



# Donner Summit Historical Society November, 2009 issue #15 Newsletter

## The Coming of a New Era

The modern era on Donner Summit arrived in the 1930's. Suddenly winter visitors became an important part of the economy. It would become the major driver of the economy when railroading changed and did not need so many resident workers on the Summit. The Summit would change more radically with the coming of the freeway. Eventually almost the only economic force left would be winter visitors.

The simple answer to what caused the change would be skiing and of course that's right. The answer is also more complicated. After all, skiing had been around for a long time; there had been "long board" races for decades all over the Sierra. What happened in the 1930's to change the face of Donner Summit?

There was a confluence of factors that made skiing and so the Summit popular and it's difficult to try to analyze what was first or what was most important.

### Arrival of Alpine Resort Skiing

The Summit Hotel burned in 1925. It had been the destination for summer visitors and was part of the old era. Its place in the local economy was replaced by the Soda Springs Hotel and many comfortable lodges built to service the ski industry – the new era.

With the coming of the 1930's skiing was already on its way to becoming a fad and the Summit joined in. Skiing was a family recreational activity that allowed all generations to participate. The highway was paved in the early 1930's and winter plowing could then begin. Rope tows and lifts arrived by the late 30's taking a great part of the effort out of early skiing. The 1932 and 1936 Olympics attracted attention to skiing and Olympic champions highlighted skiing at a time when the public was hungry for heroes (Amelia Earhart, Charles Lindbergh), amazing feats (flag pole sitting), and relief from the Depression. The railroad built Summit Station, which although it only lasted two years, increased the visibility of Donner Summit as the railroad publicized its special ski trains. Unfortunately so many people came up on the train, ill prepared, and just wandered around, sometimes in the snowsheds, that it was seen as a liability. You'll have to wait until next month for details. Ski equipment and techniques also improved dramatically in the 30's. Attaching the heel to the ski was a big improvement for example. As equipment improved, speed increased and the thrill attracted more skiers. New techniques had to match the increased speed. The 40 hour week was enacted in 1938 and families had weekends for new recreational activities.

Ski movies, highlighting champions, were made and helped instruct the public in new techniques and possibilities of the new recreation. Ski instruction became a profession in Europe and spread to the U.S. Magazine inserts, focused

**In this issue:** Bill Klein, Peter Picard, Red's Story, the building of the first California chair lift, William Wilson Wurster - the Sugar Bowl lodge architect.

**December:** Sugar Bowl's first year, the Silver Belt, life in 1939, The Snowball Express, catching a spy at Sugar Bowl, and more.

on skiing, further raised the profile and public interest. See the how to ski lessons in the last issue of this newsletter.

On Donner Summit it was the arrival of some unique personalities with entrepreneurial instincts that provided the pieces to change the Summit. This issue is devoted to them. Dennis Jones built the first lift, and although it did not work so well, it provided the impetus for the next workable lifts. Dennis also cleared Beacon Hill (Soda Springs Ski Hill) for skiing and began teaching skiing and renting equipment. We focused on Dennis last February. His father and uncle built lodging along Hiway 40. Johnny Ellis built the first Summit workable lifts on Judah and Signal Hill (Donner Ski Ranch) and planned a ski resort (see our April and August issues). Hannes Schroll built Sugar Bowl. Bill Klein was another Summit personality who changed the face of the Summit and the face of skiing (next story).



## Grand Opening Slater's Ski Lodge

AT DONNER SUMMIT ON HIGHWAY 40

## Saturday Night

DECEMBER 9, 1939

DANCING AND REFRESHMENTS

Everybody Welcome

MR. and Mrs. Frank H. Slater

### SKI IN CALIFORNIA

To those who have not as yet enjoyed the thrill of snow sports, the calm and majesty of our snow-covered mountains in winter, and the exhilaration of the bracing air of high altitudes, we say—Don't let another season pass without joining the constantly-increasing army of winter sports fans!

### YOU CAN'T GO ABROAD, SKI HERE

To the thousands of skiers who annually sail to foreign shores for their favorite sport, California extends a cordial invitation to become acquainted with her marvelous terrain and her balmy winter mountain climate.

### NEW DEVELOPMENTS

#### Ski Tows - Trails - Cleared Areas

Recall how your skiing improved over the past two seasons because of the ski tows which eliminated the fatigue of climbing and permitted as many downhill runs as daylight or your physical condition permitted? This year a rope tow will be found at practically every area in California; the longer ski tows of the wire cable or sled-type have been improved and at least one chair-type lift will be in operation.

Good news for early season skiers is the work done by the Forest Service during the past summer. Many new trails have been made, old ones brushed out. Of the greatest importance, however, is the fact that at nearly all centers areas of varying extent have been cleared of rocks, brush and stumps, so that limited skiing can now be had on as little as eight inches of snow. This assures early skiing until the deeper snows come.

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Right: 1939 ad boosting  
California skiing.

# Bill Klein

The guests at the Sugar Bowl Lodge were just getting up one January morning in 1940, thinking they were up early and ready for a day of skiing. They'd come out on the deck; the mountains were silent. The air was crisp. They heard a yodel high up on Mt. Disney and a few minutes later, straight down the mountain came Hannes Schroll. The spectators were amazed at the speed and grace. Then another yodel and there quickly followed Bill Klein – also straight down the mountain also at great speed and grace. Wait until next month and you can read about skiing with grace as Starr Walton Hurly skis the Silver Cup; but that's for next month and a little anticipation is good..

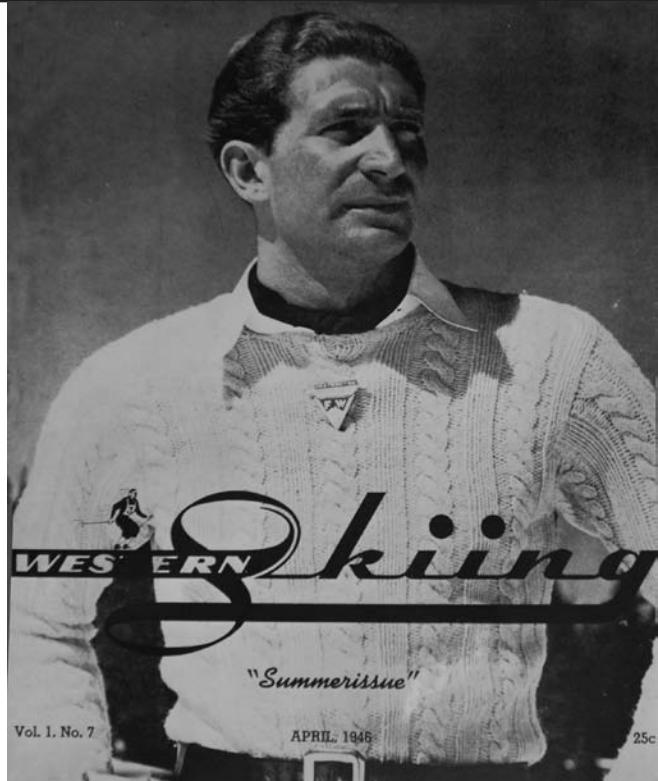
Bill (Wilhelm) Klein did not build things like some of his Summit contemporaries. He knew them all, many of whom we've highlighted in our newsletters. He says Johnny Ellis (April and August '09 newsletters) kept dynamite under his bed in his cabin at Clair Tappaan and always carried a stick in a back pocket for example. Bill and his brother, Fred, lived in Johnny Ellis' cabin (which Johnny had designed and built in 1936) at Clair Tappaan for a time.

