$34<sup>50</sup>

Complete  
With Pump.  
Heavy Duty.

FREE SOAP  
INCLUDED  
WITH THIS  
SALE



TERMS TO SUIT YOU  
McNALLY'S  
(SINCE 1877)  
APPLIANCE COMPANY



**Donner Summit, 1939**

*adapted from the first Sugar Bowl ad*

### Sugar Bowl, 1939

The Sugar Bowl promises to do more for the promotion of Western skiing than any other recent development of ski territory on the Pacific Coast. ...[It] was long known to veteran skiers to be the best skiing spot in that region...."

"...now, where were only remote ski fields before, there is a complete resort, easily accessible.

"When a guest arrives at Norden whether by train or by automobile, he is met by one of the new "snowmobiles," or by one of the more dependable and romantic horse drawn sleighs.

"From there, he is taken to the beautiful Sugar Bowl Lodge, where he finds his sleeping quarter, the dining room lounge, bar and ski shop.

"The sleeping quarters consist of separate rooms for about 25 persons, supplanted by a men's and a women's dormitory, each of which accommodates 10 guests.

"Downstairs, the guest finds the dining room where the food is ample and well

# Sugar Bowl, California's Newest Ski Center (1939)

This story and the accompanying pictures marked the opening of Sugar Bowl's first season in December, 1939. Sugar Bowl was the first California resort where the skiing was right outside the lodging door. In 1939 all the other ski areas in California were small affairs consisting of single or maybe two rope tows. Sugar Bowl was the first destination ski resort in California where lodging was immediately adjacent to the ski slopes. That was remarkable but more remarkable than the conception was the building. Sun Valley's resort was built by Averell Harriman with the Union Pacific Railroad behind him. Mt. Hood had the U.S. Forest Service behind it. Sugar Bowl was built by individuals, some of whom we highlighted in our last issue.

In 1939 there were no ski areas further east than Donner Summit. There was no Squaw Valley, Northstar, etc. For the previous 10 years Old 40 had been plowed in winter and as a result the Summit had "developed rapidly into a big-time ski resort. There are three reasons for this growth – the general Western skiing boom, the comparatively short distance between Donner Summit and San Francisco (five hours by car), and the size of the region's snowfall (about 400 inches annual, leaving upwards of ten feet on northern slopes in midwinter." In previous issues we've covered other ski areas on Donner Summit before Sugar Bowl started: at Lake Mary and Donner Ski Ranch and at Beacon Hill (now Soda Springs Ski Hill).

Even though skiing was becoming popular the Summit had evaded "high pressure resort promotion." The Summit was an unpretentious place meeting skiing demands in a "haphazard" way with the Soda Springs Hotel, Norden Hotel, and the Rainbow Tavern. They didn't bother with ski lifts, but with the

### cont'd from page 3

prepared, but in the opinion of many skiers, not too well selected. When skiers come in tired and hungry the most desired food is a thick steak, or something along that line.

The slopes facing the lodge is a choice of easy practice skiing, or more difficult runs from the top of the ski lift.

The upski, a chair type lift, is 3500 feet long, with a vertical ascent of over a thousand feet to the top of Disney Peak. In spots the chairs rise 40 or 50 feet off the snow.

The ride takes about six and a half minutes, just enough time for the passenger to smoke a cigarette and, if the weather is cold, freeze to the chair.

The down hill runs are numerous giving the skiers the choice of going as fast or as slowly as he desires.

...Most of the week-end guests were just beginning to think that they were making good time, when there was a yodel from the top of the ski lift, and Hannes came down the mountain, straight as an arrow and twice as fast.

Then came a second yodel, and down came Bill Klein in the same manner.

It was then that Thor Ellingson, who has skied for about 25 years, declared that he was going to stop skiing forever if those two maniacs don't stop doing that sort of thing..

At the end of a hard day the skiers trooped in to the lounge, relaxed in the chairs and couches scattered plentifully about the large fireplace.

And to further their relaxation there, right next to the lounge, was the very adequate bar, where most skiers found that, after all, nothing can compare to a hot rum.

coming of Sugar Bowl and its new lift, that would change.

Hannes Schroll and a group of "young San Franciscans were going to open Sugar Bowl just as the Coast's December issue would hit the stands, December 15, 1939. The new Sugar Bowl would have a lodge that could sleep 40 people in dormitories and private rooms, would serve meals, have an Austrian style ski school, a 3200 foot electric lift that would carry skiers up to Mt. Disney 1000 feet in only 6 minutes, and a skating rink (near the current lodge and the base of the Nob Hill lift). The ski lift was the first actual ski lift in California and built even before the State issued ski lift permits. The gala premiere which would include movie stars was to happen on January 4 and 5

Sugar Bowl was to be different from other winter sports places because it "is... essentially an amateur job." The owners were more interested in the skiing they would get than the money they would get out of the enterprise. So the amenities were chosen with a view towards practicality rather than glitz. The architect of their lodge, William Wurster Jr., was "an independent thinker who abhors... the 'cutie-pie' aspects of architecture." The lodge was built simply and cheaply. Dormitory bunks went for \$2 a night and private rooms for \$3.50 to \$5.00. People could eat downstairs for \$3 a day.

