

THESIS

SUN VALLEY'S ELITE BEGINNINGS:
EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON THE AMERICAN SKI INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

SUN VALLEY'S ELITE BEGINNINGS: EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON THE AMERICAN SKI INDUSTRY

This thesis examines the international influences on the American West through the creation of the American destination ski resort at Sun Valley, Idaho. The American West cannot be understood without broadening analysis outside of the territorial space of the West. Incorporation of global events and transnational themes add to understanding of the American West as portrayed through one of its key identities—the ski industry. In 1936, Averell Harriman, chair of the Union Pacific Railroad, created America's first destination ski resort at Sun Valley, Idaho. Looking to Europe for inspiration, he imported European ideas and ski instructors to capitalize on the mountains of the American West, fostering a transnational industry. Ski mountains throughout the West built off of Sun Valley's success and modeled themselves after this first resort. This thesis explores the development of Sun Valley while also examining tensions which exist between transnational and national ambitions throughout history. Topics examined in this thesis are the development of Sun Valley and the ski industry, national concerns over the believed Nazi sympathies of Austrian ski instructors, the relationship of Hollywood with destination resorts, the Tenth Mountain Division, and changes in consumerism following World War II.

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1936, six Austrian farm boys crossed the Atlantic to become instant celebrities. Though from modest backgrounds, these men were soon to become teachers to American royalty, encountering more Hollywood stars and members of the capitalist elite than the typical American. Their excursion to the United States was due in part to where they grew up: in the shadows of the Alps. Raised on farms, these men had taken up the challenge that the looming mountains offered them and became skilled ski instructors in the Alpine ski schools. The reputation these men gained as leaders in skiing sparked the interest of Averell Harriman. Acting as chair of the Union Pacific Railroad, Harriman paid for the transit of these Austrians in the midst of the Depression in order to spread awareness of winter sports and to have the men serve as ski instructors at Union Pacific's newly built ski resort in Sun Valley, Idaho. The celebrity status of these European ski instructors and the success of this first destination ski resort captured the nation's curiosity and led to the boom of the multi-billion dollar industry which now dominates the American West.

Not only were these European ski instructors representations of the consumer culture which would soon expand throughout the West, they were athletes in a growing world of international sport. The twentieth century saw an unprecedented increase in international competition with the revival of the Olympics and other competitions such as the World Cup. Athletes became celebrities as never before, acting not merely as participants in sport but as global citizens who represented their countries while also

joining together in the international language sport provided. Through sport, citizens of the world interacted in standardized practices while adding pieces of their culture to these global activities. Though many sports can trace their origins to one place, the athletes who have partaken in sport have added pieces of their culture to practices and thus many modern sports have a multinational flavor to them.

Skiing is one such sport. Downhill skiing did not come into existence until Norwegians who practiced more of a cross-country style skiing encountered the Alps. Once they brought the sport to the mountain region, Austrians and Germans infused their own culture into the sport. The ski industry today is overwhelmed with American innovations that have transformed it even more. The European ski instructors who traveled to Sun Valley for its initial season were integral in the transnational movement of ski culture. They brought their skill to share with American athletes, catering to the American desire for quick learning and fast skiing which sparked American technological innovations and fostered an international industry.

Recent trends in the field of history have seen subfields such as foreign relations and American history take on a transnational identity. The global interactions of the twentieth century have led historians to examine how nations interact and influence each other in reciprocal ways. Transnational history emerged as a study of the global influences on the American past. Historians grew interested in how state policies and military involvement determined two countries' relationship with each other. Transnational history became a means to understand how the U.S. has been influenced by other countries, along with how the U.S. helped shape other countries. These

transnational influences can be portrayed through diplomacy, culture, movements of people, and—especially in the case of this paper—sport.

The international sharing seen in skiing is an example of transnationalism. Transnationalism implies that ideas are not limited to the territorial space of one nation, but instead cross borders and build off influences from multiple countries. Sun Valley, though located in the American West and thus a part of American history cannot be fully understood without broadening analysis of the resort to its transnational influences. Were Sun Valley to be examined following the national ambitions of historians who exclude analysis of global influences on American history, an inadequate portrayal of Sun Valley would develop. Sun Valley is located in the West, yet international events, people, and ideas created the resort. The American ski industry, built upon previous mining towns and western enclaves is like no other ski industry in the world. However, this industry would not have developed without the influences from the preexisting ski cultures of Europe. From the transnational sharing of ideas and people, a unique industry developed in a specific region of the United States.

The transnational nature of Sun Valley's founder helped booster an international industry while also creating an international hub in the center of the American West. Born to one of America's wealthiest families, Harriman was involved in international finance and eventually became one of the United States' most successful ambassadors. During World War II, he acted as ambassador to Great Britain and the Soviet Union and was present at nearly every meeting involving world leaders during the war, including the Potsdam, Teheran, and Yalta conferences. He is known especially for his cold war advising experience in which he often shared understanding of the Soviet Union with

American presidents and also for his involvement in securing peace in Vietnam. He served at the will of nearly every Democratic president during the twentieth century and received a Medal of Merit, the highest honor a civilian can receive for service to one's country. Harriman's sense of duty to his country and his long career as a public servant indicate his national commitment.

An overlooked aspect of Harriman's life is his involvement in the creation of the American ski industry. He worked with and against his national commitments to ensure the success of an international ski industry. His international experiences brought Sun Valley's name to various reaches of the world and enlarged the ski industry. He took well publicized treks to nearby Soviet hills while acting as ambassador to the Soviet Union and invited world leaders such as the Shah of Iran to ski down Sun Valley's hills. Even as political tension mounted in Europe during the 1930s and Americans became wary of Nazi sympathizers, Harriman encouraged importation of ski instructors from Germany and Austria. National concerns interfered with Harriman's advancement of a ski industry leading Harriman to work to prove that international and national desires could coexist through Sun Valley. Harriman worked to create an international ski industry while balancing his duties to his nation. In this same manner, it is possible to analyze American history through a transnational approach. Sun Valley and the American ski industry are truly American phenomena rooted in a specific place, but full understanding of them cannot be reached without global analysis.

Through his famous thesis, Frederick Jackson Turner brought attention to study of the West. His work, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, argued that America became a global world power due to the uniquely American experiences which

took place on the frontier where cultures often met and new experiences were created. The majority of previous historiography on the American West is analyzed with Jackson's "frontier thesis" in mind. Recent patterns in the study of the West place emphasis on environmental history to analyze the changing landscapes of the region due to human encroachment. Sun Valley can fit into a historical interpretation that follows these patterns of frontier and environmental analysis in western history. Ski resorts and the towns which boomed around them have had gross environmental impact on the mountains of the West. The ski industry can also be seen as a form of frontier where a new identity was created for the West and those associated with mountain recreation.

However, limiting analysis of the ski industry in the West to either a frontier or environmental perspective limits its history. Michael Malone encouraged historians who studied the West to look beyond frontier analysis. He wrote:

Many historians still confuse the West as a defunct frontier process with the West as a geographical region of the United States, and this garbled terminology serves to hinder serious study of the region's modern past and to nudge western history towards antiquarianism...It has led us to focus too much of our attention upon frontiering and, concomitantly, to neglect study of the modern West.¹

He argues that previous study of the West focused upon classifying the region as a frontier which promotes stereotypes of the region and limits scholarly analysis. Richard White also acknowledges the perceptions which frontier analysis promote: "The West as a site of disorder and chaos is, of course, the oldest trope of both frontier history and the West of the Imagination: Indian wars, wilderness, gunfighters, lawlessness."² My study of Sun Valley does not specifically interpret the West as the last frontier nor does it

¹ Michael Malone. "Beyond the Last Frontier: Toward a New Approach to Western American History." *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 20, no. 4. (November 1989), 409,413.

² Richard White. "A Wider West." *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 36, no. 2. (Summer, 2005), 135.

analyze in depth the environmental history of the region. Instead, this work analyzes Sun Valley and the West through a transnational identity, as a region where international ideas crossed borders, merged and created a new industry.

Paul Sabin argued for this particular analysis of western history in his article, “Home and Abroad: The Two “Wests” of Twentieth Century United States History.” He argues that historians should bring in global analysis to studies of the West defining the West as, “a shifting international region of economic, environmental, political, and cultural interaction.”³ In particular, his work focuses on American oil development and extraction in Ecuador and Alaska. Through his analysis of this, he encourages historians to look at western history in a new manner claiming, “When historians concentrate exclusively on the modern American west, with its fixed boundaries, they risk losing sight of other central actors and processes.”⁴ He calls for a transnational history of the West, one which broadens examination of the region to outside its territorial space. My paper fulfills this by examining the international influences brought to the West through the ski industry.

Thomas Bender argued for the use of transnational history in his work *A Nation Among Nations*. In this book Bender argues that a nation is not free-standing and self contained and thus cannot be its own historical context. He challenges historians to provide a global context in their works, looking especially at the similarities which countries shared in addition to examining how countries were connected. By writing history in this way, Bender contends, the notion of one nation’s exceptionalism will disappear and global influences will be analyzed. “There are family resemblances we

³ Paul Sabin, “Home and Abroad: The Two “Wests” in United States History.” *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 66, no. 3 (August 1997), 311.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-309.

have missed,” he argues, “and we have missed the self-aware communication about common challenges that historical actors on every continent had with one another.”⁵

Many historians have acknowledged the weaknesses of certain national histories and, along with Bender, have taken up the challenge of presenting a transnational history.

Daniel Rodgers is one such historian who incorporated a transnational narrative into American history. In his book, *Atlantic Crossings*, Rodgers traces the movement of social politics across the Atlantic Ocean during the Progressive Age. He adds to scholarship by claiming that social politics during the period was not limited to one nation’s vision, but rather was a shared experience where countries learned from each other’s examples. He places the American experience in a global context. He cites many reformers from both sides of the Atlantic who traveled to various European countries and America, gaining inspiration and trading ideas along the way. His work is one example which shows how a deeper understanding of U.S. history can be obtained when a historian studies influences from throughout the world.

Another historian who uses a transnational approach in order to provide a more thorough understanding of a movement is Matthew Connelly. Connelly studies the global birth control movement in his work, *Fatal Misconception*. His work traces how population control movements went through various phases in countries the world over, leading him to present a sort of world history in which ideas move across borders. Though he relies upon abundant American sources, Connelly’s work is an excellent example of transnational history because the study is based upon organizations that are globally rooted. Because the birth control movement traversed so many borders, he can

⁵ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 10.

provide a narrative which does the same, showing how the movement affected certain countries in different manners than other countries.

Whereas Connelly and Rodgers examine movement of ideas in their transnational studies, recent trends in the field have pushed historians to analyze transnational movements of people. Historians have started to analyze how civilians interact on a global level through tracing international tourism. Authors such as Rosalie Swartz, Dennis Merrill and Christine Skwiot have studied how American tourists ventured to Latin America and affected the region's economic, political, and cultural structure. These approaches lead historians to analyze how tourist industries have been built up in host countries while also analyzing the culture that the Americans encountered. Taking a transnational approach, these authors have in turn analyzed how the regions that American tourists visited then became present in American culture.

Christopher Endy has taken a similar approach evaluating American tourism to France during the post-WWII period in his work, *Cold War Holidays*. He argues that American travel in France represented a prime example of the growing economic and cultural exchange which is now associated with globalization. He portrays how tourist interactions with the host culture of France led to a growing national identity for both France and the United States. The French gained a deeper understanding of themselves through their interaction with tourists, prompting them to protect certain aspects of their culture. Outside tourism to the region fostered an identity for the inhabitants there. A similar identity formation took place in the West once tourism to the region increased, aided in good part by the ski industry. Today, the West upholds the identity of being the outdoor recreation center for the country, especially in terms of mountain recreation.

Many of the authors who study international tourism draw upon a medley of sources for their works, yet tourist reflections and state documents dominate their research. Though often fluent in more than one language, these authors' American roots lead them to examine mainly from the perspective of Americans venturing into the world. Having a Cuban background, Louis Perez examines how Cubans traveled to America on vacations or for permanent residency. His approach allows him to portray America's varying degrees of reception to global visitors. Although numerous works have been produced tracing immigration to America, very little has been written on foreign tourism to the region. In its initial years, the Austrian ski instructors at Sun Valley were not considered immigrants due to their temporary residency within the country. They worked in the country for a short period and then returned to Europe. Their niche in the study of immigration and foreign tourism is a unique example of cultural exchange because they do not fit fully in either category.

As one form of cultural exchange, Perez analyzes sport in his work, *On Becoming Cuban*. He studies how Cubans imported the American sport of baseball in order to cling to an identity they hoped to obtain and to exert a kind of political dissent. While still under Spanish rule at the end of the nineteenth century, Cubans turned to baseball in order to honor cultural forms which were not Spanish and to argue for independence. Perez states, "Cubans early detected in baseball new ways to act out the drama of nationality."⁶ The sport became a means through which Cubans assumed a new identity tied to the future they hoped to share with America and broken from the past they had with Spain. The ski instructors at Sun Valley used sport in a comparable manner. Many

⁶ Louis Perez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, (New York: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 75.

instructors tried to break with Europe politically and become American citizens by playing up their vitality to the American expansion of skiing. Though they used their European identities to do this, many were able to become American citizens because of their indispensability to the ski industry.

Perez is not the only historian to study sport as a form of diplomacy. John Gripenrotg analyzes baseball to understand Japanese and American relations leading up to World War II in his article, "The Transnational Pastime: Baseball and American Perceptions of Japan in the 1930s." Whereas Perez analyzes how Cubans used the American sport to rebel against Spanish authority, Gripenrotg examines how Americans related to the Japanese through participation in the well known sport. Seeing Japanese citizens play baseball and omit a similar love of the sport that so many Americans held dear, pushed many in America to feel a connection with the country whose political actions seemed divergent from the U.S. Gripenrotg claims, "Such disarming images of Americanized mass consumerism and mass culture tended to fortify the generalized notion that there existed within Japanese society kindred spirits with whom the United States could find common ground and coexist peacefully."⁷ Gripenrotg successfully shows the transnational nature of sport and ties it to diplomatic relations between two countries.

As Perez and Gripenrotg both portray, sport was becoming internationalized starting in the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strong nation-states developed which encouraged citizens to claim a national identity shared with others within the same borders. Though the period saw a rise in national

⁷ John Gripenrotg, "The Transnational Pastime: Baseball and American Perceptions of Japan in the 1930s," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 34, no. 2, (Spring 2010), 250.

identity, people began to take part in sport which crossed outside national territories. International competitions became arenas where nationalist agendas could be carried out and also became examples of international networks connected through the common practice of sport. Sun Valley reflected these trends. International competition took place at the resort and many of those active in Sun Valley competed throughout the world. Constantly these athletes saw their desire to participate in global competitions clouded by the national ambitions of certain states.

One such event where nationalist agendas came to overshadow the international community of sport was the 1936 German Olympics. Barbara Keys explores the international evolution of sport in her work, *Globalizing Sport*. She incorporates many insights into how the phenomenon of global sport helped foster a global community and increased international interaction beyond state diplomacy. She includes the Berlin Olympics as an example of this. Though including this examination, Keys fails to incorporate skiing and the winter games into her work. The 1936 Olympics coincided with the opening of Sun Valley and are essential to placing the resort in a global context because they were the first Olympics to host downhill skiing competition.

Skiing's evolution involved an international community which shared trends with other sports that became internationalized during this period. Though international competitions certainly helped foster transnational sharing of sport, exchanges which took place on a less grand scale also added to skiing's expansion. Annie Gilbert Coleman examines the local interactions which took place between international characters and developed the culture and sport of skiing in her work, *Ski Style*. Her examination of skiing in the West first credits Scandinavian immigrants for bringing the culture of skiing

to the region. She also includes analysis of the import of European instructors and their impact on the American industry while her work overwhelmingly focuses on the mountains of Colorado.