Bill helped build modern skiing by teaching modern techniques in a systematic way and then improving on the techniques. As skiing increased in popularity and more people wanted to ski, Bill accommodated them first by teaching along with his brother and then hiring other instructors to teach after training them in his methods. Bill had seen that "if Alpine Resort Skiing was to grow it would need teachers to instruct" skiers. This was his key contribution to modern skiing: the franchising of instruction. In meeting and continuing to meet the growing demand for ski instruction Bill helped popularize skiing and move it into the modern age. In this way he was also increasing demand and so helped build a clientele for the many ski lodges and for the new resort, Sugar Bowl. To help spread modern ski instruction Bill helped found the CSIA, California Ski Instructors' Association. The Association helped standardize instruction so that skiers would learn the same techniques from resort to resort. People would learn more easily and with less confusion. As a result of his contributions the National Ski Congress has recognized Bill Klein as one of skiing's greats. The Donner Summit Historical Society recognized him as as Summit Pioneer in August of this year (see our September newsletter.)

During his ski instruction career which lasted into the 1950's, Bill taught recreational skiers and champions and even coached the U.C. Ski Team.

Bill Klein and his brother, Frederick, came to the U.S. in 1934 following their father who'd come two years earlier. Times were bad in Austria in the 1930's, partly as a legacy of World War I. Hitler too was on the horizon. The Kleins wanted to get back into skiing which had been a passion for them in Austria. Bill saw an article in a magazine about Professor Hildebrand who managed the U.S. Olympic team and so he contacted the professor. Dr. Hildebrand replied recommending that the brothers head for Donner Summit where there would be opportunities. Bill had no idea there was snow in California but decided heading there would be a good idea. After all, everyone wanted to go to California in those days.

Interestingly, not too long after, the head of the California Chamber of Commerce, Jerry Carpenter who was a skier, said the Chamber had to be careful about promoting skiing because everyone thought of California as





# BILL KLEIN SKI SCHOOLS

SIERRA CLUB ★ DONNER SUMMIT LODGE ★ SUGAR BOWL

SODA SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA



warm with lots of palm trees. Ski promotion could undercut that. California missed out on the '32 Olympics partly because the "Golden State" as everyone knew, had no snow.

The Kleins bought a 1934 Oldsmobile four door sedan for \$280 and headed west. On the way they visited Yellowstone, Sun Valley (where there were a lot of Austrian ski instructors), Mt. Ranier, and Mt. Hood. At each ski area they were offered instructor jobs, but the Kleins were committed to Donner Summit, Professor Hildebrand and Clair Tappaan, the Sierra Club lodge.

On Donner Summit Professor Hildebrand took them on a tour and the men asked where the skiing was because they could not imagine skiing on such rough terrain. There were so many boulders and obstacles. The Austrian Alps don't get a lot of snow and two meters would be a lot. Professor Hildebrand told them they had no idea how much snow fell on Donner Summit each winter. There would be no problems.

In 1936 the ski fad was just starting, there were few professionals, and no lifts in the U.S. Austrians were in high demand though. The Kleins received room and board along with 50 cents a lesson. Claire Tappaan, only two years old, was decidedly rougher in those days. There was no electricity and no running water. Each guest had to do his part pumping water up to a holding tank – fifty strokes per guest per day.

In Austria Bill had skied since he was little, first learning to ski with the single pole technique. Later, still in Austria, he would meet the father of Alpine skiing, Mathias Zdansky and he'd learn the double pole and Arlberg techniques.

The Kleins taught at Clair Tappaan, but soon expanded to offer ski lessons at the other resorts on the Summit. People were transported up from Rainbow Tavern in a 1932 Ford station wagon for example. Lessons involved sliding uphill and then skiing downhill on ungroomed slopes. Many people remember starting the day by sidestepping up the hills to pack the snow after storms and before skiing down. Skiing required a lot more work in the old days.

Skiing originally involved whole body movement and stemming – using the snowplow to slow down and turn (see our last issue for a discussion of techniques). Because the equipment was not advanced the speed of skiers was slow. Better equipment was available in the 1930's and so speed, and the thrill of skiing increased. This necessitated a change in technique. The Kleins began teaching the Arlberg technique which they'd used in Austria. This new technique required less stemming and less body movement. Now people began to ski with the skis together all the time and parallel skiing was born. "Speed put skis together," says Bill.

Beginning skiers skied on the slope behind the Claire Tappaan Lodge but more advanced skiers would be taken up Mt. Disney. This was an all day affair with no lifts or mid-mountain cafes. The skiers would start early in the morning sliding up Disney with skins attached to their skis. They'd ski down a ways and climb back



up a few times and then at the end of the day they'd get a long ski down. Sometimes skiers would be taken down from Donner Summit to Donner Lake on the south side of the pass. A car would bring them back up. Bill's brother, Fred, once broke his leg on one of those expeditions and it was hard hauling him out and down to the lake.

Skiing Donner Summit it was easy to see the potential of what would become Sugar Bowl. In fact the land was offered to Bill for \$2000 but he had no money. He had met Hannes Schroll however, who taught skiing at Yosemite, the only other California resort. Bill invited Hannes to Donner Summit in 1937 to look around. Hannes walked the soon to be Sugar Bowl which had cows grazing all over and said, we have to develop this. Hannes had connections to money because the rich and the famous went to Yosemite to ski. Hannes Schroll was able to buy the property from the Sacramento owners for \$6700. Hannes was covered in the last issue and will be again a few pages hence.

Once Sugar Bowl began, Hannes offered Bill a job but Bill was committed to the House of Vanderford lodge on the Summit. He would not join Sugar Bowl until after the war when he would open up a ski shop in addition to running the ski school.

