

The Mountains of Maine: Skiing in the Pine Tree State



Dedicated to the Memory of

John Christie

A great skier and friend of the Ski Museum of Maine

An Exhibit by the
New England Ski Museum
and the
Ski Museum of Maine

**Traveling exhibit made possible by
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Isolated Outposts of Maine Skiing

1870 to 1930

In the annals of New England skiing, the state of Maine was both a leader and a laggard. The first historical reference to the use of skis in the region dates back to 1871 in New Sweden, where a colony of Swedish immigrants was induced to settle in the untamed reaches of northern Aroostook County. The first booklet to offer instruction in skiing to appear in the United States was printed in 1905 by the Theo A. Johnsen Company of Portland. Despite these early glimmers of skiing awareness, when the sport began its ascendancy to popularity in the 1930s, the state's likeliest venues were more distant, and public land ownership less widespread, than was the case in the neighboring states of New Hampshire and Vermont, and ski area development in those states was consequently greater.

Only in the 1950s did the construction of alpine ski sites become commonplace in Maine, many of them conceived as economic development initiatives. From 1950 until the mid-1970s ski areas sprouted all over the state, until ski area creation slowed nationwide. Maine's relatively late start allowed its ski area builders to benefit from the expertise of ski resort planners like Sel Hannah and the Sno-engineering firm, and permitted its state government to enact environmental legislation before overdevelopment marked the landscape as it had elsewhere.

Skiing in Maine likely began in the winter of 1871. Maine resident William Widgery Thomas, Jr. had been US ambassador to Sweden in the Arthur and Harrison administrations, and knew Swedish people as rugged and hardworking. Appointed in 1869 to a state commission to encourage settlement of northern Maine, Thomas arranged for a group of 51 Swedes to settle in the town they named New Sweden. The emigrants brought skis and ski-making skills with them, and Thomas noted in a report to the legislature that some of the children used skis to cover the five miles to school in winter. No earlier reference to skis in New England has been found.

In 1905 Theo A. Johnsen, owner of a Portland sporting goods company of the same name, published a short booklet that contained both his catalog of winter sports equipment and instructions in "skeeing" as he spelled it. Johnsen's Tajco skis were beautifully made objects in the Scandinavian style, but were so finely built that their expense exceeded the resources of the few Mainers who were in the market for skis at that early date. Less expensive skis were widely available from Midwest manufacturers like Martin Strand, and Tajco ceased production after only a few years. Johnsen's book *The Winter Sport of Skeeing* does stand as the earliest American publication on skiing, and was a harbinger of increasing interest in the sport nationally and in Maine.

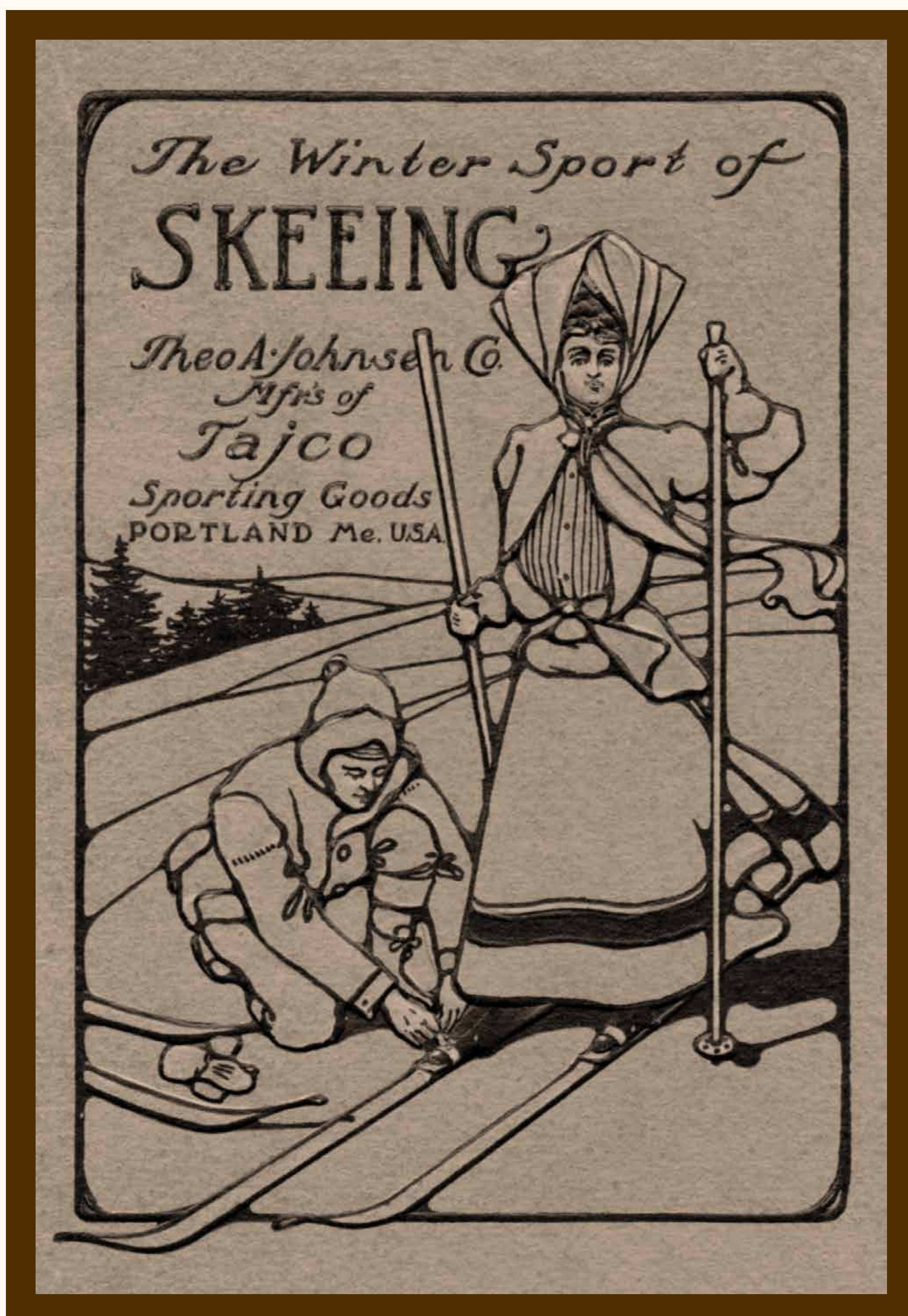
In the first three decades of the twentieth century, a handful of widely-scattered accounts of skiing activities are on the record. Game warden Frederick Jorgensen, raised in Sweden, electrified the village of Wilson's Mills in 1902 by besting the town's best snowshoer in a short race. A ski-mounted warden moving rapidly and silently over snow would be a poacher's nightmare. The expansive Poland Spring House, long a summer resort, opened for the winter season about 1916, offering skiing, snowshoeing, skating and more. The 100-mile ski journey of Bridgton insurance agent Norman Libby and Lewiston bookstore owner Algernon Chandler took them from Bridgton to the summits of Pleasant Mountain and Mount Washington in 1907. In 1926, ski mountaineer Arthur Comey of the Appalachian Mountain Club climbed Katahdin on skis, and skied from Maine's highest summit for the first time.

Such sporadic reports of skiing were indicative of the very limited adoption of the sport throughout New England in general at the time. In that, Maine was no different than any other northern tier state in the country. In the next several decades, however, skiing would boom as a sport throughout the snow-covered states while little development occurred in Maine.



As consul in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1864, William Widgery Thomas, Jr. envisioned Swedish citizens settling in the United States. "Many a time when overtaken by darkness on an afternoon's hunt and forced to put up for the night at a peasant's hut," he wrote to his superiors, "I have seen every eye in the family circle brighten as I told of the plenty in the poor man's home in the New World; and as I looked on their stalwart forms and witnessed their never-flagging industry, I have envied the Swedish the possession of such a sturdy race." By 1871, Thomas had helped arrange for a group of Swedish settlers to colonize the township in northern Maine that they named New Sweden.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen



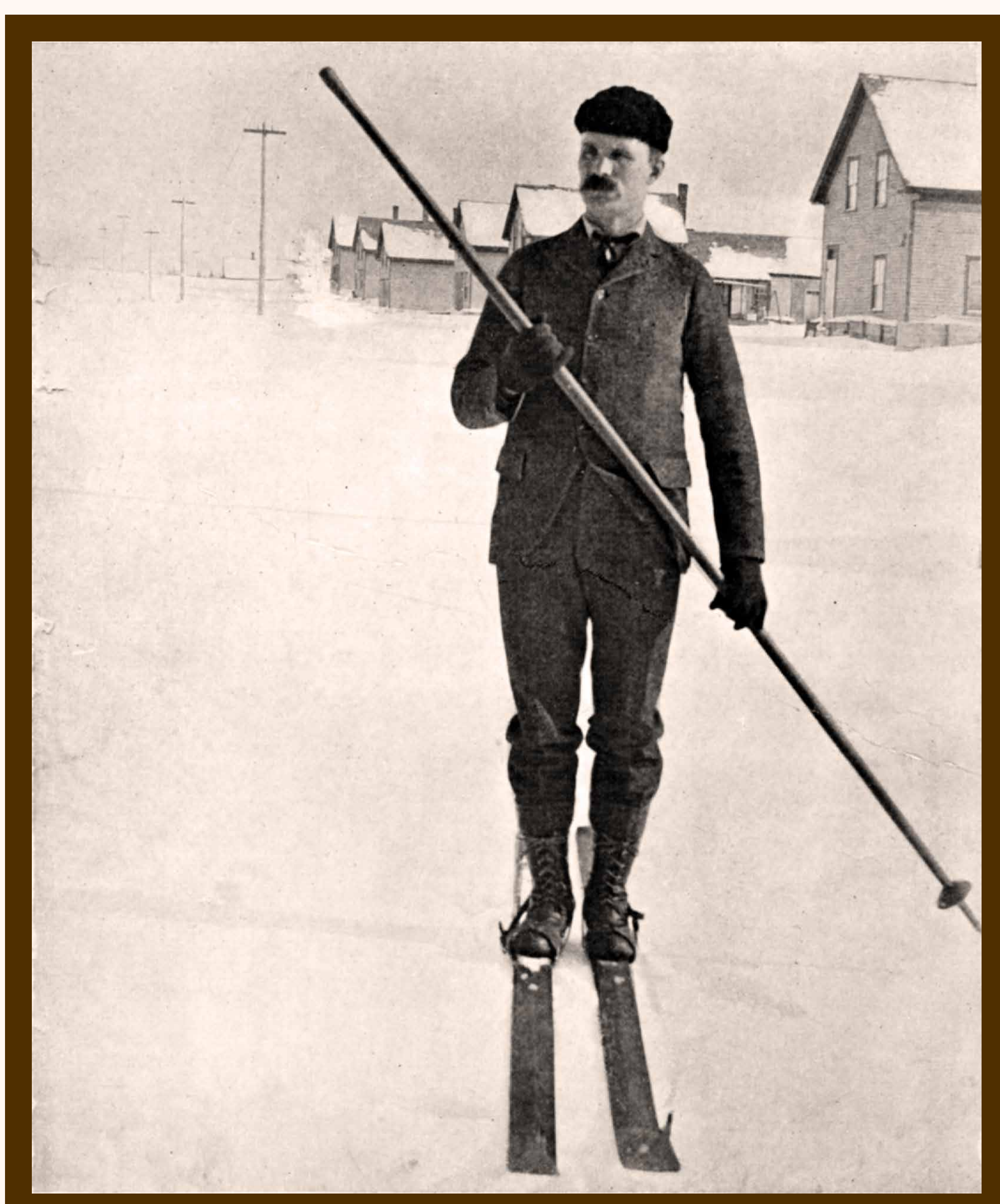
Portland, Maine sporting goods manufacturer Theo A. Johnsen's 1905 *The Winter Sport of Skeeing* was the first book on any aspect of skiing published in the United States. The book's expensively embossed cover was indicative of the taste for quality with which Johnsen crafted his 'skees', some of which were priced at \$18.00 per pair, or about \$465 in 2014 dollars. Johnsen's high prices relative to his competitors was his undoing, but examples of his finely-built ski survive.

New England Ski Museum Collection



Mrs. Alderson, left, and Miss Catherine Hanson in New Sweden, Maine exemplify the utilitarian use of skis as implements of winter travel that the Swedish pioneers of the town brought with them from the old country in 1870. The art of ski making was well-represented in New Sweden, where artisans turned out skis with characteristic diamond-shaped tips reminiscent of Viking ship prows, and decorative scribing on the top. Skis made in New Sweden came in pairs of different lengths, the shorter ski for pushing and the longer for gliding.

Collections of Nylander Museum, courtesy of www.VintageMaineImages.com



"No one around Wilson's Mills used skis when I went there in 1902, and most of them had never seen any," wrote Maine game warden Frederick W. Jorgensen. "There was a crowd assembled at the hotel, and the skis came in for a good bit of ridicule." Jorgensen's convincing win in a race against the town's best snowshoer served notice that the warden could travel swiftly and silently over snow on his rounds in the forests of the western Maine border.

Frederick W. Jorgensen, 25 Years a Game Warden, 1937



Algernon Chandler, owner of a bookstore in Brunswick, was recruited by his friend Norman Libby of Bridgton in 1907 for a journey on skis that took them some 100 miles from Libby's hometown to the summit of the highest peak in the northeast. Along the way they made two ski ascents of Pleasant Mountain, which would become the first real alpine ski area in the state a half century in the future. The skis Chandler is using have the distinctive high-curved, long tapering tips of W. F. Tubbs skis, manufactured in Norway, Maine.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen



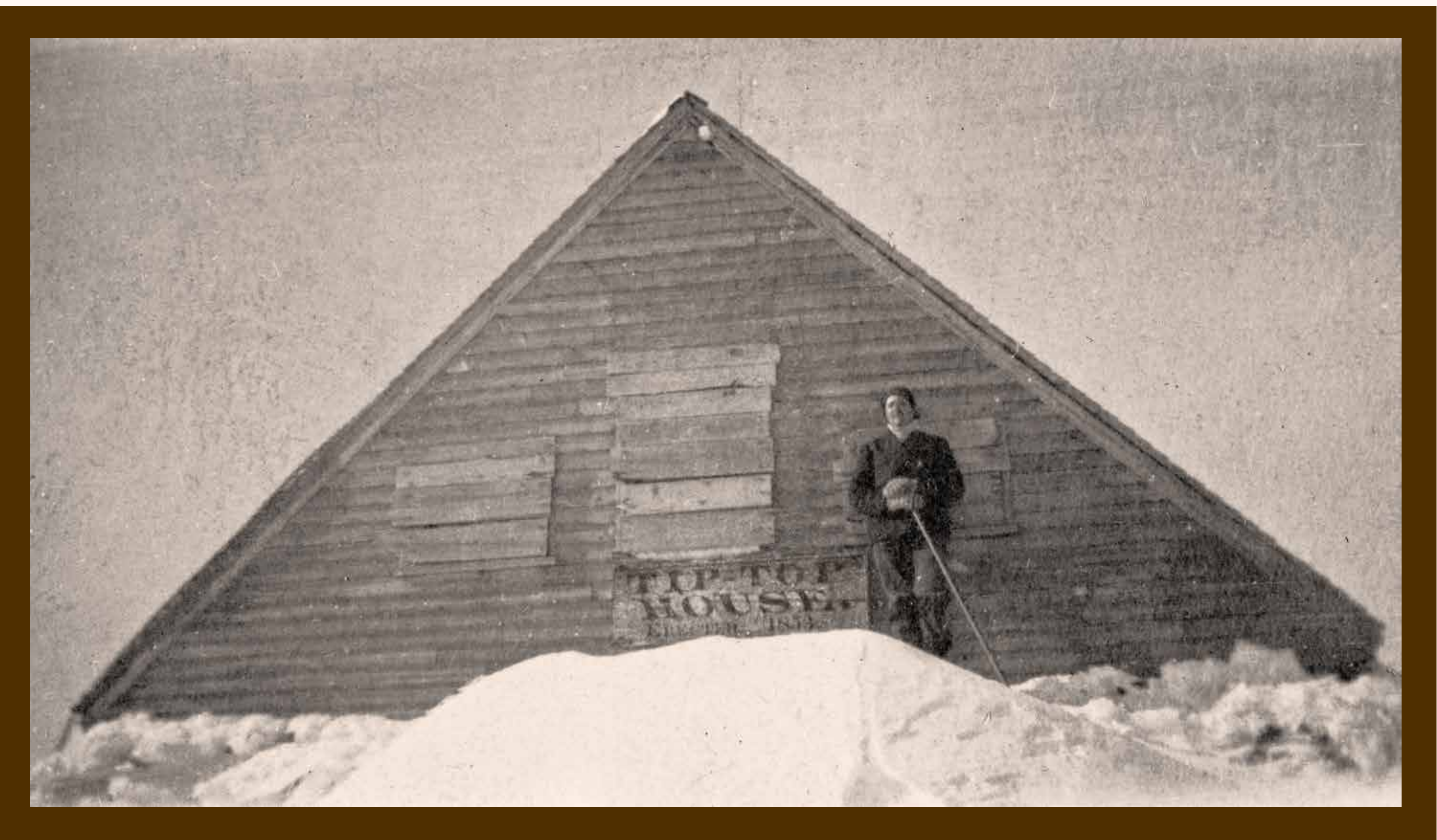
In an 1872 report to the legislature, Thomas emphasized the commitment of the New Sweden settlers to education by noting that children routinely skied five miles to school. "Thomas' description stands as the earliest unequivocal record of the use of skis in the Northeast," historian E. John B. Allen stated in 1991. Here, two New Sweden girls make their way to school on skis sixty years after the first settlers arrived in the Aroostook County town.

Collection of New Sweden Historical Society, courtesy of www.VintageMaineImages.com



Norman Libby poses at the summit of Mount Washington on the 1907 trip he made with Algernon Chandler. The Summit House in the background would last only one more year until destroyed by fire in the summer of 1908.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen



Norman Libby, a summertime editor of the mountaintop daily *Among The Clouds*, snapped this photograph of Algernon Chandler on the upper story of the Tip-Top House on Mount Washington on the pair's 100-mile ski trip from Bridgton to Gorham, New Hampshire in 1907. They had left their skis at timberline half way up the alpine peak, and used ice creepers for the icy upper terrain. At the summit they found ten-foot drifts and this former hotel half-buried in snow.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen



Three Appalachian Mountain Club ski mountaineers ascend the Saddle Slide on Mount Katahdin on the 1926 expedition on which Arthur C. Comey and Robert Underhill summited on skis.

Courtesy of Appalachian Mountain Club Library & Archives



Maine's highest mountain, Katahdin or Baxter Peak, was first climbed on skis in March 1926 by Arthur C. Comey, depicted here on the alpine summit. He was joined by fellow Appalachian Mountain Club mountaineer Robert Underhill, who took off his skis a short distance from the peak to use crampons. "The Saddle gained, if the snow on the steep side is not too hard the greatest thrill of all comes when one dips the ski-points over its rim," wrote Comey of his first descent. Comey and Underhill's party was supported by the legendary Katahdin figure Leroy Dudley at the Chimney Pond cabin, and Comey noted that Dudley was persuaded to try skis for the first time after 50 years on snowshoes. Comey returned to ski Katahdin in 1928, and found that even in that northern location, winter rain could fall, creating a long-lasting crust on the snow.