The lodge and the skating rink were run as concessions with the lodge being run by Herstle Jones, the builder and owner of Rainbow Tavern. Oscar Jones, devoted readers of our newsletter will remember, was Herstle's brother and he built and ran Soda Springs Hotel. His son Dennis, was the main feature in our February, 09 newsletter. According to the Coast, Dennis was "California's Only famous home grown ski teacher." He was operating Beacon Hill ski area (Soda Springs now) at that time.

To take advantage of the new customers that Sugar Bowl would attract in 1939 Southern Pacific put \$26,000 into its Norden station and was planning on running regular ski excursion trains to the Summit which it would call "Snowball Specials" (which you'll read about next month since there just wasn't room this month). Interestingly Southern Pacific was planning day trips as well as weekend trips. The weekend trips would include staying in Pullman cars near Truckee.

To get from the train station to Sugar Bowl, "motor sleighs, station-wagons rigged up with skis in front and tractor wheel contraptions behind" would be used. Below is a "motor sleigh." Note the skis on the front and the treads in the back of the "motor sleigh." The tractor sleighs are on the next page.

Sugar Bowl would be closed during World War II to protect the transcontinental railroad. It would reopen in 1945, but that was all some years into the future in 1939.



# Sugar Bowl Founders, 1939

Hannes Schroll took one look at the "Sugar Bowl" and decided it was the place to build a destination ski resort. Everyone knows that story. There was more to the founding of Sugar Bowl though than what one person could do. The story is one of teamwork was well. Had there not been the teamwork of four individuals, there would have been no Sugar Bowl.

When Hannes' money disappeared with the Austrian Anschluss he turned to his San Francisco friends whom he'd met when they came skiing at his Yosemite ski school. It was those friends who not only invested money but encouraged their business, organization, and club friends to join in as initial investors.

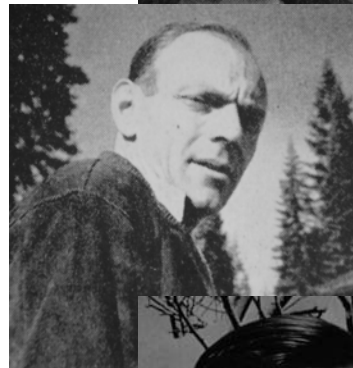
They were excited to join in on a project with so much potential for fun and which would change resort skiing in California. Imagine their courage: to invest much of their own available money, encourage others to invest which put their reputations at risk, and to do so in a proposition that was not guaranteed to succeed. When Sugar Bowl began, the United States was still in the throes of the Great Depression and expensive chair lifts were not the norm. The founders had vision though, the vision to build something special that they and others would be able to enjoy in the future. They had the vision to make history and do something special.

The founders continued their involvement for decades after the founding investing not just their money, but investing themselves. They each built houses in Sugar Bowl near the lodge. Sherman Chickering and Donald Gregory's law firm dealt with Sugar Bowl legal issues for free for decades. Wellington Henderson had an investment company and he provided Sugar Bowl with investment and financial advice also for decades and also for free.

The four founders and their families had more than a business arrangement. According to Jean Chickering, Sherman's wife, it was more like a private club; they were one big family up there. They seldom ate at their various Sugar Bowl homes, instead they ate together in the lodge and they were all there as often as they could be.

Thankfully they had the vision, the energy, and the dedication to build. Their dedication and vision can be seen still today as Sugar Bowl provides recreation for many but treats the Summit environment with respect and acts as a responsible contributing community member. The founding families have left behind a fine legacy for all Californians.

Pictured here the four original founders of Sugar Bowl top to bottom: Wellington Henderson, treasurer; Sherman Chickering, secretary; Donal Gregory, vice president; and Hannes Schroll, president.



# There at the Start

In writing for the historical society there is the intrinsic pleasure of looking into history and passing on interesting stories and facts for others' enjoyment. Sometimes though there are extra "perks." One of those perks was an enjoyable afternoon in San Francisco on Russian Hill interviewing the last surviving founder of Sugar Bowl, Jean R. Chickering, right (and yes she has a magnificent view). She is fascinating, full of humor and energy, enjoys life, and has a wonderful philosophy. Jean R. Chickering is 94 years old but doesn't seem to have slowed much. For example, on the day of our visit, she was looking forward to flying to Montana the next week to be with some of her family for Thanksgiving and looking forward to a wild animal park safari next year. Jean R. Chickering is special.

There were four founding families of Sugar Bowl (as opposed to initial investors – see the previous page): Hannes Schroll, Sherman and Jean Chickering, Wellington and Harriet Henderson, and Don and Josephine Gregory. Hannes Schroll, as we've reported, was the instigator. He'd walked the valley below the peaks and said, "We have to develop this" having come up to Donner Summit to look around at the behest of Bill Klein (see our October edition). The other three families knew Hannes from Yosemite which is where Jean learned to ski.



Her husband, Sherman, was "mountain crazy." His love of the mountains was unbelievable. He was always out doing something, fishing or skiing. He was a "great mountain climber." So when the opportunity came to participate in the Sugar Bowl adventure he was all for it. The Chickering's were already familiar with the area because Sherman's father, Allen, had purchased their estate at the old Soda Springs from the Stanford family in 1927. Alan too liked the outdoors and had told Josiah Stanford that if he ever wanted to sell the 1200 acres he, Alan, would buy it. He ended up buying it. Since the family had the estate there were familiar with the Summit and had skied at Beacon Hill (the current Soda Springs ski area).