In early 1942 Bill volunteered for the army. He'd only been in the U.S. a few years but America had been good to him. He went to Camp Roberts in Washington for training. Not long after arriving he happened to see some old friends who were in a different division. When they saw Bill they grabbed him and told their commanding officer they needed him. Bill became part of the 10th Mountain Division and went to Ft. Lewis and Mt. Ranier. There he was in charge of the ski instructors who taught American soldiers to ski prior to the coming campaigns in Europe. Bill became a technical master sergeant. Toward the end of his three year career he was ready to go to Europe when the army sidetracked him. Because of his German language abilities and his ability to handle men, Bill was tapped to go to German P.O.W. camps in New Mexico. There he became the intermediary between the POW's and the camp commandant and helped move 250 prisoners to California. Coincidentally, Bill later met Hitler's Last Soldier in America when Georg Gaertner, the "last soldier" came to teach at Sugar Bowl (you'll have to wait until our January issue for that). Bill says he had not known Gaertner at the

New Mexico POW camp from which he escaped. Bill reports that Georg saw his own wanted poster on the wall of the Norden post office shortly after his arrival on Donner Summit. When the post master turned his head, Georg took the poster down. Hitler's Last Soldier in America is a book and is another story you'll read in this newsletter when we have room.



Bill Klein ran the Sugar Bowl ski shop until 1993 and had another branch in Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco. He spent the off seasons working as a successful real estate developer in the Bay Area. He now lives with his wife, Annaliese, in Incline Village. He skied until he was 90 years old which was a couple of years ago.

Bill says, "I don't think I contributed that much [to skiing]. I wish I could have contributed more...." Bill contributed plenty to modern skiing and modern Donner Summit.

The pictures and memorabilia here come from Bill Klein's collection. The cartoons were done by an Army friend, Snuffy O'Neil. The information here is the result of a fascinating afternoon conversation and follow up phone call.

## Peter Picard

There was a confluence of things that worked to make skiing a popular participant sport in the 1930's: the improvement in technology and technique, the building of ski lodges where people could stay in the mountains, the development of ski lifts, improved transportation and road conditions, and the immigration of European ski instructors. Missing any one of those factors and skiing would not have matured beyond relatively small spectating crowds.

It took a long time to get to Donner Summit for example. If there were no lodges people would not have come. Had technique and technology not improved skiing would have been too difficult for the masses. If people had to continue climb the hills to ski down, most wouldn't have. There had to be people too who would teach the new techniques, how to use the new technology, and how to use the rope tows and other devices invented to move people uphill.

Peter Picard was one of the instructors who made skiing popular. He arrived in the U.S. in June, 1940 at age 19. He was an all around gymnast and his parents had sent him to the Royal Gymnastics Institute in Sweden from Lake Constance on



the Swiss/German border. There he'd been skiing and sailing since he was five years old.

While Peter was in Sweden his parents felt they had to get out of Nazi Germany and emigrated to Boston. Peter decided to join them but traveling from Sweden across the Atlantic in 1940 was problematical. Instead he headed across Russia, spending ten days on the Trans-Siberian railroad. He was accompanied by his friend, Maryanne

Rosen. They both had visas and Peter was aiming for Boston but Maryanne had no plans. She later became a physical therapist developing the Rosen method and now lives in Berkeley, CA.

Traveling the 10 days across Russia was an experience. Once as the train passed a town Peter saw a group of children standing barefoot in the snow. As he began to take pictures, soldiers on the train told him that was not something that was done. For ten days the only food served was eggs. Fortunately the eggs were served in different ways to prevent boredom. In Vladivostok there was nowhere for foreigners to stay except a friendly embassy. The embassy had room for Maryanne in the women's dormitory but there was no room for Peter in the men's. Lucky Peter got to stay with the women (there is still a twinkle in his eye as he relates that story). From Vladivostok Peter and Maryanne headed for Japan where they boarded a steamer bound for San Francisco via Hawaii.

In Hawaii, Peter, who is dark skinned, headed for town to buy some authentic Hawaiian clothes. On the way back he went swimming so when he arrived at the ship he was tousle headed and not wearing much. The crew would not let him board - "No natives allowed" until passengers vouched that he too was a passenger.

The day they arrived in San Francisco Bay it was windy and the bay was filled with sailboats. It was at that point Peter not only decided to stay in the U.S. but in the Bay Area. He had been an avid sailor on Lake Constance.

Leaving the ship he headed for the nearby Y.M.C.A. where he said he was looking for job and apparently mentioned some important skills. Just at that moment the YMCA camp bus heading for YMCA Camp McCoy at Pinecrest was outside. Peter soon found himself and his skills on the way to summer camp where he would be a camp counselor.

At YMCA camp in Pinecrest they heard that Peter could ski so he was taken up to Sonora Pass where there was still snow. When Peter saw some skiers heading downhill he yodeled and met the skiers at the end of their run. Conversation ensued until Peter found himself wearing borrowed boots and heading uphill with borrowed skis and poles to show the Americans he could ski a quickly set up slalom course. The Americans were impressed. He could ski.

They told Peter he had to go immediately to Donner Summit, "Jesus Christ you have to see Hannes Schroll to ski there."

Peter headed for the new Sugar Bowl. Hannes was eager for European talent and

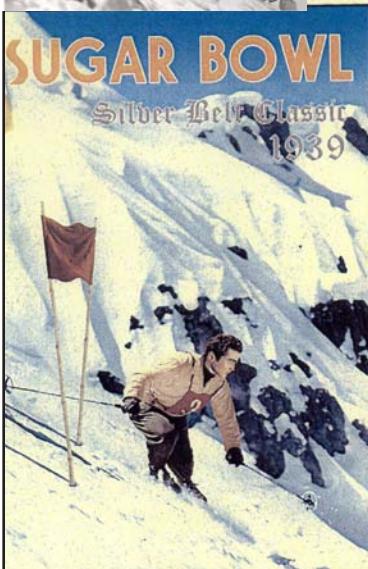


told Peter to return at Christmas time. Peter did, but Hannes did not recognize him or remember and had no idea what to do with Peter. He gave Peter to Gordon Hooley, Sugar Bowl's general manager and Peter was sent to Rainbow Tavern (now Rainbow Lodge). When Herstle Jones (see our 2/09 newsletter covering Dennis Jones, Herstle's nephew) was introduced to Peter and learned of his skills he said, "You're hired, but stay away from my daughter." At Rainbow "... I took the Rainbow people to Sugar Bowl and taught them how to ski."

Peter had had to pass the instructor's test so he could be a certified PSIA instructor. Lugi Fogel (Yosemite Ski School head) and Joel Hildebrand (Dean of Men at U.C. Berkeley, Sierra Club president and head of the U.S. Olympic team) gave him the test. Professor Hildebrand told Peter to take a run. That one run was enough. Lugi had "seen enough" and Peter was certified.

The Snowball Express (next month) which Southern Pacific ran for only a couple of years, disgorged hundreds of potential skiers and Peter would meet the train.