Courtesy of the Appalachian Mountain Club Library & Archives



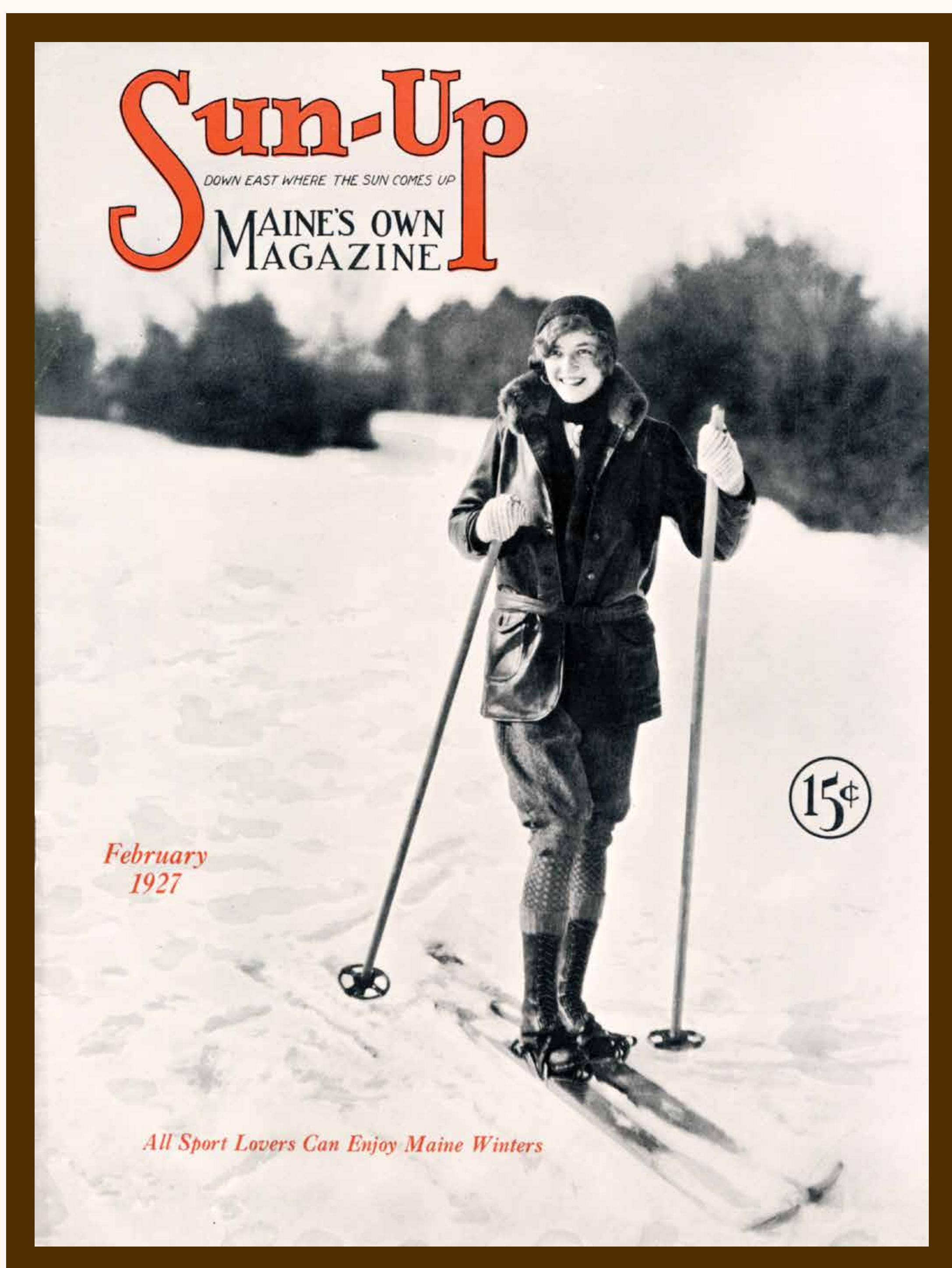
The Mansion House and Riccar Inn, annexes of the sprawling Poland Spring House, opened for the winter season about 1914, with accommodations for 250. Owned by Hiram Ricker & Sons, Inc., in 1913 the resort sent an unnamed family member to observe the operation of winter hotels in Switzerland, where the winter business was well developed.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen



“Winter is not the dull season—rather, it is the season of greatest sport, of freest enjoyment, in the land of health and vigor which is Maine,” enthused the Poland Spring winter season brochure of 1920. The introduction of skiing along with other winter sports to patrons of the Poland Spring House signified the social expansion of skiing beyond its Maine working class origins in New Sweden and the interest of middle class individuals like Chandler and Libby.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen



By 1927, skiing had become widespread enough that it was featured on magazine covers in Maine and elsewhere.

Courtesy of E. John B. Allen

Slow Progression, 1930 to 1955

When alpine skiing began to surge in popularity in the 1930s, New Hampshire and Vermont saw rapid development of skiing centers. Two factors that were important in this development were the relative ease of access from population centers in Boston and New York, especially via snow trains, and the ski trail construction performed on public land by federal agencies like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA). While both these elements were present in Maine, their contribution was relatively inconsequential there due to the greater distances from New England cities, and the fact that large tracts of land were in private hands, where federal agencies did not work.

The exception to this pattern was in the Fryeburg-Bridgton region which adjoined the New Hampshire border, and had rail access from Portland. Snow train service by the Maine Central to Fryeburg began in February 1935, the result of a concerted effort by the town's winter sports committee to clear trails and slopes on Jockey Cap and Pine Hill, and provide hospitality to snow train passengers. Ski instruction was provided on Pine Hill, behind the town bandstand, by Win Robbins of Portland, who would have a long career in Maine skiing and would become its first tramway inspector. The following year a rope tow on Jockey Cap was constructed, and the toboggan chute there was improved. The ski tow was a popular novelty, and attracted great interest in 1936. The winter of 1937 was a notably poor year for snowfall, and the Fryeburg ski tow faded away that year or shortly thereafter.

The Fryeburg winter sports committee formed a subcommittee to pursue the idea of a large CCC ski trail construction project in the Cold River Valley to the north of town on White Mountain National Forest land in New Hampshire and Maine. The 1936 concept included ski trails on six or seven peaks centered on the Appalachian Mountain Club's Cold River Camp, much as the club's Pinkham Notch Camp was the hub of ski trails several mountain ranges to the west. The ambitious borderline plan was publicized in the Portland papers, but by 1936 ski tows were the latest development, muting enthusiasm for the walk-up ski trails that the CCC built, and nothing came of the effort. The CCC did build a ski trail called the Wayshego with a 1,000-foot vertical drop on Pleasant Mountain in neighboring Bridgton about 1936, just one of a handful of Maine sites where the CCC or WPA built ski trails.

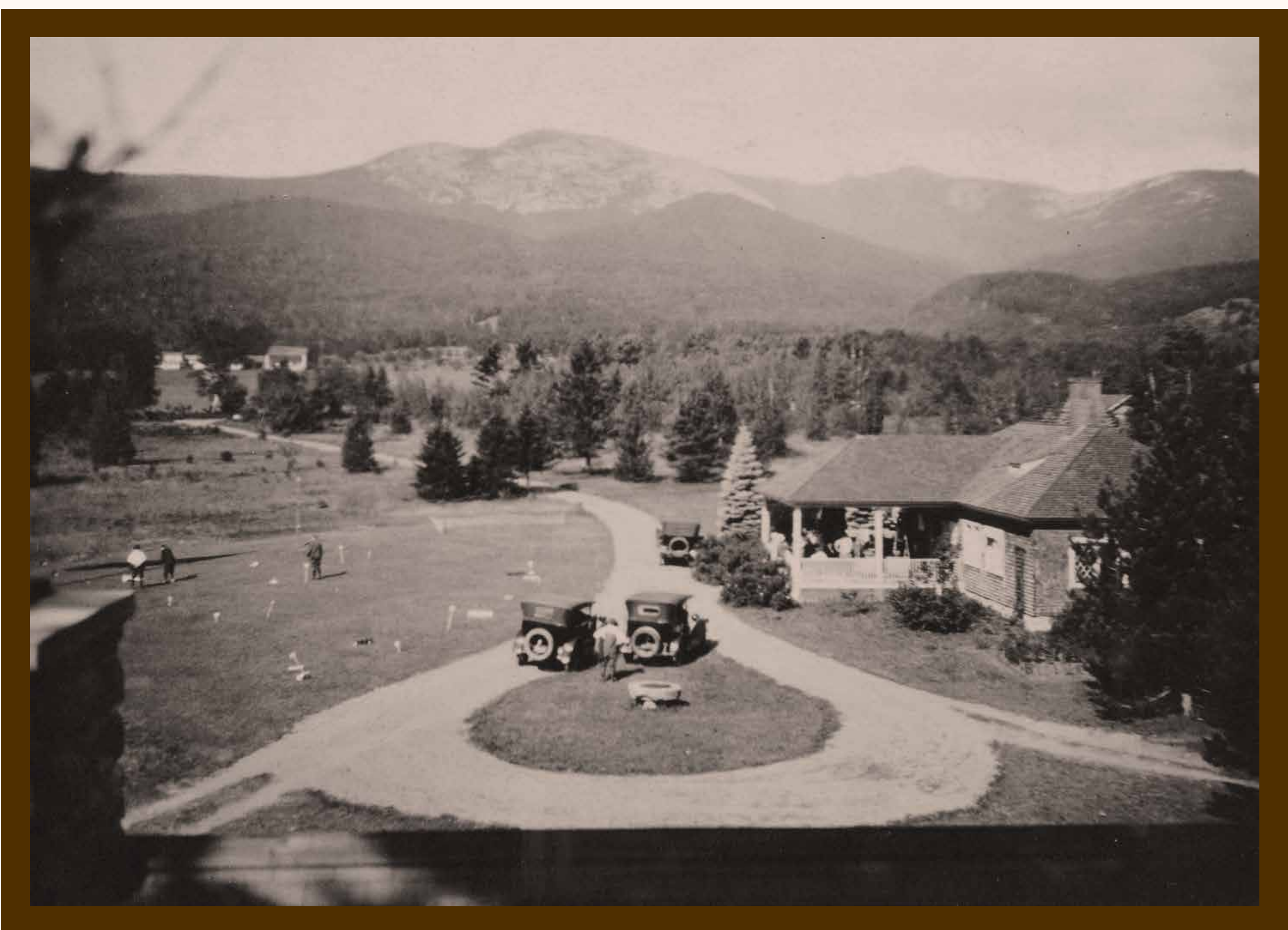
There were ski trails built by the CCC and WPA on Mount Bigelow and on Quoggy Joe in Presque Isle, where a ski tow was built from a repurposed potato sled, but the largest federal ski project took shape in Camden, where the Camden Snow Bowl with ski slopes, ski tow, toboggan chute and lodge were ready for use by 1939. The relative scarcity of federal ski projects in Maine had implications for the future, because in ski states across the country, many ski areas dating to the prewar years trace their origins to the twin federal projects.

The first major ski area to emerge in Maine was Pleasant Mountain, where several years after the Wayshego Trail was built a rope tow went up. In 1954 the state's first T-bar was installed at Pleasant, and in 1955 the area built the first chairlift in Maine, with 1,200 feet of vertical drop. With a linear length of 4,300 feet, the Pleasant Mountain chairlift was exceeded in length only by the chairs at Stowe and Mad River Glen in the east. Bridgton was close enough to Portland to the east benefit from its proximity, and not far removed from the Eastern Slope region of New Hampshire to the west, which hosted multitudes of skiers from the cities to the south. The geographic advantage enjoyed by Pleasant Mountain contrasted sharply with the next major ski area to arise in the state, on Sugarloaf Mountain north of Kingfield.



The rope tow on Jockey Cap in Fryeburg was ready for the first snow train of the season on January 12, 1936, and proved to be busy even on those weekends when no train arrived from Portland. In the winter of 1937 the tow was lengthened to provide access to a new four-mile cross-country trail beginning on the top of the hill. Paul Lemere of Whitefield, New Hampshire planned to bring his ski school to Fryeburg that winter, which the local reporter believed would be the first “full-fledged ski school” in Maine. The winter of 1937 lacked snow however, and Fryeburg fell out of favor as a ski destination.

Collections of Maine Historical Society



The Baldfaces, South (left) and North, overlook the Appalachian Mountain Club's Cold River Camp in the valley north of Fryeburg, Maine. A 1936 proposal would have located a large network of ski trails to be built by the CCC on mountains of the White Mountain National Forest that spanned the Maine-New Hampshire border. Access would be through Fryeburg to the south or Gilead from the north, so that this so-called “Borderline” development would be largely a Maine project. The bare ledges of South Baldface had the potential to match the appeal of Tuckerman Ravine in the minds of promoters, but no ski trails ever materialized from the Borderline proposal.

Courtesy of the Appalachian Mountain Club Library & Archives



Snow trains had been operating from Boston to New Hampshire for four years before the Maine Central Railroad began comparable service from Portland to Fryeburg. Maine's first snow train reached that western foothill town on February 3, 1935, following months of preparation by the local winter sports committee. This well-appointed skier is shown on the small in-town monadnock called Jockey Cap in 1936, the year the rope tow visible behind him was installed.

Collections of Maine Historical Society



On the far right in this group of 1936 Bangor-to-Caribou ski marathoners is Walter Stadig, who built the first chairlift in Maine in 1946-47 on Michaud Hill at Soldier Pond near Presque Isle. Walter Stadig's grandfather, Lars Stadig, was an experienced ski-maker in Sweden, and brought his craft with him when he arrived in New Sweden with his son, Olaf Stadig.

The five finishers in the February 1936, 176-mile Bangor to Caribou ski marathon are depicted here. From the left are Sam Ouellette, third place; Buck Ostlund, second place; Cloren Nute, fourth place; Bob Johnson, first place; and Walter Stadig, fifth place. Aged 46, Stadig was the oldest of the competitors. He finished in 43 hours, 23 minutes, compared to winner Johnson's 34 hours, 3 minutes.

Collection of New Sweden Historical Society, courtesy of www.VintageMaineImages.com



While federal Depression-relief programs like the CCC and WPA did less ski-related construction in Maine than elsewhere, there was some activity. At Quoggy Joe Mountain in Aroostook State Park near Presque Isle, seen here in 1959, the WPA built a ski trail and a ski tow for the winter of 1939. After World War II Quoggy Joe and other Aroostook County areas benefited from the presence of large numbers of airmen stationed at bases in Limestone and Presque Isle.

New England Ski Museum Collection



Toboggan chutes were a part of many winter sports centers in the 1930s. This one was built at the Camden Snow Bowl, part of the larger project begun in 1936 by the Camden Outing Club with CCC and WPA involvement. Camden Snow Bowl's toboggan chute is still active and is the scene of the US National Toboggan Championships.

Courtesy of the Snow Bowl Collection of the Camden Public Library



The Camden Snow Bowl's rope tow was operational in the winter of 1939, joining the toboggan chute which opened in 1937. The Camden project was the largest federal ski project in Maine, and included the 1,000-foot vertical Mount Megunticook Trail in the Camden Hills to the north of the Snow Bowl.

Courtesy of the Snow Bowl Collection of the Camden Public Library



This trail map of the Camden Snow Bowl shows the area as it was in the winter of 1968-69, and its location overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The town-owned area installed a Hall T-bar in 1966, which at 4,083 linear feet was the longest surface lift at the time in the state. In 1974, the lifts of Bald Mountain in Dedham were taken down and installed at the Snow Bowl.

New England Ski Museum Collection



Walter Stadig used his Soldier Pond chairlift design to install a pair of much better known chairlifts at Thorn Mountain in Jackson, New Hampshire that opened in 1949. This photograph of the upper Thorn Mountain chair gives a good sense of how Stadig's short-lived Soldier Pond chair would have appeared. The chairs traveled very low to the ground. Note how close the lifeline comes to the summer cottage on the left.

H.C. Williams, courtesy of Ken Williams



The CCC built the Wayshego ski trail on Pleasant Mountain in Bridgton in the mid-1930s. The 1,000-foot vertical trail was rated expert and intermediate, and adjoined an open slope with rope tow at its base. This photograph shows a 4-person team race on Pleasant Mountain about 1936 won by the Portland Ski Club.

New England Ski Museum Collection



Pleasant Mountain's ski slopes extend almost to the shore of Moose Pond. Pleasant was the scene of some of their first ski ascents in Maine via its summer carriage road, the state's first T-bar, and its earliest viable chairlift. That chair can be seen in this photograph from a 1968 magazine cover.

Courtesy of Bridgton Historical Society



Russ Haggett, left, grew up in Bridgton and assembled a closed corporation to develop Pleasant Mountain. Board member and stockholder of the ski area, he served as its general manager for many years. For the winter of 1954 the area installed this 2,000-foot Constam T-bar. Shown with Haggett is Ray Erickson of Cape Elizabeth, president of the corporation and a lift engineer who supervised construction of similar T-bars for the State of New Hampshire at Cannon and Mount Sunapee.

Hans and Barbara Jenni, courtesy of Dave Irons



Hans and Barbara Jenni arrived at Pleasant Mountain in 1958. Hans, a Davos Switzerland native, had taught at Cannon Mountain for several years, brought to the US as part of Paul Valar's program for recruitment of highly-qualified Swiss skiers for his ski school. Pleasant Mountain skiers marveled at Jenni's smooth reverse shoulder technique "For sheer grace and fluidity on the boards, Hans Jenni had, and has, no peer," recalled Sugarloaf manager and Saddleback owner John Christie. Barbara Jenni operated the ski shop at the ski area.

Hans and Barbara Jenni, courtesy of Dave Irons



This chairlift at Pleasant Mountain ran 4,100 feet to the top of the ski area and was operational by 1955. While Walter Stadig's Michaud Hill chair was the state's first, it was little-known and the Pleasant Mountain chair was the first significant chairlift in Maine.

Hans and Barbara Jenni, courtesy of Dave Irons

Sugarloaf

By the late 1940s people in Maine recognized that their neighbor states in northern New England had benefited economically from the skiing boom in a way that Maine had not. In 1948 the Maine Development Commission, a state agency working toward economic growth, created the Maine Ski Council consisting of ski club representatives and chaired by the president of Bass Shoe Company, Robert “Bunny” Bass. The council embarked on a survey of potential ski mountains in the state, and soon focused on the looming, pyramidal, bare-summited peak of Sugarloaf Mountain in Crockertown Plantation near Kingfield.

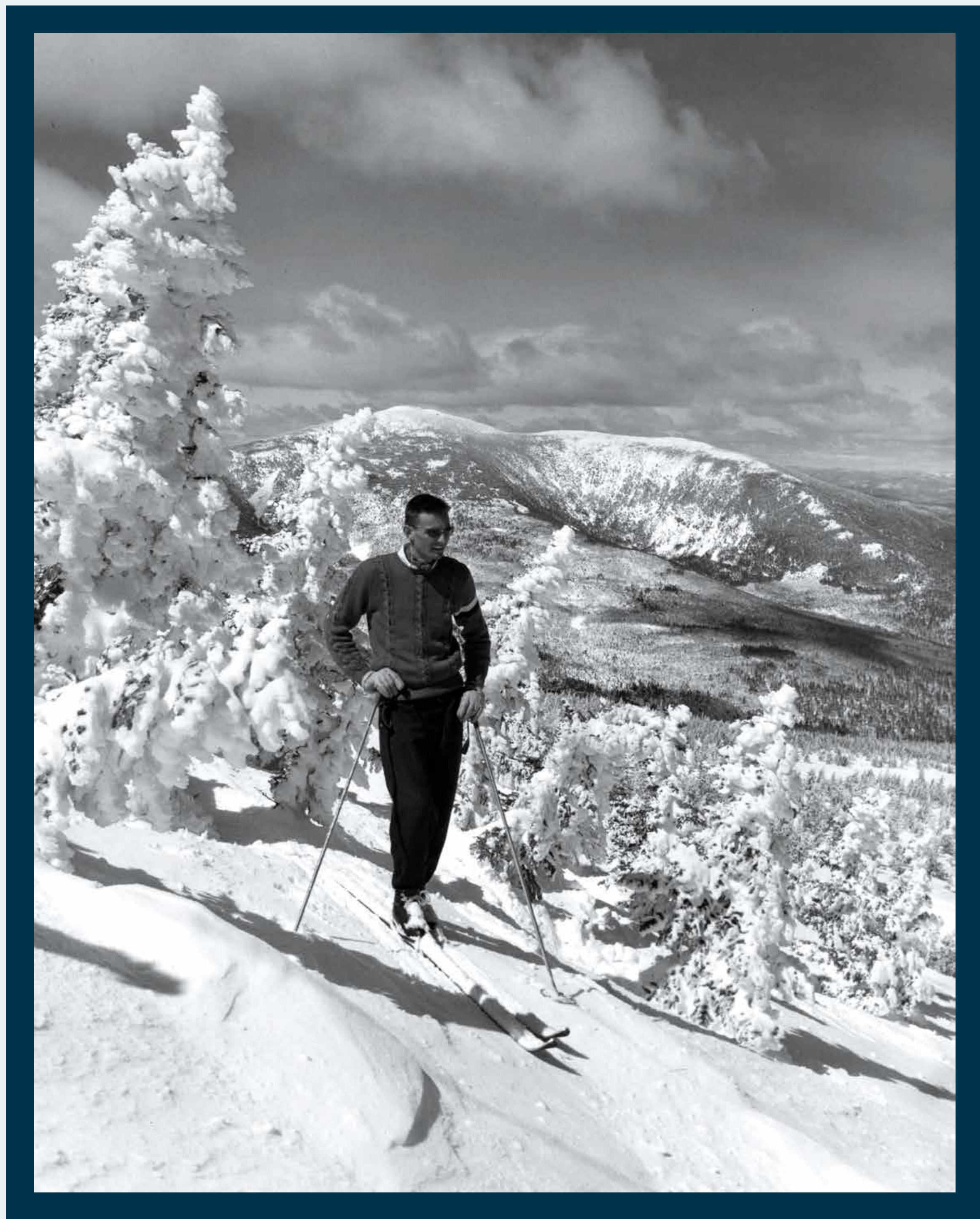
The Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club was formed in 1950, and ski trail surveyor Sel Hannah was engaged to string a route from the above-timberline tundra that form snowfields to a point at which an access road would end. The trail was cut in the summer of 1950 in a remarkably brief two week period, and was named Winter’s Way in honor of Kingfield storekeeper and ski pioneer Amos Winter. The trail angled down from the snowfields toward the north, so that “you would ski the entire trail...without any significant turns to the right,” recalled an early club member.