The Chickering's were newly-weds when they helped found Sugar Bowl having been married in 1938. They had no money, no kids, and no responsibilities. It was just "fun, fun, fun" and they were excited to be part of something new. They invested \$1000 in the venture and built one of the first houses, right next to the lodge, in 1939. "We were wildly excited to be part of the ski resort...it was all about skiing....we spent all our weekends [there]." For years they did not spend a Christmas or an Easter anywhere else. The house cost \$3500, their last "dime," and was unfinished when they moved in because there was no more money. The walls were not insulated and there was no kitchen but they had a hotplate and a toaster and just reached out the window for ice. There was a trap door in the floor that led to the boys' dormitory and that was a bit dangerous. "We lost one little boy there" which encouraged them to build a stair ladder which was safer. The little boy just went down the hole accidentally, but he was recovered. One friend, Helen Peet, was carrying a bowl of popcorn when she got too near the hole. She caught herself with her arms before she could disappear completely down the hole, but the popcorn went all over. The house sold awhile ago for \$2 million, quite an increase over \$3500. Of course there had been improvements over the years, including the addition of a kitchen and a refrigerator.

If you look closely at the picture of the lodge with the few houses next to it in 1939, you will note that most have the same sloping roof as the lodge, except the Chickering's house. Jean thought the lodge roof was very ugly and insisted on a traditional gable end roof.

Eventually the house was finished and since it sat right at Sugar Bowl, a lot of famous skiers stayed there.

Tall, athletic, and with a good sense of humor and a positive personality, Jean Rawlings must have been a great catch for Sherman Chickering. Not many other people would have followed him to Soda Springs in the snow and without mechanical aid as Jean did – once.

cont'd to page 17

# Getting to Sugar Bowl 1939

Sensitive readers will only want to read the first part of this article.

Skiers arrived at Sugar Bowl in two ways, by train or by automobile. Old 40 had been plowed in winter ever since 1932 and cars parked all along both sides of the highway while their owners took advantage of the skiing at the various rope tows. Eventually garages sprung up all along the route some of which had indoor parking.

Sugar Bowl sits well off the highway. Southern Pacific built a special depot at Norden inside one of the snow tunnels for train travelers. Still passengers and travelers by auto had to cross a quarter mile of snow to get to Sugar Bowl Lodge.



Sugar Bowl had a couple of ways of moving visitors from the Norden or Soda Springs train stations. Two Fords fitted out as half tracks with skis on the front were the main mode of transportation. Two horses pulling a sleigh was another and much more romantic.

Here's where sensitive readers will want to turn to another page.



Those horses worked well presumably, until one night a wrangler wanted to stay for drinks in the bar and so let the horses wander back to the barn in Soda Springs by themselves. The horses ended up on the railroad

tracks and since this is a family newsletter and the story is sad, we'll stop there.



Sugar Bowl moved to D-2 caterpillars after that which pulled "sleighs" that held 30 people. A sleigh ride from Norden to Sugar Bowl cost 25 cents and one from Soda Springs to Sugar Bowl was 50 cents. After the War the D-2's gave way to Army surplus weasels (below) that carried visitors much faster.



# Sugar Bowl



**Sugar Bowl**—El. 7100'. 1½ mi. from Norden Station. Ford station wagons leave as required from station for Lodge; fare 10c. Inquire at station or Norden store. New chair type LIFT, 3200' long, 900' rise. ROPE TOW on practice slopes. Many downhill runs from top of lift and Mt. Lincoln. Hannes Schroll Ski School. Ice skating rink at lodge 180' x 100'; skates for rent; skating instruction. Lighted for evening skiing, skating. New lodge accommodates 30 in private rooms with baths, 20 in dormitories. Rates, with bath, \$7.50 sgl., \$5 dbl. With adjoining bath, \$5 sgl., \$3.50 dbl. Dormitories, \$2.



## Two New Resorts To Open To the Public This Week

While winter sports fans anxiously scan the skies for the first worthwhile fall of snow, nearby and local resort managers are rushing last minute preparations on ski hills, ice rinks and accommodation for the expected largest number of enthusiasts to invade the High Sierra in history.

Two new resorts, the Sugar Bowl and Donner Ski Lodge are opening Saturday for the first time...

Although the official opening of the Sugar Bowl will be delayed until January 7 [due to lack of snow] it was announced this week that the elaborate playground will be ready for public use Saturday.

Johnny Ellis, who operates two ski tows near Donner Summit, The Norden Store and Ski Lodge, operated by Danzger and Frederick and others are ready for their biggest season.

**Sierra Sun December 14, 1939**

Pictures on pages 6 and 7 come from the archives of the Donner Summit Historical Society. The pictures are easily identifiable: the first chair lift in California (note the single rider/seat configuration); the new (in 1939) Sugar Bowl Lodge. If you have visited in recent decades you have noted it's no longer symmetrical, having been expanded to the right. The other pictures are of the lower tower configured that way so the return wheel could rise along with snow depth.