One time meeting the train he was the only instructor for the fun seekers all equipped with their ski equipment. Not one, said Peter, had their boots properly fitted for their skis so he spent the entire day straightening them out. The skiers were so novice that Peter says they even asked which pole was left and which was right.



Top picture is Peter competing at Sugar Bowl and the bottom is a celebratory poster commemorating the Silver Belt featuring Peter.

"Skiing with Peter Picard is like dancing. The times I have skied with Peter always reminds me that the ski slope is a ball room floor and we are just a couple of kids dancing to the music in our heads. Peter always followed my every turn with a big smile on his face and I could see him dancing with me in every turn. Even though Peter was in his late eighties the last time we sped down the mountain at Sun Valley, he always was right behind me, always smiling, always dancing and all the way to the bottom of the mountain run. I always thought he had "leg transplants" with the way he could keep up in the turns. What a wonderful memory of a very special skier."

Starr Walton Hurley  
1964 Olympian, Alpine Skiing

Over the years Peter taught skiing at Sugar Bowl and for the Sierra Club. He taught famous people to ski like Robert Stack, Ray Milland, and Jean Arthur, among others. Jean did not want to learn how to ski but her husband, producer Frank Ross, insisted. She said it was too cold, too much work and the clothes were too baggy.

Once settled in California Peter attended the University of California at Berkeley majoring in the sciences in order to become a dentist. At U.C. he met Professor Hildebrand who "was the leader of the American Olympic team." "Professor Hildebrand was a great skier and chemistry professor." That brought Peter to Clair Tappaan to continue to teach skiing at Pumphouse Hill behind the Sierra Club lodge. The picture at the top of the previous page shows Peter in the center giving instruction. Most of the rest of the class is behind him and some are in front. Professor Hildebrand had told Peter that teaching skiing at Claire Tappaan was a great job, "Your predecessor [Fred Klein – Bill's Klein's brother] married my daughter." Peter did not speak English well enough to know what a predecessor was.

There was talk of the Olympics being held on Donner Summit in 1944 and the downhill Nationals were to be held there as a prelude. The runs had to be long enough to qualify. That meant potential runs had to be measured. Peter and John Wiley, Sugar Bowl winter sports director, went out to measure the run from the top of Judah, down over the snowheads and down to Donner Lake. They did it with a one hundred foot long piece of rope. They leapfrogged past each other measuring one hundred feet at a time. Eventually they measured the entire distance to Donner Lake. The Nationals, as well as the Olympics, were put off by the War however, and the measuring was for naught.

The war made skiing difficult due to gas rationing but avid skiers were not to be

dissuaded. Peter and friends would combine their gas rationing coupons and head for the mountains from the Bay Area. After the war Peter was drafted into the Air Force as a dentist and sent to Europe. He was assigned to Ramstein and Wiesbaden. Sometimes, he related with another twinkle in his eye, he would say, in both places, that he was at the other and so got to ski all over Europe during his tour. Peter also raced for the Air Force downhill, cross country, and slalom. He'd win all his events.

After the War, which closed Sugar Bowl, Peter went to Sugar Bowl to teach skiing. He'd graduated from U.C. in three years. After becoming a dentist and orthodontist Peter continued to teach skiing at Sugar Bowl part time for twenty years. He loved skiing and he loved teaching. When asked why'd he kept teaching skiing while he was working as a dentist, he said, "I liked it... and I made some money."

Peter met his wife, Theresa at Sugar Bowl. She was put off by him because he was such a clown but he pursued her through the seasons and to other part-time jobs until he finally captured her. They were married at a justice of the peace in Carson City on their way to Sun Valley to ski. It was easy getting married. "You just walk in." There were maybe twenty girls typing during the ceremony. When it came to the "I do" part the typists stopped. The vows were said and the typing continued.

Peter Picard skied until December, 2007. When he quit he'd been skiing for 85 years because he loved it. He lives now in Walnut Creek aged 90 years. He has been recognized by the Veteran Ski Association and inducted into their "Veteran Ski Instructors Hall of Fame" in Salt Lake City. Peter Picard is one of Donner Summit's pioneers.

After we had talked about Peter's life for some time, we turned serious to get his ideas about changes over the decades. The biggest change in skiing is that it's now so much easier and the clothing is so much warmer. In the old days skiers hiked up hills and tied on skis with leather straps. Now you don't even have to bend over; you just step in to your skis. First there was no wax and skis had no edges. Then metal edges were developed that skiers would screw to their wood skis. Next metal edges were set flush into grooves in the wood and finally, metal skis arrived in the 60's. Boots were leather and low cut left-overs from the War. Then they were laced and higher leather followed by buckles instead of lacing. Finally, boots are now made of plastic.

Peter knew Howard Head and tested his skis but not everyone was enamored with the improvements in ski technology.. While at Sugar Bowl Peter taught skiing with Dennis Wiles, whose real name was Georg Gartner and escaped German POW and the subject of Hitler's Last Soldier in America. "Dennis" saw Peter on Head (metal) skis and made fun. You would not play tennis with a metal racket would you, he asked.

Peter helped develop a safety binding for skis. To the toe piece which pivots he added a wheel to the top so the boot could release upward as well as laterally. It was called the "Ski Free."



Pictured Above: Sugar Bowl ski instructors. Hannes Schroll far left, Bill Klein fourth from left, and Peter Picard, second from right.

# ELECTRICAL GIFTS

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"With only a few hitches it served well and with it and this resort big time skiing came to the Sierras." [sic]

Norman "Red" Rockholm

# The First Chair Lift in California Sugar Bowl, 1939

This is the story of Norman "Red" Rockholm (below left) who helped build the first ski lift in California, at Sugar Bowl.

Working his way through college in Nebraska, Red had a number of jobs. When his 15 cent an hour job cleaning



bricks came to a close and without enough money to go back to college, he "bummed" west with two friends to Lake Tahoe. They hopped freights taking "a few cans of sardines, tuna, pork and beans and a 5 cent load of bread" along with some clothes. He quickly learned the rules for hopping freights, which I include here in case you are ever of a mind to do likewise:

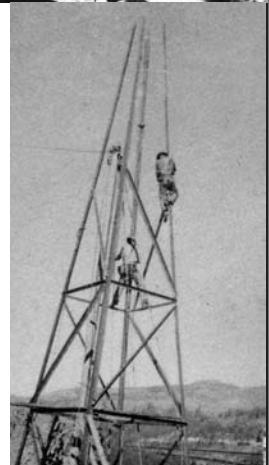
- Use the front ladder on the freight car
- Use open cars
- If you end up on top of a car, tie yourself down
- Watch out for the "bulls" (railroad detectives)

In the Sierra Red worked construction for \$4 a day and then cut trees for Sierra Pacific Power for \$5 a day. He also helped build the "Thunderbird Lodge and boat house, tunnel, and wine cellar" on Lake Tahoe. Later Red worked laying power lines for the power company, one from Donner Summit to Truckee. In winter he patrolled the lines on skis and attempted to keep them clear, but in 1938 he said 800 inches of snow fell on Donner Summit making the job difficult. Skiing was a matter of balance, "We hardly had time to learn the snowplow or any of the Christie turns but boy were we good at making sitzmarks – it was the only way we could stop." His "ski boots" were logging boots with a groove cut into the heel.