It was evident from the scale of Sugarloaf that more than volunteer labor would be needed to develop it, and in 1955 the Sugarloaf Mountain Corporation was formed. They immediately erected a Constam T-bar that served 900 vertical feet, cut the Narrow Gauge trail, and built a base lodge to replace the club shack which preceded it. These improvements netted a small profit in the winter of 1956, and a second T-bar was built in the fall of that year that, used in series with the first, reached into the snowfields. Unfortunately, the winter of 1956-57 saw little snowfall, and the upper T-bar did not operate. The law of averages reliably delivered a blockbuster winter in 1958, when the upper T-bar lift building was completely buried at one point.

The winter of 1958 also presaged the end of Sugarloaf’s monopoly on skiing in Maine’s central mountains, as Sel Hannah reported favorably in ski area exploration trips to Saddleback and Bald Mountain in Rangeley and Locke Mountain in Newry. Within a few years, Sunday River, Saddleback and Bald Mountain would join Sugarloaf and Pleasant as ski development in Maine entered its period of greatest growth.

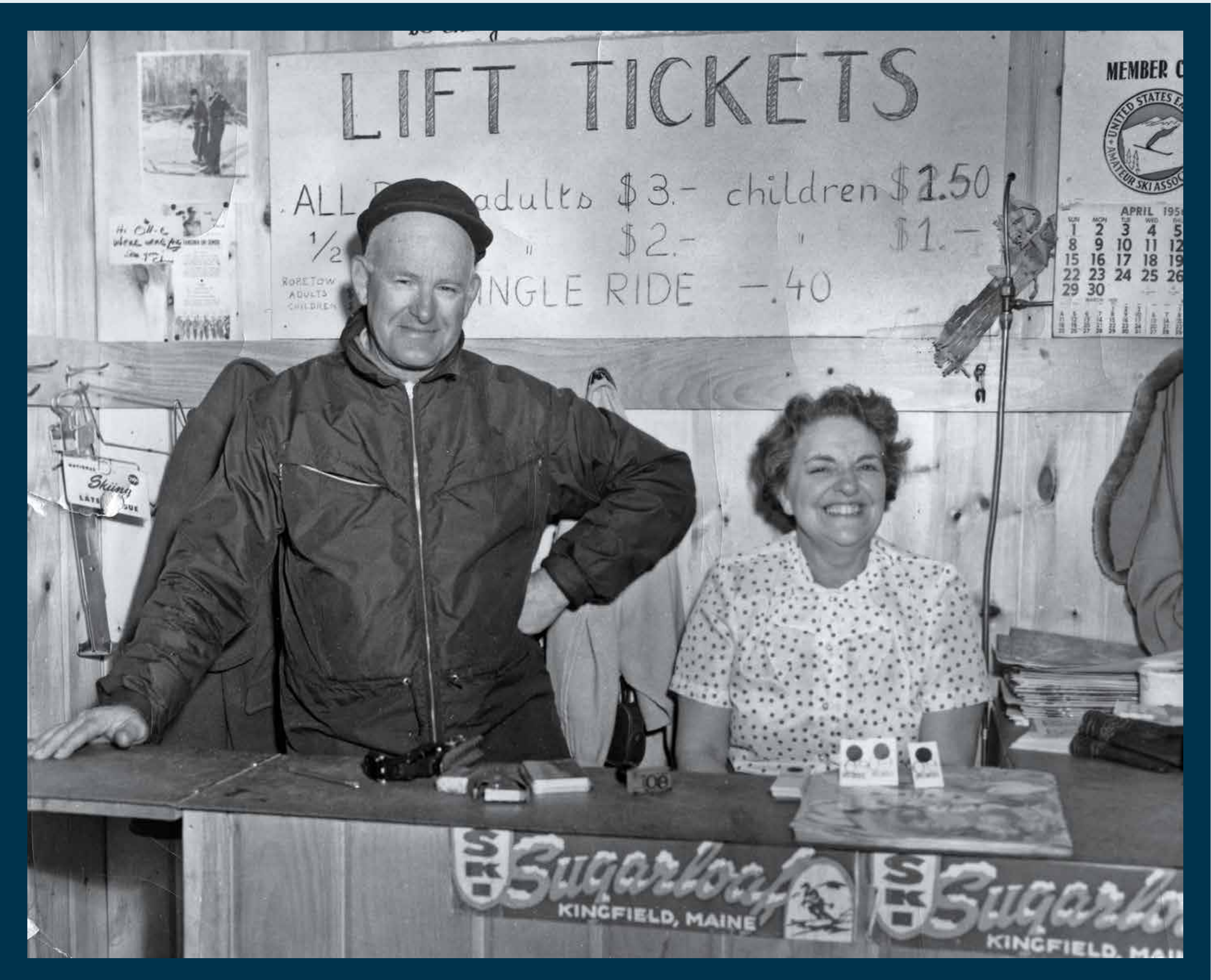
Despite the new competition, Sugarloaf solidified its status as Maine’s premier alpine area with its 1965 installation of a two-stage, four-person Polig-Heckel-Bleichert gondola rising 2, 350 vertical feet to the mountain’s northwest summit ridge. Accompanying the new lift was a massive summit structure housing the mountain station, restaurant, and first aid. The large scale of the Sugarloaf gondola vaulted the area into the front rank of ski areas in the northeast at a time when rope tows, T-bars, and Pomalifts were still common lift types, and double chairlifts were not yet dominant. “That lift might not have gotten a lot of people to the summit,” Robert Bass is remembered as saying after its first year, “but it sure got a lot of people from Boston to Sugarloaf”. That, after all, was the main goal.

Awareness of Sugarloaf widened further when the area hosted the NCAA intercollegiate championships in the winter of 1967, and as Maine planned a bid for the 1976 Winter Olympic Games at the same time. The Sugarloaf-Bigelow area would provide the Olympic alpine venues, but the state bowed out when it became apparent that no new area could be built on Bigelow in time for 1976 Games. However, the 1967 approval of an FIS-sanctioned men’s downhill course on Bigelow served to keep alive visions of a ski resort there that would continue well into the 1970s.



This westerly view from near the top of Sugarloaf’s upper T-bar in 1958 looks toward South Crocker and North Crocker Mountains, with the Crocker Cirque between them. The Appalachian Trail, which at first ran near Sugarloaf’s Tote Road, was relocated in the early 1970s to run over the Crocker summits.

Dick Smith, New England Ski Museum Collection



Amos Winter and his wife Alice man the desk at Sugarloaf in this April 1956 photograph. As the mountain developed, Winter sold his Kingfield store and devoted his full attention to Sugarloaf.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



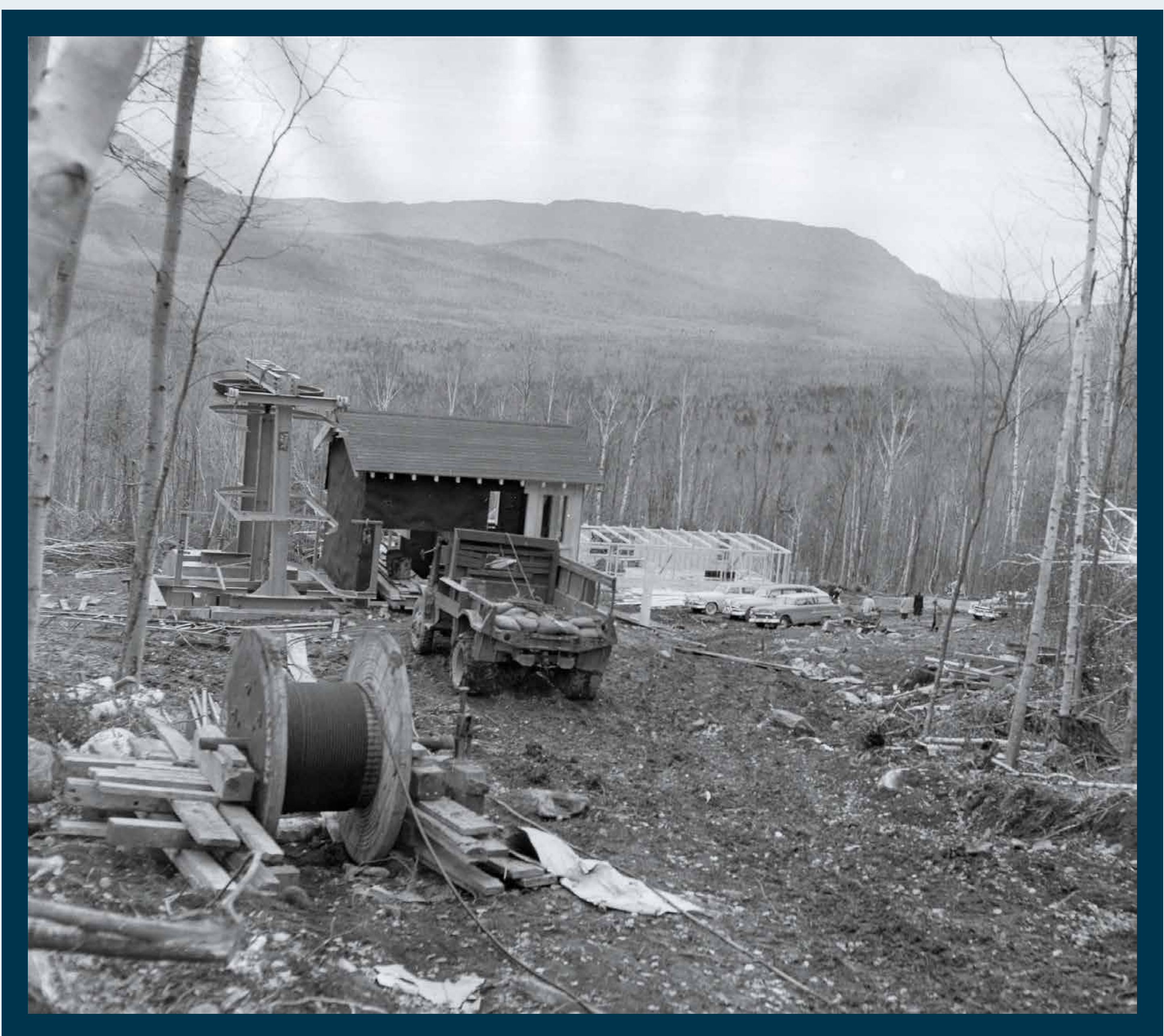
Amos Winter, owner of a general store in Kingfield, would occasionally travel to Tuckerman Ravine in New Hampshire for spring skiing. Seeking closer ski fields, he led a group of high school boys in cutting out a ski trail on Mount Bigelow. When that trail became inaccessible when the Dead River was damned, creating Flagstaff Lake, Winter’s focus shifted to Sugarloaf. As the area took shape under the guidance of the Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club, Winter became its general manager and most outspoken advocate. Here Amos Winter skis in the extensive snowfields of Sugarloaf.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



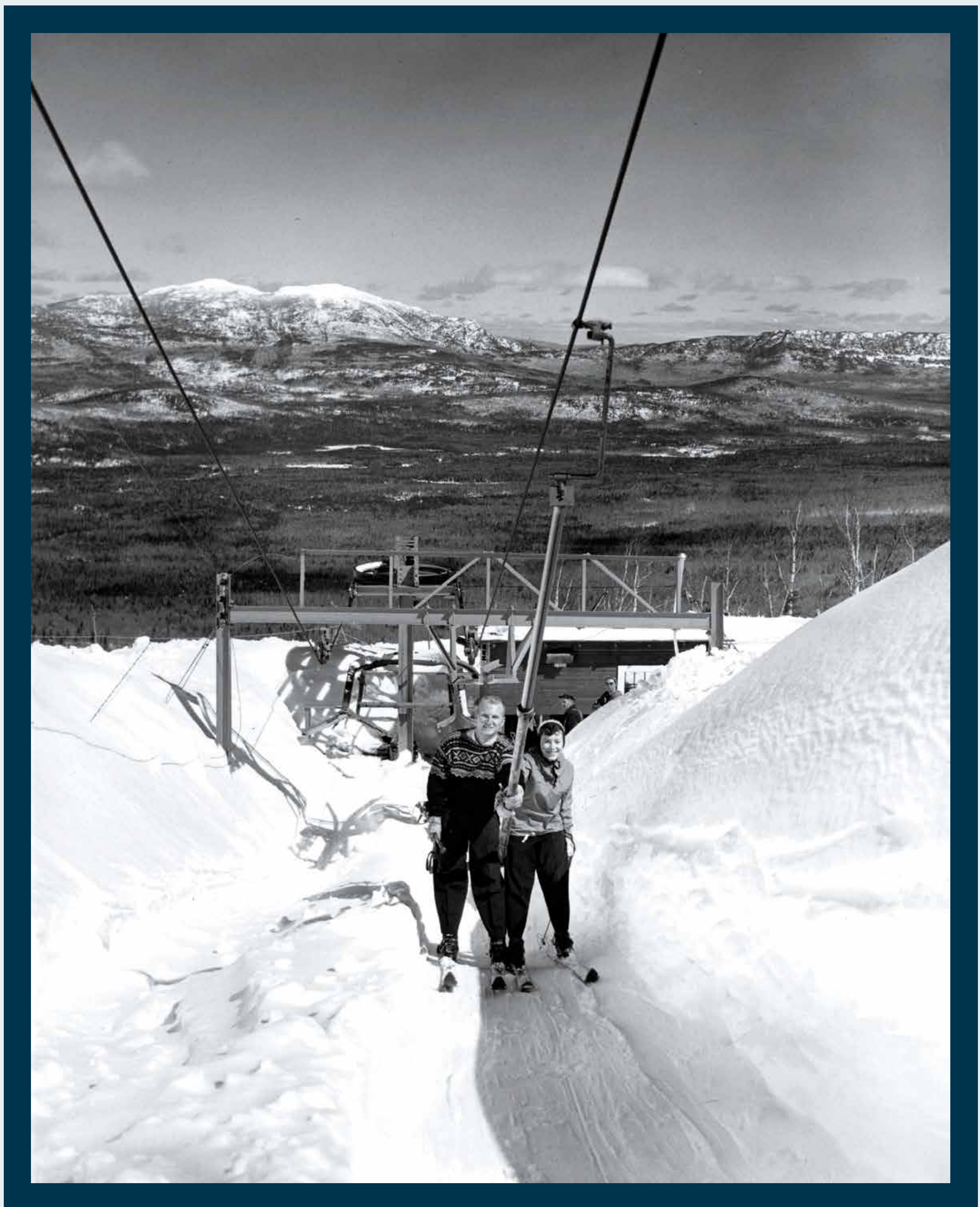
Winter’s Way, the first ski trail on Sugarloaf, was a walk-up situation from the first season of 1951, until the winter of 1954, when a short rope tow on the gentle terrain of the lower mountain became operational. Skiers in those early days recall that making two runs constituted a full day. The Bigelow range forms the background of the photograph. Stub Taylor, left, was one of Amos Winter’s original Bigelow Boys, helped cut Winter’s Way, then became the mountain’s first employee.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



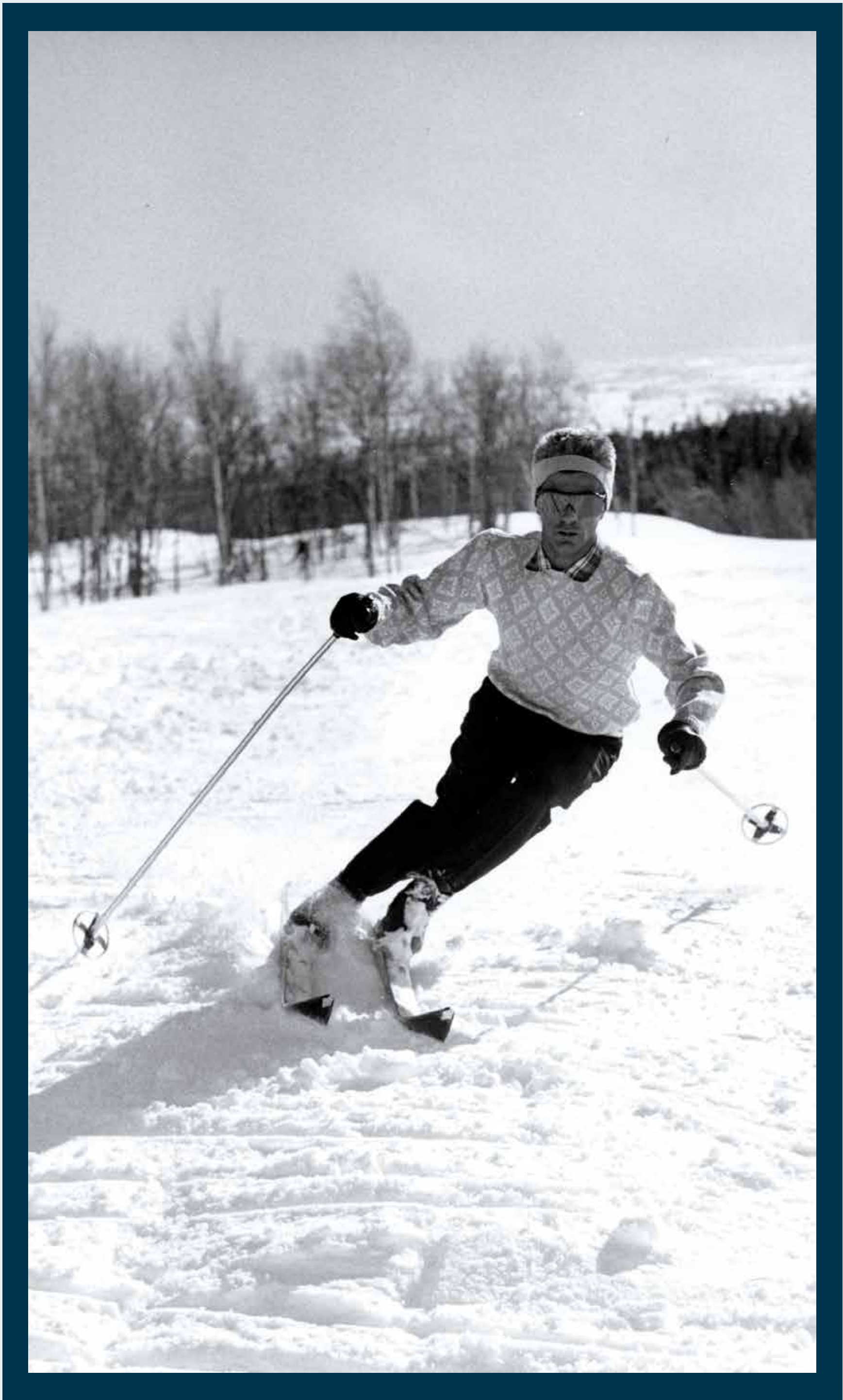
The Sugarloaf Mountain Corporation was formed in March 1955 to finance improvements that the ski club could not. By the winter of 1956 this Constam T-bar was in place, as was the base lodge seen under construction. Narrow Gauge, which would become a celebrated racing trail in years to come, was cut at this time.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



Following a successful 1956 winter in which the Sugarloaf Corporation made some 14% net profit, a second T-bar was built for the winter of 1957. Situated in series with the first tow, the second T-bar would allow skiers to reach the snowfields near timberline. Narrow Gauge was extended to match the new elevation, but the lift did not operate in 1957 due to low snowfall. The winter of 1958, when this photograph of the base of the upper T-bar was taken, was one of the snowiest on record.