Sun Valley is so fundamental to the buildup of the international industry of skiing, no book on the history of modern skiing, including Coleman's, excludes mention of the resort. Coleman includes a chapter on Sun Valley, as do many authors writing more broadly on the history of skiing such as Roland Huntford and John Allen. In conjunction to these histories, works specific to Sun Valley have been written. Dorice Taylor wrote a history of Sun Valley which focused mainly on the clientele that the resort attracted throughout her years as publicity manager for the resort. Her work is titled *Sun Valley*. Doug Oppenheimer and Jim Poore wrote a vivid description of Sun Valley in their work, *Sun Valley: A Biography*. These two authors provide details on many of Sun Valley's innovations in the ski industry. Though descriptive, their work does not tie Sun Valley to many of the major themes at work in the resort. Analysis of the transnational themes present in Sun Valley along with examination of tourism and the boom in consumption are missing in Oppenheimer and Poore's work. Wendolyn Holland wrote the most extensive study yet of Sun Valley entitled *Sun Valley: An Extraordinary History*. Her well researched work covers prehistoric culture in the Sun Valley region through the end of the twentieth century. The broad scope of her work leads to a less in-depth analysis of the major themes present during Sun Valley's initial years. My work draws upon her success while examining more thoroughly the period surrounding Sun Valley's initial years and Sun Valley's place within a transnational community.

This paper follows the chronological development of the resort. A brief history of the Union Pacific Railroad is provided, tying the company to the American West before it built up the ski industry. From this background, the paper shows Union Pacific's interest in understanding the ski industry and the company's quest for the ideal location for a ski resort. Details from the lodge's construction and opening period are provided followed by the expansion which took place at Sun Valley with the opening of another hotel and with development of summer recreation. As World War II approached, Sun Valley transformed, turning itself over to the war effort and losing many of its employees to the war. Many of those connected to the resort found themselves in the Tenth Mountain Division which receives some attention in this paper. Following WWII, expansion of the ski industry took place throughout the West and Sun Valley reopened with success. The paper traces Sun Valley's initial reopening following the war and quickly incorporates details about new owners and new consumers in the resort industry.

Union Pacific Railroad

The Union Pacific Railroad is well known for linking the United States with the first transcontinental railroad in 1869. Beyond uniting the country with transportation, Union Pacific (UP) is credited for founding many towns throughout the West during the later part of the nineteenth century. An entire region once disconnected from the rest of the country became incorporated through the railroad's expansion. Farming and ranching took off during this period due in part to the access the railroad granted western regions. Spurring the economy while linking regions, UP transformed the west, leading the region to be integrated into the nation by the turn of the century. During the twentieth century, UP continued to shape the region with its creation of tourist destinations. Sun Valley is

only one example of the impact UP had on the western economy and the American infrastructure of tourism during the twentieth century.

Union Pacific emerged out of a government charter in 1862. In the midst of the Civil War, President Lincoln signed into law, “An act to aid in the construction of a Railroad and Telegraph Line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, and to secure to the Government the use of the same for Postal, Military and other Purposes.”⁸ The act would have a profound impact upon the American economy following the Civil War. UP historian Maury Klein wrote of this impact stating, “The railroad opened new land for settlers, new markets for merchants, new sources of profit for financiers, new resources for industrialists to exploit, new jobs for everyone from managers to itinerant laborers, and new enterprises for the ambitious.”⁹ The golden spike was laid in 1869, uniting the country by rail. From there, the company started to make branch lines to regions that they saw having economic potential.

Farming, mining, and ranching were the most prosperous industries in western territory. Because of the potential to hit rich, the western regions attracted many immigrants to settle and join in the new economies. Outside the major eastern cities, the West became the most diverse part of the country. Ski historian Annie Gilbert Coleman claims that some of these early immigrants came from the Scandinavian and Alpine regions bringing their ski skills with them. She argues, “Skiing became a part of Rocky Mountain culture as soon as miners, ranchers, and settlers entered the region in the mid-

⁸ Maury Klein, *Union Pacific: Birth of a Railroad 1862-1893* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1987), 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

nineteenth century.”¹⁰ Initially, these immigrants shared their skill in resourceful ways. To traverse the snow-covered regions of the West, mail carriers and other working settlers strapped on skis to get to their destinations. UP connected these early western communities with the rest of the world, but to get around the regions outside rail connection, early settlers relied upon skis during the winter months.

One region in particular to which the railroad was drawn due to its economic potential was the Wood River Valley in what would become south-central Idaho where Sun Valley would be built. The early mining prosperity in the region led railroad investors to lay tracks reaching up the valley and helped the towns in the region increase in size. The Wood River Branch lay off of the Oregon Short Line created by the UP in 1881.¹¹ This line connected the UP transcontinental line with Northwest Territory which was dominated by Henry Villard and his Oregon Rail and Navigation Company.¹² The mining of various minerals in the Wood River Valley eventually subsided and ranching came to dominate the economy. Even with the changed economy, UP was still vital in connecting the region to the outside world. The extension of the line allowed for ranchers to graze their sheep in the region before shipping them to the eastern stockyards. Eventually, the depots in the Wood River region gained the distinction of shipping more sheep than any other depots in the country.¹³

Before UP would develop this region into the country’s first destination ski resort, the company had experience building up other destinations along its lines. Hoping to lure

¹⁰ Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 16.

¹¹ Klein, *Union Pacific: Birth of a Railroad 1863-1893*, 438.

¹² *Ibid.*, 437.

¹³ Pete Lane interviewed by Miriam Breckenridge. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho 10.

travelers to its lines, UP used regions through which the railroad traveled as an asset. In 1885, UP built a facility along the Great Salt Lake and named the destination Garfield Beach.¹⁴ The venture marked UP's first excursion into the tourist industry. Success at Garfield Beach during the summer led the company to research other possible destinations along its lines and Yellowstone Park became a tourist destination in 1905.¹⁵ Klein speaks of the importance these two destinations had on UP vision. He writes, "These early ventures into the tourist trade were small and somewhat fleeting, yet they too planted seeds that in the next century would blossom into one of the finest tourist operations in America."¹⁶

Averell Harriman became associated with UP through his father, E.H. Harriman. Known as one of the last great barons of industry, E.H. became chair of UP after the company went into receivership in 1898. He explored UP territory like no other chairman before him and often took Averell Harriman with him, exposing Averell to the region that he would later develop once he assumed the chair in 1931. Because E.H. explored the territory so thoroughly and brought a new energy to the company he was influential in revitalizing UP. UP historian Maury Klein describes E.H. as a man capable of pushing the company to success:

For [E.H.] Harriman there was always something to be done, a challenge to be met or an obstacle to overcome. There was in him a deep sense of purpose, a rage for order that could not tolerate looseness or disarray...His vision of an enterprise extended beyond what it could become to what was required to get it there. Harriman made a spectacular success of his rail enterprises because he was the right man in the right place at the right time. He was a man of system come to an industry in transition and desperately in need of someone expert at bringing order out of chaos.¹⁷

¹⁴ Klein, *Union Pacific: Birth of a Railroad 1863-1893*, 522.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 522.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 524.

¹⁷ Maury Klein, *Union Pacific: The Rebirth 1894-1969*, (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 69-70.

Through his efficient work ethic, E.H. made UP into a standardized system and eased passenger traffic, something integral to the later development of Sun Valley.

Determined to make his son work hard in life, E.H. ensured that Averell would work through the UP hierarchy. Averell's first job with the company happened to be in the territory that he would later develop into the Sun Valley resort. During the summer of 1909, before starting college at Yale, Averell worked laying a line for UP. Describing the work, he said, "I worked with the gang. I started as an ax-man. We cut the brush or the trees in front of the fellow who was staking the line. But then I got demoted to be the fellow that held the pole for the man that was leveling the thing off."¹⁸ This work, though menial, started Harriman's interest in western territory. He later proclaimed, "I fell in love with Idaho at that time."¹⁹ From that summer forward, Harriman made yearly treks to Idaho, often to accompany his mother to their summer home along the Teton Basin.

Upon Harriman's return from working in Idaho, E.H. passed away. Harriman assumed a position in the UP board upon his graduation from Yale in 1913. Two years later, at the age of twenty-four, Harriman became junior vice president of the company.²⁰ Though remaining active in UP, Harriman's interests led him to join in international business ventures. These ventures took Harriman on multiple international trips and earned him recognition as one of America's best known business figures abroad.²¹ Many

¹⁸ Averell Harriman, interview by Deane Thompson, August 10, 1983, interview OH-106,107, transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho, 1.

¹⁹ Harriman interview, 2

²⁰ Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1992), 108.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

of the international connections he made abroad on these business trips would later serve him as ambassador and would be fundamental in the creation of Sun Valley.

Though he remained active in various international and domestic business activities, Harriman's attention became more focused on UP once he assumed the chairmanship in 1931. He took this position in the midst of the Great Depression when UP faced a serious passenger traffic problem. Harriman biographer Rudy Abramson described this problem: "During the twenties, UP's passenger revenues had declined by half, and in the three years following the Crash, they had declined by half again—which meant it was carrying only a fourth as many passengers as it had ten years earlier."²² In order to combat the lack of passenger traffic, Harriman challenged his engineers to increase the speed of the trains in order to cut rail travel time. Nation-wide publicity tours dominated Harriman's initial years as chair. He launched campaigns that advertised trains successfully cutting cross-country travel by a day. Harriman's tenure as chair was marked especially by the development of the streamliner train named the Challenger. Eventually, Harriman would lend this name to one of the Sun Valley lodges, but at its inception, the name signified Harriman's goal for UP. Harriman explained, "The idea of the Challenger was that the train really was a challenge to the operations of the buses and trucks and the air travel, all of which was taking business away from the railroads."²³ Despite President Franklin Roosevelt's endorsement, ridership did not increase substantially. Harriman turned to the burgeoning industry of winter sports as inspiration to fix his problem.

²²Ibid., 212.

²³ Harriman interview, 40.

The Growth of an Idea

Sun Valley capitalized on growing American interest in skiing and transformed the industry. Using UP funding, Harriman studied the fledgling global industry of skiing. Drawing upon European success, he imported a European familiar with the ski industry in order to find the ideal location in the American West. Drawn to Ketchum, Idaho, UP soon had the location to build the resort which would transform the ski industry.

Harriman brought infrastructure to the sport which traces its roots to antiquity. Ski historian Roland Huntford explains the longevity of the sport. “Together with the hammer, the knife, and the axe, the ski is one of the few Stone Age implements handed down to us in their original form.”²⁴ Most archeologists and historians concur that skiing’s exact origins, though unknown, are extremely ancient. Evidence of ski culture has been found in ancient texts from civilizations such as the Greeks and Chinese, supporting the notion that it is a global sport influenced by many cultures.²⁵ Scandinavia claims credit as the region of the sport’s origin, though traditional Scandinavian skiing more closely resembles cross-country skiing than downhill skiing. Traveling Scandinavians dispersed the sport throughout Europe and eventually the world. Norwegian infiltration of the Alps brought the sport to that area. Through the challenge of the looming mountains, downhill skiing developed in the late nineteenth century.

Hannes Schneider grew up in the Alps and is known for developing the method from which today’s downhill skiing can be traced. Schneider, using shorter skis and poles, advanced the notion of turns in skiing. He named this approach the Arlberg

²⁴ Roland Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion: The Dramatic History of Skiing* (New York: Continuum Books, 2008), 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15, 18.

Method.²⁶ He started a ski school during the 1890s at the Austrian resort of St. Anton. Schneider hired boys from local villages as instructors and most visitors to the region learned Schneider's method through these newly formed ski schools. The creation of these ski schools led to more standardized practice of the sport. Though visitors to the region were overwhelmingly European, wealthy Americans traveled to the Alps to take ski lessons from these ski instructors. The popularity of these Austrian ski instructors soon reached global proportions, leading to their importation to the United States once the country tried to build up its ski industry.

Although the downhill method of skiing increased in popularity, no downhill competition took place at the first Winter Olympics hosted at Chamonix in 1924.²⁷ Rather the Olympic events more closely resembled Scandinavian methods than the newer Alpine methods. Nonetheless, because of the success of these Olympics and the growing popularity of winter sports, America petitioned to host the 1932 Winter Olympics.

The U.S. chose Lake Placid, New York for the location of the 1932 Olympics because easy access from major Eastern cities made the site usable. The setting disappointed many though for what it lacked. Don Fraser, an American pioneer in skiing who was active in Sun Valley development competed in the Lake Placid Olympics. He described the limits of the Olympics, saying, "They had no mountains there, really, that were worthy at that time of the ski jump. There was nothing, really in the way of downhill skiing."²⁸ Despite the limitations at Lake Placid, those with the means to travel in the years following increased their outings to ski on surrounding mountains. New Yorkers especially would escape for the weekend to the Adirondacks to partake in the

²⁶ Coleman, *Ski Style*, 44.

²⁷ Huntford, *Two Planks*, 326.

²⁸ Oppenheimer, Doug and Jim Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*. (Boise, ID: Beatty Books, 1976), 13-14.

new sport. Harriman, aware of the limits of eastern mountains and the expense of travelling to Europe, wanted to profit on the growing interest in the sport. He stated:

We felt that the growing interest in skiing and winter sports generally warranted the development of a new American resort. Thousands of people were going to Europe each year to ski and we felt sure that equally desirable territory could be found in our own country. We wanted to offer these people and many thousands more of smaller incomes new opportunities for healthful recreation.²⁹

Harriman started to take on the idea of building a winter resort.

Determined to capitalize on the emerging winter sports culture, Harriman convinced Union Pacific chairmen of the necessity for a resort. In a 1935 letter, he wrote Chairman Carl Gray saying, "I believe it is worth while for us to investigate the present centers of sport in our territory, having in mind that we might assist through our advertising and otherwise in promoting these places."³⁰ Harriman, knowing UP's history of developing destinations such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone Park, saw a destination resort as a way to increase ridership on UP lines while also promoting the territory that these lines passed through. He later proclaimed, "I thought we might make an asset out of the liability of having so much snow along our route."³¹

Harriman's familiarity with the ski culture of Europe gave him confidence in the idea. Among Harriman's multiple professions, he owned a bank while chair of UP. His banking interests frequently took him to Europe where he sometimes found his European associates off skiing at resorts such as St. Moritz. He wrote, "I thought that was something we should develop in the West."³² Wanting to draw on that European model,

²⁹ Averell Harriman to Harry C. Bates, December 14, 1936, Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA

³⁰ Averell Harriman to Carl Gray, October 2, 1935, Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

³¹ Introduction written by Averell Harriman in Doug Oppenheimer and Jim Poore, *Sun Valley*, introduction (no page numbers).

³² Harriman interview, 3.

Harriman thought it essential to hire a European to inspect UP territory in the American West in order to find the ideal location for a resort. On a previous hunting trip to Austria, Harriman rented a house from an Austrian count by the name of Felix Schaffgotsch. He wrote to UP chairmen about Schaffgotsch claiming, "I believe he would give us a competent survey and we could then tell whether it is worth while going any further or not."³³ Harriman convinced the chairmen, and the Austrian count made his way to the United States.

From the start of the venture, UP was interested in utilizing European successes to capitalize on weaknesses in the American ski industry. Studies were made on the American market and Count Schaffgotsch acted as expert on the European ski industry. Harriman communicated the success of European resorts through the count's expertise writing UP chairman Carl Gray:

He has an interesting story to tell of the development of skiing in Austria which has occurred within the last ten years. He tells me that railroads run special trains three times a week all winter, connecting with the English Channel steamer boats, taking English passengers to Austria for skiing. Small towns that have only had summer tourists now have a constant tourist population during the skiing season up to five thousand in the most popular areas.³⁴

UP researched how Americans were leaving the country to take part in the successful ski industry of Europe claiming in a report that Americans, "have gone in increasing numbers to the Swiss and Austrian Alps each year."³⁵ The report cited 8,600 Americans

³³ Averell Harriman to Carl Gray, October 2, 1935. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

³⁴ Averell Harriman to Carl Gray, November 27, 1935. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁵ Prospectus on Sun Valley Lodge (no date). Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

traveling to Europe during the 1934-1935 winter season to take part in European ski culture.³⁶

Beyond citing growth in international interest in the sport, the UP report was specific in studying the American potential for a new ski resort. The report claimed that ski outings had increased significantly over the past five years, “having evidenced an enthusiasm for the sport which insures its continued expansion.”³⁷ Study was also made of the increased sale in ski merchandise from department stores throughout the country. UP looked into existing ski resorts claiming that, “snow conditions, weather conditions, terrain, and hotel accommodations are generally unsatisfactory at practically all existing American resorts...it is practically impossible to find first class skiing conditions at any existing winter resort in the U.S.”³⁸ From the report, UP seemed optimistic about the potential profit which would come from the creation of a first class European modeled resort built in the U.S.