Finding himself unemployed later in the 1930's he went up to Donner Summit where he shoveled snow and met the subjects of previous newsletters: Johnny Ellis and Dennis Jones. He helped Johnny Ellis built his Mt. Judah rope tow but "because of the terrain and wind conditions little skiing was done there."

Then Hannes Schroll arrived and Donner Summit changed. Hannes was an Austrian ski racer who'd come to the U.S. to participate in a ski competition and stayed, first becoming a ski instructor in Yosemite. He had a vision

Pictures on this pages and the next come from "Red" Rockholm's scrapbook now in the possession of the Donner Summit Historical Society. Top is "Red." Top right: setting the forms for one of the Sugar Bowl chairlift towers. Second from top: wheelbarrow brigade. Third from top tower under construction by steelworkers from Oakland. Bottom, "Red" with the tower wheel.



for Donner Summit. Hannes' Austrian money had disappeared with Austria in the 1938 Anschluss (Germany took over Austria) but money was obtained to buy what is today Sugar Bowl and then more money for construction. Red went to work building Sugar Bowl. There were one hundred investors and Walt Disney was "supposedly" number one although he "used the installment plan to pay up." His name added "zest to the project."

Plans for Sugar Bowl included the first ski lift in California and the second in the nation. The footings for each of the 13 towers had to be set into the rock. In order to set the footings to the rock holes had to be drilled for steel. The steel would be grouted into the rock and extend into the concrete that would be poured over it. That would anchor the concrete to the rock. Drilling was an ordeal with no power drills. It was done just the way the hardrock miners drilled: with hammers and star drills. "It was quite a sight to see that fellow sitting there, legs spread wide, both hands on the drill steel and each stroke of the maul make a slight twist....The two guys swinging the hammer kept eyes on the top of the 1 inch piece of steel and as one maul was coming off of it the other was coming down on it. Everything had to be in synchrony." Sounds pretty scary for the guy holding and rotating the star drill bit. How many hands were hit by mauls?

To get material up the mountain for construction, a donkey steam engine sat at the bottom of the hill. Horses carried cable up the mountain where it was attached to a tree. The cable pulled a steel sled, the "stone boat" up and down the mountain. It was about 5 X 8 feet and one foot deep.

That sled hauled up the cement, gravel, and sand as well as all the tools. A mixer mixed batches of concrete and wheelbarrows carried the concrete to the footing forms as up can see on the previous page. Once the towers' footings were poured, crews turned to the lodge and neighboring house foundations. For comparison, Sugar Bowl's new Summit Chair (2009) on Mt. Judah had its rebar cages and concrete delivered by helicopter and once the footings were ready the towers were also delivered by helicopter this year. Wouldn't the guys of 1939 have loved having helicopters rather than "stone boats."

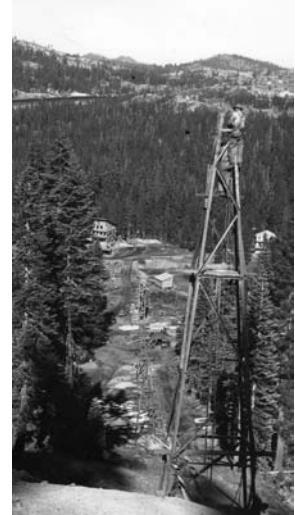
It gets cold at 7000 feet. To prevent the cold from weakening the concrete "smoke pots" (two gallon buckets with burning fuel oil) were used to keep the temperature from getting too cold as the concrete cured.

The lift towers were erected by unionized iron workers from Oakland. Those workers also installed the machinery. Once the lift was completed it had to be advertised so Norma Brooks was dressed in a ski outfit and put on the only chair on lift in that Fall of 1939 (that's her on page 11 picture to the far right). She didn't like being up there and got nauseous so Red put on some skis and was in the publicity pictures (that's him on page 11 bottom right).

Since this was the first lift, there were kinks to be worked out of the system. The single chairs swung from side to side in the wind for example, and so for a time sand bags were suspended from the chairs for stabilization. The finished ski lift cost \$39,000 and rides were 25 cents each or \$2.50 a day.

The "stone boat" had worn a groove into the side of the mountain alongside the lift route. Just as the resort was just nearing completion, Red was at the top and slipped on some ice and then fell into the "stone boat's" groove. He tumbled down the mountain side his head just missing a rock outcrop. It was only after his elbows were able to find purchase that he was able to stop. His friends didn't stop laughing until Red tried to stand up and immediately fell

Pictures here from "Red's" scrapbook. All four are towers under construction.  
Bottom photo is the top tower.





over. His leg was broken. He collected \$25 a week from the insurance company for the winter as Sugar Bowl began operation.

"Skiers flocked to the bowl to match skills with Mt. Disney." Many famous people were included: Howard Hughes, Lowell Thomas, Claudette Colbert, Norma Shearer, and Errol Flynn. It was Claudette Colbert who cleaned up Hannes Schroll's language by explaining to him that when he instructed skiers about proper form it was better to say, "bend ze knees and keep your apparatus down."

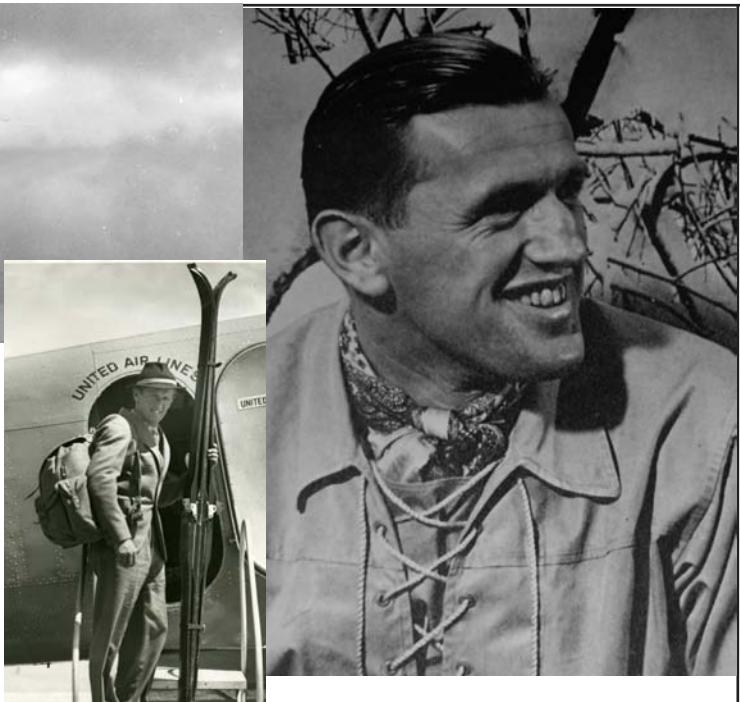
"Apparatus" was a much better word to use than one normally associated with the posterior (we're a family newsletter) of a person.