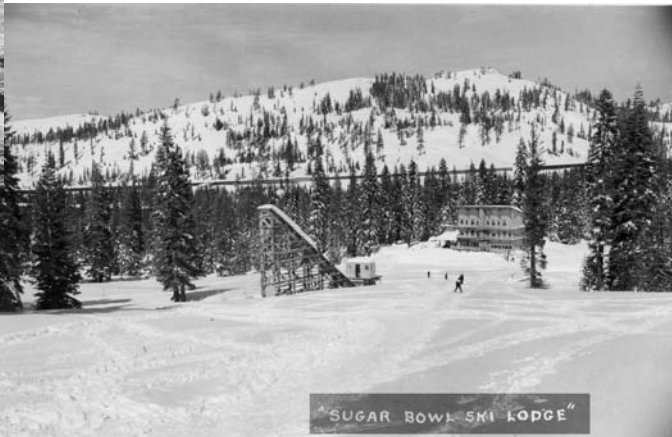


# Scrapbook 1939



## From 1939 Sugar Bowl ad:

Sugar Bowl is considered by experts to be the finest skiing area in the West – the newest and one of the longest chair lifts in the U.S. has just been installed. It provides a safe and comfortable 3000 foot ride to an elevation at thousand feet above the new Lodge in 6 \_ minutes, for a very nominal charge. Skis need not be removed. Also ice skating and skijoring.



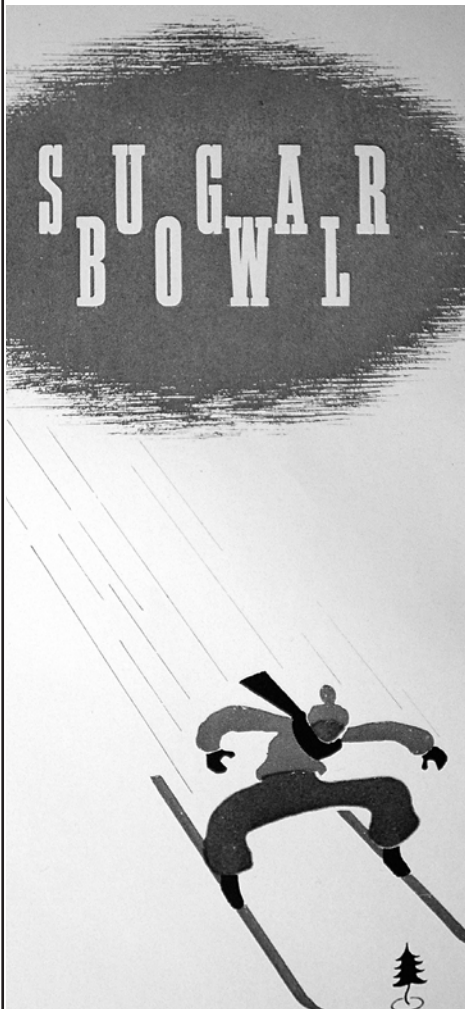
The first chairlift in California, the second in the U.S., 1939, Sugar Bowl, CA

# Sugar Bowl Helps Capture Spy

Red was not just a construction worker. He was also a deputy sheriff in Nevada County. In March, 1942, just a few months after Pearl Harbor (Sugar Bowl had not been closed yet), the sheriff of Nevada County called Red asking him to help track down a Russian KGB agent who was wanted for espionage. The spy was a young Polish woman whose alias was Helena Rulles... the last name Red couldn't really catch. The FBI and the sheriff were concerned about her presence because the transcontinental railroad was so vulnerable and important. It was thought that Helena, whatever her last name, was skiing at Sugar Bowl. Red watched all day but with so many visitors it was difficult. In the afternoon it began to rain and skiers headed for the lodge and the fire.

Red watched the gathering and then noticed a young woman sitting on a man's lap. She matched the description the sheriff had given him. Ascertaining that her name was indeed Helen, Red reached in his pocket for a telegram envelope. He approached the group of people announcing, "Telegram for Helena Rulle..." garbling the last name. Helena took the bait following Red as he continued to announce the name. Once removed from the public view, Red showed his badge and told Helena he'd be watching her the rest of the day. Three FBI agents arrived and escorted Helena out of Sugar Bowl on the sleigh.





## GENERAL INFORMATION

**RATES** Private room for two with bath, twin beds, \$5.00 per person.  
 Private room single with bath, \$7.50.  
 Private room for two with adjoining bath, twin beds, \$3.50 per person.  
 Private room single with adjoining bath, \$5.00.  
 Dormitories for men, \$2.00.  
 Dormitories for women, \$2.50.