Upon Count Schaffgotsch’s arrival in the U.S., he and Harriman developed a list of desired aspects for a ski resort. That list included, “A valley with sun pouring in, a dry climate with not too much snow, and yet enough for skiing and all the other things that you need.”³⁹ They also sought available access via UP lines yet adequate distance from a city so as to promote longer excursions similar to Alpine resorts. Schaffgotsch started his tour of the West in December, 1935. His travels took him to numerous mountains that would later develop into winter resorts such as Mt. Rainier, Jackson Hole, Alta, and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Harriman interview, 3-4.

Aspen.⁴⁰ The Count deemed many of the Colorado mountains as too high in elevation. Due to the newness of the sport in American culture, Schaffgotsch feared that the many Americans who were trying skiing for the first time would consider the mountains too steep. Though originally optimistic about the Utah and Victor, Idaho regions, none of the mountains he explored fulfilled Schaffgotsch's desires for the ideal location.⁴¹ William Hynes, UP railroad specialist in charge of freight and passenger services, toured Schaffgotsch through UP Idaho territory. Hynes later described his experience, saying, "I didn't know a damn thing about what the hell a ski resort was, to tell you the truth. I kind of thought it was a waste of time and money. I didn't believe Union Pacific was really interested in it."⁴² Nonetheless, Hynes took the Austrian count to the Central Idaho town of Ketchum on the Wood River Branch of the Union Pacific Line.

Schaffgotsch's immediate reaction to the region was positive. He saw the potential, claiming, "Among the many attractive spots I have visited, this combines more delightful features than any place I have seen in the US, Switzerland, or Austria for a winter sports resort."⁴³ Within two days, he wired Harriman, "Am expecting you here in Ketchum. Place perfect, any number excursion, ideal snow and weather conditions. Accommodations primitive, log cabins, own cooking. Bring skis to climb hills."⁴⁴ Local guides took Schaffgotsch on tours through the region, introducing him to potential ski mountains. He wired Harriman on January 21st, "It's ski Heaven. When are you coming

⁴⁰ Expenses Account, F. Schaffgotsch. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁴¹ Count Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman, January, 1, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Count Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman, January 12, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.;

⁴² William Hynes quoted in Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, 22-23.

⁴³ Count Felix Schaffgotsch quoted in the *Union Pacific Bulletin*, September, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁴⁴ Count Felix Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman telegram, January 18, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

out?” and again on January 28th, “this without doubt is the perfect place. Salt Lake and Denver no good.”⁴⁵ Enticed, Harriman made the trip with his wife and daughter over President’s Day weekend. Harriman later reminisced about his initial trek into the region: “I remember very vividly getting out of the car and putting on my skis, skiing into Sun Valley on this powder snow...there were all the mountains and Baldy in the background and the hills covered with snow. And I fell in love with the place then and there.”⁴⁶ Union Pacific had found its ideal location for a winter resort.

Sun Valley Development

The town of Ketchum, which had developed with railroad assistance and had been long dominated by mining and sheep-herding industries, soon grew overrun with talk of eastern interest in the region. The small western town was to be transformed into the innovative leader of an international industry within a year of Count Schaffgotsch’s contact. Due to the snowfall the region received and its location amongst mountains, Ketchum received an infusion of UP money forever changing the western town into a glamorized model of European ski culture.

Shortly after the Count’s venture into the region, UP contacted sheep ranch owner Ernest Brass for purchase of his property. Before Harriman’s arrival, Ernest’s daughter Roberta toured Schaffgotsch around the region. She would later become active in the resort as its first rodeo queen and as one of the first clerks in the lodge’s store.⁴⁷ UP finalized the purchase in May 1936 buying 3,888 acres for four dollars an acre.⁴⁸ Two

⁴⁵ Count Felix Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman telegram, January 21, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.; Count Felix Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman telegram, January 28, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁴⁶ Harriman interview, 4.

⁴⁷ Cheryl Hymas (daughter of Roberta Brass) interview by author via phone, March 22, 2010.

⁴⁸ Hymas interview.

theories exist about how the exact location of the lodge was selected. The location is rumored to be the warmest spot in the valley. One account claims that sheep used to gather there while another credits the location as where Brass's seed potato plot was.⁴⁹ Regardless of the reasoning, ground broke for the resort in May 1936.

Once Union Pacific finalized its purchase, quick action followed to ensure the resort would open the following winter. UP hired Gilbert Stanley Underwood as architect. Underwood had designed the lodge at Yosemite and many nearby UP train depots. Even with his experience, Underwood still felt pressure on the quick deadline for the resort. He wrote to UP engineer Howard Mann on March 19, 1936, "I have been working like a B.....d every minute since I met Mr. Harriman...I'm trying like hell to make a good job of it."⁵⁰ While the architect scrambled, so too did local men eager for a construction job. Due to slow business from the Depression, many people petitioned UP for work. The records are filled with letters of introduction from stone masons to electricians. Local Idahoans supplied most of the labor while UP workers filled managerial positions.

Throughout construction of the lodge, Harriman was increasing in importance to the Roosevelt administration. His international prestige would, within a few years, take him abroad working first as the agent in charge of the Lend-Lease program and eventually as ambassador to the Soviet Union and Great Britain during World War II. Nationalist ambitions would often try to interfere with Harriman's involvement in the global ski community, but he would always provide thoughtful consideration to his aspirations for the ski industry. While abroad, he balanced his work for the American

⁴⁹ Hymas interview.

⁵⁰ Gilbert Stanley Underwood to Howard Mann, March, 19, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

government with details pertaining to Sun Valley. Once he became governor of New York in 1955, Harriman always took a personal interest in legislation pertaining to developing the ski areas of the Adirondacks and continued to maintain contact with those at Sun Valley. Nationalist ambitions tried constantly to interfere with Harriman's goals, but he handled them in a manner which promoted the resort and the international community of skiers.

Though growing quite active in government activity during Sun Valley's initial years, Harriman spared no detail on the lodge and had every final decision go through him directly. Even miniscule details such as the construction of sewage disposals and the shade of paint within freight elevators could not move forward without Harriman's consent.⁵¹ Harriman ensured that as much consideration for detail would be present in publicity for the resort by hiring publicity agent Steve Hannagan for promotion of the resort.

Hannagan's past success transformed Miami Beach from a simple beach into a destination. He immediately started to incorporate his ideas into the Idaho resort. He informed Harriman that much more publicity would surround construction of a million dollar resort in the mountains as compared to a simple lodge being built. He wrote,

If it is not done on this scale, then it should not be done at all. And every continental winter sports feature which is transplanted to Sun Valley must be done with a flair of showmanship. In this manner that is not only convenient, efficient, and effective—but a conversation topic.⁵²

⁵¹ Averell Harriman to McNeil, June 23, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Averell Harriman to Wellman, June 21, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵² Steve Hannagan to Averell Harriman, March 28, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

He convinced Harriman because final construction cost would exceed \$1.5 million, a significant amount more than the original projected cost of \$347,072 for a one hundred room resort.⁵³

Once construction of the lodge began, a genuine fear developed that fire would destroy a lodge made out of wood. UP developed the idea of a concrete exterior made to look like wood. A Sun Valley employee identified as WCM described this process for the walls of the lodge:

They are reinforced concrete cast in monolithic. They are not pre-cast blocks...rough sawn lumber having plenty of knots was used for the form work. The concrete was puddle and tamped close to the forms to obtain the rough board impression on the outside fence of wall. Chemical stain was applied to the concrete after the building was complete. The stain is permanent and non-fading.⁵⁴

Hannagan also petitioned Harriman to build an outdoor heated swimming pool in order to advertise the phenomenon of swimming outside during winter. Using the chemical formula of nearby hot springs, the round Sun Valley swimming pools, whose costs exceeded \$20,000, became an immediate asset to the resort.⁵⁵

A minor labor dispute interrupted the rather swift construction of the lodge. Due to the tight time demand in which the resort needed to be completed, laborers were pushed beyond their contracted hours. Harriman received a complaint from Harry Bates, president of the Bricklayers Union complaining that men from his union were not being

⁵³ Correspondence entitled Estimate for Proposed 100 Room Winter Resort, Feb. 29, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁴ WTW sent to Hildegard Braun, September 15, 1939. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁵⁵ Howard Mann to Averell Harriman, December 16, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Howard Mann to Averell Harriman, September 3, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

paid sufficient wages for their overtime work.⁵⁶ The bricklayers rebelled and were arrested on UP's orders. Mr. Bates mailed Harriman a letter complaining that this was unjust. It seems that Harriman was not in favor of unions. In his opinion, UP sponsored Sun Valley not only to promote skiing, but also, "to promote employment in the depressed construction industry."⁵⁷ He thought that with the lack of available jobs, workers should be willing to work without union protection. When the cement finishers and brick layers attempted to join together in unions, a UP manager at Sun Valley looked outside Idaho for construction crews corresponding with Harriman that he had "hopes to obtain sufficient non-union work."⁵⁸ Seemingly, Harriman wanted to create Europe in America, yet without the labor unions so prominent throughout Europe.

Aside from these labor disputes, the multiple construction crews who lived in boxcars on the property completed their work within the strict time demands. Harriman applauded the crews' work, writing, "it is a beautiful job and it is my impression that the men on the task, both in managerial positions, as well as those who worked as laborers, are to be congratulated for the accomplishment."⁵⁹ To design the interior, Harriman hired his friend Marjorie Duchin. An eastern socialite, Duchin scandalized New York society when she married famed musician Eddy Duchin. Her correspondence for the lodge designs came from multiple upscale hotels in different cities all throughout the country. She infused her glamorous lifestyle into the lodge's design. In contrast to the white snow outside, Duchin draped the lodge interior with bright colors. Pertaining to

⁵⁶ Harry Bates to Averell Harriman, Dec. 9, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁵⁷ Harriman letter to Bates.

⁵⁸ HMC to Averell Harriman, October 26, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁵⁹ Harriman letter to Bates.

this color selection, she wrote, “I have long been an enthusiast of winter sports, and so, with my memory to jog my conscious, I have concentrated my efforts on comfort and on gay and colorful rooms as cheerful contrast to the lovely vistas of white glimpsed through windows in every direction.”⁶⁰ Once completed, the furniture, carpets, draperies, linens, and uniforms of workers totaled \$88,400.45.⁶¹ Duchin’s upscale taste is still felt in the lodge bar that Harriman named in her honor after her death. Today, the room provides specialty drinks and live jazz echoing back to Duchin’s era.

Correspondence throughout the lodge’s construction contained many name suggestions for the resort, including ‘Ketchum Hotel’ and ‘Sun Lodge.’⁶² Although accounts exist that state local mines were considered as names for the resort, Harriman claims that “the name was sort of automatic.”⁶³ Harriman wrote, “it named itself” by providing just what they were looking for: a valley filled with sun.⁶⁴ Hannagan approved the name and started advertising the resort as having “winter sports under a summer sun.”⁶⁵

To promote other winter sports besides skiing, Harriman had a skating rink built in front of the lodge. Inside the lodge, Saks Fifth Avenue built a store to sell winter sports apparel. The association this store had with chic merchandise boosted Sun

⁶⁰ Marjorie Duchin correspondence labeled Sun Valley (undated). Averell Harriman Papers. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶¹ Mandel Brothers of Chicago Official Recapitulation for Sun Valley Lodge. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁶² Howard Mann to Prater, August 27, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁶³ Harriman, interview, 12.

⁶⁴ Introduction written by Averell Harriman in Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, introduction (no page numbers included).

⁶⁵ “Discovered! Winter Sports Under a Summer Sun: Sun Valley Lodge.” Union Pacific Advertisement, 1937. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

Valley's upscale appearance. During 1936, skis sold for \$8.50 and ski boots for \$3.60.⁶⁶

The store made substantial profit as many people partook in winter sports for the first time at Sun Valley. A few days after opening, Harriman received a telegram stating, "Saks selling merchandise for about 500 dollars per day...almost all guests taking ski instructors with weekly tickets."⁶⁷ Sun Valley was successfully bringing people in contact with winter sports.

Harriman believed that the elite guests he hoped to attract would be more motivated to try skiing if an easier means of getting to the top of the mountain existed. Some of the European resorts had basic lifts moving up the mountain, but Harriman wanted something more efficient and comfortable. On April 15, 1936, he wrote Chief Engineer Howard Mann:

It is essential in connection with Ketchum enterprise to develop a method of lifting skiers two thousand feet above the valley floor to mountains east of trail creek. Proctor knows point which is desired to be reached. There have been a number of ways this problem has been approached in other places from hoists pulling up sleds to aerial tramways. Suggest you have one of your engineers discuss the problem with Proctor and examine terrain with a view of making a recommendation how the problem can be solved in the most economic manner. Our approach should be to develop as inexpensive a method as possible with a capacity of say one hundred people an hour. After your investigation will want rough estimate of cost of construction and operation.⁶⁸

Immediately, UP engineers went to work designing a contraption to get people up the mountain. One of those engineers, Jim Curran, came up with the idea of attaching chairs to the banana belts that carried produce off ships.⁶⁹ Later, a run on one of Sun Valley's

⁶⁶ Ski sport receipt for Count Schaffgotsch. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶⁷ John Morgan and Count Felix Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman, December 29, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁶⁸ Averell Harriman to Howard Mann telegram, April 15, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁶⁹ Harriman interview, 5.

mountains would be named in honor of Curran's impact on the ski industry.⁷⁰

Experiments took place in the UP headquarter parking lot in Omaha. Warren Miller, famed ski producer who started his career at Sun Valley, described the experiment:

First they built a large wooden scaffold out over the side of a pickup truck and hung a chair from it. Then the driver started driving forward and scooped up the skier who was standing on a pile of straw on a hot Omaha afternoon in June. The goal was to figure out how fast to make the chair move up the hill while the overhead cable was towing it. But the straw wasn't as slippery as snow, so they added oil to it. And it still wasn't slippery enough, so after lunch they moved to a concrete parking area. There they replaced the skis with a pair of roller skates, and gradually the speed of the pickup truck was increased until finally the chair hit the skier too fast and hurt the back of his legs. So they slowed down the trucks speed until they settled on the same feet per minute that a fixed-grip chairlift anywhere in the world still runs today.⁷¹

Nearly all national newspaper accounts that covered the resort included details about the invention of this first chair lift.

To prepare the surrounding mountains for the skiers that would venture to the region, Harriman hired Dartmouth ski coach Charles Proctor. At the time, Dartmouth had one of the leading ski schools in the United States and Proctor's reputation was well known. Upon his selection, Count Schaffgotsch wrote to Proctor claiming, "I would like to tell you how happy I am that you have the time of doing the job, I am sure you would like the country out there, and as the pioneer of the U.S.A skiing it is certainly very important that you should be one of the first in the development of Ketchum."⁷² The location of Sun Valley was originally selected by the Austrian count, but an American would decide what mountains would be developed and where the runs should be placed upon those mountains.

⁷⁰ Wendolyn Holland, *Sun Valley: An Extraordinary History* (Boise, ID: The Idaho Press, 1998), 201.

⁷¹ Atkeson and Miller, *The Golden Days*, 8-10.

