Sahalie Historical Note #4: The Original Lodge of the 1930s
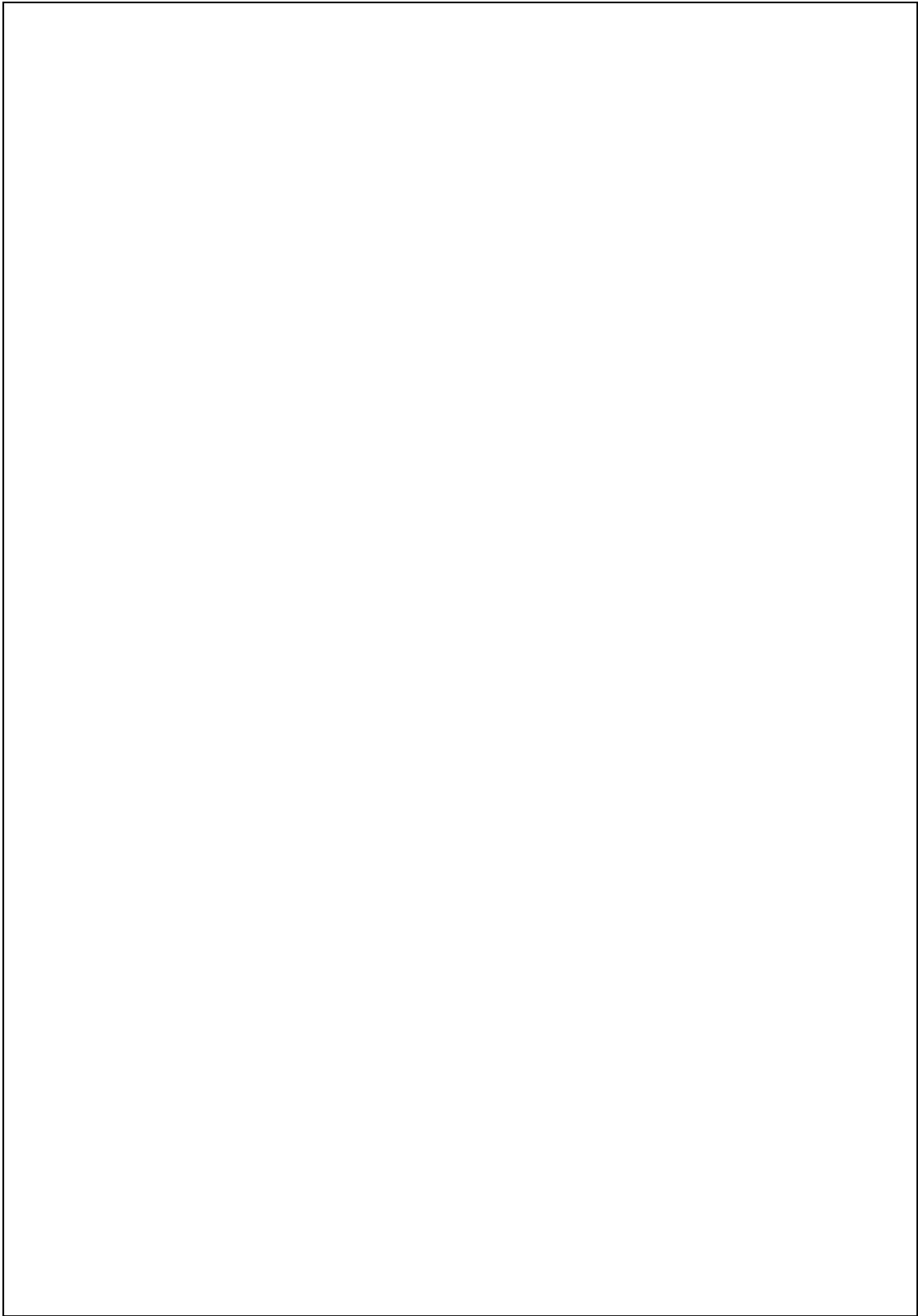
The newly-formed Commonwealth Ski Club seems to have burst on the scene "whole-cloth" in 1931, emerging out of the Ski Section of the Seattle Turn Verein. Commonwealth held a house-warming for its partially-completed lodge at Snoqualmie Pass on December 27, 1931.[1] This is the first mention of Commonwealth Ski Club that I can find in any records. The Turn Verein entered into a contract to purchase a 45-acre parcel of land at the Pass from Northern Pacific Railway Company on May 13, 1931, but didn't complete the transaction in an official deed until July 15, 1932.[2] The clubhouse was said to have sleeping accommodations for 40 folk when it first opened (only partially built). A photo of happy skiers outside of this new building appeared in the March 27, 1932 *Seattle Daily Times* (see photo).[3]