**DINING ROOM** Breakfast.....7 to 9....\$ .75  
 Lunch....12 noon to 2.... 1.00  
 Dinner....6:30 to 8:30.... 1.25

**CHAIR LIFT** Operates continuously on week days  
 9 to 1 A. M., 1:30 to 5 P. M.,  
 Saturdays and Sundays 9 to 5 (subject of course  
 to changes according to weather conditions)

**FARE**  
 Twenty-five cents..(\$ .25) per single ride  
 Two Dollars.....(\$ 2.00) whole day ticket  
 Ten Dollars.....(\$10.00) whole week ticket

**SKI SCHOOL** Directed by HANNES SCHROLL in the Ahlberg  
 Technique.

**CLASSES:** 10 to 12 A. M.  
 2 to 4 P. M.  
 Every day of the week

**RATES:** Single Lesson .....\$ 2.00  
 Whole Day..... 3.00  
 Four Lessons..... 5.00  
 Ten Lessons..... 10.00  
 Private Lessons (per person per hour) 5.00

**SKI RENTAL** Skis may be rented and all manner of ski equip-  
 ment purchased in the Lodge Ski Shop.

*(All Rates Quoted Above Subject to Change  
 Without Notice.)*



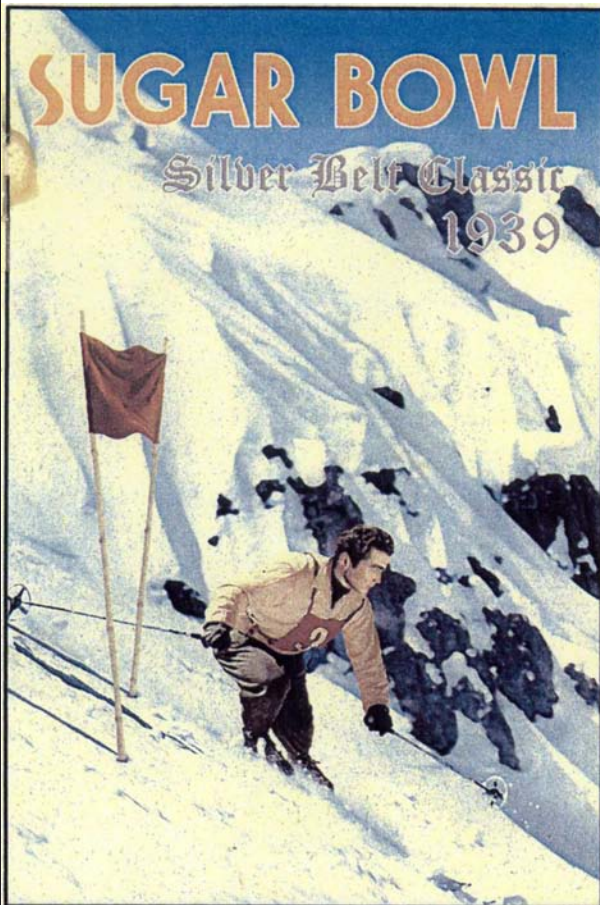
Pictured page 10 and 11:  
 the Sugar Bowl Lodge  
 and ski lift; Cartoons  
 and information from one  
 of the first Sugar Bowl  
 brochures (1939); the  
 dormitory in the lodge.

Many famous people  
 came to Sugar Bowl  
 starting at the beginning  
 such as Sterling Hayden  
 (pictured page 8 lower  
 right), Errol Flynn,  
 pictured below left this  
 page, Bing Crosby, and  
 Veronical Lake.

# Silver Belt, 1939

There is no more iconic event related to Sugar Bowl than the Silver Belt races held from 1940 to 1975. Named for the prize, a silver studded belt and silver belt buckle, the race was a giant slalom that started at the top of Mt. Lincoln went down between the rocks to the right of the current Lincoln chair and ended up in the bowl below.

It was not just a slalom race; it was more than a race. It was what one Silver Belt contestant called it, “a happening” with its own rituals. Racing was by invitation only and it attracted the top racers in the world. There were no grooming machines in those days but something had to be done to pack the snow or the early skiers would carve deep grooves into the snow changing the race for later skiers. In Europe, where ski racing was a popular spectator sport, the military could be called upon to pack the snow. In California that was not an option.



The day before the annual Silver Belt race racers would side step up Lincoln packing snow and then sidestep down. If the snow was particularly loose, they might also have to “boot pack” the snow walking up in ski boots without skis. Another tradition had the skiers, even after the Lincoln chair was built, going up the Disney chair and hiking over the Palisades (rock formations forming cliffs) to get to Lincoln. All during the week prior there were “fun and games.” The night before the event there was a “Calcutta” pool, and after the event there was always softball on skis.

The Silver Belt was more than just a race because it was a “pure giant” with its course and topography determined by the mountain and not by grooming machines. Bill Klein almost always set the course. Sometimes a 100 skiers would race, dropping steeply down 1,300 feet through a large gully ending at the bottom. Over the years the list of winners would also be the list of the best skiers in America.

There was not much choice regarding slope; the art was in setting the flags which snow conditions dictated. “The Silver Belt had it all...”H” gates...hairpins...All the fun stuff... The course led you down the mountain. It wasn’t just about speed...” it was about artistry in the placing of the sixty or so gates. Bill used natural terrain and matched his gates to the terrain.

Everyone looked forward to the annual race. Norm Sayler, who has raced the Silver Belt three times and who raced in Sun Valley and Aspen, among other places, says it was the best. Great skiers all looked forward to it: Buddy Werner, Marv Melville, Max Marrolte, Christian Pravda, Andrell Moltrer, are just a few names that rolled off his tongue. There were locals too: Bobby Kolak and Jimmy Heuga.

The local community was pulled into the event too with local homeowners putting up the famous skiers who had come to race.