⁷² Count Felix Schaffgotsch to Charles Proctor, March 11, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Upon his arrival in the region, Proctor went to the local school house and took some of the older boys out of their classes. He capitalized on these boys' knowledge of the local mountains while also training them to become skiers. The original intent was for these boys to become ski instructors, but as Harriman turned to Austrian instructors instead, these boys later became the first members of the ski patrol founded in 1939.⁷³ During the winter that Proctor surveyed the region, he often took the boys down mountains facing town in order to get local residents curious and excited about the ski culture which would soon immerse the region. The plan worked, for local resident Earl McCoy later recalled that spring it became the thing to go out skiing.⁷⁴

Proctor selected three mountains for development the opening season, one of which bears the name Proctor. Harriman named the mountain in his honor as a means of appreciation but also knew that Proctor's reputation as leader of the American ski industry was a good connection for Sun Valley to boast. The name of the second mountain came from a similar concept. The first season it opened, Sun Valley hosted Birger Ruud, a famous Norwegian known the world around for his ski jumping skills. After Ruud jumped off the ski jump at Sun Valley, Harriman named the mountain in his honor, tying Sun Valley to the international prestige of the Ruud brothers. The third mountain maintained the name Dollar Mountain. This name had long existed among the local community and Harriman honored that. Through their names, these three original mountains represented the blended nature of Sun Valley with roots in Idaho, connections to the East, and ties to skiing's European prestige. Bald Mountain, the mountain that is

⁷³ Earl McCoy interviewed by Shirley Huckins on March 15, 1991. OH-MCC-0307. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho, 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

used today by the resort was deemed too steep for the beginning skiers venturing to the mountain. It would not be developed for a few more years.

As opening day approached, Harriman worked to assemble a ski school with European instructors. He knew that the caliber of ski schools in Europe had made those destinations popular and wrote, "I do feel that we should work to place our school at the top of the ski schools of the world in every respect."⁷⁵ He sent Count Schaffgotsch back to Austria to assemble a group of men to lead the ski school. Schaffgotsch's brother, Friedrich, was an instructor in Hannes Schneider's St. Anton ski school and so Schaffgotsch looked there for instructors. With the political tensions in Europe associated with Hitler's rise in power, many Austrians were eager for the opportunity to travel to the U.S. They were not required to have special work permission from the American Consulate, but instead could travel to the U.S. and work for a winter season on an ordinary visiting visa.⁷⁶ For the 1936-37 initial season at Sun Valley, Schaffgotsch acquired six men: Hans Hauser, Joseph Benedict, Franz Epp, Alfred Dingl, Joseph Schwaighofer, and Roland Cossman.⁷⁷ Upon reaching Sun Valley, these Austrian instructors found the same similarity to the Austrian Alps that Count Schaffgotsch had sensed upon first arriving in the region. Schaffgotsch wired Harriman, "Yesterday I have returned here with the rest of the ski-instructors, they are in very high spirits, and crazy about this place."⁷⁸ The head instructor, Hans Hauser, made \$1,000 for the season while

⁷⁵ Averell Harriman to Count Schaffgotsch, June 26, 1938. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁷⁶ Hans Hasslinger to Mr. Flanders, October 12, 1937. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁷⁷ EG Smith to AG Bloom, November 21, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁷⁸ Count Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman, November 26, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

the remaining five instructors made \$500 each.⁷⁹ The instructors also received free transit, room, and board which totaled as quite an expense since Harriman encouraged the instructors to socialize at the lodge and travel the country to promote winter sports.

In an attempt to publicize Sun Valley while also popularizing winter sports in America, Harriman sent the Austrian instructors on a tour through the U.S. They travelled to ski shows in New York, Boston, and Chicago before arriving in Idaho. Of the ski show in Madison Square Garden, *The New York Times* reported:

Skiing hysteria has seized New York with a tremendous grip. Madison Square Garden was packed to capacity last night to see the leading professional and amateur skiers zip down the little mountain of snow that has sprung up on 8th avenue's diversified sports forum...the Austrians, Hannes Schneider and his followers, performed their graceful swings and turns.⁸⁰

Ski historian Annie Gilbert Coleman describes the ski instructors' popularity: "In America's new consumer-oriented culture, European ski instructors became expert commodities in high demand. They emerged as minor celebrities."⁸¹ Harriman used the instructors as a tool to display skiing and its European ambiance to a broad public. Before their return to Austria at the end of the first season, these ski instructors traveled to Mt. Rainier followed by a tour down the "California circuit."⁸² Not only did these tours orient the American public with the European nature of skiing, the tours also familiarized the Austrians with the U.S. One ski instructor, Roland Cossman, expressed his appreciation to Harriman for the experience writing, "It was very nice of you to give

⁷⁹ Charske to Carl Gray, November 18, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁸⁰ *The New York Times*, December 11, 1936.

⁸¹ Coleman, *Ski Style*, 51.

⁸² KMS to Averell Harriman, March 30, 1937. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

us boys at the end of the winter such a beautiful time to see the country.”⁸³ Their excursions into various parts of the country allowed the instructors to relate to their American guests who came from some of the regions the Austrians ventured to while also rewarding them with the experience of seeing new cultures.

Besides modeling Sun Valley’s ski school on European ski schools, Harriman also worked to assemble ski organizations after the European model. It was quite common for ski organizations to exist in Great Britain. Members would meet throughout the year and travel to the Alps together in order to take part in the winter activities at the European resorts. Harriman hoped to create a similar club centered out of Manhattan. He sent letters addressed to various men throughout Manhattan which signified the elite nature of the club that Harriman hoped to foster. He wrote,

It has been suggested that a ski club be organized at Sun Valley similar to other clubs at winter sports centers, to promote the development of the sport and enter into the activities of the territory and national associations. The UP would welcome the organization of such a club and gladly cooperate with it. I am asking a number of skiing enthusiasts to join me at the Rookery (40 Wall Street) on Wednesday, September 23rd at 12:30 to discuss the organization of such a club, and hope that you can join us there.⁸⁴

Present at the meeting were many leaders of American capitalism including Sterling Rockefeller, Nelson Rockefeller, and JEP Morgan. Though it is not clear whether this elite club was ever formally organized, many of these men ventured to Sun Valley as guests. Similarly inspired clubs did emerge in cities throughout the U.S. as records show

⁸³ Roland Cossman to Averell Harriman, April 15, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁸⁴ Averell Harriman to William S. Paley, Esq. (undated). Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

the creation of organizations whose sole purpose was to organize trips to the resort such as the Sun Valley Club of Pittsburgh.⁸⁵

Sun Valley's Opening

On December 21, 1936, the resort's reservation book was filled with Hollywood stars, eastern elite, and Idaho leaders for opening night, but the resort lacked one essential element—snow. Harriman, absent from the opening due to his daughter's debutant ball in New York, insisted that the guests stay for free until adequate snow arrived. Normal rates for a night's stay at the lodge were \$16.00 per day for a double room and \$42.00 per day for a suite for three people.⁸⁶ The reservation list included guests from all throughout the country. Sun Valley historian Wendolyn Holland explained the elite nature of the crowd writing, "The railroad itself served as a critical social filter, even without Hannagan and Harriman's efforts. Arrival at the remote Wood River Valley by ski train was a privilege few could afford. Traveling to such a remote location required money, free time, and energy that it was effectively limited to the wealthy."⁸⁷ It required a commitment to come to Sun Valley as train travel was expensive and necessitated multiple days for travel time. UP travel from New York City for a ten day round trip to Sun Valley cost \$122.95 and required passengers to be on the train for two days and sixteen and a half hours.⁸⁸ The elite nature of Sun Valley was set from its start due to its isolated location.

⁸⁵ Averell Harriman to A.M. Byers, June 19, 1940. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁸⁶ "Winter Rates for Sun Valley Lodge." Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁸⁷ Holland, *Sun Valley*, 210.

⁸⁸ Union Pacific Pamphlet. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Harriman and Hannagan worked hard to ensure that opening night emanated glamour through its guests. Harriman's sister-in-law, Francis, attracted Eastern socialites from her Long Island home and Harriman courted the Hollywood crowd. He sent Count Schaffgotsch to California with the intent to get the social circles talking about Sun Valley. Harriman wired many Hollywood stars a generic letter stating, "I have asked Count Schaffgotsch, the boy who discovered 'Sun Valley' to get in touch with you while he is in Hollywood and tell you about recent developments at our new Idaho winter resort. He will call upon you within the next few weeks and I am sure you will enjoy meeting him."⁸⁹ Harriman's efforts to promote Sun Valley as the next new social stage worked successfully before and after the resort opened. A month before the opening Harriman wrote, "Sun Valley lodge appears to have gained great popularity both in the east and west in the brief period since our first publicity appeared."⁹⁰ After many of the capitalist elite who followed a specific social calendar visited Sun Valley, they further promoted the resort's place as an elite social destination. One such visitor wrote

Harriman:

Ever since I got back from Sun Valley I have been absolutely no good at work or anything else; all I have been doing is to tell everybody in glowing terms that there is nothing quite like Sun Valley anywhere and that anybody intending to spend his winter vacation in the south rather than Idaho just does not know what he is missing.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Averell Harriman to Gary Cooper, October 28, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁰ Averell Harriman to William Campbell, November 25, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹¹ Norbert Bogdan (Vice President to Schrodgers) to Averell Harriman, February 24, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

In the years immediately following the resort's opening, elite crowds associated Sun Valley as a place that suited their upscale tastes. Visits there grew to indicate one's position in an elite circle.

Harriman's friendship with director David Selznick helped set the precedent for Sun Valley's ongoing relationship with movie stars. Selznick knew movie stars would bring publicity to the resort and claimed to be there for the opening as "a favor to Averell."⁹² Harriman referred to Selznick as a "personal friend" in a forwarded telegram quoting what Selznick wrote: "Think I can get Sun Valley away to excellent start in Hollywood...I could turn my publicity department loose and really get some free space for Sun Valley...I can't think of any better opportunity to get the place quickly established with Hollywood people."⁹³ His visit to the resort received even more publicity than he expected when a fight, started by him, broke out during the dinner party on opening night. Newspapers published details of the fight which apparently started when an Eastern businessman asked actress Claudette Colbert to dance.⁹⁴ Movie stars could write off their Sun Valley trips as a business expense on their tax returns if they allowed themselves to be photographed.⁹⁵ Naturally, the press was all too eager to photograph guests and report on the newly built resort.

In anticipation of the opening, *The Daily News* reported, "Sunny Hollywood is as enthusiastic as Manhattan society about the resort in the Idaho Sawtooth Mountains."⁹⁶

Two days later, *The New York American* published, "A combination of Alpine snows and

⁹² David Selznick to Averell Harriman, December 2, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁹³ Averell Harriman to Carl Gray, November 14, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁹⁴ "Sun Valley Opens with a Bang," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 1, 1937.

⁹⁵ Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 229.

⁹⁶ *The Daily News*, November 23, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

sun-tanned enjoyment of the tropics will greet the Winter sports enthusiast at the unique resort at Sun Valley, Idaho with...an Alpine inn of unprecedented luxury.”⁹⁷ *The Chicago Journal of Commerce and La Salle Street Journal* went so far as to write, “It is said to be superior to the Austrian or Swiss Alps for winter sports. The Union Pacific Railroad which is sponsoring the project is again pioneering in America. It is developing new play-grounds with all the facilities for luxury and simple comfort in sport.”⁹⁸ These newspaper accounts played up the transnational nature of the resort drawing constant comparisons between Sun Valley and the European Alps.

Not all newspaper accounts wrote enthusiastically about the resort however. A.E. Cahlan for *The Las Vegas Evening* wrote,

This Idaho resort is entirely experimental. Whether it will be successful or not remains to be seen—depends entirely on the number of visitors sufficiently interested in making the trek. Nobody ever heard of the place before... and yet for the moment we find the Union Pacific investing a million dollars in a three months a year winter resort and doing nothing whatsoever in this great Boulder dam section. Figure the answer to that one, I can’t, unless the Austrian counts are super-salesmen and we’ve been laying down on the job.⁹⁹

Upset that UP selected Idaho over Nevada for its flagship resort, Cahlan could barely hide his resentment.

One man enthusiastic about the selection of Idaho territory was UP president William Jeffers. In the opening night speech broadcast all the way to Salt Lake City, Jeffers exclaimed, “It is particularly happy that Idaho was selected...Here is combined more opportunity for such sports than at any other one place...We visualize Idaho,

⁹⁷ *The New York American*, November 25, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁹⁸ *The Chicago Journal of Commerce and La Salle Street Journal*, November 27, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

⁹⁹ A.E. Cahlan, “From Where I Sit,” *The Las Vegas Evening*, May 27, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

especially this particular area of the state, as the coming playground of the nation... We will leave no stone unturned in telling the story of Idaho to all the world.”¹⁰⁰

Acknowledging the wonderful selection of Idaho as location for the resort, Jeffers also spoke of the expanding sport of skiing: “It has been only in the very recent past that skiing and similar winter sports have achieved such a great degree of universal popularity, and the time is now ripe for the development of the unparalleled winter sports advantages of Idaho.”¹⁰¹ Initially hesitant of Harriman’s interest in a winter resort, Jeffers now seemed convinced of its potential.

Nineteen thirty six was a record setting year for the least amount of snow fall in the Wood River Valley. Harriman, detained in New York, had daily telegraphs sent to him monitoring the weather in anticipation of the grand opening. Telegraphs mentioned the bleak conditions for the resort which had boasted so loudly of its expected role in the expanding ski industry. The telegraphs to Harriman were bluntly to the point writing lines such as, “everything fine, but no snow,” “sunshine, no snow,” and “we are praying for more snow.”¹⁰² Harriman took the disappointing snow fall in good humor congratulating those present at the opening from New York City. He wrote, “Congratulations to you all on the splendid job. It was so good that Jupiter must have been jealous and vented his wrath in withholding snow.”¹⁰³ The men who received Harriman’s congratulations sent a favorable report in return writing, “guests favorably

¹⁰⁰ “Winter Resort Fete Attracts Idaho Leaders,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 22, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Marjorie Duchin to Averell Harriman, December 15, 1936; Count Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman, December 21, 1936; Count Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman, December 24, 1936. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰³ Averell Harriman to Morgan, Count Schaffgotsch, Ray Stevens, Kenneth Singer, Steve Hannagan, December 24, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

impressed with our efforts to please them.”¹⁰⁴ The good spirits of the guests was probably due in part to Harriman’s insistence that no one should be charged room or board at the lodge until snow arrived.

The UP sponsored free party did not last long as snow soon overwhelmed the resort. Howard Mann received a telegraph on December 27th stating, “About thirteen inches snow during night and still falling.”¹⁰⁵ Guests were soon able to take to the mountains. Preparation for the ski runs had overlooked one minor element however. No one had cut the sagebrush and the snow failed to cover it completely, so skiers venturing to the mountains had to navigate around the brush.¹⁰⁶

Despite the sagebrush, the Austrian ski instructors took to the mountains with their eager pupils. Otto Lang, who was first brought to the resort as the private instructor of Nelson Rockefeller before becoming Sun Valley’s head instructor, articulated the differences the Austrians faced in teaching American pupils as compared to Europeans. He said, “Americans are temperamentally so different from Europeans. They’re more go go go. And they want to learn faster, they want to go faster, even if it isn’t perfect. That’s just their nature.”¹⁰⁷ Friedl Pfeifer, another Austrian who would become head instructor at Sun Valley claims that Harriman was as guilty as any other American with this desire for speed. Describing Harriman skiing, Pfeifer claimed, “Boy did we ever sweat it out. He wanted to go fast. Oh did he take spills.”¹⁰⁸ To adjust to the American temperament, the Austrian ski instructors sought quick advancement for their pupils.

¹⁰⁴ Morgan, Count Schaffgotsch, Ray Stevens, Kenneth Singer, Steve Hannagan, to Averell Harriman, December 25, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁵ HS to HCM, December 27, 1936. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹⁰⁶ Harriman interview, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Otto Lang interviewed by Ginger Piotter on February 6, 1986. OH-LAN 0186, (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Friedl Pfeifer interviewed by Penney Brons on February 27, 1987. OH-PFE-0238, (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

Lang claimed, “You have to do something a little different to attract the Americans to ski school. You had to advance them much faster. And that’s what we did and it was very successful.”¹⁰⁹ A significant number of people were introduced to skiing on the three mountains that existed at the time, taking up the sport which now had American influences. At the close of the first season, Sun Valley had hosted 4,000 guests.