The lodge was completed in the summer of 1932. On November 5, 1932, 150 members of the Commonwealth Ski Club held a "huge dinner" to "properly open" their newly expanded, "now fully equipped" lodge, followed by an open house the next day. Completion of the lodge gave Snoqualmie Pass four large ski lodges; the other three being the Mountaineers (1914), the Seattle Ski Club (1931) and Washington Alpine (1932).[4]

The new Commonwealth lodge was designed by Arthur L. Loveless, a well-known architect in Seattle who designed many stately Tudor mansions and other notable buildings throughout the region; he is best known for many of the fraternity and sorority houses along U.W.'s Greek row; the beautiful Loveless Building is located on the corner of Broadway E and E Roy on Capital Hill in Seattle. Involvement in the design is also credited to Loveless' associate (and nephew), LaMonte Shorett. ("Monty" Shorett shows up in a list of Commonwealth skiers at one of the club's early tournaments in March, 1934.[5] He got to enjoy some of the fruits of his design.) The lodge was "three stories in height with a full basement, built in the form of two L's, with a three-flue chimney thrust through the center."[6] I intend to search the U.W. Special Collections for drawings.

The November, 1932, newspaper story confirmed that "the Commonwealth Club is sponsored by the Seattle Turnverein."[7]

An article in 1933 called the Commonwealth Club's new lodge "very imposing, to the left as one approaches the Summit. It has the added comfort of steam heat, so we've been told."[8] A later article referred to it as "pretentious." It was clearly the first major impression one had upon arriving at the Summit after a long, rough road. (Washington Alpine's Guye Cabin, by comparison, was hidden down low in the trees close to the river.) The enclosed photo shows a