Immediately, challenging races that attracted good skiers from all over were held at Sugar Bowl. The Silver Belt is one example(see our next edition). There was a Snowshoe Thompson race that attracted "long boarders." A race was even planned from Donner Peak down to the west end of Donner Lake over the snowsheds but was never held because of WWII.

Sugar Bowl opened in December of 1939 and operated through the 1941-42 season after which it was closed by the Army to protect the transcontinental railroad from sabotage. Sugar Bowl reopened Christmas of 1945. There was no more Snowball Express (next issue), people arrived via the highway, and the D-2 tractor (see next issue also) had given way to Army surplus weasels that carried visitors much faster from the highway to Sugar Bowl.

Pictured here: top the side view of the lower station. Note that the ramp allows the cable wheel to slide up as snow depth increases. To the right Norma Brooks, wife of a Souther Pacific public relations man, in publicity photo. She didn't like it for long and was replaced by "Red" below right. Immediately below, the finished lift, lodge and houses of the stockholders. Hannes Schroll's house is far right. Bottom picture shows the lift and lodge after snow fell and gives a good view of how the lifts could accommodate high snow depths. Next month in our December issue, the lift in actual operation.





# Imagine the Character

You can easily find the history of Sugar Bowl in many places: who found it, how it was purchased and built, the original facilities, when Hannes Schroll came to America etc. One of those places includes our last newsletter. That being the case and since our newsletters are not supposed to get too long, we won't repeat all that. Instead of the history our research staff thought we'd explore the personality.

We started to dissect what's needed to come up with and implement a new idea, which Sugar Bowl was as the first California destination skiing resort built as a destination ski resort (as opposed to just ended up becoming one), and see how that applied. That was to be the thrust of this article. Then we came across a couple of stories that are probably more interesting than analytic prose and they give the reader the opportunity to consider the personality that put Sugar Bowl together. They will lead you to the same place but be more fun.

Story #1: Hannes Schroll saw the possibility of Sugar Bowl and was willing to risk his family money. Then Hitler's Aschluss with Austria not only took Austria but Hannes' money as well. He lined up some friends to buy the land and then more investors to fund the building. Imagine calling Austria just as the Anshluss was occurring and finding out your money is gone but persevereing anyway.

Story #2: Walt Disney's daughter, Diane, remembered that she very much wanted to learn to ski and the highlight of a trip to Sugar Bowl "was when Hannes took me up the chair lift... on Mount Disney and skied down with me on his shoulders."

Story #3: One potential ski instructor from Italy ran into the hard business man. Hannes had a job open but was not willing to make any commitment to the Italian until he looked the guy over - in person. To be an instructor you not only had to be capable, but you had to look good. The instructor would have to travel from Italy to be "looked over."

Story #4: According to [Time Magazine](#), March 18, 1940, Hannes Schroll, "Austrian skimeister," was the holder of the world's record on skis: 95 MPH. Some sources call him a "madman"





and "dare devil" which seems appropriate but what appears to be mad to those who are comfortable esconced in a chair with a brandy reading this newsletter is confidence and control to those who successfully buck complacency and put themselves at risk.

Story #5: Hannes changed the name of Hemlock Peak to Mt. Disney, presumably to show appreciation for Walt Disney's investment which gave credibility to the Sugar Bowl project.

Story #6 and the best one: The story of Hannes always starts with his arrival in the U.S. at the Mt. Ranier ski trials for choosing the '36 Olympic ski team. Everyone knows he beat the other racers handily, the second place finisher by almost two minutes. The following description of the feat which appeared in the Rotarian magazine in February of 1936, gives us a pretty good idea of the kind of person Hannes Schroll was.

Americans did not know what skiing was until Europeans like Hannes Schroll came to America to show them what "real skiing is" the article said. Skiing as they did it in Europe was "so filled with thrills, spills, and unbelievable leaps that it leaves spectators gasping.

"At least that's the way Seattle folks felt about the exploits of a young Austrian, one Hannes Schroll ..... [said one spectator] 'I hardly knew the front end of a ski from the south end of a post office, but I learned! I was planted half-way down the almost two-mile long course. From where I stood I couldn't see the top of the hill where the starters were, it was that

foggy. The course was bumpy and steep. I hardly wanted to crawl down.'

'Pretty soon the boys start to come down at one minute intervals....I knew Dick Durrance, of Dartmouth, when he came by. He was going like a hurricane. Some others coasted along. Then I heard a yell high above me. I looked up, and coming down through the fog like an eagle swooping down on a rabbit was No. 51 – Hannes Schroll. And he was yodeling at the top of his lungs!'

'He jumped the first terrace like a deer going over a rail fence. Then he jumped another- and landed on one ski. His body was leaning over like an open jack-knife, and he was swinging his ski poles to keep from somersaulting.

'He must have skidded a quarter mile on that one ski, whooping and yelling all the time. As he passed me, his hat sailed through the air, and he whooped even louder he was that glad to get both his skis back on the snow. Before he stopped, he – No. 51 – had passed No. 41, who had taken off ten minutes before.'"

"Hannes Schroll won of course," by almost two minutes. This was just one more win to add to his 87 European skiing awards.

"....Hannes Schroll taught [Americans] ....you've got to leave caution at the starting line. From the spectator's point of view, there's only one expression that describes it – reckless abandon..." Maybe, though, that's exactly what's needed to implement a vision.

The pictures here on these two pages are all of Hannes Schroll and were chosen to help illustrate the personality. On this page there's number 51 from the Rotarian, and the previous page, bottom Hannes' skiing style from the Sugar Bowl archives, top pictures come from the Norm Sayler collection. Look at the size of the hickory skis Hannes was skiing on - 95 MPH! That's on his way to Mt. Ranier. The top left picture is even more interesting. Hannes is skiing of course, but not on snow. It's on a salt mound in the Bay Area. He must have been a fun guy too.

Truckee Soda Works, Local Distributor Telephone 74



"In its original form the main block of the ski lodge was symmetrical about the brick chimney." The lodge was expanded to the right later.