Harriman wanted to ensure that guests who did not ski would be equally entertained at Sun Valley. Because famed musician Eddy Duchin, husband of the lodge’s interior decorator, was booked at the Plaza in New York during Sun Valley’s opening, Harriman hired the Harl Smith Orchestra upon Duchin’s recommendation. The band would play at Sun Valley every season until 1951 when band member Hap Miller would change the band’s name and continue to play at Sun Valley until 1972.¹¹⁰ The band was compatible with Sun Valley’s upscale nature for, as Miller describes, “Harl Smith had a reputation for being, you might call it, a society band. We played in nice hotels, and it was the hotel-type band, society-music.”¹¹¹ With snow absent from the mountains during the opening, the band entertained guests. Miller recalls, “They had all this energy, I guess, that they were going to use for skiing. And so we started using it by letting them dance.”¹¹² The success of the band prompted Harriman to eventually incorporate a music festival at Sun Valley modeled after European cities such as Salzburg whose resorts

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Otto Lang. OH-LAN 0186. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹¹⁰ Hap Miller interviewed by Marcia Jones on October 28, 1982. OH-44(printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

hosted successful music festivals.¹¹³ Sun Valley now dedicates the month of August to hosting a summer symphony at the resort modeled after the European music festivals.

Ski Competitions

Skiing gained momentum as a sport due to international competitions which were held throughout the world. Harriman, working to secure Sun Valley's place in this international arena, sponsored ski competitions at Sun Valley. Nearly all of the star athletes from the period were connected to Sun Valley in one way or another. Most of the Austrian ski instructors were known as being the best skiers in the world and many other star athletes were recruited by Harriman to race in Sun Valley's competitions. They were then often enticed to stay and further promote the resort. Sun Valley advanced its popularity by hosting international ski stars and in turn the resort also helped promote ski competitions.

As Sun Valley ventured into the arena of ski competition, the resort looked to Europe for what would make hosting international competitions a success. Sun Valley incorporated ski jumps and cross country skiing into the competitions it hosted because of their popularity in Europe. However, the competitions that became the most popular were the downhill competitions. Harriman knew that if the competitions were successful, Sun Valley would in turn achieve success. Of the races, he wrote, "It was quite important in the development of Sun Valley. It attracted people and, of course, some of the best skiers in the world came here for those competitions...we wanted to have an internationally recognized first class competition."¹¹⁴ He developed a race which would

¹¹³ Averell Harriman to William Jeffers, January 2, 1939. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹¹⁴ Harriman interview, 26 & 30.

bear his name. The Harriman Cup, hosted annually at Sun Valley, soon became the place where international ski stars could prove themselves.

International ski competitions were not created at Sun Valley by any means. In 1924, the first winter Olympics were hosted in Chamonix. The winter competition started amongst much controversy as the founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin was hesitant to add winter sports. He argued that the ancient Greeks were not involved in winter sports and that most of the competitors in these sports would have to come from colder, mountainous regions which would contradict the notion of universalism in the Olympics.¹¹⁵ Inquiry into winter competition at the Olympics also gained protest from the Scandinavian countries that were fearful their own competitions would lose ground to Olympic sponsored winter events. Despite protests, the International Olympic Committee granted the first winter games to Chamonix. Due to the success at Chamonix, St. Moritz hosted the 1928 games and Lake Placid hosted the 1932 games.

The winter before Sun Valley opened, the fourth Olympic winter games were hosted in Germany. The International Olympic Committee set standards which stated that the country selected for summer games had first choice for selection of hosting the winter games that same year.¹¹⁶ The 1936 Summer Olympics were scheduled to be hosted by Nazi Germany in the capital of Berlin. Germany decided to sponsor the Winter Olympics that year as well, hoping that the country could use the winter games to prove to the world that they were capable of hosting the later and more popular Summer Olympics. Historian David Clay Large wrote of the importance of the Winter Olympics

¹¹⁵ David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936*, (New York: Norton and Company, 2007), 44

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1

to the German Reich: “It provided the opportunity to show off their organizational skills and to dispel any lingering doubts regarding Germany’s suitability as the host for the much larger summer festival to come.”¹¹⁷ The twin Bavarian villages of Garmisch and Partenkirchen located about sixty miles southwest of Munich were selected for the winter games.

The opening date for the winter games was set for February 6, 1936. As opening day approached, the event sites were missing the one critical element which Sun Valley also would lack at its opening day—snow. Fifteen thousand labor servicemen had hauled snow from the higher elevations to the Olympic sites in order for the athletes to train before the events.¹¹⁸ As committee members were planning to push back the opening date, a blizzard hit the day before the scheduled opening and the games started without a hitch.

With the German Olympics being the first to include Alpine competitions, it was expected that the Austrians would take home all the medals in the event. However, the Germans dominated in this event due to the International Olympic Committee’s decision to ban ski instructors. The committee argued that the ski instructors were paid to teach and thus not technically amateurs.¹¹⁹ This move seemed particularly aimed at Austria and Switzerland where the majority of ski instructors hailed from because the Nordic ski trainers from Norway were still allowed to compete. In response to this ban, the men’s alpine teams from Switzerland and Austria boycotted the Olympic Games. These men

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 110.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 129.

swept all the medals at the World Alpine Championship held eight days later in Innsbruck for which the German Olympic medal winners did not show up.¹²⁰

The best estimate for attendance at the German Olympic winter games is 650,000 for the eleven day period.¹²¹ This was a significant increase in winter sport interest for only 14,000 people had been in attendance at the Lake Placid Games held four years earlier. It was upon this momentum that Harriman capitalized and introduced international competition to Sun Valley through the Harriman Cup.

The first Harriman Cup was hosted on a mountain near Sun Valley because the three developed mountains were not long enough and Bald Mountain was yet to be developed. Harriman hoped that this competition would provide a European air to his resort. As winner of the first Harriman Cup, Dick Durrance claimed, “Harriman was determined that Sun Valley would match anything that Europe had to offer.”¹²²

Harriman’s daughter, Kathleen Harriman Mortimer, recalled that Harriman knew these competitions benefited the resort’s publicity, but claims that her father, “got pleasure out of it for sports sake.”¹²³ He encouraged international competitors to visit Sun Valley during the Harriman Cup, even going so far as paying the transit of certain international teams.

Harriman knew the national attention that international athletes would bring to the resort, positively promoting the resort to those interested in international competition while also bringing concern to the national government due to the political connections of

¹²⁰ Ibid., 135.

¹²¹ Ibid., 136.

¹²² Durrance quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 289.

¹²³ Kathleen Harriman Mortimer interviewed by Deanne Thompson on March 22, 1985, OH-241. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

certain groups. In response to an inquiry from the German ski team asking to visit Sun Valley, Harriman wrote fellow UP worker John Morgan,

I think you will agree that the only time we would want to have this group at Sun Valley would be for our ski races, for which they would likely have a certain publicity value. Also a visit by a German team at that time, when we will have representatives of other countries competing also, would minimize any possible political aspect of the visit.¹²⁴

Harriman knew that international competition was good for the ski industry but with the global political tensions which existed during the 1930s, he knew that these competitions needed to be handled delicately. He had to balance national concern with his ambition to promote an international arena where athletes could participate.

Harriman had promoted the competition which drew some of the best skiers to Sun Valley, but everyone expected the Austrian ski instructors to sweep the competition. Since the Austrians were known as the best skiers, everyone thought that the head instructor, Hans Hauser would win the cup. However, an American named Dick Durrance who raced under Charles Proctor at Dartmouth beat the competition by seconds. Harriman started a precedent of hiring star athletes with Durrance hiring him on the spot after he won the race. Durrance would continue on to win three of the first four Harriman Cups which prompted Harriman to permanently give Durrance the trophy and to name the mountain where the first competition was held in Durrance's honor.¹²⁵

International racers enjoyed coming to Sun Valley because of the star treatment Harriman gave them in addition to having an encounter with the American West. The Austrian ski instructors sometimes played this notion up, one time even greeting the Swiss ski team

¹²⁴ Averell Harriman to John Morgan, October 8, 1937. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹²⁵ Interview with Dick Durrance and Margaret Durrance, OH-DUR-0149. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

dressed as western bandits in Stetsons, on horses, bearing guns.¹²⁶ Sun Valley had the ability to capitalize on Western motifs while blending European influence through its architecture, ski instructors, and international visitors.

The limits of the mountains that UP developed for Sun Valley became apparent through these competitions. The second Harriman Cup was hosted on Bald Mountain, the mountain upon which guests ski today. By far the tallest mountain in the area, Bald Mountain was good for competitions because of the longer length it had for races. The New Deal sponsored Civilian Conservation Corps worked in conjunction with the Forest Service to cut the trees on the mountain, developing many of the runs which are still used today.¹²⁷ After the success of the second Harriman Cup atop Bald Mountain, Harriman became convinced that the mountain should be developed for guest use. For the third season, Harriman placed a chair lift on Baldy. He again recruited Charles Proctor to select where the runs and lifts should be laid. Proctor worked in conjunction with many of the Austrians who had been scouting the mountain during the first two years, waiting for it to be developed. Baldy expanded the capacity along with the interests of those visiting. The year it opened, the ski school had to increase to fifty instructors.¹²⁸

Bald Mountain would be instrumental not only in Sun Valley's future successes, but also in the success of the American ski team. During its initial years, many athletes trained on the mountain for the next Olympics. The 1940 Winter Olympics which were to be hosted in Finland were cancelled however upon Soviet encroachment into the

¹²⁶ Friedl Pfeifer, *Nice Goin' My Life On Skis*, (Missoula MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1993, 73.

¹²⁷ Interview with Alf Engen, OH-304. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹²⁸ Pfeifer, *Nice Goin'*, 83.

region.¹²⁹ Following WWII, preparation for the 1948 Olympic Games at St. Moritz took place on Bald Mountain. Alf Engen, a Norwegian who had been fundamental in the early development of Sun Valley coached the American men's and women's Alpine teams which received free room and board while training at Sun Valley. All of the European teams were expected to win the 1948 games because Europeans were still considered the leaders of skiing. However, training on the longer runs on Bald Mountain prepared the Americans better than most of the European competition, producing the first American Alpine gold medalist, a female named Gretchen Fraser.

Gretchen Fraser became an instant celebrity, promoting both the American rising dominance in the sport of skiing along with the increase of women in competitions. The first alpine Olympic competition for women was not until the 1936 German Olympics and women were not allowed to compete in the Harriman Cup until the second year. In the initial years of Sun Valley, women were even banned from being ski instructors something Harriman justified stating, "I am told experience has shown that people do not like women skiing instructresses. Both men and women prefer men. We have therefore made it a matter of policy to have only men."¹³⁰ Gretchen Fraser's success through international competition helped break the barriers against women who are now present in all international ski competitions and as ski instructors the world over.

Harriman used Fraser for gender-based appeals in Sun Valley's marketing as she rose in fame. Her signature look with her hair in pigtails promoted her as an all-American sweetheart and endeared her to the public. Her connection to Sun Valley

¹²⁹ Interview with Dick and Margaret Durrance, OH-DUR-0149. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

¹³⁰ Averell Harriman to Alfred Biddle, March 27, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

strengthened the image of the resort. Sun Valley continues to use her image in marketing campaigns and honors her through the restaurant in the main lobby which bears her name and which displays her medals and multiple pictures with her signature pigtails. Picabo Street is another female gold medalist whose connection to Sun Valley the resort continues to exploit. Raised in the region, she trained on Bald Mountain before she became an Olympic gold medal winner in 1998. The resort connects itself to her Olympic stature through having pictures of her throughout their halls and through using her name for a run on Bald Mountain.

Sun Valley Starts to Expand

Sun Valley's first season was so successful, Union Pacific started to inquire into other means through which to encourage further travel to the resort. Once the first season ended, UP broke ground on a second hotel to accompany the lodge. Still using Europe as a model for endeavors at the resort, UP incorporated European inspired images throughout the new hotel. UP also expanded Sun Valley's potential by creating a summer season at the resort. With the expansion, Sun Valley continued to be modeled after European resorts while also becoming an innovative leader in the culture of the American West.

In order to attract good skiers interested in more than the upscale nature of the lodge, Harriman decided to build a cheaper hotel. "The ski enthusiasts are not necessarily very long on the pocketbook," he claimed.¹³¹ Holland expanded on the new consumer that the Inn brought writing, "The new, lower-priced Challenger Inn, like the new line of modern, efficient Challenger passenger trains, targeted a middle class that

¹³¹ Harriman interview, 9.

enjoyed being treated like the upper class.”¹³² The addition of the Inn did not take away from Sun Valley’s upscale taste, but it did expand the resort’s clientele by providing the middle class a means to experience the resort’s high culture.

Though more affordable, Harriman ensured that the new Challenger Inn added to the ambiance of the resort. He asked lodge architect, Gilbert Stanley Underwood to design, “something like a Tyrolean Village.”¹³³ Sun Valley’s newspaper, *The Valley Sun*, wrote of the new addition, “Sun Valley village resembles the square of a Swiss or Austrian mountain village, but also has a quality of its own.”¹³⁴ A visiting guest claimed that the Challenger Inn was “picturesque pseudo-Swiss, neo-Austrian, [and] quasi Bavarian”¹³⁵ Harriman hired one of the lead painters of the time, Walt Kuhn, to supervise the painting of the new Challenger.¹³⁶ Kuhn blended European inspiration with local culture to paint the Inn. For color selection, he chose tones that would go with the surrounding sagebrush.¹³⁷ Constructed as one building, but designed to look like multiple separate buildings, the Challenger Inn continued to supply glamour in the mountains, even with its lower rates.

With the newly built inn and the addition of five more Austrians to the ski school, Sun Valley’s second season increased the resort’s European character. Harriman wrote of the need for “an enlargement of the same instruction staff which proved highly successful at the Lodge last year.”¹³⁸ Schaffgotsch again travelled to Europe and drew instructors

¹³² Holland, *Sun Valley*, 230.

¹³³ Harriman quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 230.

¹³⁴ *The Valley Sun*, December 21, 1937, 3.

¹³⁵ “Echoes from Sun valley,” *Trail and Timberline* (March 1938), 232.

¹³⁶ Harriman interview, 11.

¹³⁷ Kathleen Harriman Mortimer interviewed by Deanne Thompson on March 22, 1985, OH-241, (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹³⁸ Averell Harriman to Ralph Flanders, Dec. 23, 1937. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

from Austrian Alpine villages. Harriman also selected a Bavarian for the end of the first season who would come to clash with the Austrian dominated ski school.

Coming from Bavaria during a period of strife between Germany and Austria, Florian Haemmerle's hiring led to friction between himself and his Austrian cohorts. Bavaria bordered Austria along the Alps and with Hitler's encouragement, the Anschluss took place in 1938. This forced Austria to become a part of Germany and tension often played out between bordering cultures such as Bavaria and Austria. The tension led to a rift in the ski school at Sun Valley and prompted Harriman to create two separate schools, one run by Hauser, another by Haemmerle. The Austrians maintained their duties as Alpine ski instructors on the mountains surrounding Sun Valley while Haemmerle led excursions into the outlying mountains to many of the tiny cabins UP built throughout the region. These excursions became a part of the Sun Valley Alpine Touring Center and were modeled after traditional Alpine excursions in which guests would hike to far out cabins and camp out while exploring the surrounding region. Though modeled to make guests feel as if they were roughing it, these excursions still catered to the upscale nature of Sun Valley. As Haemmerle's wife later recalled, "When Florian went to these cabins, he had a chef at his disposal, and he had two ski patrol boys who carried the food and supplies, and Florian was to do nothing but take care of the guests."¹³⁹ Perhaps due to the continued luxury in the mountains, these excursions were a favorite of the Shah of Iran when he visited Sun Valley.¹⁴⁰

The national associations of both Haemmerle and his fellow Austrian instructors subsided as a love for skiing united the men, and dissipated political tensions. Following

¹³⁹ Beatrice Haemmerle interviewed by Shirley Huckins on August 14, 1985, OH-HEA-0166, (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹⁴⁰ Holland, *Sun Valley*, 340.