Dick Smith, New England Ski Museum Collection



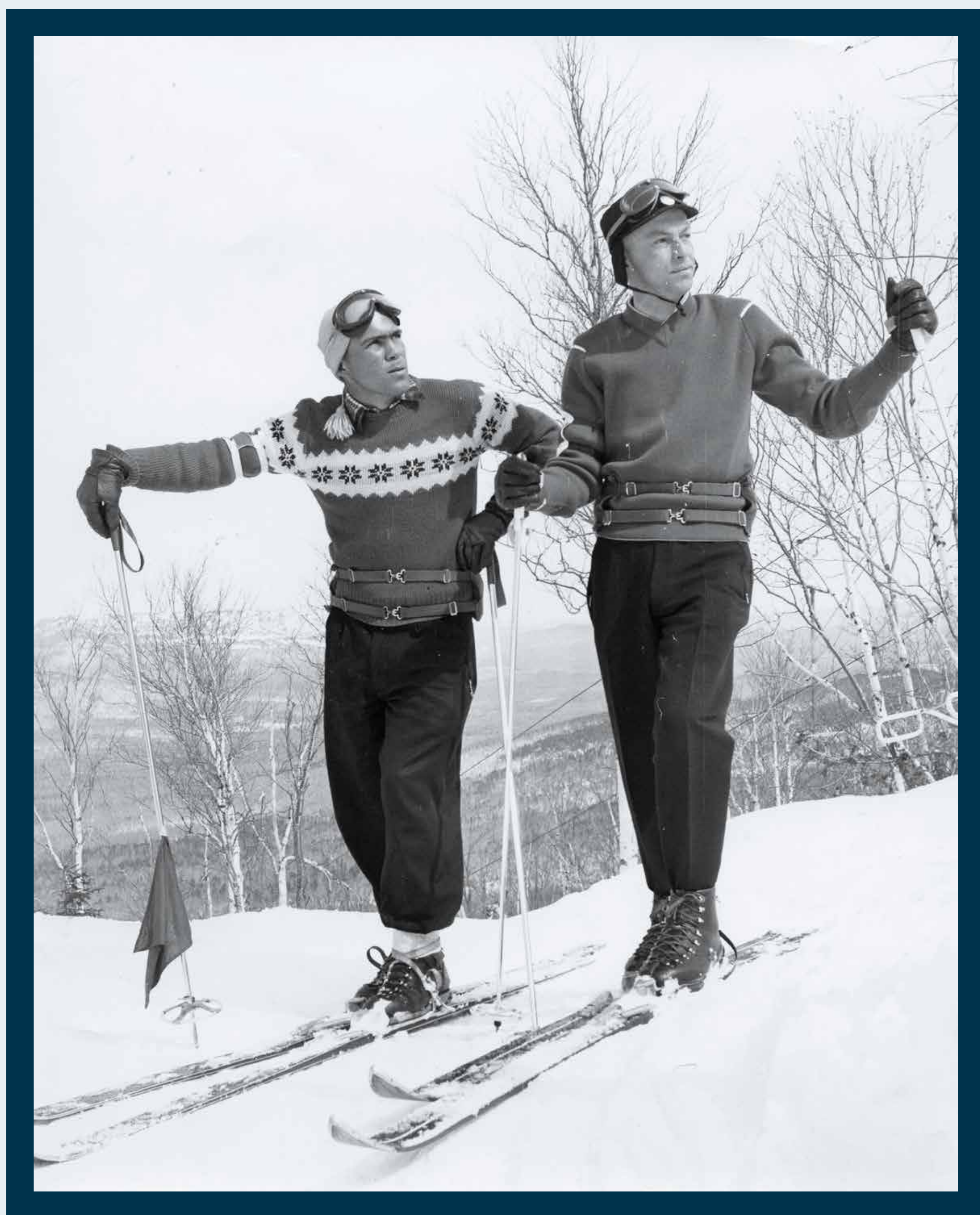
Bill Briggs, who would one day be the first to descend Wyoming's Grand Teton on skis, directed the Sugarloaf Ski School in the winter of 1957. He was succeeded by Austrian Werner Rothbacher, seen here, in the winter of 1958. Rothbacher received a PhD from the University of Vienna before moving to the US. He was Sugarloaf's ski school director until 1966.

Dick Smith, New England Ski Museum Collection



Damon O'Neal, 16, of North Conway, New Hampshire was a rising star in regional skiing when he died of a head injury in a practice downhill run at the US Eastern Amateur Ski Association junior downhill championships at Sugarloaf in March, 1959. The tragedy convinced USEASA to mandate that helmets be worn in all junior downhill competition and practice. Damon O'Neal's memory is kept alive by a scholarship in his hometown.

Courtesy of Roland O'Neal



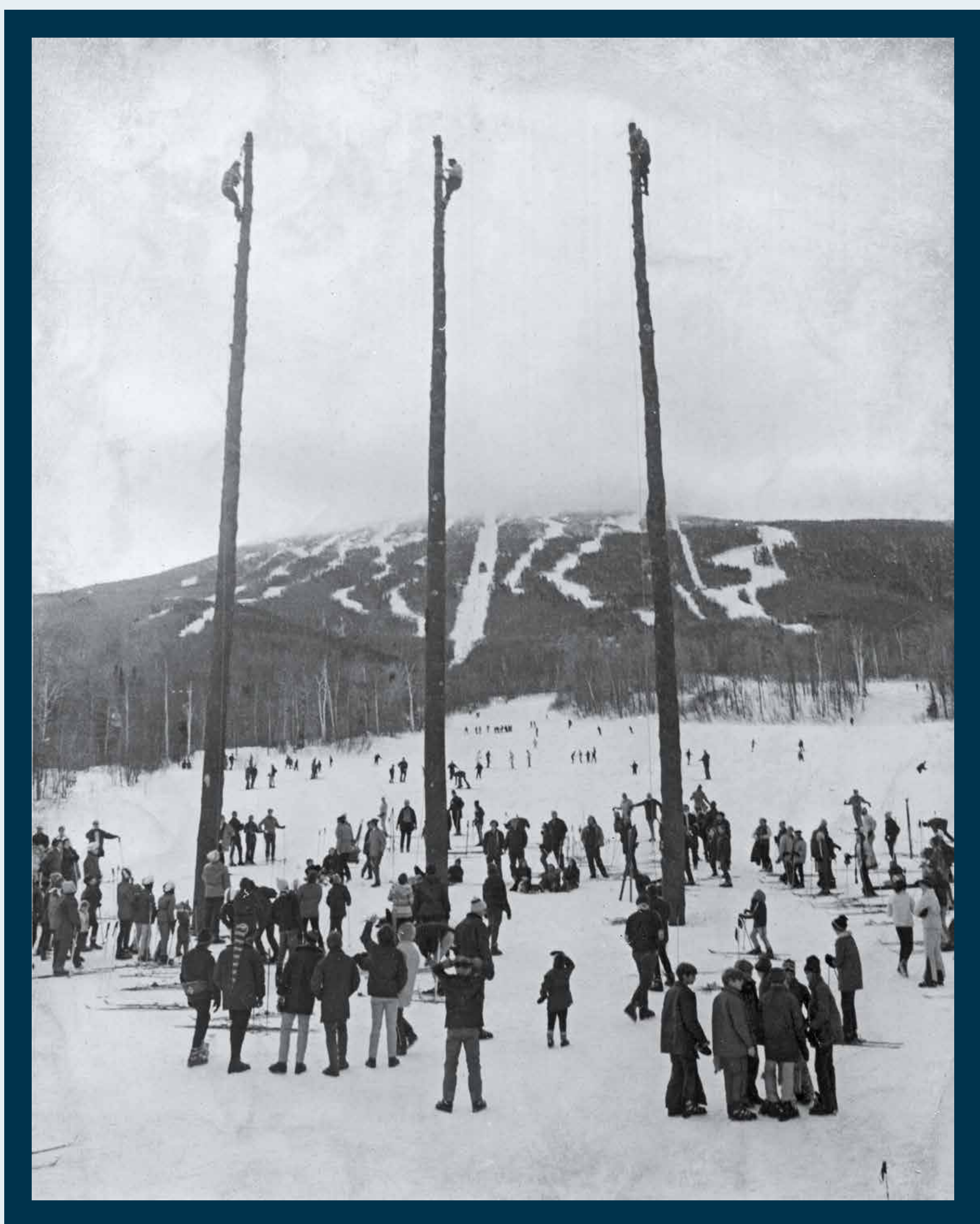
Stub Taylor, left, seen here with fellow patroller Sterling Price, was the mountain's first employee, and stayed with the corporation for his entire career. He led the Sugarloaf ski patrol and was a key figure in summer construction and maintenance until his 1996 retirement.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



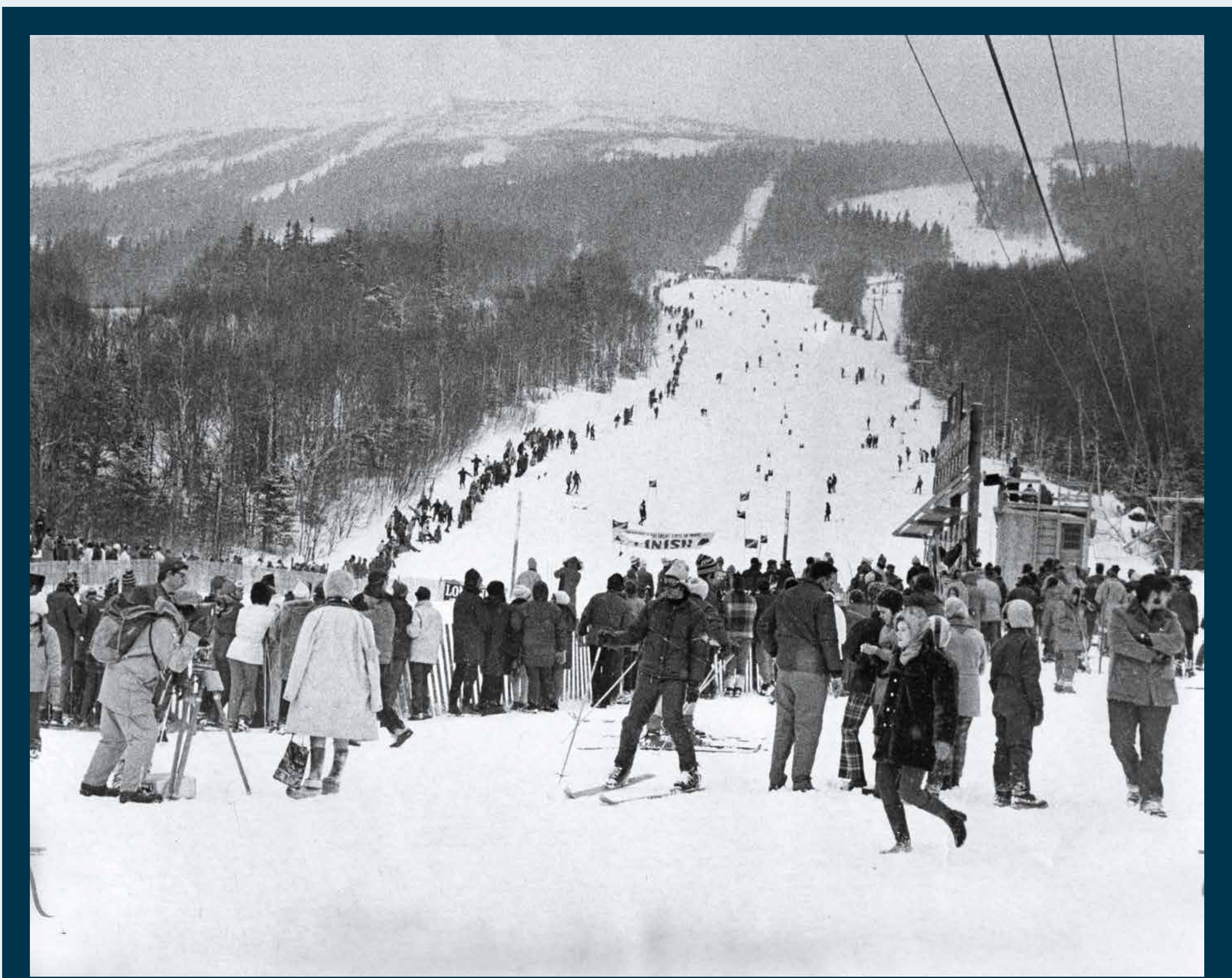
Harry Baxter, shown here with his wife Martha, was recruited by Sugarloaf manager John Christie to run the ski school in 1966. At the time Baxter was running Mount Whittier in West Ossipee, New Hampshire. Baxter built the iconic Sugarloaf sign behind him. When John Christie moved on to Mount Snow, Baxter replaced him as general manager of Sugarloaf, then moved west to Wyoming to work as marketing director at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. Sugarloaf proved to be a good talent incubator for Jackson Hole; Harry Baxter joined Bill Briggs and Chip Carey as former Sugarloaf personalities drawn to the Tetons.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



Sugarloaf debuted on the international ski race scene in February, 1971, as host mountain for a World Cup event. In keeping with the mountain's logging-derived trail names, the race was called the Tall Timber Classic. After two years of preparation, Sugarloaf organizers were confronted with a last-minute request to hold the Arlberg-Kandahar men's and women's downhill at the same time. Due to a lack of snow in Europe, that portion of the A-K, once the most important ski race on the Continent, could not be held. The A-K event was fit into the schedule, and both races were run successfully. The winners of the first A-K downhill to be held outside of Europe were Annemarie Proell and Bernard Russi. In this photograph, the US, Maine and FIS flags are raised on towering tree trunks by climbers using lumberjack skills suggestive of Maine's woodlands heritage.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



This view shows most of the GS course on Narrow Gauge that was used for all events at the Tall Timber Classic. The men's downhill ran from the summit of the mountain, and the other events—women's downhill, men's and women's GS—from the top of the upper T-bar.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



International celebrities of skiing attended the 1971 Tall Timber Classic at Sugarloaf. Shown here is Austrian Karl Schranz, second from left, behind the bar at the Red Stallion with bartender Peter Roy, and Wendy and Ed Rogers, the tavern owners.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club

Ski Area Boom Years: 1960-1974

During the 1960s, at least nine major and mid-sized downhill ski areas opened in Maine. Virtually all were started by community leaders seeking to improve the economics of their regions. In most cases the areas struggled in their early years, but taken as a whole, by the winter of 1970-71, the Maine Department of Economic Development declared that skiing was worth \$10.2 million to the Maine economy.

The advance scout for many of these new areas was Sel Hannah. Sunday River, Saddleback, Rangeley Bald Mountain, and Enchanted Mountain in Jackman were all endorsed by Hannah. Other proposed locations like Old Speck in Grafton Notch, he found to be completely unsuitable.

Hannah's trained eye saw future problems that would-be ski promoters missed. Sunday River's founders initially picked out terrain too steep for 1960s skiers to handle, and Hannah focused their efforts on more appropriate slopes of Locke and Barker Mountains. At Saddleback, he kept upper lift terminals off the windswept tundra above timberline, a temptation that an owner in the 1980s could not resist, bringing environmental controversy in its wake.

The first of the new crop of areas to open was Sunday River Skiways near Bethel, which first ran its T-bar on December 19, 1959. Rangeley Bald Mountain followed in January 1960, while Mount Abram in Locke Mills and Saddleback in Rangeley began operations in December 1960. Lost Valley in Auburn started up in January 1961, and the winter of 1962 saw Mars Hill (now Big Rock) in Aroostook County and Chisholm Ski Park (now Black Mountain of Maine) in Rumford get underway. Squaw Mountain in Greenville opened in December 1963, and Enchanted Mountain in remote Jackman started operations in February 1966.

In a 1969 feasibility report for Sunday River, Sno-engineering stated that southern Maine suffered by comparison with larger ski markets such as Denver because a relatively low 3.5% of its population were skiers. Despite the seemingly robust 10.8% increase in Maine ski area sales from 1960 through 1968, other resorts like Vail and Snowmass were growing much faster. In addition to the lower skier population in Maine, with the exception of Sugarloaf, most ski visits to Maine areas were by day skiers, not overnight visitors.

Maine resorts generally thrived in the 1960s, once they were past the notably poor snow conditions of 1963-64. Some resorts moved from T-bars and Pomalifts to aerial lifts, and seven were spread around the state in 1969. Lengthy chairlifts that opened access to significant vertical drops appeared on Saddleback in 1963, Enchanted Mountain in 1966, Squaw Mountain in 1968, and Sunday River in 1972.

Construction of large-vertical chairlifts and accompanying trails to match the scale of the larger Maine mountains did not assure that skier visits would follow. Suffering after two winters in which snowfall was subpar, Saddleback was sold by its original investors in 1965 to a pair of developers who quickly sold again to the Gannett Publishing Company. In the summer of 1972 it was sold again, this time to John Christie, erstwhile Sugarloaf and Mount Snow general manager. Several months later Sunday River shareholders voted to accept a bid from the Sherburne Corporation, owner of Killington.

The new owners of both Sunday River and Saddleback had expansive plans, but had no way of knowing that the favorable conditions for ski area construction of the 1960s were on the verge of a downturn that would make resort development considerably more challenging due to a series of poor snow years, high interest rates, and increasing environmental consciousness and regulation.



Sel Hannah traveled to Rangeley in early April 1958 to survey two separate mountains to determine their suitability for ski development. Hannah was guided on his trip to Saddleback Mountain by Rangeley town manager Oscar Riddle, seen here on that expedition. They found evidence of high winds above 3,800 feet, and Hannah advised keeping the upper lift terminal below that elevation. Nevertheless he gave a positive report, while cautioning that the project would need to be very well capitalized.

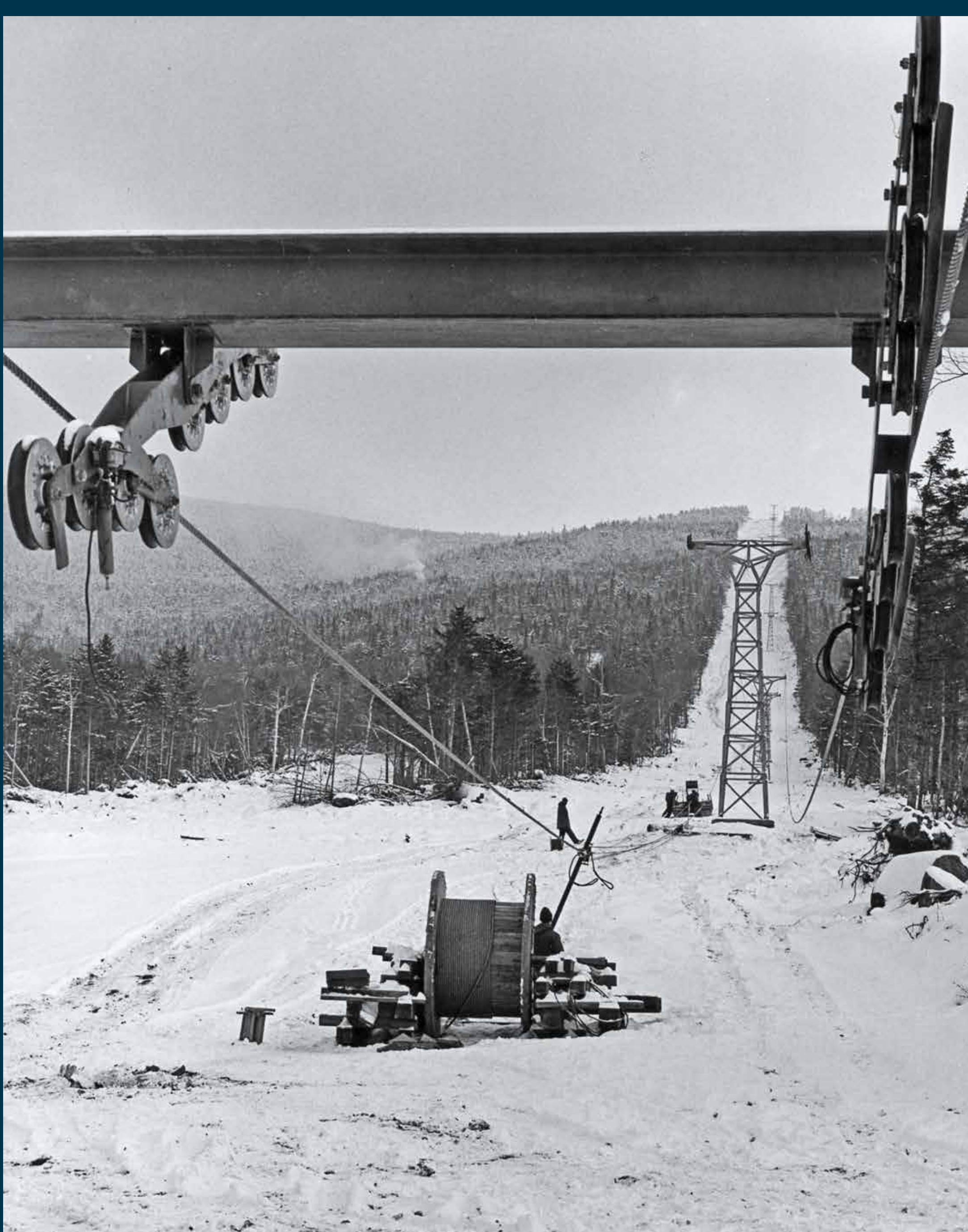
At the same time, Hannah looked over Bald Mountain in Oquossoc near Rangeley, and reported that a much smaller, community area could be built there. Rangeley Bald Mountain was developed in 1960, but did not operate for much longer than a decade.