## Sugar Bowl Lodge

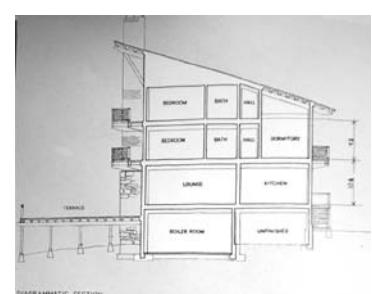
William Wilson Wurster is maybe the most influential unknown architect to have designed in California. Even students at U.C. Berkeley where he was dean of the School of Architecture and where Wurster Hall bears his name, don't know who he was. Mr. Wurster designed hundreds of houses in the 1920's-1950's "inventing" the California ranch house in 1928.

Wurster believed in simple climate suited styles that were understated. He believed in unadorned interiors and exteriors and considered sites and site appropriate materials before designing. He worked to develop organic designs where the house complemented the geography or seemed to grow out of it. Simply, he thought less was more. His wife once said he could make an \$80,000 dollar house look like \$10,000 which is not as silly as that might sound. He used custom windows and flush baseboards for example to remove distractions. They were more expensive but looked simpler. "Interiors of Douglas fir plywood are more expensive than sheet rock but look cheaper, so we use Douglas fir plywood," he said.

He said he believed in designing "up from the log cabin instead of trying desperately to compress the mansion." He

designed large small houses that provided feelings of openness through their wide spaces provided by wide hallways and high ceilings. He connected the living room, family room, dining room, and den taking the walls that separated them in more traditional houses.

It was said, "He was very good at building a very small house that had a sense of graciousness."



Besides houses, Mr. Wurster designed large projects such as Ghirardelli Square, the Cowell College at the University of California at Santa Cruz, the Bank of America building in San Francisco, Schuckl Cannery offices in Sunnyvale, various U.C. buildings, and the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.

William Wilson Wurster also designed the lodge at Sugar Bowl and his ideas

can be seen in the design: the simple unostentatious exterior and simple interior design. The lodge sits perfectly in among the trees and takes advantage of the views of the mountain. In addition he took the high snows into account building the lodge off the ground and letting it shed the snow to the rear, away from the views..

"Architecture is not a goal," said Wurster.

"Architecture is for life and pleasure and work and for people. The picture frame not the picture."

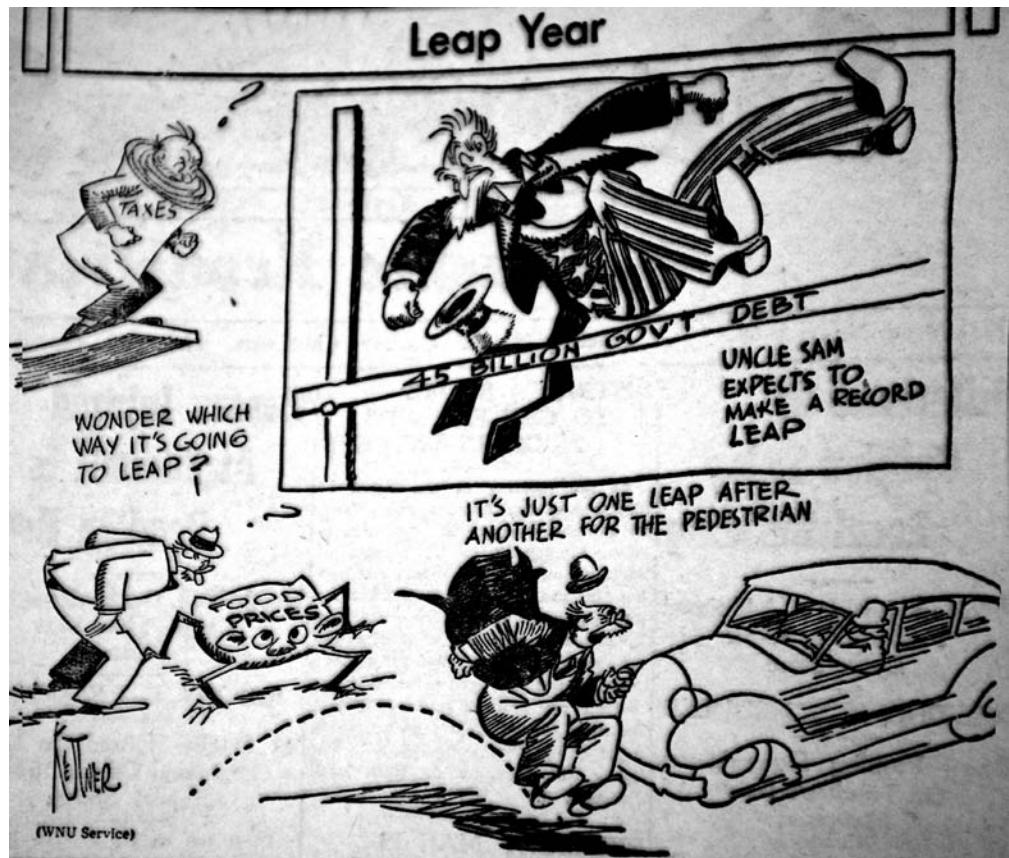
In 1936, three years before Sugar Bowl lodge, Wurster said, "I like to work on direct, honest solutions, avoiding exotic materials, using indigenous things so that there is no affectation and the best is obtained for the money." The Sugar Bowl lodge fits his philosophy perfectly.

The lodge fits right into its site which is surrounded by trees. The open front faces the mountain it serves and exposes the life that will be in it to the mountain view, the center of skiing activity, and the sun. The design accommodates the extreme snow conditions of Donner Summit where 40 feet of snow might fill in a season and where drifts might be twenty feet high. The lodge sits off the ground and the roof lets the snow run off to the rear keeping the views open. Large overhands enable balconies and keep the balconies protected from snow. The simple design lets the grandeur around the lodge be the focus. [So much for my first attempt at architectural review- ed] Even if you are not a downhill skier, you can enjoy the lodge at Sugar Bowl, expanded since 1939. The Lodge at Sugar Bowl Restaurant (formerly Four Peaks) is open year-round on the other side of the Magic Carpet (the gondola which goes across the railroad tracks). The ride is free.

This Sierra Sun editorial cartoon from January, 1940 (which was a leap year) shows that worries about the national debt have been around for a long time. By the way the debt ceiling is now about 11.8 trillion dollars.



Sugar Bowl Lodge: designed for the serious sportsmen rather than the tourist trade: Wurster called it a "Frame for the life of skiing."



## [Original] PRESS RELEASE -- SUGAR BOWL CORPORATION, SAN FRANCISCO.

December 8, 1939.