WWII, Haemmerle returned to Sun Valley and, along with fellow ski instructor Alf Engen, named many of the surrounding mountain peaks in honor of the Austrians who fell during the war. One, named Salzburger Spitzel, is specifically in honor of the Austrians from Salzburg who ran Sun Valley's ski school in its initial years.¹⁴¹

These ski instructors were instrumental in catering their European ski skill with the American ski style, creating a new ski industry. Beyond the mountain, these men also fostered international melding. As part of their contract, the instructors were encouraged to socialize with guests after a day of skiing. One instructor reflected on the status he held as an instructor: "You were really glamorized. Let's face it. Very much so."¹⁴² Many a single socialite found herself in the arms of a ski instructor and eventually married these foreign farm boys. Coleman contests, "The status and worldly image of Austrian ski instructors came to outgrow their modest origins, educations, and bank accounts"¹⁴³ During the third season when Friedl Pfeifer became the head instructor and imposed an eleven PM curfew on the ski instructors, protest came not from the men but from the many socialites at the resort.¹⁴⁴ The curfew did little to deter romance however, as the majority of the early ski instructors married American women and became citizens.

One Sun Valley love story that took a different turn mixed mafia and murder. Hans Hauser, the initial head instructor for the resort fell for hotel guest Virginia Hill. Hill's popularity ran rampant throughout the resort due to her inclination to tip workers

¹⁴¹ Beatrice Haemmerle interviewed by Shirley Huckins on August 14, 1985, OH-HEA-0166, (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹⁴² Leif Odmark interviewed by Ethel Wells on October 24, 1991, OH-503. (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹⁴³ Coleman, *Ski Style*, 49.

¹⁴⁴ Pfeifer, *Nice Goin'*, 70.

with hundred dollar bills.¹⁴⁵ Rumors tied her to mafia man Bugsy Siegel and an arrangement with the mafia which mailed shoeboxes full of hundred dollar bills to the resort. Hauser and Hill married in 1950. The union supposedly led to Hauser's demise because he was found dead by hanging in 1974. Many believed the mafia was involved.

The connection of Sun Valley to Europe further strengthened with the premier of movies filmed at the resort. *I Met Him in Paris*, starring Claudette Colbert and *The Mortal Storm*, starring Jimmy Stewart, were both set in Europe, yet filmed near the resort. Twentieth Century Fox made a movie about Sun Valley which connected the resort to Europe in the public's mind due to the film's lead actress. *The Sun Valley Serenade* starred famed Norwegian figure skater Sonja Henning. Footage showed the star skiing Sun Valley's mountains and skating on its ice rink to the tunes of the Glenn Miller Band, blending a European star with an American resort. Bringing footage of the surrounding area to a broad audience, these films increased Sun Valley's European ambiance and the resort's niche in American culture.

Though the resort continually looked to Europe as a model, people began to place Sun Valley in a category of its own. Returning to Europe after the first season, Count Schaffgotsch wrote Harriman, "To my amazement I find Sun Valley is here better known than most winter resorts in Switzerland, and people won't believe the whole thing is only a year old."¹⁴⁶ Opening the second season, Count Schaffgotsch wrote, "America now is catching up pretty fast, and, as it looks to me, Europe will be outdone in no time."¹⁴⁷

Europe soon followed Sun Valley's lead in using chairlifts reversing previous borrowing

¹⁴⁵ Beatrice Haemmerle interviewed by Shirley Huckins on August 14, 1985, OH-HEA-0166, (printed version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹⁴⁶ Count Schaffgotsch to Averell Harriman on April 27, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁴⁷ *The Valley Sun*, December 21, 1937, 3.

trends from Europe. Holland describes this move as, “A clear indication that Sun Valley had achieved eminence and was establishing a new standard in the world of Alpine skiing.”¹⁴⁸ In 1939, Friedl Pfeiffer, head ski instructor at the resort, informed potential guests, “You will not miss the Alps anymore—that I can tell you.”¹⁴⁹ Firmly established as a winter resort after its first year, UP started to look into the possibility of opening Sun Valley during the summer season.

Many of the resorts in the Alps were originally summer resorts only to be transformed into year round destinations once the phenomenon of skiing reached the region. Sun Valley looked to these resorts as inspiration while also capitalizing on summer recreation typical of the West aiming to create a unique experience for summer tourists. Harriman knew that this niche was a new creation writing, “I consider the operation of the lodge in summer time as distinctly an experiment, but feel that we have a good chance of making it a success if we work out the details satisfactorily. Should it be a success, we will attract a new type of summer traveler to our railroad.”¹⁵⁰ The UP board was all too enthusiastic for a venture into summer tourism at Sun Valley with President Jeffers responding to Harriman, “I am convinced as to the possibilities of the development not only as a skiing attraction but as a summer attraction as well and with the right sort of publicity which I am sure it will get, there seems no doubt as to the success of the undertaking.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Holland, *Sun Valley*, 105.

¹⁴⁹ Friedl Pfeiffer, *The Sun Valley Ski Book* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1939), introduction.

¹⁵⁰ Averell Harriman to WS Bassinger on March 1, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁵¹ William Jeffers to Averell Harriman on April 10, 1936. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Consideration as to what would make the Sun Valley Resort a success during the summer along with the winter went into details from the inception. For the resort, Harriman envisioned horseback riding, along with camping, fishing, and hunting excursions to take advantage of the western recreations while also blending activities typical of Alpine summer resorts such as hiking and mountaineering. He researched dude ranches in the region and desired to promote a new version of experiencing the West in which people could take part in all the outdoor activities while still residing in the comfort of a first class resort. The guests that he envisioned for the resort were people who “want all that a dude ranch can provide, without any of the discomforts.”¹⁵² He continued, writing,

We must run the lodge as a high class hotel, giving the same type of service that we have given this winter, and attempt to attract the same type of guest. The dude ranch operations can be brought right up to the front door of the hotel, but the life in the hotel must be much the same as it was this winter...it is impossible to run a high class operation in the winter and a second class one in the summer.¹⁵³

Again the press was all too eager to give Sun Valley attention. *The New York Times* informed readers of the summer opening writing, “The famous Sun Valley resort in Idaho will be converted from a winter sports mecca into a summer vacation ranch.”¹⁵⁴ Though most of the European instructors had to return home once the winter season was complete, many of the other workers had the option of staying at the resort year round, even though guests were only present during the winter and summer season. It was not until the second owner, Bill Janss, took over Sun Valley that the resort opened its doors year round to guests.

¹⁵² Averell Harriman to WS Bassinger on March 1, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “Westward Ho! For the Tourist,” *The New York Times*, April 25, 1937.

Sun Valley and World War II

Sun Valley's success piqued the interest of others in the American West. Groups throughout the West visited Sun Valley and contacted Harriman for assistance in building resorts elsewhere. As Coleman notes however, Sun Valley was unique in having UP funding. She wrote, "Resort developers who shared Harriman's dream but not the backing of a company like the UP had a much more difficult time creating such places."¹⁵⁵ Sun Valley thus dominated the market in those early years though other resorts worked to find the means to replicate the resort. World War II disrupted this momentum as public attention turned to the war effort. The world became entangled in conflict and Sun Valley was not spared the effects of war. WWII brought controversy for the foreign employees, a rise in Harriman's international stature, and a new role for America's first destination ski resort.

Groups from Colorado contacted Harriman for help in building up their surrounding mountains in 1938. On July 22, N.C. Barwise wrote Harriman, "Sun Valley has so tremendously developed interest in Western skiing that I believe you will agree with me that the development of the Denver region will not offer competition to Sun Valley, but on the other hand, will be an additional stimulus."¹⁵⁶ Harriman communicated with Denver Mayor Ben Stapleton regarding the potential market and Colorado mobilized itself to provide winter recreation via rail traffic, following Sun Valley's path to success.

Harriman seemed personally interested in the growth of a ski community in the West. When Coloradans participated in the 1937 Harriman Cup, he wrote, "We were

¹⁵⁵ Coleman, *Ski Style*, 77.

¹⁵⁶ N.C. Barwise to Averell Harriman, July 22, 1938. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

delighted to have representation from Denver in our races.”¹⁵⁷ One Coloradan wrote Harriman about the potential a ski community spread throughout the West could offer Sun Valley: “I venture to say that at least two-thirds of those whom I met at Sun Valley have asked me why we did not develop the Berthoud Pass and West Portal Regions so that they could stop off either on their way to, or home from Sun Valley.”¹⁵⁸ Harriman communicated with governors throughout the West, hoping to encourage development in the region writing, “I hope that I have perhaps stimulated their interest in the possibilities.”¹⁵⁹ Outside Idaho, his attention particularly focused on Colorado. “I want to assure you,” he was quoted in *The Denver Post*, “that we are planning to get behind Denver in every practical way to assist in the development of its great winter sports area.”¹⁶⁰ The outbreak of World War II in 1941 slowed Colorado’s advance in winter recreation, though the region would see a boom post war.

As the U.S. became enmeshed in war, Harriman’s duties as diplomat took him abroad, and travel to Sun Valley slowed. While abroad, Harriman continued to spread interest in Sun Valley, inviting many high ranking international officials to visit while at his numerous conferences. Harriman had General Manager Pat Rodgers wire him daily with details of snow fall, lift purchases, and arrivals of important guests. Sun Valley always remained on his mind as guests sent him messages about their vacations. In response to a message from Senator William Fulbright, Harriman responded, “Much disappointed not to have got home in time to join you. More peace in Sun Valley than

¹⁵⁷ Averell Harriman to Frank Ashley, March 22, 1937. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁵⁸ N.C. Barwise to Averell Harriman, July 22, 1938. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹⁵⁹ Averell Harriman to Fred Brown, August 29, 1939. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁶⁰ “Harriman Assures Denver of U.P. Aid in Winter Sports,” *The Denver Post*, October 1, 1939.

here.”¹⁶¹ A jovial Ernest Hemingway even wrote a poem for Harriman speaking to how his presence was missed while he was in London acting as Lend Lease Agent for the United States. The poem follows:

From us who are finding it pleasant
By rattling the corn on its stalks
To purge the obscenity pheasant
Because without taxes it squawks
To you who are aiding the British
With leases and also with loans
We sent you our thanks somewhat skittish
Though Averell’s absence makes groans¹⁶²

Hemingway appreciated Harriman for more than just his company. Harriman had worked out a deal with the writer giving him free residence at the Lodge as long as Hemingway socialized with guests. Harriman thought that having Hemingway as a resident visible to guests was good publicity and Hemingway was all too eager to take advantage of free rent at the place he called “The Glamour House.”¹⁶³ *For Whom The Bell Tolls* was written in room 206 in the lodge and the manuscript was read by many guests before publication. Not a skier, Hemingway once informed ski instructor Friedl Pfeifer that they would be great friends as long as Friedl tried not to get Hemingway onto the mountain.¹⁶⁴ Instead, Hemingway took advantage of the region’s other offerings, becoming an avid hunter. The valley became his permanent residence following WWII and is where the author ended his life in 1961. He is buried in the local cemetery.

¹⁶¹ Averell Harriman to William Fulbright (undated). Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁶² Ernest, Jack, & Marty Hemingway, Christopher LaFarge, John & Anna Boettiger, Colonel Taylor Williams to Averell Harriman on November 14, 1941. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁶³ Tillie Arnold interviewed by Penney Brons, October 20, 1982, OH 34 & 35. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹⁶⁴ Pfeifer, *Nice Goin’*, 96.

Harriman also communicated with Sun Valley while abroad due to the controversies which developed involving many of the ski instructors. Being an international hub with a high number of Europeans present from the Alpine region, Sun Valley became involved in a FBI investigation. Immediately following the bombings at Pearl Harbor, FBI agents came to Sun Valley and required all non-citizens to give over cameras and radios for FBI inspection.¹⁶⁵ Hans Hauser and head ski instructor Friedl Pfeifer, along with two hotel guests and two other ski instructors got thrown in the local jail before being sent to Salt Lake City for an extended examination. Frederick Blechmann, a ski instructor who was a part of the investigation described it saying, “we were questioned many times...we were completely investigated of our past in the United States.”¹⁶⁶

Harriman tried to step in speaking on behalf of the instructors. He again had to balance national concern with his ambitions to foster an international community. He wired an affidavit from his post in London to state his belief in Friedl Pfeifer’s innocence. He wrote:

I found no evidence that he was in anyway involved in any Nazi activities in the US. His sole interest was in skiing and the development of the ski school at Sun Valley...the earnestness of his work, his desire to bring into the ski school instructors of American birth (each year increasing their number) and his marriage to an American citizen all, to my mind, substantiate the above...I have long taken ski trips with him to explore the country and to develop new ski runs, which naturally gave me an opportunity to get to know his views and character. I found no suspicion of Nazi sympathies but on the other hand a real appreciation of the opportunity that America gave him to develop his life here.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Frederick Blechmann interviewed by Shirley Huckins on July 30, 1985, OH-BLE-0160, (print version). The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Averell Harriman to Whomever it may concern, Dec. 29, 1941. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Pfeifer was sent to a camp in Fort Lincoln, North Dakota after his trial and was unconditionally released on February 14, 1942. He did not return to Sun Valley for the season claiming, “I decided there are much bigger things to fight against than this small and false gossip. So I have resigned from Sun Valley and I feel I have done the only thing to stop all these wild rumors and fairy tales about Sun Valley and myself.”¹⁶⁸ Similar to so many others involved in the ski industry, Pfeifer joined the Tenth Mountain Division in the United States Army.

The FBI accusations were not entirely unwarranted. Friedl Pfeifer claimed, “The Sun Valley instructors were good skiers and teachers, unfortunately some of them brought along their political views in support of Hitler.”¹⁶⁹ In particular, Count Schaffgotsch had not worked to hide his Nazi sympathies. One Sun Valley guest, British actor David Niven claimed, “He spent hours extolling the virtues of Hitler, sympathizing with his problems and enthusing over his plans...Felix said that he was bringing over a dozen good ski instructors from near his home in Austria, ‘all Nazis too.’”¹⁷⁰ Harriman did not put Schaffgotsch on the payroll during the third season replying to the Count’s entreaties from Europe stating, “This winter’s organization completed...therefore no position open.”¹⁷¹ Schaffgotsch joined Hitler’s army and perished on the Soviet line coincidentally while Harriman was acting as American ambassador to the Soviet Union.¹⁷²

As Harriman’s stature in the American international political arena grew, some of the early ski instructors who did not fight in the Tenth Mountain Division or had not

¹⁶⁸ Friedl Pfeifer quoted in WAH letter to William Jeffers on December 29, 1941. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁶⁹ Pfeifer, *Nice Goin’*, 68.

¹⁷⁰ David Niven, *The Moon’s a Balloon*. (New York: Putnam Press, 1972.), 189.