view of the old lodge in the mid 1930s from the Summit.[9] (Notice all the trees behind the building – the ski slope above the lodge had not yet been cleared.)
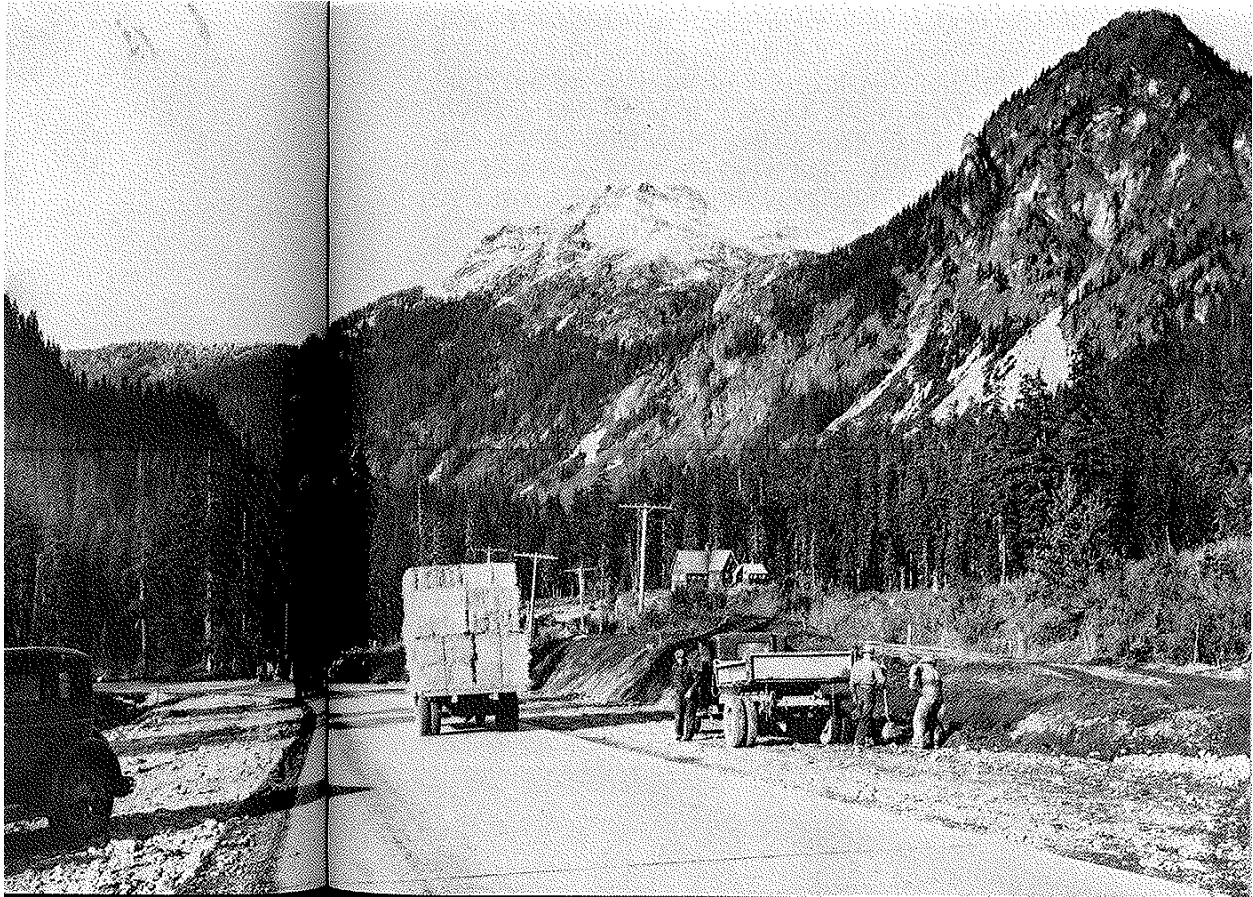

Photo looking north from Snoqualmie Pass Summit, c. 1935, with the Commonwealth/Sahalie Ski Club's lodge in the background. From Washington State Historical Society, as included in Yvonne Prater's book on the history of Snoqualmie Pass (see footnotes), p. 63.

A note in the May, 1933, *Seattle Times* newspaper mentioned that Commonwealth Ski Club was considering plans to build a clubhouse in the city, but nothing seems to have come of these plans.[10]

Commonwealth began offering ski lessons for its members in the 1933/'34 season. This was a major step forward, since early skiing was mostly cross-country, and when new skiers tried to go downhill, there were a lot of injuries. "Controlled" skiing using turns was a relatively new concept being pushed by ski promoters. Commonwealth employed some of the best skiers available: the initial teachers were Ben Thompson, Hans Grage and Don Fraser, all huge names in early Northwest skiing. Skiers learned "to do level-running, execute kick turns, exhibit proper handling of ski poles and descend a slight slope in various fundamental positions."[11] Some of us

could use help with these skills even today! This instruction appears to have been open to the public.[12]

As early as January 28, 1934, the club sponsored ski competitions on "Guye Peak rock slide;" the slalom course was set there that day by Hans Grage. A number of further ski competitions were held there and in the Commonwealth vicinity through the '30s, including an annual competition among the four Summit ski clubs (Commonwealth, Seattle, Washington Alpine and the Mountaineers) that involved jumping on Seattle SC's hill, slalom and downhill either at the Summit/Municipal Hill or on the Guye Peak rock slide, and cross-country either in a loop from the Summit as far as Hyak or up to Source Lake (past the present Alpental).

And Ben Thompson illustrates the kick-turn, one of the simplest procedures for changing direction. "Chaplinesque" fairly adequately describes it.

From *Seattle Sunday Times*, December 24, 1933, p. 21.