Hannes Schroll started the race as a way to raise West Coast’s skiing visibility and soon turned it over to Sugar Bowl’s winter sports director. The race attracted world class skiers



and European champions, the biggest names in skiing. Since Sugar Bowl was small compared to other major ski areas like Sun Valley, this was an important part in building Sugar Bowl's reputation. Since there were not many west coast races in the Pacific Coast Champion Circuit, this also helped raise Sugar Bowl's visibility.

The first year of the race, 1940, the race was won by Friedl Pfeifer and Gretchen Kunigk. Peter Picard, pictured here and the subject of the poster came in second in the men's division. You will note the date of the commemorative poster is the wrong date to commemorate but what the heck, it's a great poster.

It was a difficult course rated hardest in California and fifth in North America. Starting at the top of Mt. Lincoln the course dropped precipitously down then through gulleys flanked by rocks and finally into a bowl 1300 feet below the Summit.

The caption for the poster shown here describes the course well, "A 1948 issue of Western Skiing Magazine described the course as a straight schuss, then a check and a gate, winding up in a final schuss down near the vertical steilhang to the finish gate that curdled the blood of most of the spectators and half the racers.

"The course was very European in design, meaning that it followed the actual terrain of the mountain." explains Olympic Bronze medalist and 1975 Silver Belt winner Greg Jones. "It offered a lot of variety. It was also difficult to prepare for since it ran through a gully and over a steep face. In later years, even modern grooming machines had a tough time trying to maintain the course."

Ski racing was not so popular in America as it was in Europe where there could be large crowds and whole towns would sponsor events. In America people were more interested in talking about golf and baseball and participating in sports rather than watching ski racing. The Silver Belt never attracted more than a few hundred spectators. In 1967 with the beginning of the World Cup, a new amateur points system, increasing costs, and scheduling problems, the silver belt lost popularity and was last raced regularly in 1975.

The Silver Belt buckle on the previous page belongs to Starr Walton Hurley, Summit downhill Olympian. She won one of her two Silver Belt buckles in 1957. The winners that first year in 1940, were Friedl Pfeifer and Gretchen Frazer. Gretchen later was on two Olympic teams and won the first American alpine medal in 1948 at St. Mortiz. Freidl served in World War II and was wounded severely.

The Silver belt: "a straight schuss, then a check and a gate, winding up in a final schuss down near the vertical steilhang to the finish gate that curdled the blood of most of the spectators and half the racers."

Western Skiing Magazine 1948

## Winter advice 1939

Those of you who have not taken your cars to the mountains as yet should check them now for equipment such as chains, jack and accompanying tools.

As a supplement to chains, it is well to include several burlap sacks, which, when wrapped around the tires, afford better traction than chains on smooth ice.

On snow, however, chains are always best.

It also helps give better traction to let out some of the air in your tires when driving on slippery roads.

In connection with the draining of the radiator and engine block of your car at night, it will be facilitated by loosening the drains plugs before leaving the valley instead of trying to open rusted valves.

San Francisco Chronicle December, 1939

# Starr's Story

The general outline of the Silver Belt is well known. But what was it like to ski the Silver Belt? Starr Walton Hurley, Summit Olympian was the youngest person ever to win the Silver Belt race. This is her story drawn out during an interview in the Summit Restaurant in Soda Springs one Fall afternoon..

Riding the lift  
Expectations high  
The excitement of competition  
Think of the course  
How to conquer  
Skier against course  
Skier against mountain  
You know the route intimately  
It's memorized  
Yesterday we boot packed it all the way to the top.

Think of the course  
Nothing else  
Not the other skiers  
It's just the mountain  
The fastest way down  
Following the drop of water  
Beating the drop of water  
Flowing down the mountain  
Smooth  
Fast  
Gravity and the course are guides

How can I be fastest - Gate to gate  
How can I flow down the course?  
As fast as possible

Go with the mountain  
With the snow

The wax is correct, hand rubbed, layer upon layer  
Each layer set to peel off  
Subsequent layers match changing conditions  
Down the mountain  
Dad is the wax expert.

At the top,  
Off the lift,

Find a flat spot to change skis  
The waxed race skis  
The perfectly waxed race skis  
The race skis Dad waxed

Tie on the bindings  
Feel the skis  
Back and forth  
Back and forth  
Running smoothly  
Get the bib on  
Get in the groove  
All quiet on the mountain top

In the gate  
All alone  
With the mountain  
Straight down - The first gate  
Can I get it right?  
No sounds  
Just the countdown  
10, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 - "go"

Push off  
Straight down.  
Can't see the bottom  
It doesn't matter  
Focus on the first gate  
7 gates in the chute  
Focus  
Focus on the first turn  
Get it right  
The rhythm will follow  
The rhythm for the rest of the race

It's all about rhythm  
Rhythm and glide  
Smooth  
Fast

Steilhang

Photo by: Cath Howard  
Sugar Bowl

# Silver Belt

Ski with the mountain  
And against the mountain  
Think of the drop of water

Think – always two gates in advance  
The rhythm is set  
Rhythm and glide  
Relaxed

Skiing must be smooth and gentle  
You are going with the snow  
Snow is such a beautiful element  
Such beautiful form  
Enjoy the course  
Tender  
Gentle

It's only the gates  
Only the snow  
The sound of the skis  
Only the rhythm of the course  
Gate after gate  
Down down.  
Steepest slalom in North America.