¹⁷¹ Averell Harriman to Count Schaffgotsch, October, 23, 1939. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁷² Roland Cossman to WP Rogers, October 29, 1945. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

perished during the war contacted him in order to return to the United States. One of the original six Austrian instructors, Roland Cossman could not get back into the U.S. in 1939 and had to remain in war-torn Austria. He wrote Harriman seeking assistance to gain return to the U.S. stating, “I would like so much to go back to the States and stay there. I have lost my family and I don’t think I ever will be happy in Europe. Sun Valley has spoiled me too much and nothing in the world would make me happier as to work for you again in Sun Valley.”¹⁷³ The records do not indicate how Harriman responded to Cossman’s multiple requests, but other telegraphs represent the good fortune these European men felt if their experiences as ski instructors in the U.S. cleared them from possible obligations to Hitler’s army. Sepp Benedikter wrote Harriman to boast of the American citizenship he received after being brought over as one of Sun Valley’s original instructors. He believed the experience at Sun Valley had brought him great fortune, exclaiming, “What with all the hostilities in Europe I’d probably be doing a goose-step into the Sudeten land.”¹⁷⁴

As so many of the instructors joined the army and tourism declined during the war, Harriman decided to turn Sun Valley over to the American Navy for use as a convalescent hospital. Harriman argued, “We’d have to close it down anyway. It was the right thing to do, and it wouldn’t have been possible to run this resort as a resort during the war.”¹⁷⁵ From July 1943 through December 1945, Sun Valley was leased to the United States Navy. Because it was donated to the greater public good, Sun Valley remained in the press during a time when luxurious frivolity gained little print. *The Salt*

¹⁷³ Roland Cossman to Averell Harriman on February 16, 1946. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁷⁴ Sepp Benedikter to Averell Harriman on October 3, 1938. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁷⁵ Averell Harriman quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 310.

Lake Tribune reported, “Sun Valley, Idaho-One of the great winter resorts not only of this country but of the world...has stacked its skis for the duration.”¹⁷⁶ The resort was used as a recovery hospital for, “men whose bodies and nerves have been shredded by the enemy.”¹⁷⁷

The men sent to Sun Valley for recovery had many of the resort amenities available to them. *The Salt Lake Tribune* listed the recreations writing, “...Once only available to the wealthiest at prices from \$5.00 to \$50.00 a day. Now war-woozy sailors and marines who have gone down but not out in the rout of the Jap regain the courage and strength to become again self-reliant, self-sustaining men.”¹⁷⁸ The use of Sun Valley as a convalescent hospital was successful as it hosted 1,603 patients during its highest occupancy.¹⁷⁹ Following the end of the war, the navy and UP worked together to transition Sun Valley back into a resort. The commanding officer at the convalescent hospital wrote, “The closing of Sun Valley as a navy activity would ordinarily be cause for feelings of deep regret and sad thoughts of leaving a place that has meant a delightful home to many of us, both staff and patients, were it not significant of the fact that the long hard struggle is over.”¹⁸⁰ Opening its doors to soldiers not of the wealthy elite signified the transformation Sun Valley would undergo following its reopening and the post-war consumer boom and rise of a middle class.

¹⁷⁶ “Sun Valley Skis Give Way to War,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 25, 1945. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹⁷⁷ “Sun Valley Famed Idaho Resort Becomes Haven for Wounded Navy Men,” *The Idaho Statesman*, July 25, 1943.

¹⁷⁸ “Sun Valley Skis Give Way to War,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 25, 1945. Sun Valley Collection, Union Pacific Museum, Council Bluffs, IA.

¹⁷⁹ Holland, *Sun Valley*, 311.

¹⁸⁰ Alfred J. Toulon quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 318.

Tenth Mountain Division and Skiing's Post-War Expansion

While the Sun Valley Resort became a part of the war effort, so too did many of the Sun Valley employees. In particular, many of the ski instructors and ski patrol members joined the Tenth Mountain Division, connecting them to even more of the American leaders in skiing. This division's specialty in mountain warfare training appealed to those with skiing skills who wanted to do their part for the country. Upon the division's return from European combat, many of the veterans combined their war experiences and love of skiing to become active in the ski industry's expansion. Their efforts helped fully transform the West into an area dominated by ski resorts, giving Sun Valley competition for years to come.

The Tenth Mountain Division developed out of an idea of Charles Minot Dole, founder of the National Ski Patrol Organization. Sitting around with fellow skiers one night in 1939, he commented upon how brave the Finnish troops were combating the Russians upon the Finnish-Russian border.¹⁸¹ Using skis, the Finnish Troops stealth attacked Russians on the mountains in the region. Dole thought that an American division should be created, trained to perform similar tactics and proposed the idea to high-ranking members of the U.S. military. Though not originally appealing to the U.S. military, a division was formed for mountain and cold terrain combat in 1941, eventually becoming the Tenth Mountain Division.

Mountain warfare troops had been present throughout history, especially in the Scandinavian countries, however the Tenth was the first such U.S. division. It is the only U.S. infantry division ever recruited by a civilian organization (the U.S. Ski Patrol) and

¹⁸¹ Charles Minot Dole. *Adventures in Skiing*, (New York: Franklin Watts, 1965), 90.

created as a result of a sport.¹⁸² Men in the ski industry, such as the ski instructors at Sun Valley, and others who had a love of the outdoors flocked to join the division, originally training in Washington State out of Fort Lewis on Mt. Rainier. A base camp for the division was eventually created in Camp Hale, Colorado at the elevation of 9,500 feet with the surrounding 14,000 foot mountains used for training and recreation.¹⁸³

American military winter equipment and techniques were outdated and so the Tenth's first purpose was to improve the equipment. Tenth historian Christopher Ott explained, "The troops first responsibilities were to revise the army's winter equipment and procedures, which hadn't been updated since WWI. They tested food, clothing, and equipment, they improved skiing techniques, and they built survival snow shelter that could be heated with a candle."¹⁸⁴

Beyond modifying technique and equipment, the basic goal of the division was to turn mountain men into mountain soldiers. One member of the Tenth claimed, "I thought this sounded so great, it just sounded like Sun Valley and I thought gosh, this is an outfit I would like to be in."¹⁸⁵ To bring some organization to the division, those seeking to join the ranks had to submit multiple letters of recommendation which attested to the fact that these recruits could ski and were in good condition. These references were especially important for the foreign born recruits. As Dole explained, "A shadow came over ski instructors of Austrian birth when it came to official things."¹⁸⁶ Recruitment into the Tenth Mountain Division fully assimilated many foreign born instructors into the American culture while their brave actions added to the division's success. Friedl

¹⁸² Richard Wilson Collection, Box one. The Tenth Mountain Division Collection, Denver Public Library.

¹⁸³ Dole, *Adventures in Skiing*, 117

¹⁸⁴ Christopher Ott, "Legacy of the Ski Patrol," *The Denver Business Journal*. April 7, 1998.

¹⁸⁵ Newt Elredge quoted in *Fire on the Mountain* (movie) by Beth and George Gage (1995).

¹⁸⁶ Dole, *Adventures in Skiing*, 138.

Pfeifer, one of the instructors questioned by the FBI, would go on to win a Purple Heart from his combat in the Tenth.¹⁸⁷ Before he joined the division Pfeifer reflected, “It was clear to me that I could not make this country my home unless I was willing to fight for it.”¹⁸⁸

Though Pfeifer would more than prove his devotion to the U.S. through his combat experience, national fears about his international background initially slowed his ability to participate in the war effort. Fear over the transnational nature of skiing, especially through the industry’s international actors seemed to upset national ambitions, however the creation of the Tenth can be seen as an attempt to turn the transnational sport into an instrument of national war making. National and transnational ambitions interfered before the war, but with the national sponsorship of the Tenth, these competing visions seemed to unite and helped bolster the industry of skiing in the American West following the war.

The Tenth reached much success during the war, with many soldiers proving their commitment to the nation through their love of skiing and the outdoors. During training however, the incompatibility of this transnational leisure activity with national military mobilization led to a lack of military discipline in the division. The officers and lower ranking soldiers often knew each other well from previous experience since the ski industry was so small at the time. This made a hierarchy typical of war divisions difficult to create. One veteran remarked, “All of us while we were there started to refer to it as a great ski club.”¹⁸⁹ Another veteran referenced how the men would leave camp on their days off to ski the surrounding mountains, claiming the agenda was: “Ski all day

¹⁸⁷ Pfeifer, *Nice Goin’*, 129.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁸⁹ Gage, *Fire on the Mountain*.

Saturday, party all night Saturday, and ski all day Sunday before you had to get back to the camp.”¹⁹⁰ Other divisions took to calling the Tenth “the ski boys.”¹⁹¹

Despite the notion that these soldiers were in some way a part of a less noble division because of their connections to skiing, the Tenth became one of the most decorated divisions during WWII due to the heroic actions of its soldiers.¹⁹² Leaving the U.S. in December 1944, the Tenth headed to Italy for a campaign to remove the Germans from their stronghold in the Northern Italian Mountains. Their skiing and mountaineering skills enabled the Tenth to push back the Germans and helped lead to victory in the Italian campaign.

Men of the Tenth Mountain Division came back to the United States after their successful campaign and became influential to the post-war boom of the ski industry.

Tenth veteran Richard Wilson explained:

No sooner had World War Two come to a close than these war-weary mountaineers carried their love of skiing into the civilian world. The American winter sports scene would never be the same. From coast to coast, they made their mark in just about every aspect of skiing as instructors, competitors, coaches, resort developers and managers, designers and manufacturers of ski gear, owners of ski shops and ski lodges, ski writers, and infidels.

Many of the veterans returned to Colorado where they had grown familiar with the surrounding mountains while training at Camp Hale. Tenth veteran Peter Seibert would found Vail and veteran Lawrence Jump would found Arapahoe Basin.¹⁹³ The mountain where the most veterans flocked to immediately following the war was Aspen.

¹⁹⁰ Gage, *Fire on the Mountain*.

¹⁹¹ Charles Minot Dole, *Adventures in Skiing*, 129.

¹⁹² Gage, *Fire on the Mountain*.

¹⁹³ Richard Wilson Collection, Box One. The Tenth Mountain Division Collection, Denver Public Library. Denver, CO.

With Sun Valley not open until one year after the Tenth veterans returned from Europe, head ski instructor Friedl Pfeifer returned to the town he had fallen in love with while on his weekend excursions away from military training at Camp Hale. The first time he stumbled upon the old mining town of Aspen, Pfeifer claimed the town reminded him of the Austrian village he grew up in. He immediately had the desire to develop the region into a ski town stating, “I felt at that moment, an overwhelming sense of my future before me.”¹⁹⁴ Following the war, he recruited many of his fellow Tenth veterans to assist him in creating a ski school in Aspen. One such veteran, John Litchfield, later reflected, “We came out of the war looking around for something to do until we kind of got our heads screwed on straight again and our feet back on the ground, so through Friedl Pfeifer, he got a hold of myself and so I found myself in Aspen.”¹⁹⁵

Coloradans saw in Aspen success in their future economy and the beginning of a burgeoning ski industry. Present at Aspen’s opening, Governor Lee Knaus opined, “The rebirth of Aspen is one of the greatest things that has ever happened to the state of Colorado.”¹⁹⁶ Aspen took a similar path to Sun Valley in its creation, growing out of its mining identity through the infusion of ski culture. Pfeifer admitted, “My experience in Sun Valley, and what I learned from Averell Harriman, gave me the courage to launch a winter resort in Aspen.”¹⁹⁷ Tenth veterans were instrumental in Aspen’s success. Pfeifer encouraged their recruitment writing, “Over the years, more of the Tenth’s veterans

¹⁹⁴ Friedl Pfeifer, *Nice Goin’*, 111.

¹⁹⁵ Gage, *Fire on the Mountain*.

¹⁹⁶ Lee Knaus quoted in Dole, *Adventures In Skiing*, 142.

¹⁹⁷ Pfeifer, *Nice Goin’*, 215.

worked for the ski school and spilled into Aspen. In a way, the town served as a memorial to all of them who had marched into Aspen years before.”¹⁹⁸

In 1946, after Aspen’s initial season, Sun Valley reopened its doors and Harriman turned to Pfeifer for support in organizing the ski school. Reluctant to give up on Aspen, Pfeifer worked out a deal with Harriman which allowed him to serve as head instructor for both Aspen and Sun Valley, rotating weeks between the two places. He wrote, “Aspen was my dream, but Sun Valley became my bread and butter as I drove the eight hundred miles between the two areas and directed both ski schools.”¹⁹⁹ Harriman paid Pfeifer well and the Sun Valley ski school successfully got running again, preparing itself for the increased traffic the resort would receive in the following years. After Sun Valley’s first post-war season, Pfeifer did not renew his contract claiming:

I had promised Mr. Harriman that I would put Sun Valley Ski School back together. With this accomplished he knew I would not be back the next season. That chapter of my career was closed...One of the hardest things I ever had to do was say goodbye to Mr. Harriman and Sun Valley, but I had made the commitment to return to Aspen if I survived the war. He accepted my decision and wished me the best of luck.²⁰⁰

Pfeifer reached success at Aspen and helped encourage surrounding mountains in Colorado to develop into the prosperous resorts they are today.

Sun Valley’s Reopening

Sun Valley reopened its doors on the tenth anniversary of the grand opening. Many guests returned, creating an atmosphere similar to the resort’s prewar heyday. As years went on, resorts throughout the West began to compete with Sun Valley and the upscale clientele started to share their exclusive resort with a burgeoning middle class.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 149.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 150, 215-216.

Harriman's rise in political stature also took his attention away from Sun Valley and influenced Union Pacific to eventually sale the resort to Tenth Mountain veteran Bill Janss. Sun Valley transformed with increased competition while the expansion of the ski industry to a broader clientele and to various parts of the West marked Sun Valley's success as a resort.

The navy turned the resort back to Union Pacific in December 1945. Preparation for a grand reopening immediately commenced. One former employee sent Harriman's secretary a description of the resort's condition writing,

I had not seen Sun Valley since February 1942. Sentiment made me quite fearful of the conditions I might find left in the wake of navy occupation. I need not have been. Sun Valley has never been lovelier, more come of age than she is now. Rigorous wear and fair tear during the war years may have lined her face a bit, but there is nothing so wrong that cannot be rejuvenated with a little paint and padding.²⁰¹

Though in seemingly good condition even after Navy use, Harriman ordered that the resort be completely refurbished and refurnished before guest use.

The grand reopening took place on December 21, 1946. This time around, the resort had abundant snow on the surrounding mountains and Hannagan prepared for it to be, "The biggest, most successful opening in history" based upon the "unprecedented amount of reservations."²⁰² On December 30th, Harriman received word "Parties galore everything nicely under control."²⁰³ A large part of the reopening's success was due to a significant number of returning guests and employees. General manager Pat Rodgers cited this as a "feature very pleasing to our guests...many remarked that it seemed as

²⁰¹ CT Carey to Robert Meiklejohn, August 20, 1946. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁰² Steve Hannagan to Averell Harriman, December 17, 1946, Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Pat Rogers to John Morgan, October 12, 1946, Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C..

²⁰³ Nelson Newton to Averell Harriman, December 30, 1946. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

though Sun Valley had never closed.”²⁰⁴ Again the press was eager to report on the resort. *The Pacific Coast Record* wrote, “The resort which made America conscious of winter sports is back from the war...this year round sports capital again opened its doors December 21 on a peacetime, playtime basis.”²⁰⁵ Sun Valley seemed not to have missed a beat even with the war.