Heading into the 1935/'36 winter season, newspaper articles headlined "Commonwealth Ready": "Many improvements have been made during the summer [to the lodge]…. The ski run adjacent to the lodge has been widened and lengthened." Also, "Commonwealth Ski Club… is ready for the winter, and eager for it."[13] Following that season, in the summer of 1936, the organization changed its name to Sahalie.

First note of a tow comes just in time for the 1940/'41 winter season: "Sahalie Ski Club members packed their new ski tow motor to Snoqualmie Pass Summit yesterday [December 7, 1940] and an 'installation' party will be the main order of business today. The Sahalie membership voices a hearty vote of appreciation to Lars Nerland, Earl [probably Al] Swan and their helpers for the work they put in readying the lift motor for winter operation."[14]

In addition to lodge caretakers, it appears that Sahalie had a cook as well in the old days. Chick Garrett mentioned in one of his new ski columns at the beginning of the '40/'41 season that, "Clem Becker, old-timer of 'steak and French fries' fame, is back to tickle the palates of the Sahalie Ski Club members."[15]

Lights were installed in early 1941. Chick Garrett's ski column in the January 17, 1941 *Seattle Daily Times* notes, "Thirty-five skiers turned out for the Sahalie Ski Club's 'night skiing party' Wednesday. 'Great fun,' said Aurelia Lonseth. 'We plan another night skiing party soon and will install more lights on the slope covered by the club ski lift.'"[16] Garrett noted another night skiing event at Sahalie two weeks later, again on a Wednesday night (!): "The … hill will be lighted from 8 to 10:30 o'clock, the lift running. Then it's a hot supper and home."[17]

In the fall of 1941, a newspaper article notes, "Al Swan, Sahalie Ski Club president, informs this department that the Sahalies have …cleared their ski slope so as to provide almost three times as much sitzmarking area. The club plans to move the powerhouse to the foot of the hill and lengthen its ski tow."[18] Herb Lonseth was quoted as claiming the new Sahalie slope offered <u>four</u> times as much skiing room "since it was given a two-week going over by a couple of loggers. 'Two more acres were cleared this summer, merely doubling the Sahalie Hill skiing area,' [countered] Mrs. Lonseth."[19]

And then the war broke out. Those Sahalie members who were not enlisted continued to meet and to operate the lodge. Sahalie Ski Club was noted as the leader in developing what was called the "service skiing program," bringing service men on leave in Seattle up to the lodge to get away from the war for a few days. "Sahalie Ski Club, which quietly has been playing an important role in making skiing possible for service men in the Seattle area, will be host to another Uncle Sam contingent today…."[20] "[Pacific Northwest Ski Association] officials will meet… to discuss furthering the service skiing program in which Sahalie has taken the lead. 'It's Sahalie's policy to house as many service skiers as can come to the Summit,' [Herb] Lonseth explained yesterday…. Most of the service men who are guests have never had skis on before, and many have never seen snow, Lonseth said."[21]

A small classified in the *Seattle Daily Times*, August 2, 1942, reads: "ATTENTION fuel dealers and truckers, 50,000 feet hemlock logs for cord wood available at summit Snoqualmie Pass. Phone or write Sahalie Ski Club, 821 West Barrett. GA 8658."[22]

The tragic fire struck on April 16, 1943. It happened on a Friday evening, fortunately when no one was in the building. The caretaker, Leonard Hamilton, was up-hill messing with the water supply. The cause was said to be an electrical short-circuit on the top floor. Some young skiers coming in for the weekend saw the smoke, were able to enter the lodge, and removed a number of items of furniture, skis, sleeping bags and the juke box. But the lodge itself burned to the foundation that evening. The loss was estimated at $20,000 (today we'd have to add a couple zeros to that sum). Stories and photos of the fire were featured in both the *Seattle Daily Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, in amongst war bulletins from Europe and the Pacific.[23]

The original Sahalie Lodge burned to the ground on April 16, 1943. *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, April 18, 1943.

The next listing in the newspaper comes more than a year later, in July, 1944, while the war still raged both in Europe and in the Pacific: "Sahalie Ski Club ...is carrying on social activities in spite of the fact so many members have joined the armed forces…. [Club members] are now making plans for a beautiful new ski lodge to replace the one lost by fire. It will be constructed as soon as materials are available."[24] But no further mention is made of this effort in any subsequent newspapers. Further digging is needed to uncover the next chapter in Sahalie's ski lodge at Snoqualmie Pass.