New England Ski Museum Collection



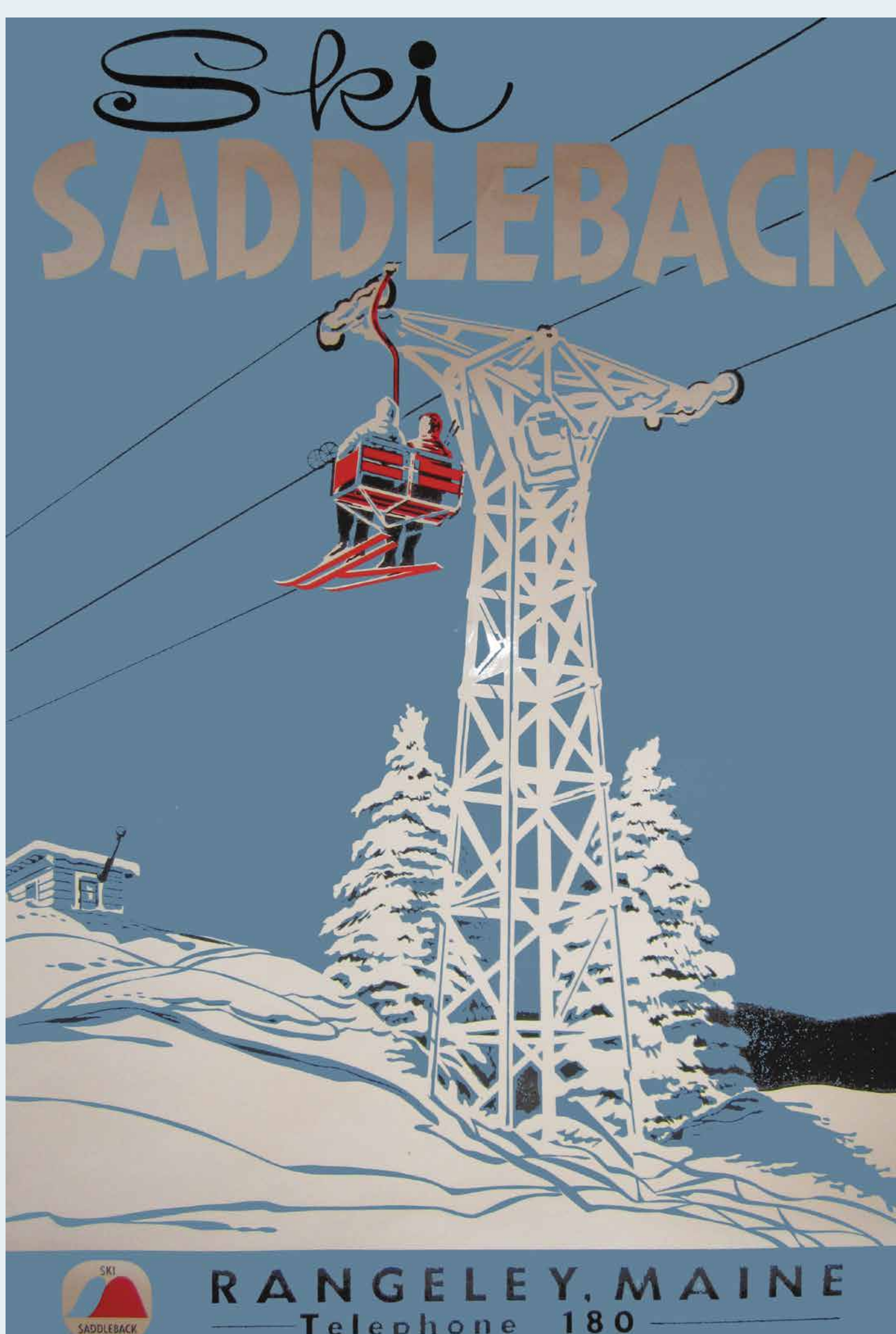
This aerial photograph depicts Saddleback in the summer of 1970. The Rangeley double chair is the lifeline on the left. Future expansion of the area would occur to the left of that line. One large expense that Saddleback shared with other Maine areas was the cost of building a four to five mile access road. Vermont ski areas built in the 1960s benefited from a state appropriation of highway funds to build ski area access roads, but Maine ski resort owners had no comparable state assistance.

Courtesy of Saddleback Mountain



Saddleback was developed by the Rangeley Saddleback Corporation, with a board of directors drawn from the summer resort town of Rangeley, "long known as the Half-way spot to the North Pole". Stock was offered beginning in the summer of 1958, and the mountain opened officially on January 24, 1961 with two T-bars. In the summer of 1963, this Mueller chairlift was constructed. Named the Rangeley chair, the lift was the longest in the state at 4,600 feet, with a vertical drop of 1,200. The Rangeley double was a substantial undertaking, and after it was complete the management realized that additional towers were needed to stabilize the line. The lift did not operate more than a handful of days in the winter of 1964 due to poor snow conditions.

Courtesy of Saddleback Mountain



Suffering from the effects of the snow drought of 1964 and the expense of the Rangeley double chair, Saddleback was sold in 1965. New owners J. Richard Arnzen and the Guy Gannett Publishing Company named long-time ski instructor Roger Page as general manager, and embarked on a construction program of their own. Page taught skiing at Mount Mansfield and Sugarloaf before Saddleback, and he was instrumental in designing the trail layout of the mountain. This photograph shows the construction of a new base lodge in the summer of 1967.

New England Ski Museum Collection

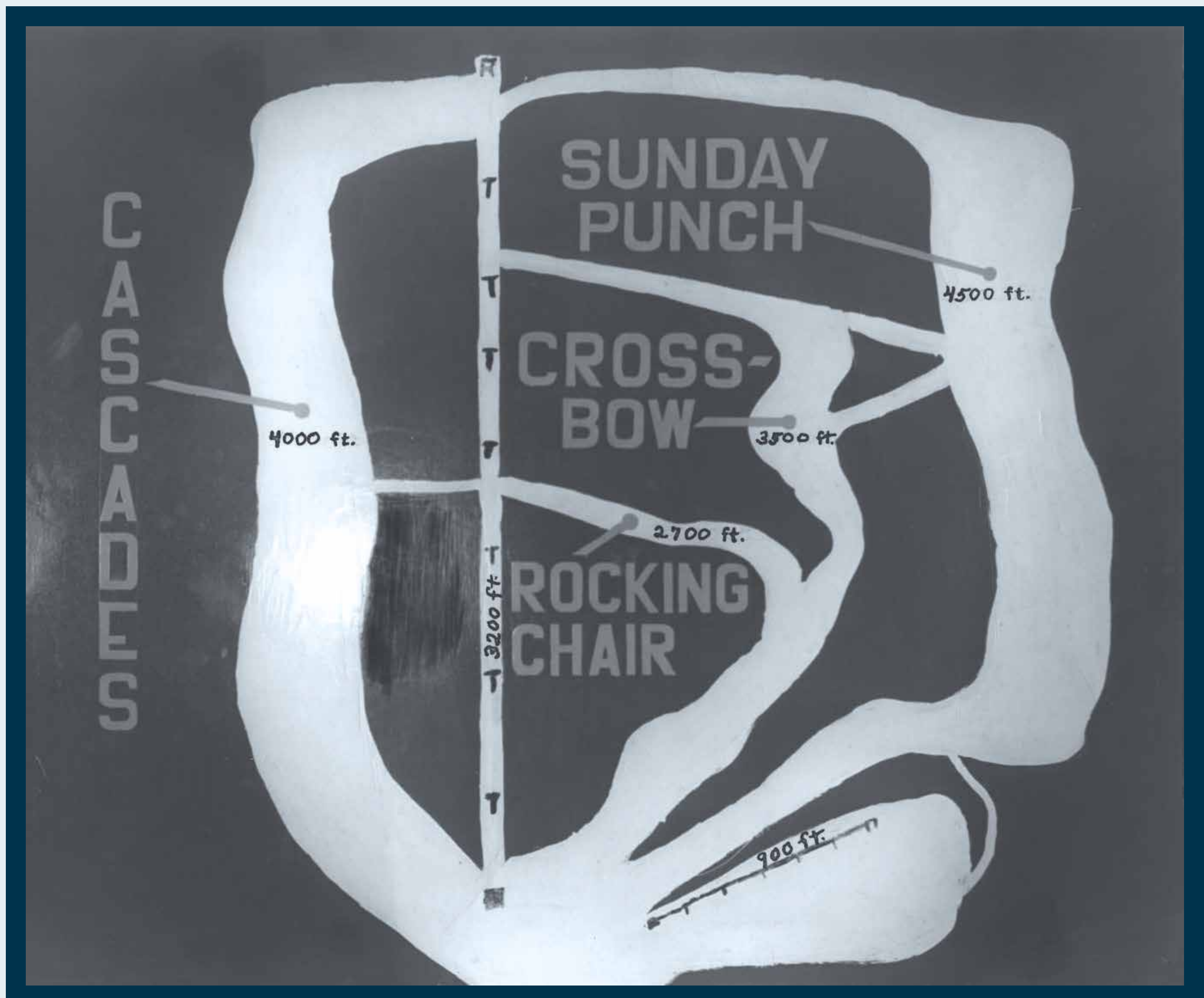


John Christie, general manager at Sugarloaf from 1962 to 1968 and at Mount Snow until the summer of 1972, purchased Saddleback from the Gannett Publishing Company in 1972. His Big Rangeley Corporation's board of directors included Walt Schoenknecht, his erstwhile boss at Mount Snow, Doc DesRoches, president of the ski industry trade group SIA, and Maine outdoorsperson Bud Leavitt. Christie's company owned the ski area through the end of 1975, during three very difficult ski seasons due to rising energy costs caused by an embargo on Mideast oil and scant snowfall in the Northeast. John Christie had perhaps the highest profile of any ski industry figure in Maine and his comments appeared frequently in the ski press. In this photograph he is shown with Saddleback's manager Dick Frost.

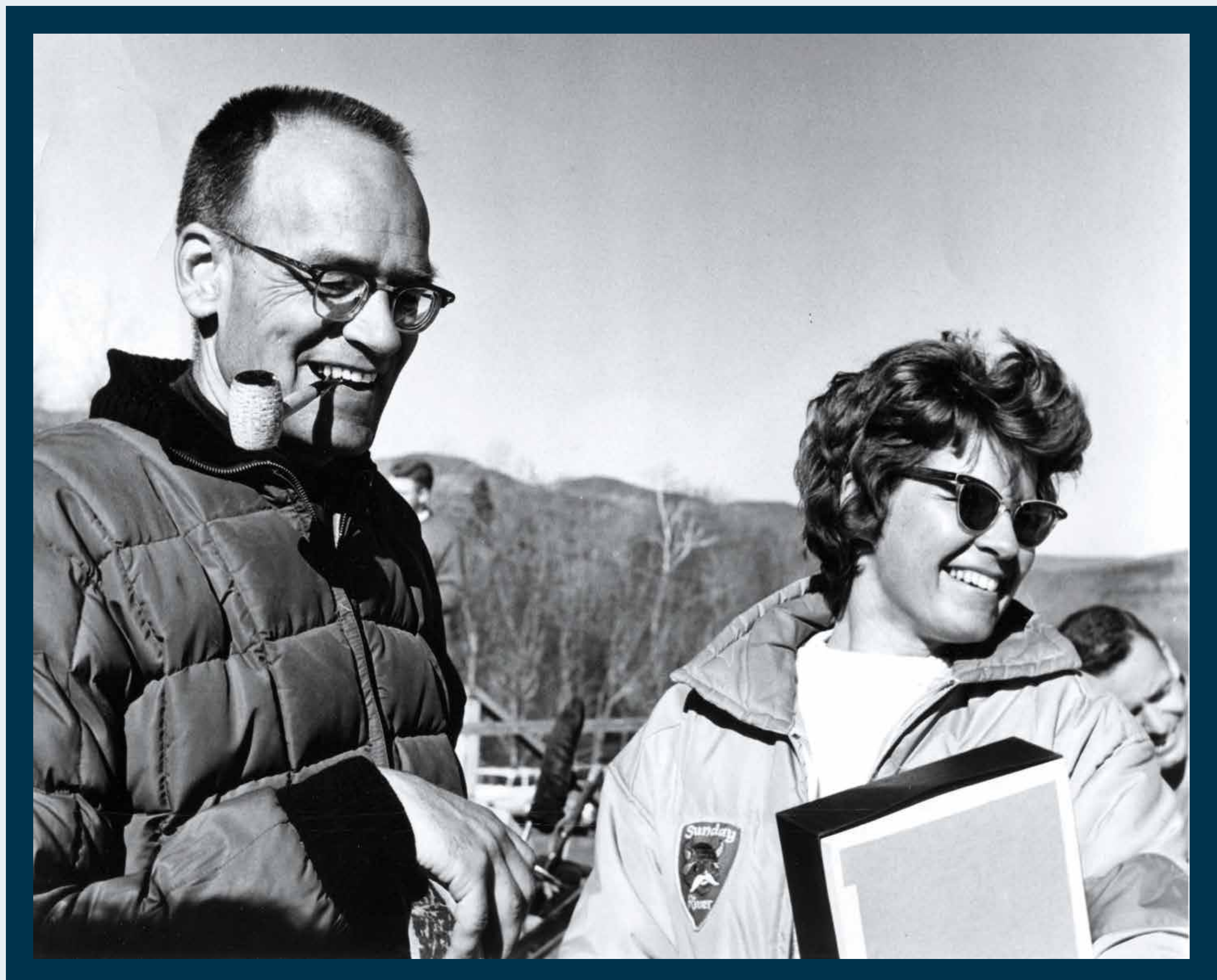
Courtesy of Saddleback Mountain

Sunday River

Sunday River Skiways opened with its first T-bar on December 19, 1959. Much larger chair lifts opened access to significant vertical drops in 1972, the same year that Sunday River shareholders voted to accept a bid from the Sherburne Corporation, owner of Killington in Vermont, to purchase the ski area. In 2020, Sunday River operates 18 lifts, providing access to 135 trails and glades.