The course flattens – just a bit  
Then the steilhang  
The steepest part  
you don't notice steepness  
Only gates  
And rhythm  
How to accomplish the goal  
Beat the mountain  
And  
Please God, let me keep standing

Five more gates  
Faster  
Rhythm increases  
The drop of water is speeding  
Gravity is in charge  
Smooth  
No mistakes

No mistakes – please  
The end of the Steilhang is the finish  
But two tricky gates  
Got to get through the technical gates

No mistakes  
No mistakes  
Made it now  
Into a tuck  
Tuck to the finish  
Just a few hundred yards  
No poles, just tuck,  
You've got the speed  
The wax is perfect  
Don't slow,  
Ski past the finish  
Don't slow up

Out of the tuck  
Fast stop  
Spray of snow  
Lots of people now  
Not alone now.

Boy, that was fun

Steilhang

The Silver Belt course varied from year to year depending on how the snow fell. Experts looking closely may disagree with the route delineated here, but it is a generalized route based on the recollections of three Silver Belt participants and Sugar Bowl personnel.

It followed the mountain terrain and the fall of the snow. There was no grooming. Today race courses are designed based on what the designer wants and what the snow machines can deliver. The Silver Belt course, from Mt. Lincoln to the bottom, 1300 feet top to bottom, traced the route a water drop might take if it could make it all the way down the mountainside. It was as natural as could be.

Photo by: Cath Howard  
Sugar Bowl

# SKIING IS EASY

It is not difficult to learn to ski well. Learn the fundamentals from some good instructor and skill comes rapidly. You cannot learn to ski from the following illustrations but they will give you the general idea and emphasize the necessity for instruction. Ski instructors at all areas. Attend the dry skiing courses, November-December, for physical conditioning.

A liberal use of the ski tows will aid in your progress.

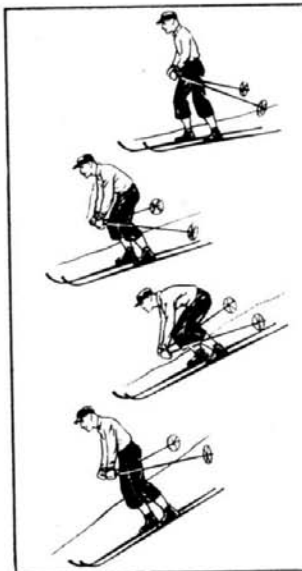
Illustrations from Chas. M. Dudley's book, "It's Easy to Ski."



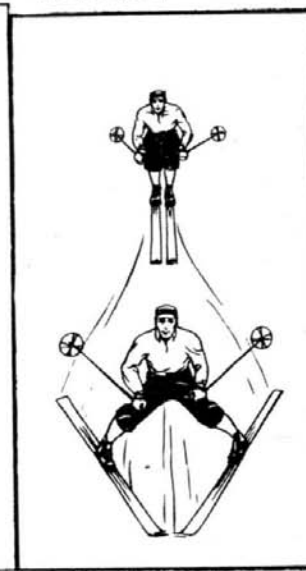
**THE KICK TURN:** Place poles on the opposite side of skis to the direction in which you wish to turn. Lift up inside ski straight ahead, swing foot around and place it parallel to other ski but facing in opposite direction. Lift stationary ski and place beside first.



**CLIMBING:** On gentle slopes straight ahead walking is sufficient; as the grade steepens, the half sidestep is used; then the herringbone, and for steep slopes, the side step.



**STRAIGHT DOWNHILL RUNNING:** Keep the knees bent and flexible to compensate for uneven terrain, your weight forward and one ski slightly advanced.



**SNOW PLOUGH OR STEM, to reduce speed or to stop:** Crouch, stem by pressing heels and ski ends out, tips nearly together. The stem is the basis for nearly all turns.

Lessons from the Coast Magazine December, 1939

# Three Arrested By Warden As Deer Meat Found

Christmas Tree Cutters Are  
Fined \$25 Each By  
Justice

VIGIL IS REWARDED

LaMarr Active On Job For  
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Above: Sierra Sun headline December, 1939.

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## Jean R. Chickering from page 6

Skiing from Sugar Bowl to the original Soda Springs was a “wonderful, thrilling thing” Jean says Sherman tried to convince her. It almost ended in divorce, Jean laughed. She agreed to accompany him but in those days there was no Lincoln lift so they had to hike up. Almost to the top, with Sherman some distance ahead, Jean made the mistake of looking straight down into the valley and was petrified, “Now I knew ‘frozen with fear’... I could not move.” Sherman put down his pack and the skis he was carrying and came back down with a ski pole. He took Jean’s skis and handed her the end of the pole. Can you make another step now.... Sherman asked? Just then his knapsack started to slide down the hill. There, sliding down the mountain, was their dinner, steak, eggs, and their clothes. Sherman started to run after the sliding pack. “It was the funniest thing,” says Jean, his arms windmilling as he chased the pack. He got it after it had gone about fifty feet. That was all she needed. Jean was free of the fear and hiked to the top, but then it got worse.