### Sugar Bowl Opens to the Public December 15TH

Headed by the internationally-famous ski champion, Hannes Schroll, and featuring one of the country's most spectacular ski-lifts among many other attractions, a new winter playground at the crest of California's High Sierras opens to the public ... Already widely known as the Sugar Bowl, this modern resort now makes it possible for thousands of winter sport enthusiasts to enjoy some of the finest ski—fields not only in the West, but in the entire United States.

The Sugar Bowl Lodge itself, just completed, is located near 7000-foot-high Donner Summit, route of both the transcontinental railroad and highway. Mt. Lincoln and Disney Peak both rise over 1000 feet above the Lodge, and it is their generously—open slopes, together with those of Donner Peak, that have long been the favorite fields of the West's most ardent and expert skiers. Average annual snowfall in this area is in excess of 400 inches.

Beginner as well as expert skier can now enjoy the Sugar Bowl's slopes, however. The electrically—operated chair—lift, besides being truly spectacular, is also outstanding for its safety and comfort. Thirty-two hundred feet it length, it carries skiers from the Lodge to an elevation of 8000 feet — a vertical rise of close to 1000 feet. The ride takes less than seven minutes.

With a ski school under the supervision of Hannes Schroll and featuring the Arlberg Technique, and with an open-air ice rink close to the Lodge among its other new facilities, the Sugar Bowl takes its place this winter among this country's and Europe's most complete and modern winter resorts.

#### Sugar Bowl

Ski experts have long considered the Sugar Bowl the best skiing area in the West. Clear, clean, north slopes of powdered snow offer either the expert or the beginner thrilling downhill and cross country runs at the top of the High Sierra.

Topographically the Sugar Bowl, located about a mile and a half from the Norden Ski Hut, is a small basin surrounded on the east, south and west by a rim of mountains that tower about 1,000 feet above the floor of the basin. Altitude at the floor of the bowl is 7,000 feet, the rim 8,000 feet.

Just completed for the 1939-40 winter sports season the new Sugar Bowl Lodge and other facilities for skiers. Nestled in the bottom of the Sugar Bowl, the lodge and its surroundings capture the charm and comfort as well as the gayety and spirit of the Tyrolean Alps.

The Sugar Bowl Lodge, designed by the noted modern architect, William Wilson Wurster, is in a style that can be called "Tyrolean Modern." A broad porch and balconies flanking the lounge and private rooms overlook the magnificent ski slopes of the Sugar Bowl.

Rates in the lodge are very reasonable: 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. Twenty persons can be accommodated in private rooms. In addition there are two dormitories (one for men and one for women) accommodating 10 persons each. Rates \$2.00 per person. Lodge lounge and dining room open to lodge guests only. Meal prices: breakfast 15c, luncheon \$1.00, dinner \$1.25. Manager: Herstle Jones.

Of particular interest to skiers is the modern electrically operated chair lift, one

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of the newest and longest in the United States. The lift is approximately 3,000. feet long (rise 1,000 feet) from the bottom of the bowl to the top of the rim. About six and one-half minutes is required for the ride; one need not remove skis. Ski lift rates: 25c per ride, \$2.00 per day or \$10.00 per week.

In the Sugar Bowl there are seven marked downhill and cross country ski runs varying in character and skill required to negotiate. The Emigrant Run, an easy downhill run to the Lodge, has a historical background. The run follows the route of the early pioneers who preferred to climb the crest from Donner Lake over the Lincoln Saddle rather than climb the Donner Summit. The Crest Cross Country Run to Soda Springs starts at the top of the chair lift and is about four miles long over easy slopes. The Ridge Run, of moderate severity, is suitable for intermediate skiers. The intermediate and have several exciting runs to choose from—the '49er Run from the top of the lift requires 49 turns to make the course, the Pony Express Route and the steep Donald Duck Schuss.

The lodge has eating facilities for those wishing to lunch in the Sugar Bowl. On the porch in good weather a 50c luncheon will be served to the general public (not guests at the lodge) and the menu includes: soup, sandwich, fruit and hot drink. A refreshment bar in the lodge is open to the general public (non-guests) and serves conventional and special drinks at popular prices.

In front of the lodge there is an outdoor ice skating rink. Shoe skates may be rented at the rink. Instructors are on hand for those wishing to take lessons. Rates: Admission 25c; private lessons \$2.00 per half hour. Also skijoring.

In the basement of the lodge there is a ski shop, ski rental department, lockers and rest rooms—all open to the non-guest public. Rental rates: \$1.00 per day plus deposit of \$.5.

Hannes Schroll and his assistants conduct a ski school, teaching the Arlberg technique. Rates: \$2.00 per hour with reduced rates for courses.

To provide transportation between the Sugar Bowl and Southern Pacific's Norden Ski Hut, motor sleighs will be operated every few minutes. Rates for mile and a half ride: 15c one way; 25c round trip.

Reservations for the Sugar Bowl Lodge may be made through any Southern Pacific agent or at the lodge office, 340 Pine Street, San Francisco.

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# End Note for November's issue

End note for November, 2009. In the last issue we put Sugar Bowl's opening into contest: the state of Donner Summit in 1939, the State of Skiing in 1939 and Sugar Bowl, 1939. In this issue we have the personalities, the building of the first chair lift, and the building of the lodge. Now we're ready to open - in our December issue, 70 years after Sugar Bowl first opened. You can see here that they were prepared. The problem was that there was no snow and wouldn't be until early January. But that's for next issue. Both articles below come from December 14, 1939's *Sierra Sun*.

## Local Resorts Prepared For Snow Sports

Truckee, Tahoe, Summit and Donner Lake Ready For Season

### EXPECT BIG CROWDS

### Two New Resorts To Open To 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 accommodations 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, while other resorts, including Tahoe and Truckee are making ready for a bigger and better season.

Although the official opening of the Sugar Bowl will be delayed until January 7, it was announced this week that the elaborate playground will be ready for public use Saturday.

## Precipitation In This District Is Under Normal

All Storms Diverted North Local Forest Man Advises

According to District Ranger H. I. Snider, only .05 inches of moisture was precipitated by the brief snow flurry here Tuesday night and Wednesday morning. This brings the total up to 5.52 inches since September 1 of this year.

Snider said that if no precipitation is recorded between now and January 1, 1940, the season will end 1.61 inches below normal.

The northerly turn of the Japanese current is cited as the cause of the light snow fall by the ranger. He

## Sugar Bowl Lodge, Back Country Ball

November 21, 2009

5-10 P.M.

Sugar Bowl Lodge

\$15

Benefitting the Sierra Avalanche Center  
Music by Pete Charles Trio

Buffet dinner

reservations req'd

RSVP: asi@alpineskills.com