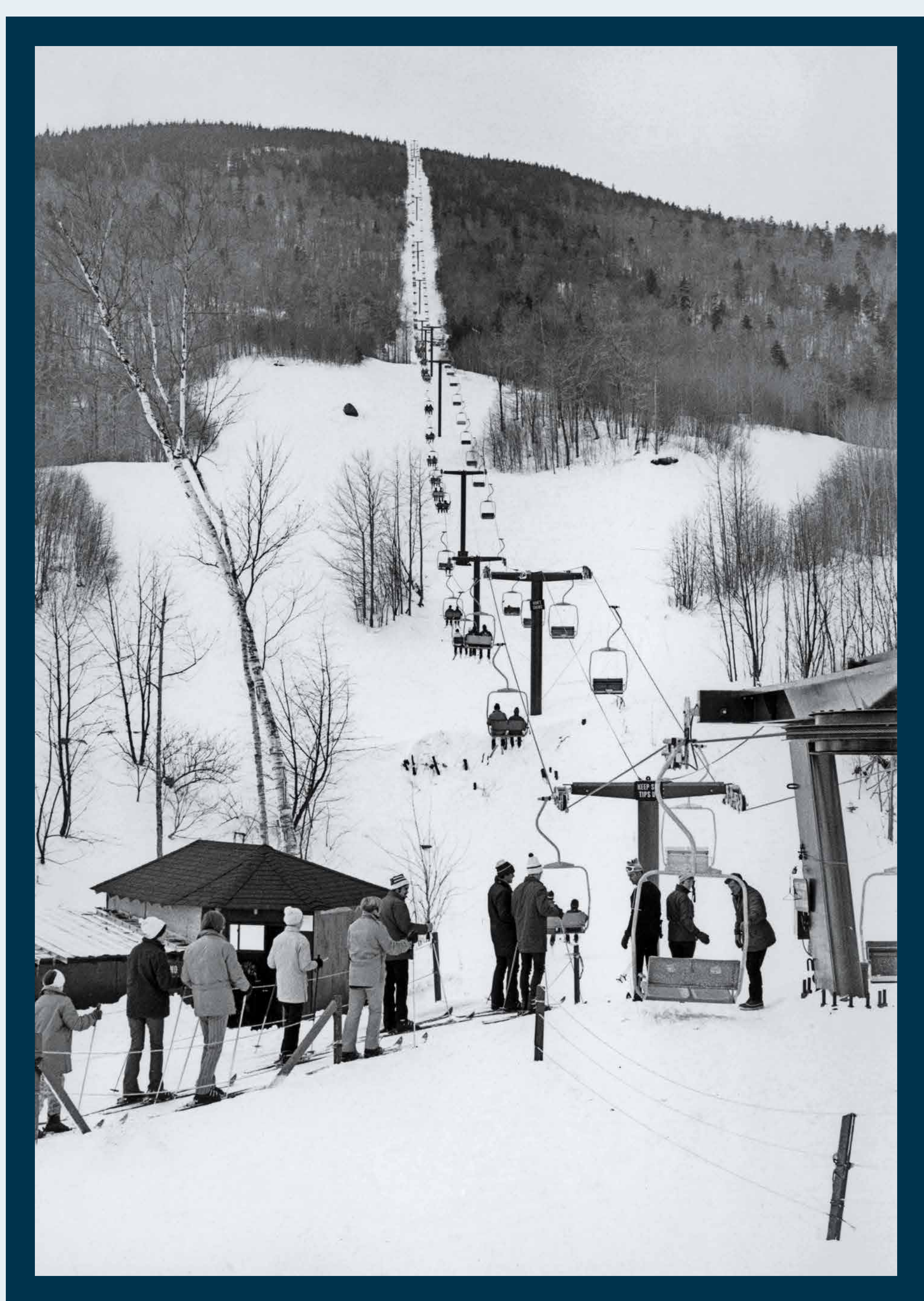


Early Sunday River trail map.
Courtesy of Wende Gray



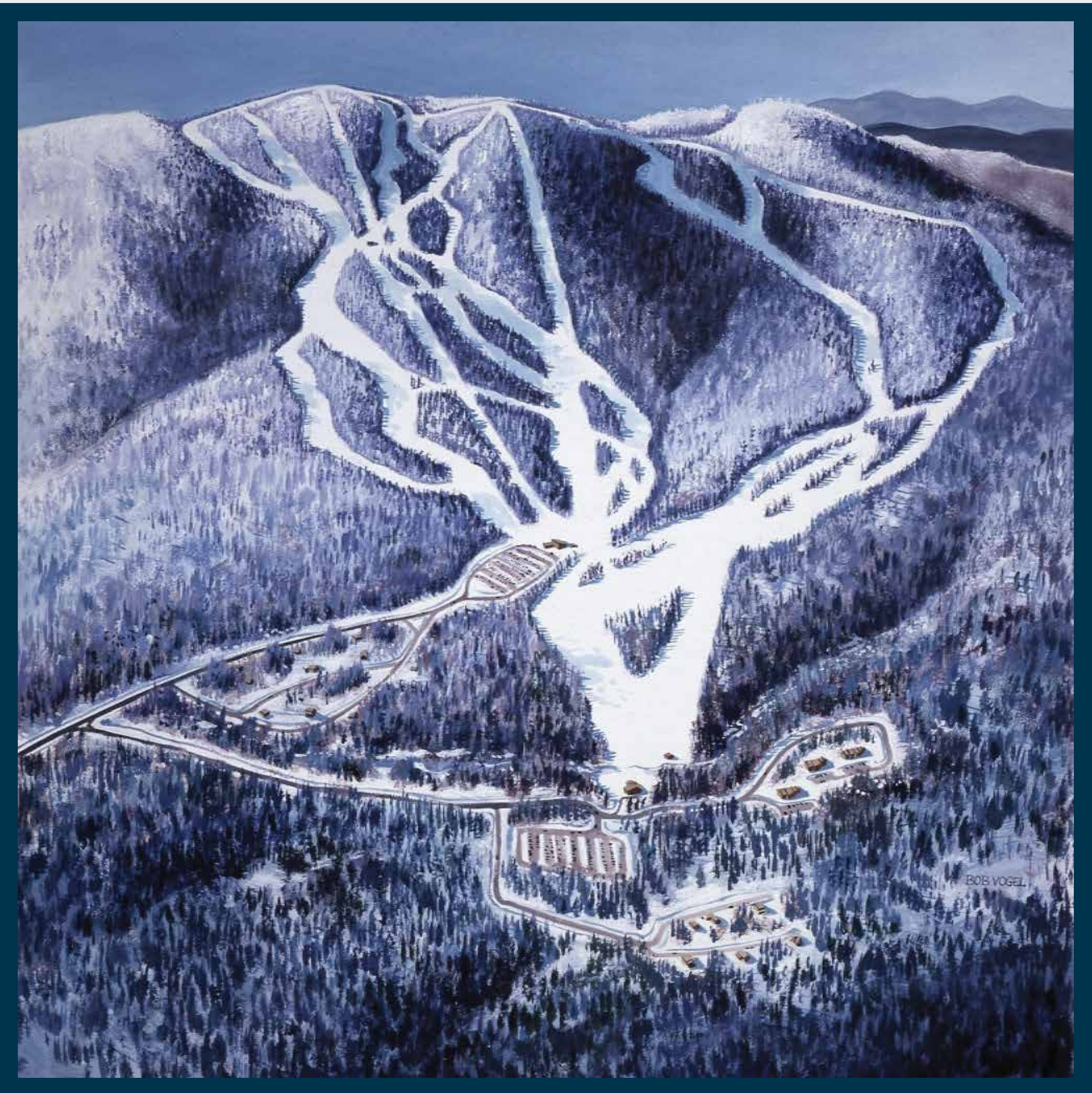
Murray "Mike" Thurston, shown here with his wife Connie, was one of the group of Bethel businessmen who formed the Sunday River Skiway Corporation in April 1958. A conversation at a chamber of commerce meeting early that year led to an exploratory trip up Barker Mountain in February, and a positive survey from Sel Hannah. Paul Kailey, ski coach at Gould Academy in Bethel, took skis on the February scouting trip, and became the first skier of record at the site of Sunday River. Mike Thurston was a central figure in the ski area's first decade, serving as vice president and president.

Courtesy of David Irons



Sunday River operated without a chairlift during the 1960s, at a time when Saddleback, Sugarloaf and Squaw all installed major aerial lifts. When they did contract for a chairlift in 1971, it was with a company new to the ski industry, Pullman-Berry, well-known for its Pullman railway cars. Favorable financing terms with no money down helped the mountain select the new lift builder, and when the lift was completed for the winter of 1972, there were problems. The upper bullwheel developed a pronounced tilt, according to Dave Irons, ski patrol director at the time, and had to be closed for repair. "For a while we wished they had stayed in the railroad business," wrote Mike Thurston of the Pullman-Berry chairlift, "but it eventually worked out." The chairlift installation would be the last effort of the original board of directors, and in October 1972 Sunday River was sold to Sherburne Corporation, owner of Killington.

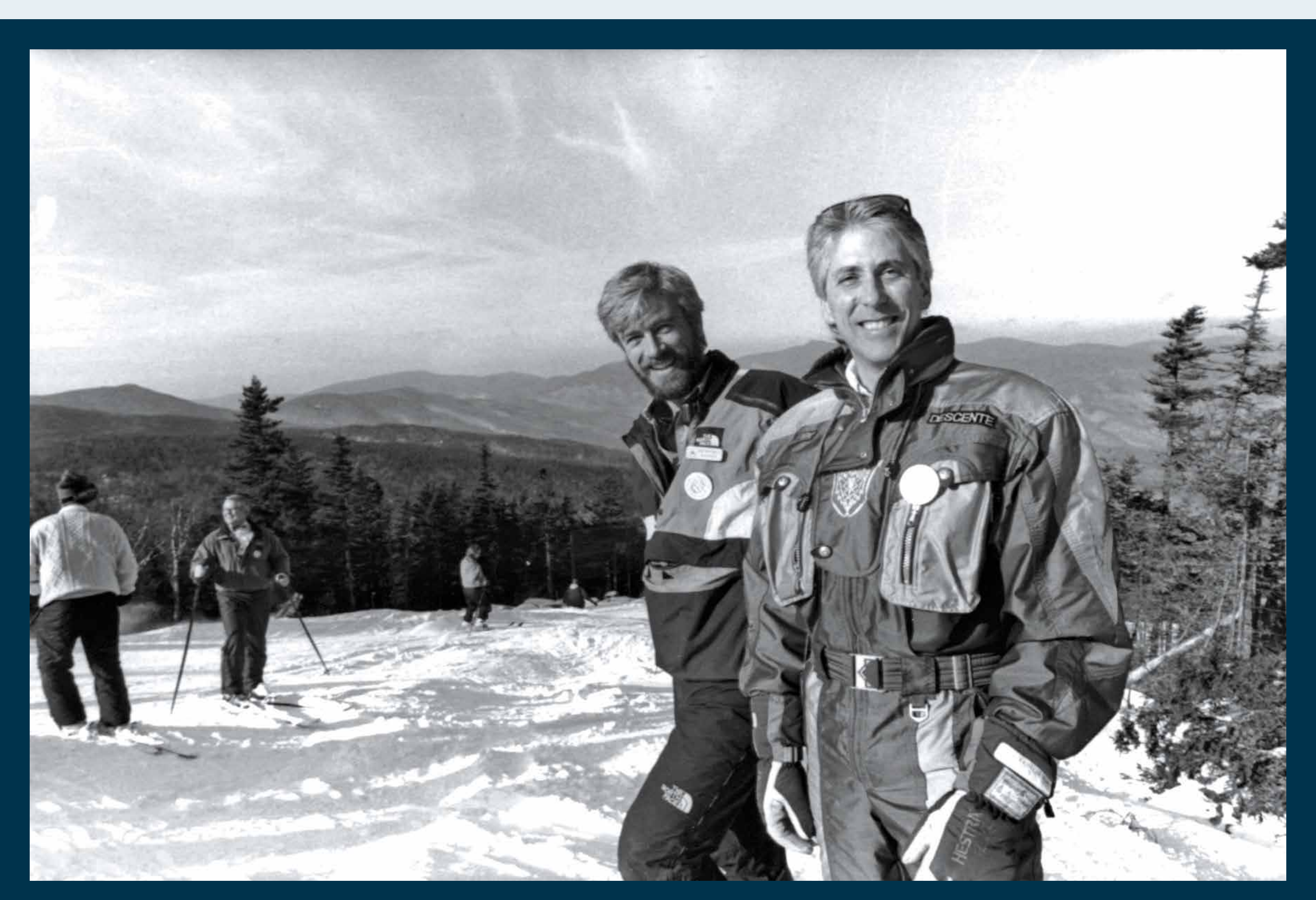
Courtesy of Sunday River



Sunday River, 1978.
Courtesy of Wende Gray



The original base area of Sunday River is shown here as it was in the early to mid-1960s. The T-bar in the photograph was the first tow to be installed. It was joined by a second, upper T-bar known as T-2 in the summer of 1961, and a third beginner's T-bar in the Mixing Bowl in the summer of 1963. Paul and Jean Kailey operated a ski shop in the basement of the base lodge in the first winter, 1960, then built the Sun Ri Ski Shop, shown in the lower right here.
Courtesy of Sunday River



Killington's purchase of Sunday River in the fall of 1972 brought Les Otten to the area, first as assistant manager, then manager in 1974. Otten's most important move in the 1970s was the installation of top to bottom snowmaking, and the focused concentration on snow quality that slowly built Sunday River's reputation for excellent snow during the decade. Under Sherburne's ownership Otten and his team struggled with high interest rates, inability to hire year-round staff and the resulting loss of expertise, and high energy costs. Hoping to call attention to its snowmaking ability in the "no-snow" winter of 1980, Otten arranged for 10 tons of manmade snow to be trucked from Bethel and dumped on the Boston Common. The guerrilla marketing stunt received press coverage all over New England. The gloomy winter of 1980 would be the last of Sherburne's ownership of Sunday River. With a loss of \$250,000 on 32,000 skier visits, the parent company decided to sell the area to Les Otten, who would build it visitation number to over half a million per year by 1992.
Courtesy of Dave Irons

Struggles of the Seventies

While the decade of the 1960s saw the blossoming of alpine ski areas throughout Maine, the 1970s brought the harsher reality of sustaining those operations in an environment that had changed rapidly since the areas were first planned. Twin energy crises struck the nation at the start and the end of the decade, spiking gasoline prices and raising the possibility of rationing. The gasoline price shocks coincided with several winters of disastrously deficient snowfall in the northeast. Environmental regulations were introduced in the form of the Maine Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) and the federal Environmental Protection Act. The prime interest rate began to climb from 10% in 1974 to a ruinous high of 21.5% in 1980. Taken together, these factors constituted strong headwinds for Maine ski areas, and some did not survive the decade.

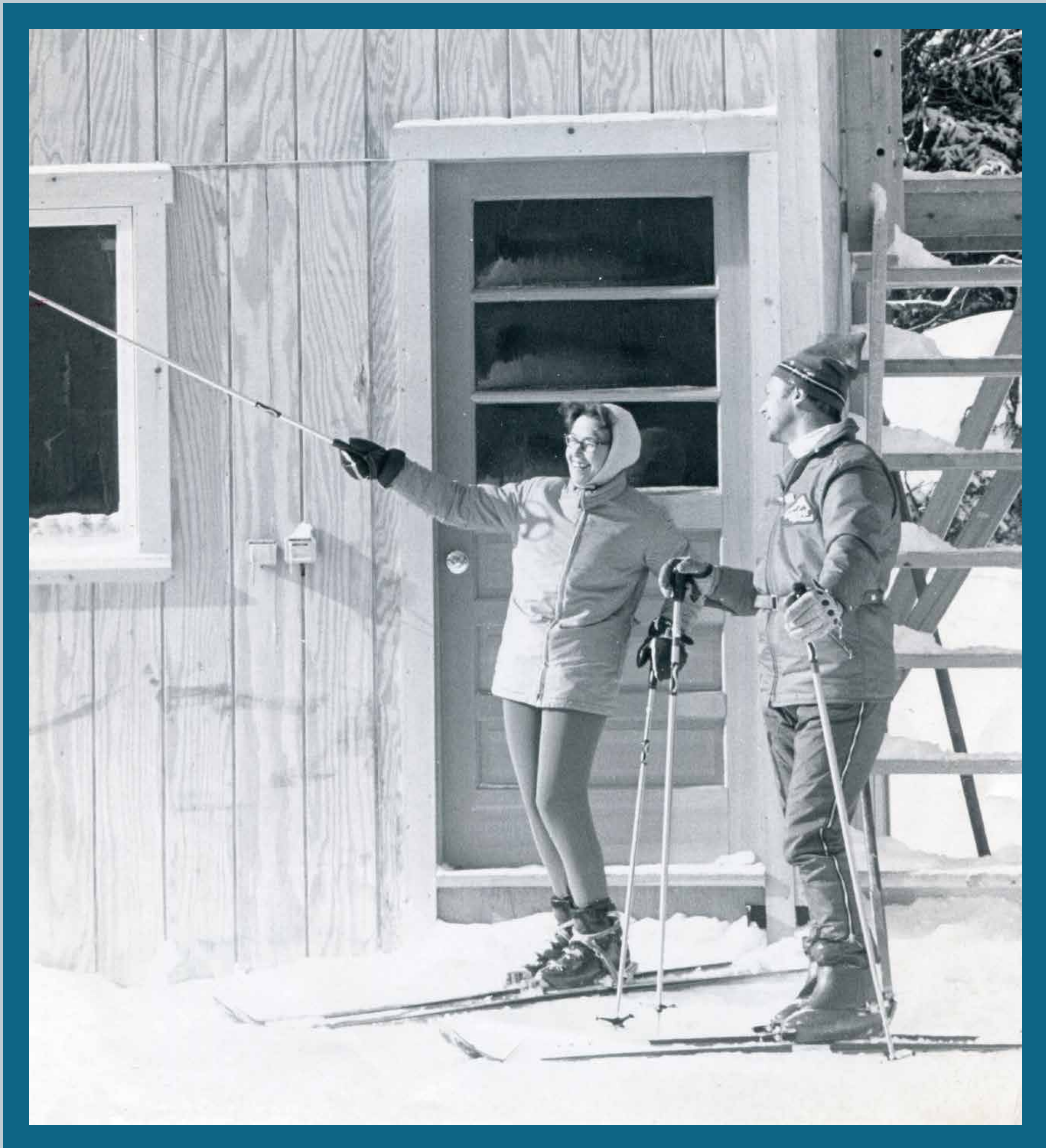
Enchanted Mountain, which was challenged by its remote location and lack of accommodations since its 1966 opening, closed in the winter of 1974. Bald Mountain in Dedham shut down, and its lifts were installed at the Camden Snow Bowl in 1974. Evergreen Valley in Stoneham, under development with elaborate aspirations, opened in 1973 only to close down in 1975.

Snowmaking, developed in southern New England, made inroads into Maine in the 1970s as snowfall became less reliable. Saddleback had a small slope covered with snowmaking that allowed it to capture a ski camp from Sugarloaf during the holiday season of 1972. Sunday River put in top-to-bottom snowmaking for the winter of 1975, and boasted a 166-day season that year. For the next few years, Sunday River could routinely open from two to five weeks earlier than their competitors. Sunday River's snowmaking covered its 1,500-foot vertical drop on one trail, and was an impressive enhancement when most Maine and New Hampshire areas depended almost completely on natural snow.

Along with snowmaking came the need for snow grooming, and several Maine areas and individuals were in the forefront of slope grooming technology. Don, Stuart and Norton Cross, Bethel brothers with a background in logging, opened Mount Abram in 1960, and turned their expertise in machinery operation to grooming the area with a Tucker Snow-cat and homemade implements. In the 1960s, Mount Abram became known for its manicured slopes in a way that its nearest competitor, Sunday River, was not.

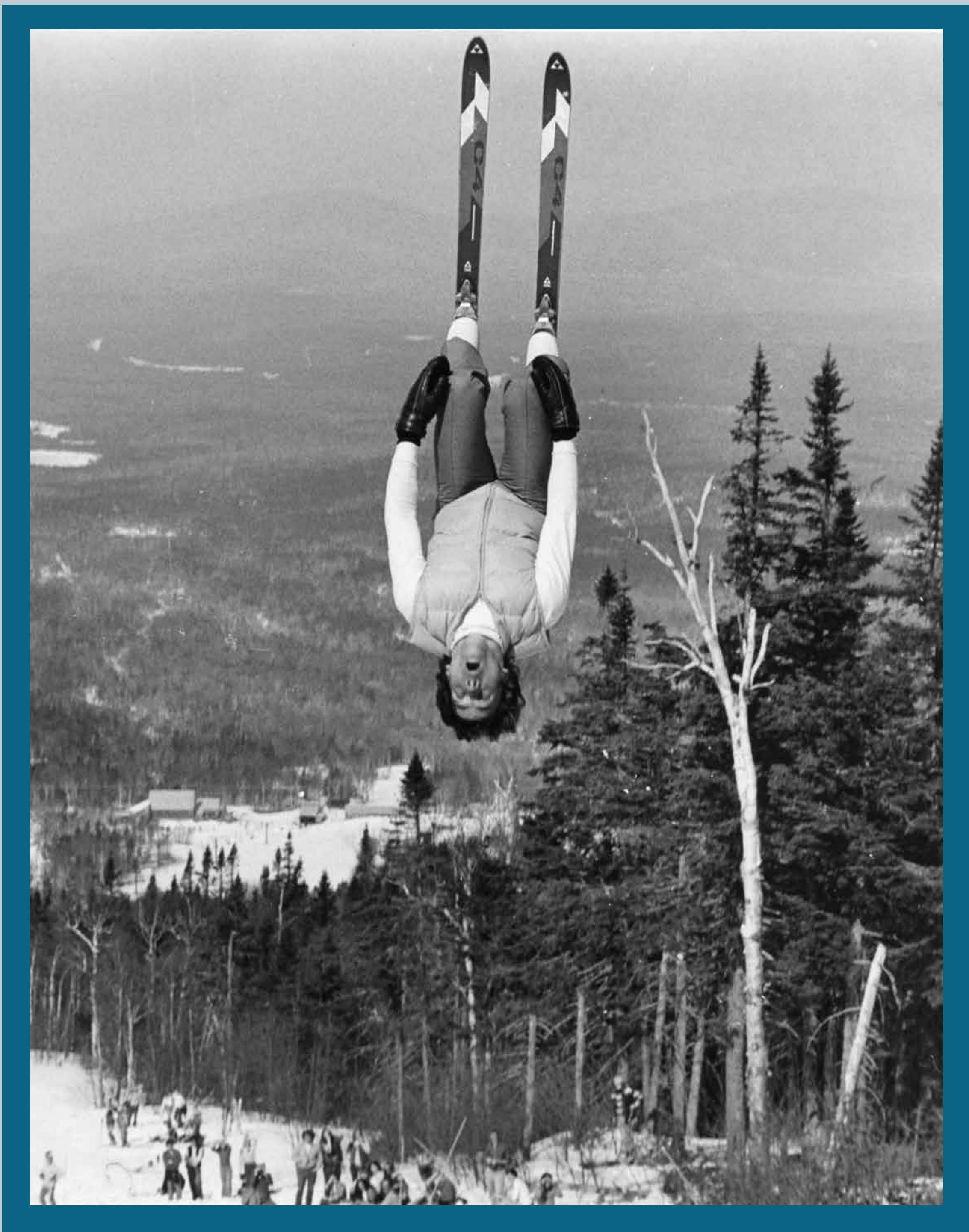
The first snowmaking system in Maine was put together at Lost Valley in Auburn, where an apple grower with a degree in agricultural engineering, Otto Wallingford, built a system of his own in 1962. He designed snowmaking enhancements such as an air dryer, fan guns, and guns mounted high over the snow surface on light poles. His greater contribution came in the area of slope grooming. Wallingford was the inventor of the Powdermaker roller and a co-founder of Valley Engineering, which built other important implements, as well as the tractor-mounted U-blade and the hydraulic systems to control it.

As skiing matured as an economic segment as well as a sport, employers operating ski-related businesses increasingly sought to hire people with a skiing background. Two Maine natives, coach Tom Reynolds and retired Ski Industries America executive director Ralph "Doc" Des Roches, collaborated in the early 1980s to create a certificate program in ski industry studies at the University of Maine in Farmington (UMF) that graduated students who can be found in most aspects of the ski industry to the present day. The program combined training and internships in ski coaching and instruction with business principles derived from Desroches' background in ski equipment and apparel firms. For most of three decades until its discontinuation in 2009, the distinctive Maine ski industries program led to solid careers in skiing for scores of disciplined, highly-trained graduates all over the world.



Jean Luce, seen here with Sugarloaf ski school director Harry Baxter, was a key figure in the evolution of freestyle skiing from random ski antics performed by a few kids and pranksters to an Olympic sport. A member of the USEASA junior competition committee, Luce modified the Junior Masters style contests first organized in 1966 by Peter Pinkham's group centered around North Conway with concepts imported from existing rules governing skating and Nordic jumping. Her key contribution was the division of freestyle into three disciplines, ballet, moguls and aerials. Sugarloaf became a center of the developing freestyle movement, as the 1967 State of Maine Masters Championships evolved into the Maine Freestyle Championships.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



Saddleback had a freestyle program based on the Masters style events. Here, George Frost performs a double back flip then called "the Frost Flop" in a freestyle event at Saddleback in the 1970s.