■ Dave Galvin

[Updated 3/26/2012]

[As with any of these historical notes, if you have additions, corrections or stories to tell regarding the contents above, let me know at galvind53@gmail.com . I would like to be as accurate and complete as possible about this evolving history of our club and its environs.]

[1] "New Ski Club Makes Bow to Northwest," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 27, 1931, p. 19.

[2] The original deed conveying the lower 45.3 acre parcel of land from the Northern Pacific Railway Company to the Seattle Turn Verein was dated July 15, 1932. It is recorded in Vol. 1839, Page 342 of the Records of King County. This deed mentions that a previous contract to convey the land was made between the parties on May 13, 1931. This explains how the original lodge was constructed and opened even before the official deed was signed. The price for the transaction was a grand total of $250 – that's $5.52 per acre, a better deal than Frederick Weyerhauser got in 1900! Times must have been tough for the railroad in 1931/'32. In order to ensure that the title was clear for the property, a "correction" deed was signed on March 27, 1959, and recorded in Vol. 3909, Page 287 of the Records of King County. This correction, signed once again by the Northern Pacific Railway Company, conveyed the land to the Seattle Gymnastic Society, for a sum of $25, which ups the original cost to $6 per acre.

[3] "A Clubhouse in Snow-Land: The Quarters of the Commonwealth Ski Club of Seattle," photo and caption, *Seattle Daily Times*, March 27, 1932, p.53.

[4] "Snow Falls in Mountains, so Skiers Happy: Commonwealth Ski Club Completes New Addition to Lodge; Holds Open House Today in Snoqualmie Pass," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 6, 1932, p. 25.

[5] "Bolstad First in Seattle Ski Slalom Event; Fraser All-Star," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 19, 1934, p. 15.

[6] "Snow falls…," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 6, 1932, p. 25.

[7] "Snow falls…," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 6, 1932, p. 25.

[8] Virginia Boren, 1933, "Practice Yodeling, For Ski Days Are at Hand: Skiing High, Skiing Low," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 10, 1933, p. 20.

[9] Yvonne Prater, 1981, *Snoqualmie Pass: From Indian Trail to Interstate*, Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers, p. 63.

[10] "Clubhouse Plans Before Ski Group," *Seattle Daily Times*, May 14, 1933, p. 15.

[11] "Snow Piles Up, Skiers Prepare for Long Trips: Instruction Pending," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 28, 1933, p. 18.

[12] "Snow Assures Skiers Better Racing Sunday," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 12, 1934, p. 22.

[13] "Runs Widened," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1935, p. 21; "Skiers to have Busy Week-End; Money Needed: … Commonwealth Ready," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 21, 1935, p. 4.

[14] "Sahalies Busy," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1940, p. 20.

[15] Chick Garrett, 1940, "Sitzmarks…and Remarks" column, *Seattle Daily Times*, December 15, 1940, p. 24.

[16] Chick Garrett, 1941a, "SitzMarks…and Remarks" column, *Seattle Daily Times*, January 17, 1941.

[17] Chick Garrett, 1941b, "Sitzmarks…and Remarks" column, *Seattle Daily Times*, January 29, 1941, p. 15.

[18] Chick Garrett, 1941c, "Sitzmarks…and Remarks" column, *Seattle Daily Times*, October 5, 1941.

[19] "Sahalie Hill is Improved," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 12, 1941, p. 25.

[20] "Ski Stars Jump Today," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 14, 1943, pp. 5, 8.

[21] "Preps to Ski Today; Hostmark in Army," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 28, 1943, p. 7.

[22] "Cars To Sell?...Use Want Ad Columns," *Seattle Daily Times*, August 2, 1942, p. 39.

[23] "Fire Destroys Ski Lodge," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 17, 1943, p. 5.

[24] "About People You Know… Plan Indoor Outing," *Seattle Daily Times*, July 30, 1944, p. 26.