They put on their skis and headed along the ridge to Anderson Peak. At Anderson they turned to go down to Soda Springs but it was all “breakable crust” and Sherman said, “No snow plows, only kick turns” because the thin layer of ice on top of the snow was unstable and made it hard to maneuver. One ski would be on the ice and the other would have sunk into the soft snow beneath. So it was traverse, kick turn, traverse, kick turn all the way down the mountain and that made the trip miles longer than it should have been. When they reached the cabin in Soda Springs, Jean was exhausted with only enough energy to fall spread-eagled on the snow covered roof. There is a picture of that but we’ll have to wait to see it. The trip had taken all day. The eggs had broken all over their pajamas so they were into a rustic evening.

The adventure wasn’t over however. Another risk of divorce came on the way out. They were tired so they skied down to the Cedars to see whether the caretaker there could help them get out. Maybe he could pull them on skis behind his tractor: ski jouring. The caretaker agreed but when they got to Ice Lakes (Serene Lakes) he could go no further because the snow was too mushy. The Chickering’s were left to ski back to Sugar Bowl. As they skied, Sherman skied faster so periodically he’d stop and wait. Jean would catch up and Sherman would take off right away. After a few repetitions of that behavior, “divorce loomed.” She instructed Sherman that it would be polite to wait and give her a chance to rest. “If I’d had a rock I’d have thrown it at his head,” she laughed.

A better ski in the old days was to go from Donner Summit to Donner Lake. “That was skiing over the snowsheds.” They’d ski down to the hamburger stand at the west end of Donner Lake and pay the man \$5 to take them back to the Summit in a car.

Health took a toll and the Chickering’s eventually gave their Sugar Bowl house to the “kids” who eventually sold it. “Sherman died....we just weren’t going for skiing and I did not want to cook for 10.” Today Jean still visits the old Soda Springs. She spent five weeks there last summer. That they’ll never give up.

## Jean on life:

“I’m glad we didn’t have a kitchen and we had a simple life in the early days,” says Jean. It really makes one appreciate things more. Jean took care of her family and did a lot of charity work over the years, working with unwed mothers, in hospitals, driving for different organizations, etc. Even today she is involved donating money and helping on a more personal basis than her active participation in years earlier. A new love that makes a lot of sense to her is her son Lawrence’s initiative, EGG, Educate Girls Globally (<http://www.educategirls.org>). She says this makes so much sense because it’s proactive rather than reactive. Instead of waiting to solve problems such as terrorism retrospectively, let’s do something to stop terrorists by making life better so they don’t become terrorists. Educating women, EGG, is the answer. Countries that educate women do better economically. There is less poverty, more literacy, better health, lower birthrate, and violence decreases. To Jean this is not an American initiative; it’s not Democratic and it’s not Republican; it’s global. That fits her philosophy too: we all have a stake in the world and all have a responsibility to make things better. “To me...[this] is very exciting.”

## Jean's reminiscences:

On Hannes Schroll, “I loved that man.” “What a rebel” and he was “such a daredevil.” During one Strawberry Hill race he roared down the course, we were all standing looking on. As he came by he looked up and saw Jean. He waved, “Hello Darling...” and fell on his face. [here we should turn your attention to the Olympic trials at Mt. Ranier in our last issue].

Hannes liked a little alcohol from time to time and eventually that enjoyment got him banned from the Sugar Bowl Lodge’s bar by his wife, Maude. He was out on the deck of the lodge and took a run. He somersaulted off the end of the porch and broke his arm. For Maude that was too much; he was banned for life from his own bar.

Werner was the Sugar Bowl Lodge

go to the next page

bartender for years. He was quite an attraction. "People who never drank went into the bar to hear his stories." He had a gift of entertaining, "sleight of hand," says Jean. One day Werner got sick and Walt Disney took over for a few hours. No one recognized him.

Jean's father was a large man, 6' 3". He came to learn to ski. Siggy Engel, who'd come over from Austria after Hannes, was his instructor. Siggy didn't speak English very well yet and had trouble finding the right words. Just as Jean's father was starting his lesson, he fell over and no matter how hard he tried he could not get up. Siggy came over and tried urging him upright but it didn't work. Siggy got so frustrated with this beginner skier that he blurted, "Get up you big fat pig." That was all the extra urging that was needed. Stewart Rawlings popped up. Hannes thought it was so funny when the story was reported to him but he did suspend Siggy for two weeks. There were standards to uphold after all.

Jean once worked as an extra in one of the movies made at Sugar Bowl, Two Faced Woman, starring Greta Garbo (review coming in January). She received \$5 a day. That's why she ended up with a Social Security card - for her two days of paid work.

Getting to Sugar Bowl was a lot of fun in the old days. Sherman would come home and they'd head for the train station with him still in his business suit. The train would be delayed an hour or two in Sacramento so it would not arrive before 7 AM at Norden. The trip was nice in the Pullman with the double decker bunks. Dinner was included on the train. There was no danger as there was with driving.

Sometimes they did drive to Sugar Bowl. They'd park and then take the tractor pulled sleigh into Sugar Bowl. It was the only time Jean ever drank straight from the bottle in her life because when they came up at night, "it was so cold."

The most exciting weekend ever. Trader Vic of San Francisco wanted to do something special at Sugar Bowl. So in mid-winter he brought in lots of artificial palm trees which, when placed on the ski hill, formed a slalom course. People skied down the hill and were greeted by Hawaiian music, hula dancers, the palm trees and canoes filled with floating gardenias. "There were Mai Tais everywhere....Oh we never had so much fun."


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