Courtesy of Saddleback Mountain

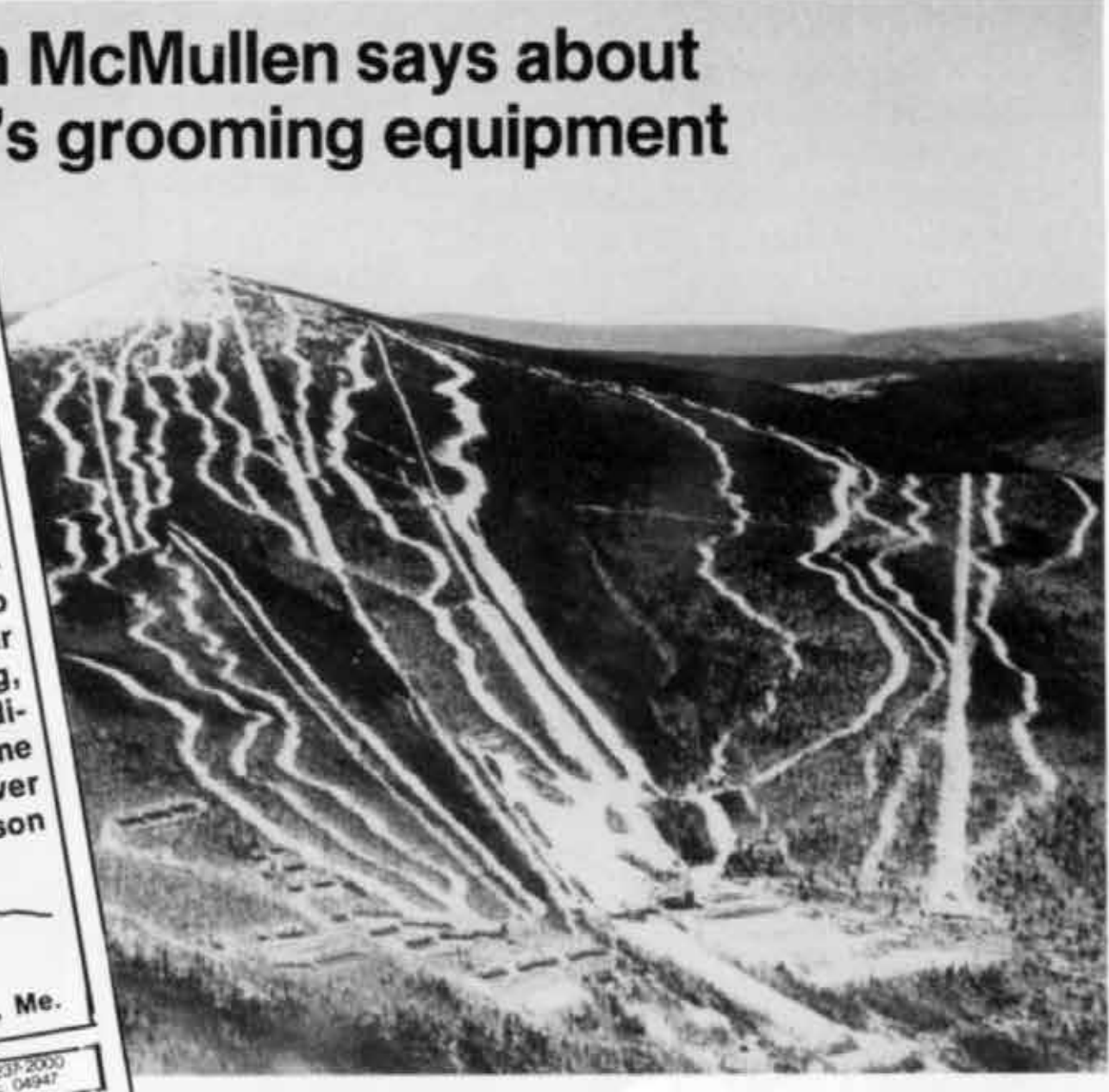



Rudi Wyrsh, seen here at Pleasant Mountain performing his characteristic stilt skiing, was involved in teaching and coaching throughout New England in the 1960s and 1970s. He and Herman Goellner put on trick skiing performances at Sugarloaf in 1965, feeding the aspirations of race program youths for the fun and tricks that would become freestyle. Pleasant Mountain was the home of a significant freestyle program in the 1970s under Wyrsh and his successor Bruce Cole.
Dick Smith photo, New England Ski Museum Collection



Powdermaker, circa 1968, created by Otto Wallingford
 To improve snow conditions, Otto Wallingford wanted a way to pulverize the hard pack to a softer, more skiable surface. He called on his background as an agricultural engineer and came up with the idea of a giant roller of spandex steel and hauled it up the slopes. The “Powdermaker” was born. The invention led to the formation of Valley Engineering in 1969 and soon his grooming equipment was patented and being sold to ski areas around the world.
Ski Museum of Maine Collection

This is what Hazen McMullen says about Valley Engineering's grooming equipment







“On a mountain as steep as Sugarloaf, the Valley Engineering rear-mounted, hydraulically raisable Powder Maker can groom a trail with 35% less man and equipment hours. Normally, after grooming down a steep trail like Narrow Gauge, to go back to the top we have to make a two mile detour over an access trail. Now, with the retractable rig, we can raise the drums at the bottom, drive directly up the trail, turn, lower the rig, and resume grooming. In an eight hour shift, we can cover 35% more terrain, and over a 190 day season that's a heck of a lot of gas and labor saved.”

Hazen McMullen
 Hazen McMullen
 Operations Manager
 Sugarloaf/USA, Kingfield, Me.

SEE (2001 238-2000) / KINGFIELD, ME 04039

Among the many pieces of Valley Engineering grooming equipment used by Sugarloaf, this versatile retractable Powder Maker is what Hazen refers to in his letter.

Photos Chip Carey

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Valley Engineering was known throughout the US ski industry as the builder of Powdermakers, steel rollers that could scuff frozen hardpack into a powdery, eminently skiable surface. The company was founded by Otto Wallingford of Lost Valley and Don Waterman of the Oliver Stores, and was based in Gray beginning in 1972. In addition to the signature Powdermaker, the company built implements for snow tractors like hydraulic-controlled U-blades and compactor bars. This 1975 Valley Engineering ad featured a letter from Sugarloaf’s Hazen McMullen, who reportedly would not return a prototype Powdermaker in 1968 because its grooming results were far superior to any existing alternative.
New England Ski Museum Collection



Hazen McMullen arrived at Sugarloaf at the time their gondola was installed in the summer of 1965 and became operations manager at the mountain. “I’ll always be grateful that we had Hazen McMullen to guide and inspire us with his native intelligence, skill, experience, good humor, and most of all, his seemingly superhuman strength,” raved Sugarloaf manager John Christie in his 2007 book on the mountain.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



Ralph “Doc” Des Roches was born in Rumford and attended Fryeburg Academy before enrolling in the University of New Hampshire. After his wartime service with the 10th Mountain Division, he was manager of Pennsylvania’s Laurel Mountain. Des Roches was selected to be the first president of Ski Industries of America, the trade group that represents equipment and apparel manufacturers. Upon his 1981 retirement from SIA, he moved to Farmington, and with coach Tom Reynolds, revived and expanded Reynolds’ earlier plan for an academic program that would prepare students for ski business careers. Des Roches brought his industry contacts to the effort, and with this the program was approved. The University of Maine at Farmington ski industries certificate program offered three concentrations, professional ski teaching, ski coaching, and ski business. The program graduated hundreds of talented, disciplined students over nearly three decades, many of whom found long term employment in aspects of the ski business.

New England Ski Museum Collection



The University of Maine at Farmington ski team served as the genesis of the university's ski industries program. Coach Tom Reynolds, who had earlier coached at the university in Orono, at Sugarloaf and at Farmington High School, came to Farmington in 1966. The UMF ski team achieved stellar results at the US and Canadian-American levels, and Tom Reynolds was twice named alpine coach of the year.

Courtesy of Leigh Breidenbach



University of Maine at Farmington coach Tom Reynolds put together a proposal to initiate an academic program in ski instruction and ski coach training in the late 1970s, but the university did not immediately accept it. Reynolds was a native of Bingham, Maine, where he grew up skiing at Baker Mountain, a rope tow area with 600 feet of vertical rise.

Courtesy of Leigh Breidenbach

Skiing Maine: From the Top of Maine to the Western Mountains

During the halcyon decades between the 1940s and 1970s, scores of ski areas of all sorts and sizes were in operation from one corner of Maine to the other. These ski areas grew out of decades of skiing on local hills, at winter carnivals, and on some of Maine’s remote mountain terrain.

If you would like to learn more, we encourage you to track down a copy of *Skiing Maine* by John Christie and Josh Christie.



The program book for the 1927 Rumford Winter Carnival outlined the events of this two-day affair, which included winter sports competitions plus many social happenings, culminated in a Snow-Ball and the crowning of the carnival queen. Courtesy of *A Century on Skis* by Scott Andrews.

Ski Museum of Maine Collection



Cars lined Saint John St. and over 5,000 spectators watched the jumpers on Portland’s Western Promenade ski jump in 1924.
Maine Historical Society Collection

In *First Tracks*, Glenn Parkinson gives some background on winter carnivals: “In the 1920s Maine cities and towns began to hold winter carnivals. Portland and Augusta vied with each other to stage the most elaborate carnivals. Augusta built an electric windmill to house their jump tower and invited Governor Percival Baxter to open the festivities. Portland attracted some of the East’s best jumpers for its carnival.... [The] 1924 winter carnival in Portland was perhaps that city’s biggest and best carnival.”

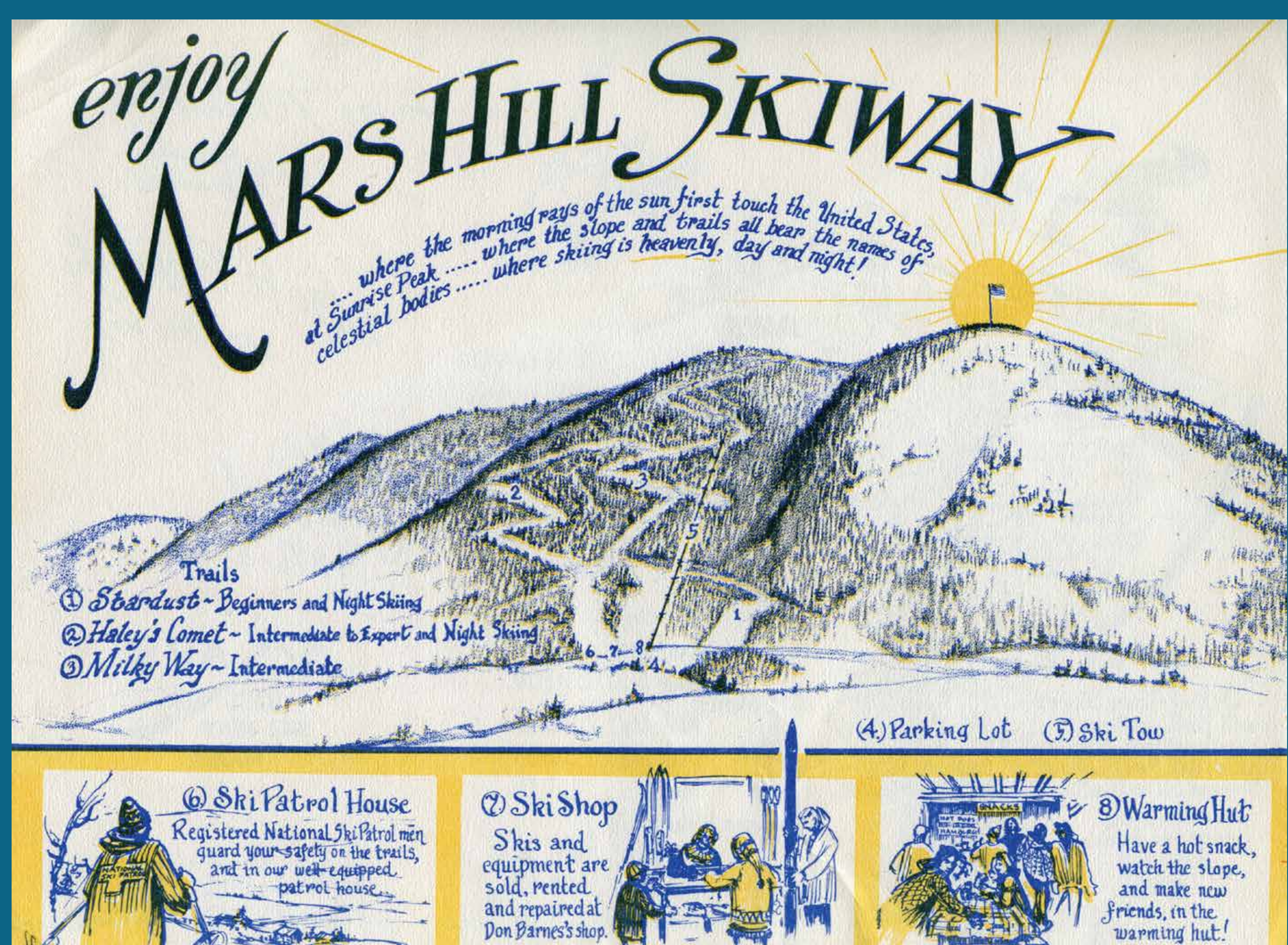


Family ski outing at Mt. Abram, late 1960s.
Ski Museum of Maine Collection

The first skiers on Mt. Abram took advantage of logging roads to descend the mountain. Stuart, Donald, and Norton Cross began purchasing land on the mountain in 1947. In 1959, despite the opinion of ski area designer Sel Hannah that Mt. Abram had very poor potential for a ski area, the Cross brothers began construction, and were up and running for the winter of 1960-61.

“Ronald Snyder, one of our loggers, suggested taking trees off a mountain and making a ski slope. The next day we had so much snow we had to snowshoe up across a big part of Mt. Abram in order to get to work. That noon Norton said, ‘Why wouldn’t that (Mt. Abram) make a good ski slope?’”

- Donald Cross, as told to Don Bennett



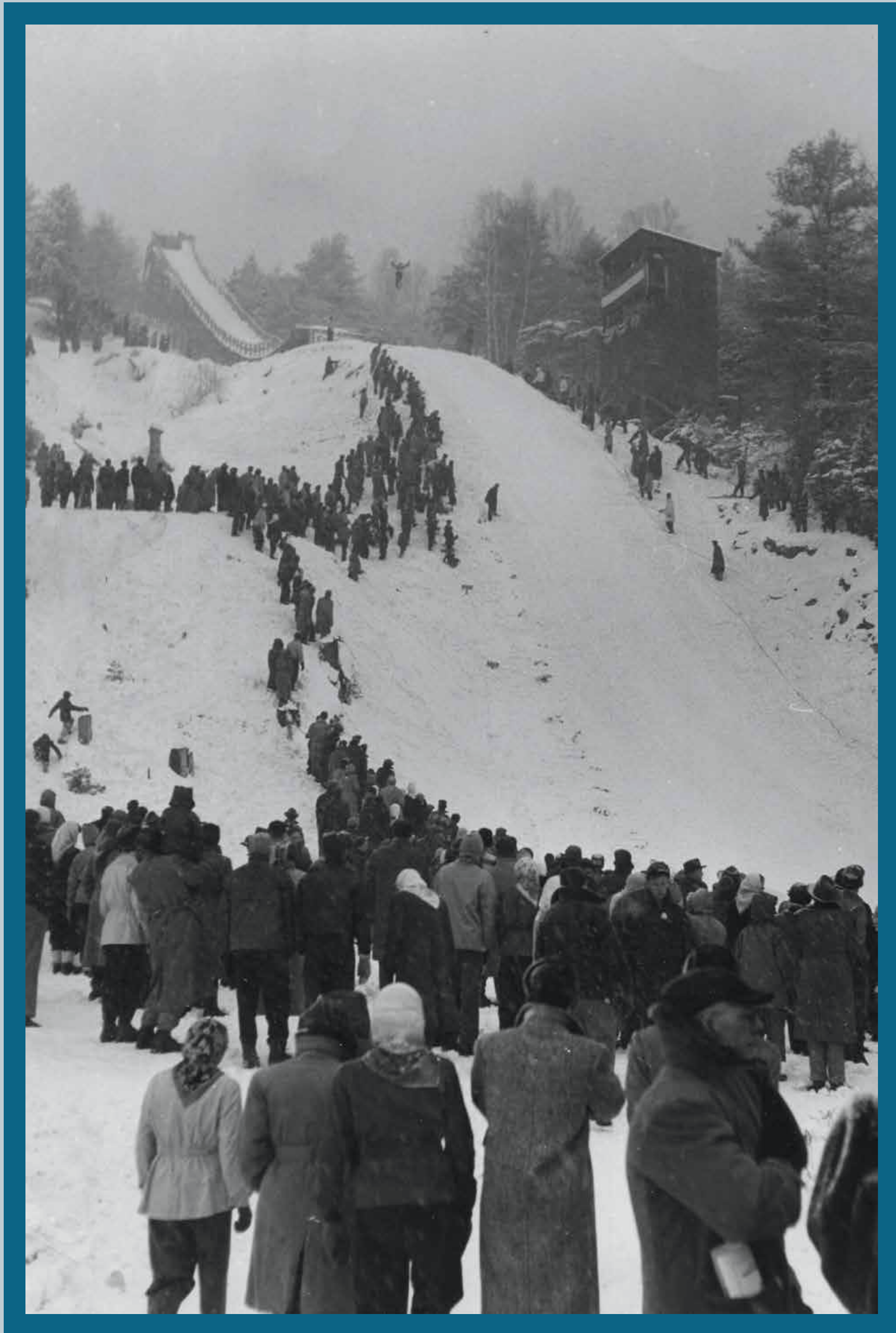
Mars Hill in Aroostook County opened with a 2,500-foot, 610 vertical-rise Pomalift in February 1961 on the western face of the mountain. This early brochure claims its summit receives the first daylight of any point in the US, and that is certainly true for ski area summits. After construction, Sel Hannah was called in to consider expansion plans. In 1966 he met with Wendell Pierce and John Hawksley of Mars Hill, and a plan was developed to expand onto the east face of the mountain to access the nearby New Brunswick market, but that expansion never occurred. Mars Hill exemplifies the community-based, mid-sized ski mountains of Maine that appeared all over the state in the 1960s, and that still provide winter recreation to local and regional inhabitants.