Sun Valley increased its rates following the war, but the growing income level of most Americans allowed those beyond the elite to visit the resort. Little open objection took place for the forty percent increase in rates. Pat Rodgers provided Harriman with detail on the increased revenue writing, “During the holiday period in 1941, we had a gross revenue of \$74,000. As compared to this holiday period of \$131,000 gross.”²⁰⁶ While many of the elite guests returned to Sun Valley following the war, Hannagan claimed the resort attracted a wide variety of people. He wrote, “It is known as a class resort, but it has a reputation of accommodations for all type purses with the common denominator of affability among all guests.”²⁰⁷ Of the reopening season Hannagan wired Harriman:

You’ll find in the main, the happiest group of guests we ever have had—more of them using the outdoor facilities than ever before. Your dream of a resort of active participants in winter sports is accomplished. In fact, Mr. Secretary, your dream resort has become a reality—successful, proud, with tradition, integrity—and profit.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Pat Rodgers to Averell Harriman, January 13, 1947. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁰⁵ Duke Miller, “Come Take It Cold,” *The Pacific Coast Record*, January 1947. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁰⁶ Pat Rodgers to Averell Harriman, January 13, 1947. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁰⁷ Steve Hannagan to Averell Harriman, April 2, 1946. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁸ Steve Hannagan to Averell Harriman, February 18, 1947. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

People flocked to Sun Valley in unprecedented numbers to experience the resort and to take part in the sport of skiing. For the first season back from the war, Friedl Pfeifer had to call on reserve instructors to handle more than five hundred students in a single day.²⁰⁹

After this initial season back from war, Sun Valley began to attract guests outside the ski industry and those not interested simply in following the social vacation calendar. Conferences started taking place at Sun Valley pushing some within the Hollywood crowd elsewhere due to the pedestrian image this promoted of the resort.²¹⁰ Also, Idaho divorce laws were similar to Nevada's which required only a month long waiting period before a divorce could be finalized. Many people flocked to Sun Valley to obtain a speedy divorce through month long residency in the region.²¹¹

Harriman was again absent from Sun Valley's opening due to commitment elsewhere. He left Moscow in January 1946 and took part in the Paris Peace Conference before becoming Ambassador to Great Britain and then American Secretary of Commerce. He received the Medal of Merit for his work during WWII and his stature in politics seemed to be rising and would eventually lead to expectations of becoming Secretary of State and to two Democratic presidential runs.²¹² As he would do following his future political defeats, Harriman traveled to Sun Valley for rejuvenation once his war commitments finally slowed. Of his 1947 trip to Sun Valley he wrote, "I had five and a half wonderful days there in February which put me back on my feet—and skis—

²⁰⁹Pfeifer, *Nice Goin'*, 149.

²¹⁰ Beatrice Haemmerle interviewed by Shirley Huckins, August 22, 1985. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

²¹¹ Everett "Phez" Taylor interviewed by Shawn Gray, July 18, 1985. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

²¹² Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 405.

again.”²¹³ Harriman’s position as Secretary of Commerce required him to cut all ties to the business world and he dropped his chairmanship of Union Pacific, leaving it in the hands of his brother Roland.

UP losing Harriman’s scrupulous eye for details pertaining to Sun Valley at a time when resorts throughout the West were rising would affect Sun Valley as the decade wore on. Before the war, Harriman had worked hard to encourage the creation of other resorts throughout the West. Inadvertently he also encouraged expansion in the European ski industry through his work on the Marshall Plan. Austria in particular used some of its Marshall Plan funds to build cableways and ski lifts something ski historian Roland Huntford calls, “part of a far-sighted plan to foster tourism and hence promote national recovery.”²¹⁴ Of the increase in American ski resorts, Harriman reflected, “Sun Valley has achieved its objective of encouraging the development of ski resorts in many parts of the West, and Idaho has the pioneer resort it is justly proud of. My hopes have come true.”²¹⁵

During the initial season back from the war, the expanding ski industry seemed not to concern those at Sun Valley due in large part to Sun Valley’s established identity as compared to resorts such as Aspen. General Manager Pat Rodgers examined Aspen as competition in a 1946 letter to Harriman. He wrote:

It is my feeling that too much emphasis is being placed upon Aspen. It is my opinion that Aspen is the same as other ski resorts throughout the country in that they are all assets to our resort as more people are becoming ski-minded. The more enthusiastic they become over the sport, the more they will desire to ski at the top ski resort---Sun Valley. Aspen may in time develop into a good ski resort

²¹³ Averell Harriman to Frank Elkins, March 24, 1947. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²¹⁴ Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion*, 375.

²¹⁵ Harriman introduction, Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, introduction (no page numbers).

if the promoters of it can stand the loss that is bound to occur during its early existence...Transportation into Aspen is very poor at the present time and there are absolutely no amusements after ski hours. The one hotel is small and not well furnished...I cannot see that Aspen will ever be a serious competitor of Sun Valley...it will not deter one iota from Sun Valley's prestige.²¹⁶

Friedl Pfeifer also commented on the differences between Aspen and Sun Valley, claiming that neither was a threat to the other. He wrote, "There was no competition between Aspen and Sun Valley, we were both trying to build our individual characters."²¹⁷ Though seemingly on different levels, certain early regular guests of Sun Valley such as Gary Cooper and Gerald Ford would come to choose Aspen over Sun Valley.

As early Sun Valley guests left the resort to try other mountains, so too did many of the instructors. As mentioned earlier, Friedl Pfeifer who started his American career at Sun Valley would co-found Aspen. Dick Durrance, the original Harriman Cup winner became fundamental in Alta's creation. Stein Eriksen, an instructor who was hired at Sun Valley after he won the Olympic gold medal in 1952 would develop Deer Valley, Utah. He later reflected upon Sun Valley's influence in his own resort writing,

I consider Sun Valley one of the most desirable ski resorts in the world. Beautiful mountain and the whole development in Sun Valley is extremely attractive...we kept a lot of the images or the ideas and what Sun Valley had given me that was kind of directly put into effect when we developed Deer Valley. I remembered the lodge in Sun Valley, the attractiveness of the Tologe and the services that were given to the people here and the clientele that the lodge kind of catered to. So we put the same ideas into Deer Valley.²¹⁸

Sun Valley was a model ski resort and those connected with it would go on to promote similar resorts throughout the West.

²¹⁶ Pat Rodgers to Averell Harriman, December 10, 1946. Averell Harriman Papers, The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²¹⁷ Pfeifer, *Easy Goin'*, 148.

²¹⁸ Stein Erickson interviewed by John Huckins, February 7, 1986. OH-312. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

Harriman was never shy to boast of Sun Valley's impact on the ski industry of the West. In an interview with Pfeifer's wife, Harriman provided a more modest assessment of his role in the American ski industry:

I do not mean to imply that I started skiing for the United States because I did not. We simply made it easier for the people to take up the sport. My idea was to start a new industry for us, not just make one place popular, but by popularizing one place make way for more along the lines of the Union Pacific.²¹⁹

Harriman's original idea of increasing passenger revenue through the creation of a destination ski resort was successful. In the initial prewar years, Sun Valley brought the Union Pacific treasury \$250,000 a year in additional passenger revenue.²²⁰ The resort also romanticized the image of rail travel and helped polish the image of Union Pacific

Following WWII, the rise in automobile production and air travel affected UP profits. Starting in 1940, United Airlines advertised flights from New York City to Sun Valley, having passengers fly into Cheyenne, Wyoming or Pocatello, Idaho since the Wood River Valley still did not have an airport. Automobile travel increased with passage of the Federal Highway Act in 1956, linking Sun Valley with more parts of the nation, but damaging the importance of rail travel to Americans. Competition such as this impacted UP desire in maintaining a resort which had never brought profit beyond increased rail passenger revenue. As resorts throughout the West rose to compete against Sun Valley, UP sought updates at Sun Valley, but railroad income did not exist like it had during the 1930s. Absent from the board, Harriman could not defend the resort he loved so much and UP chairmen started to weigh options, including the idea of selling the resort. Kathleen Harriman Mortimer later claimed, "One of the sad things about Sun

²¹⁹ Harriman quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 333.

²²⁰ Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 232.

Valley was that my father was really the only member of the Union Pacific board who really cared about it.”²²¹

UP hired Tenth Mountain veteran Bill Janss to write a report on Sun Valley in 1963. Janss was head of a development company based out of California which had become famous for developing the Westwood and Thousand Oaks neighborhoods of Los Angeles.²²² Through this company, Janss had developed Snowmass and had been involved in development of Aspen. Beyond his business resume, Janss was well connected with members of the ski industry, having been a member of the 1940 US ski team. He ventured to Sun Valley the year it opened, returning every year after to either race in the Harriman Cup or to visit with his wife.²²³ The report he produced informed UP that Sun Valley was losing three quarters of a million dollars each year. Janss explained these losses claiming,

Well they were just not competing. They had done really nothing. They had built no more lifts. They were losing money, spending badly. It was an absentee ownership, and the things that they were doing here were just costing them a lot of money and everybody was king of taking things home, and not working hard.²²⁴

He informed UP that it would take five million dollars and extensive work to turn Sun Valley around which prompted UP to sell the resort to Janss on the spot.

Becoming new owner of the resort, Janss immediately set out to bring Sun Valley up to par with the resorts it had inspired and which were now bypassing the resort due to their advancements in ski mountain quality. Knowing that it was from Sun Valley that

²²¹ Kathleen Harriman Mortimer quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 355.

²²² Bill Janss interviewed by Shirley Huckins, October 20, 1992. OH-552. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Bill Janss and Konrad Staudinger interviewed by Ginger Piotter, January 20, 1987. OH-363-364. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

many of these resorts got their inspiration, Janss was hesitant to alter everything about the resort. He explained, “Some fine things happened at Sun Valley, and we didn’t want to change for change, we wanted to take what was there and really go on with the idea, and maybe add to it.”²²⁵ He continued to import European ski racers to be instructors at the resort claiming, “It’s like buying, [sic] getting a football player. It’s an attraction. A new season starts, you have to have a new player.”²²⁶ He increased ski lifts on the mountain, making the Warm Springs side of Bald Mountain more accessible to guests and increasing the number of ski runs from thirty-three to sixty-two.²²⁷ Janss also encouraged the invention of another American innovation which, similar to the chairlift, would forever transform the industry of skiing. The snowmaking technology which Janss sponsored at Sun Valley is now found at resorts throughout the world.

Focusing more on expanding skiing capacity at Sun Valley than on promoting an elite resort for guests, Janss brought Sun Valley to a broader consumer base. He claimed that developments which took place under his tenure were, “directed squarely at a growing and empowered middle class.”²²⁸ Due to this desire and based upon his experience as a developer, the first condominium project was built in Sun Valley in 1966. Similar condominium projects would sprout up around the valley in the proceeding years in addition to the low income housing that Janss lobbied the Idaho legislature for.

Janss transformed the region, opening Sun Valley up even more to middle class guests and bringing ski technology to a new level at the resort. After completing these

²²⁵ Bill Janss interviewed by Shirley Huckins, October 20, 1992. OH-552. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

²²⁶ Bill Janss and Konrad Staudinger interviewed by Ginger Piotter, January 20, 1987. OH-363-364. Transcript, The Community Library Association, Inc., Ketchum, Idaho

²²⁷ Holland, *Sun Valley*, 373.

²²⁸ Bill Janss quoted in Holland, *Sun Valley*, 375.

transformations, Janss claimed, “It was time to sell it to someone with some dough.”²²⁹ Earl Holding, owner of Sinclair and Little America, purchased Sun Valley, his first ski resort, in 1977. Holding’s ability to invest great sums in the resort has returned Sun Valley to Harriman’s original image as a high-class resort. Holding built lodges around Bald Mountain which mimic the original lodge’s upscale nature. He also continued Janss’s success in catering to a middle class through sponsoring ski packages for guests at the resort. A family friendly environment exists today at the resort under his command. Holland summarized the differences in Sun Valley’s owners writing, “Whereas Averell Harriman brought an air of New York finance, railroading, and international diplomacy to Sun Valley; and whereas Bill Janss brought with him the breeze from California with its condos, ski bums, and skier volume, Holding imports a wholesome Mormon flavor with his huge investment.”²³⁰ Though each owner brought unique qualities to the resort, the fact that there have only been three owners over the course of Sun Valley’s history has helped many of Harriman’s original visions for the resort continue to prosper.

Conclusion

In 1936, Union Pacific took the company’s biggest impediment—snow—and turned it into an asset. Through Averell Harriman’s vision, UP built the Sun Valley Resort and started a large publicity campaign to attract tourists to the resort as a means to increase ridership on the railroad. Capitalizing on American weaknesses and European successes in the ski industry, Harriman created a new sort of destination resort, one which incorporated transnational ideals and can now be found all throughout the West. His

²²⁹ Ibid., 384.

²³⁰ Holland, *Sun Valley*, 390.

vision fostered a new industry and brought Idaho and the West into the minds of people the world over.

Sun Valley continues the tradition Harriman started of being an international hub. Austrians are still prominent on the ski school and the employees who work at the resort overwhelmingly come from foreign countries. Though diversity is present at the resort through these employees, the staff and the guests remain overwhelmingly white. The racial makeup of the staff is contrasted against the consumers at the resort. Coleman acknowledges this writing,

One look at modern ski resort workers proves that the American West remains a region of racial and ethnic diversity. Increased diversity in the resort service industry over the past fifteen years, however, has had little impact on the consumer side of the equation. Western ski slopes and resorts continue to exist largely as islands of whiteness.²³¹

The consumers of the resort culture continue to reflect the racial makeup of their European predecessors. Sun Valley has a large Latino population which makes up the service industry in the region. Very few of these service workers have the ability to live in Ketchum however. Instead they live down valley in more affordable housing and commute to work at the resort.

Today, tourists of middle and upper class incomes vacation at the resort. The resort has become a prominent family vacation spot, leading Sun Valley to attract more guests during the summer than during the winter season. A broad clientele comes to the resort through the conferences hosted at Sun Valley. These range from the Idaho Dairyman's Convention to the Western States Annual Bankers Convention. Sun Valley has not lost the elite connotation that Harriman helped foster. The leaders of capitalism

²³¹ Annie Gilbert Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 65, no. 4 (November, 1996), 608.

meet annually at Sun Valley each summer for the Allen & Company Convention, a week long conference mixed with vacation and high profile meetings which has earned the name, “summer camp for billionaires.”²³² Each year the guest list includes such names as Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg.

Resort construction boomed throughout the West following WWII. Construction halted in 1980 and the West did not see construction of another resort until Tamarack Resort was built in 2003. Tamarack Resort is the most recently constructed destination ski resort and is coincidentally located in Idaho, a four hour drive from Sun Valley. This resort did not reach the success that Sun Valley did, going through many financial problems in its short history, even declaring bankruptcy. Seemingly the industry which grew exponentially during the post war period has established itself and little room exists for new developments.

Harriman’s transnational resort has finally reached success with both national and international ambitions. Following WWII and his commitment as ambassador to the Soviet Union, Harriman created a career out of encouraging high ranking American officials about the lack of democracy’s ability to coexist with communism. He constantly vocalized the need for containment and encouraged national action to achieve this. His calls for an international community of skiers seemed to exclude those who had communist backgrounds because he saw them as competing too much with the national preservation of the American quality of life. Sun Valley today is proof that those fears are no longer warranted. Harriman’s original international employees which were made up of mostly Germans and Austrians are now blended with multiple employees from the

²³² Joe Flint, “Allen & Co. Gears up for Annual Invasion of Sun Valley.” *The Los Angeles Times*. July 6, 2009.

former Soviet bloc. These employees add to the international nature of Sun Valley and are examples of how the transnational ski industry overcame national ambitions.

From analysis of Sun Valley and Harriman's involvement in the ski industry, an understanding of the American West develops. The ski industry synonymous with the region is not to be understood without a broader examination of the transnational themes which created the industry. Through sport, movement of people, culture sharing, political tension, and tourism, Sun Valley contributes to the discussion of transnational themes in history. The resort is more than an elite destination which prompted the creation of other resorts throughout the West, it is an example of the successful coexistence of transnational and national desires.

Sun Valley continues to reach success because it advertises its place as the leader in the industry. Marketing campaigns focus on the tradition of Sun Valley and its glamorous niche in the ski industry. As the resort celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary during the 2010-2011 season, studies have been made to assess Sun Valley's future. Compared to other mountains throughout the West, Sun Valley's average age on the mountain far exceeds the competition which seems to cater to younger crowds. Worried about its future, Sun Valley has started to look to these other mountains for inspiration and is now working to attract a younger crowd to the area.

This competition is a testament to Sun Valley's original success. Importing Austrian instructors, Harriman helped advance a transnational industry. The Austrians shared skills with Americans who in turn created innovations such as the chair lift and snow making equipment in addition to boot and ski advancements. Once seen as a European sport, skiing has now become a global sport due in good part to what took

place at Sun Valley. The original Austrians who ventured across the Atlantic to become ski instructors at UP's newly built resort are representatives of transnational actors who shared their culture and created something new. Eastern and European resorts are still popular amongst skiers, but the American West has prospered as a destination because of its connection to skiing. Sun Valley melded European sport with western mountains and helped promote an identity along with an industry for the American West.

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