New England Ski Museum Collection



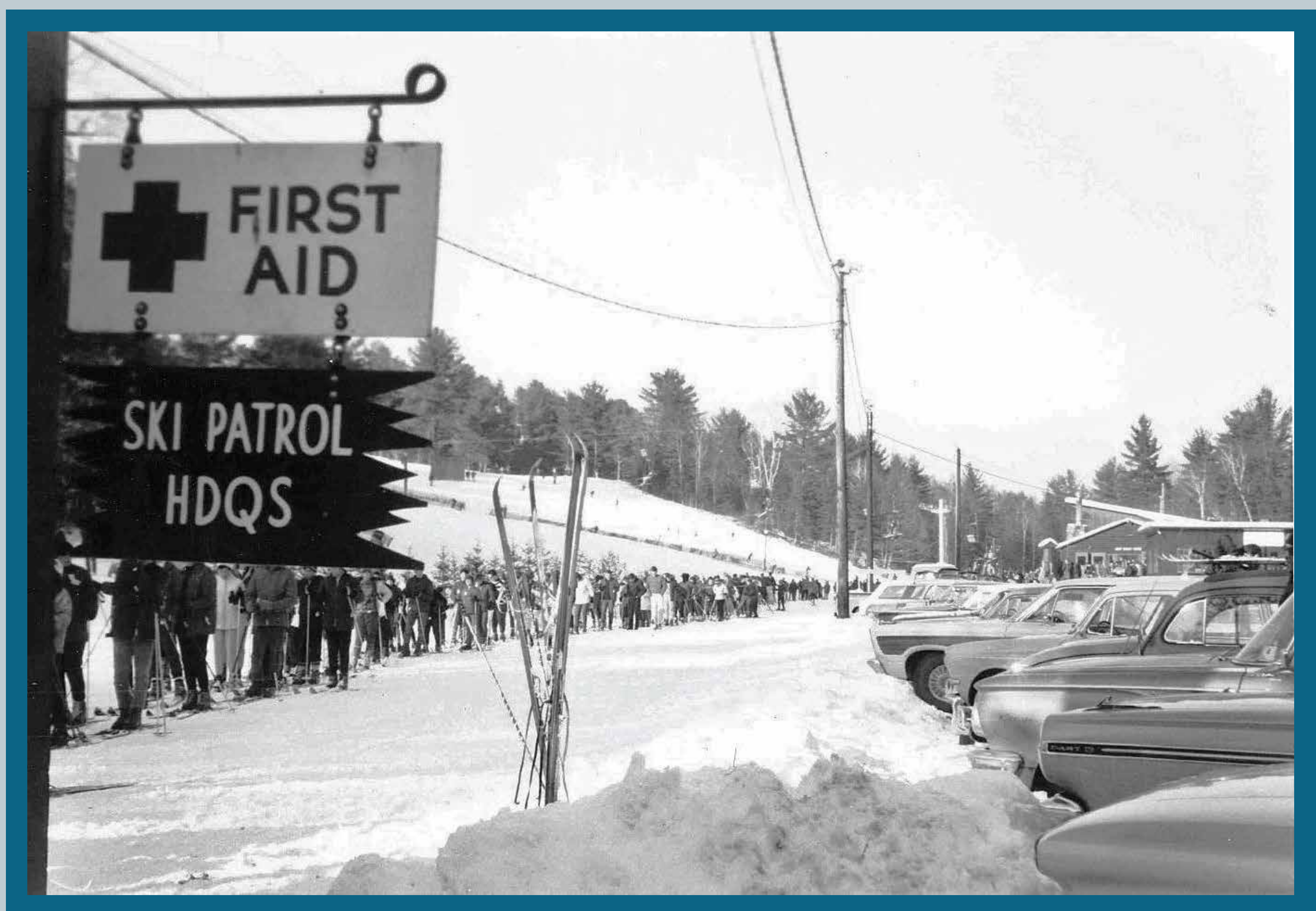
Rope tow at Titcomb Mountain, which opened to the public on February 8, 1942.
Ski Museum of Maine Collection

In her book *A Mountain of Ski Memories*, Megan Roberts recounts the early history of Titcomb Mountain: “In April of 1939, the Franklin Ski and Outing Club was established. Voter Hill (a working farm) was the first ski hill for the club. In November of 1940, a rope tow was purchased and the club needed a hill to install it on. They looked just one hill over to the Knapp Farm which would allow them to install their rope tow. In April of 1941 their name was changed to the Farmington Ski and Outing Club to better reflect who and where they were.”



Scotty's Mountain was the focus of the Chisholm Ski Club from the late 1940's through 1959. The large ski jump at Scotty's was the site of many of the club's regional, state and national competitions. It was replaced by the Ski Club's development of Black Mountain in the 1960s.

Courtesy of Chisholm Ski Club



Skiers wait in line for the t-bar lift at Lost Valley, 1966.

Ski Museum of Maine Collection

Lost Valley opened to the public on January 6, 1962. The small ski area was known as a feeder hill and helped launch the career of three-time Olympian and 1993 World Championship slalom silver medal winner Julie Parisien.

Thwarted Ventures, Grand Enterprise

Maine's 1967 preparation of a bid to host the 1976 Olympic Winter Games was based on the assumption that a major resort could be constructed on the north side of Mount Bigelow, the mountain range to the north of Sugarloaf. The shores of Flagstaff Lake, the impoundment that had impeded access to their ski trail for Amos Winter and his Bigelow Boys in the late 1940s, would be the scene of a marina, airport, housing for 1,150, a golf course, and the base of a ski area with Olympic venues.

Sno-engineering did extensive exploration of the mountain and laid out a trail that met the international standards for an Olympic downhill course, a rarity in the east because of the daunting vertical requirements. The 2,703-vertical foot course received approval from the International Ski Federation (FIS) after it was inspected by delegate Willy Schaeffler in April 1967. Although the grand scheme to build a resort on Bigelow faltered for a time, causing Maine to withdraw its bid, the vision was revived in the early 1970s by the Flagstaff Corporation.

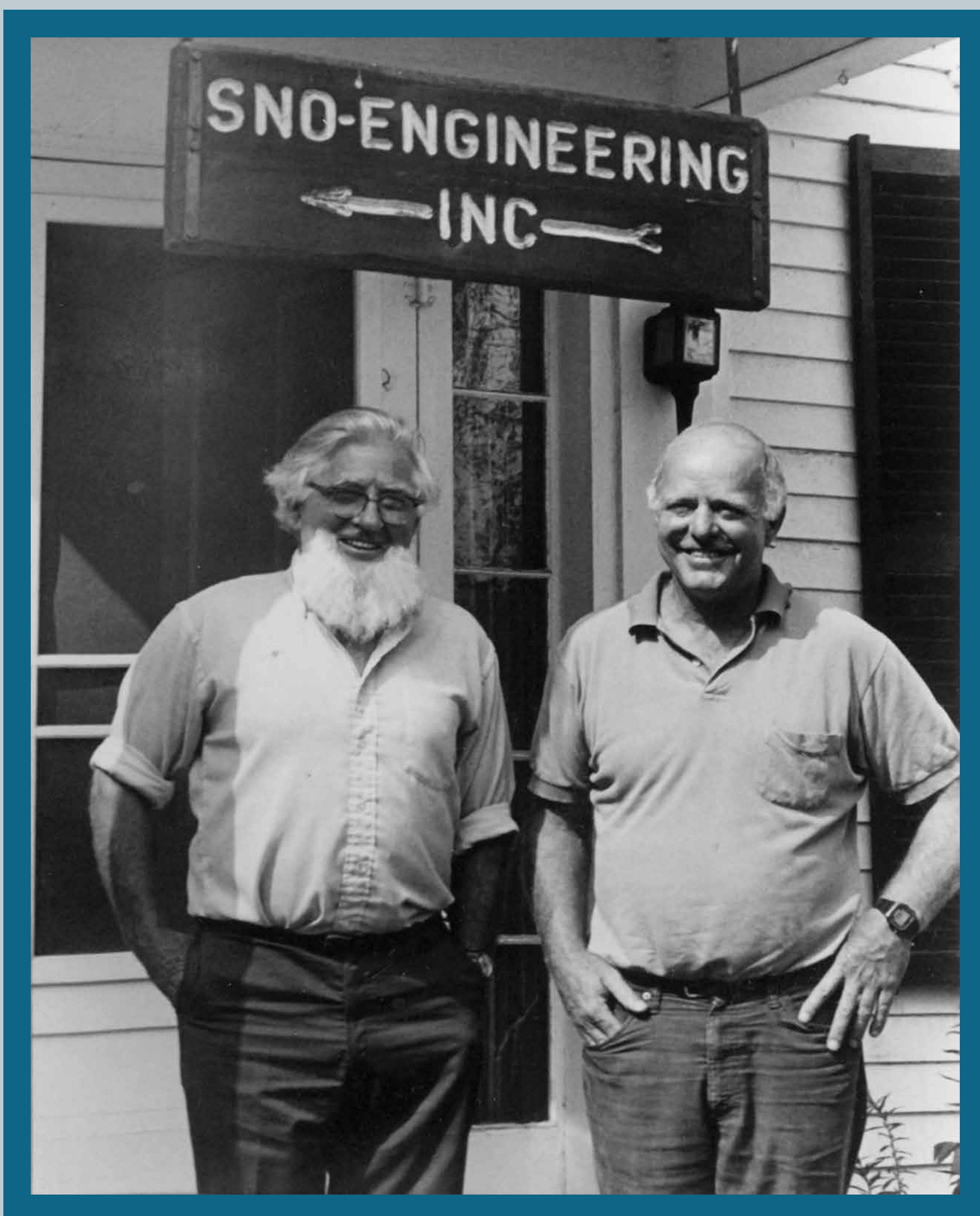
With the 1971 legislation establishing the Land Use Regulation Commission as a zoning body for unincorporated areas, public opinion in Maine gained a voice it had previously lacked. Environmental groups rallied opinion against the Flagstaff proposal, and in a 1976 referendum Maine voters established the Bigelow Preserve, encompassing 36,000 acres of land purchased from the Flagstaff group. Given the financial headwinds of the era, the referendum may well have spared the developers an expensive failure.

Saddleback received LURC approval for its planned expansion in 1989, only to run afoul of the National Park Service, custodian of the Appalachian Trail. Owner Donald Breen proposed an extension of the area to the summit ridge and over to the south side, terrain that Sel Hannah cautioned in 1958 was too wind-exposed. The expansion would cross the AT, and years of legal battles were resolved only when the summit option was dropped in 2000.

Maine's environmental laws, adopted a scant decade after large scale ski development appeared in the state, largely fulfilled the premise of writer Bill Berry who observed in 1973 "Maine may be the first state in the country to enact environmental-protection laws in time, before significant development occurs in the mountain region."

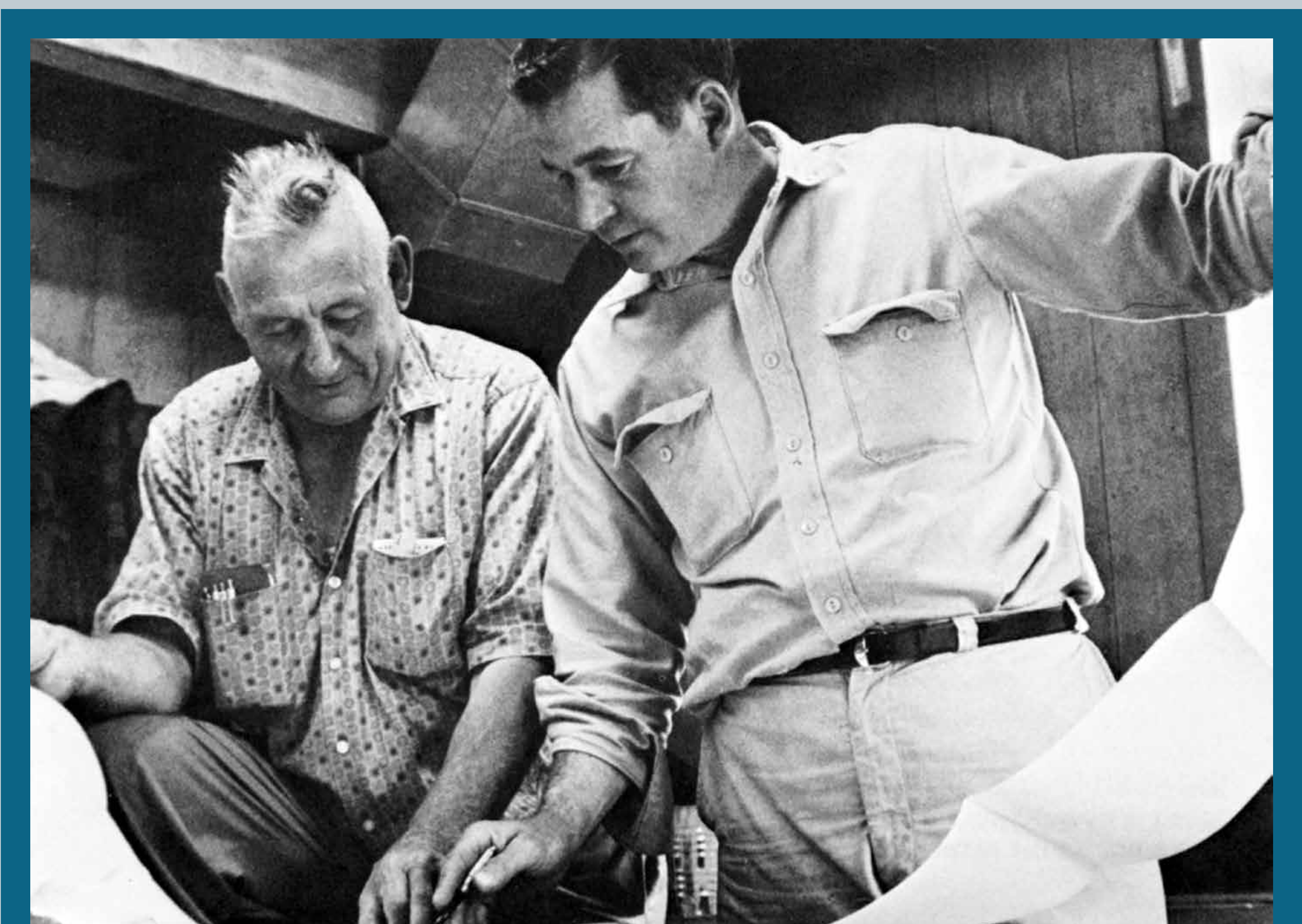
The massive expansion fantasized at Saddleback and Flagstaff became reality at Sunday River in the 1980s and 1990s. Leslie B. Otten, Killington's on-site manager, purchased the area in 1980, at a time when interest costs amounted to 22.5% of the resort's budgeted revenue. By 1996, through a tight focus on snow quality and the snowmaking technology needed to produce it, continual terrain expansion, creation of affordable lodging, and cultivation of new skiers through innovative ski school programs, Otten's Sunday River skier visits expanded to 589,000. By that time, operating as the American Skiing Company, Otten had acquired nine major ski resorts throughout the country, including one-time competitor Sugarloaf, and one-time parent company Killington.

American Skiing Company was undone by excessive debt by 1999, but the improvements to Sunday River, Sugarloaf, and their sister resorts across the country remain. The modest wintertime prosperity envisioned by the community groups that founded Sugarloaf, Sunday River, Saddleback, and a handful of other ski areas in the 1960s had grown to an unimaginable scale, but in a manner and in a setting that remains distinctively shaped by the unspoiled, enduring vastness of Maine.



Because most Maine ski areas were built in the 1950s and 1960s, area promoters could rely on the experience of specialized resort consultants whose expertise was gained from lessons learned in the 1930s and 1940s in Vermont and New Hampshire. Sel Hannah and Joe Cushing of Sno-engineering in Franconia were two planners who were particularly active in Maine in the 1960s. The detailed instructions they developed for crews doing the work of trail building covered marking trail locations to avoid errors in cutting, clearing and burning forest cover, grading and seeding trail surfaces, and building water bars. These unspectacular insights derived from hard experiences elsewhere all combined to form an effective erosion control program that brought environmental sustainability to ski area construction.

Courtesy of Joe Cushing



Sno-engineering often recommended to its ski area clients that dozer operator Ray Parker of Lyndonville, Vermont, left, be hired for grading ski trails. Parker developed the system of using two dozers in tandem for steep grades in which one machine served as a winch anchor for the other. "He knows where to leave in a hummock or a hollow, where a drop or turn will create skiing interest," Skiing Area News reported in 1967. "On the other hand he knows that a smooth trail is essential to establishing good turf, thus retaining the maximum snow cover." In this photograph Parker is seen with Colby Russell, mountain manager of Squaw Mountain in Greenville.

Hanson Carroll photo, New England Ski Museum Collection



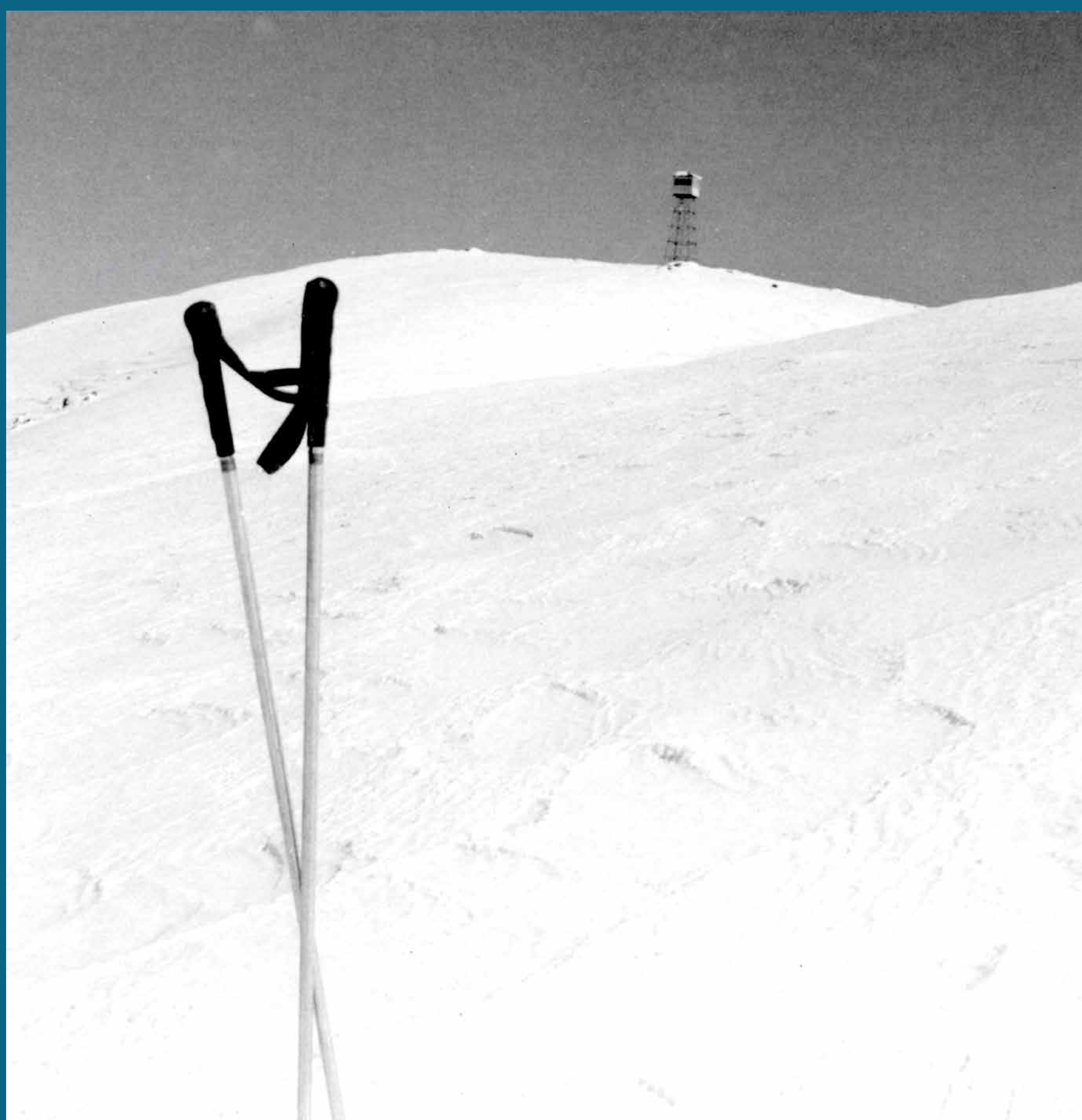
Willy Schaeffler, left, the FIS technical advisor for the US, and Sugarloaf manager John Christie are shown in April, 1967 as they prepare to fly over a proposed Olympic downhill course site on Mount Bigelow. The short-lived Maine bid to host the 1976 Winter Olympics envisioned alpine ski events at a proposed new ski resort on the north slope of Mount Bigelow that would front on the shore of Flagstaff Lake. The 2,703-foot Bigelow downhill course that was selected by Sno-engineering would have exceeded the 800 meter vertical drop required by FIS, a dimension that could not be matched elsewhere in New England.

Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club



The proposed Olympic downhill course on the Bigelow Range would have started at 4,145 West Peak, seen here on the right. Sugarloaf, the alternative downhill venue, can be seen in the upper left. At Sugarloaf, the men's downhill would have run from the summit down its west (right) ridge before dropping onto Narrow Gauge. FIS representative Willy Schaeffler approved the Bigelow course for future homologation, remarking that it "will present a great deal of challenge to top caliber racers," but the trail was never cut. After efforts to establish a ski area on the mountain by the Flagstaff Corporation, the Bigelow Range became public land in a 1976 referendum.

New England Ski Museum Collection



The windswept snowfields of Saddleback, photographed here by Sel Hannah and Oscar Riddle on their April 1958 scouting trip, would have been the site of a ski lift and trails under a plan advocated by Saddleback owner Donald Breen in 1984. While approved by the state environmental panel LURC, because the Appalachian Trail runs along the ridgeline, the Appalachian Trail Conference and the National Park Service contested the plan. In 2000 the mountain and the NPS came to a settlement that avoided ski development infringement on the Appalachian Trail.

New England Ski Museum Collection