Alta circa 1939



In early 1937 S. Joe Quinney gathered a group of Salt Lake City businessmen to form the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association. Quinney and the other businessmen wanted to develop Alta from an almost completely abandoned mining town into a ski area for the people who lived in the greater Salt

a 1938 Perspective

From a strictly financial perspective, no sound businessman would invest in Alta's future. Several very difficult conditions made Alta's financial future highly problematic:

 The world-wide Great Depression was in full force and not likely to end for years to come. Jobs and money were hard to come by. People who had jobs were the lucky ones.

 Few people could afford the luxury of skiing. Ski equipment and clothing were expensive, uncomfortable, and ill-suited for their tasks.

Lake area.

· The steep, uphill road from the Salt Lake Valley to Alta made access difficult and sometimes impossible—especially during the winter skiing months. The avalanche danger on the road to Alta and in the ski area during the winter was sometimes dangerously high.

 No suitable public facilities existed no lodges to stay overnight, no restaurants or cafes to buy hot food, no public shelter to escape from winter storms.

Regardless of these conditions, a rope tow was operating successfully at Alta during the mid-1930s and Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association led by Chairman Stewart Cosgriff, S. Joe Quinney, and others had decided that the task of developing Alta as a ski resort—with a chairlift in Collins Gulch could and would be done. Only four chair lifts had been built before—three in Sun Valley, Idaho and one in New England.

Mack Corbett Muses About Alta's Future in 1938 Mack Corbett, a staff writer for the Deseret News, wrote the following article. In it he describes and



### The AHS Mission Statement

The Alta Historical Society is a not-for-profit organization, approved by the IRS under 501 (c) (3) guidelines. It was formally established in 1995, chartered by direction of Alta Mayor, Bill Levitt and initially set up under the umbrella of The Friends of Alta.

The specific mission of the Alta Historical Society is to:

\*Collect and preserve valuable historical photographs, film, documents, artifacts and oral histories that are directly tied to Alta's past.

\*Facilitate ways and means to tell the story of Alta's rich history in ways that will enhance the cultural awareness for visitors and citizens of the Alta community.

\*Work in support of, and collaborate with, other organizations having a focus on Utah history and goals which are compatible with the Alta Historical Society.

> discusses the problems and opportunities of developing a ski resort at Alta. Under the heading "Alta's Future," Corbett specifically focused on the difficulties that the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association was having in getting the original Collins Lift operational. This first chairlift in Utah was scheduled to begin operation in the late fall of 1938. However, it did not begin operating until 15 January 1939, after Corbett's article was written and before this article was published in the 1939 Utah Skiing Manual.

In the first paragraph, Corbett predicted that the first Collins chairlift would haul people up the mountain only on some "far-future day." However, in a positive tone, he noted the possibility that Alta "perhaps" might become the greatest skiing center near a large population center in the United States and Europe:

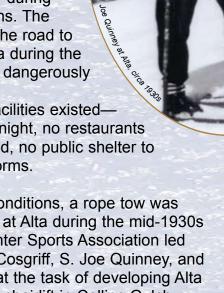
On the evidently far-future day when the Alta chairlift [Collins] totes its first human cargo up the steep sides of Collins Gulch, that portion of the Wasatch Mountains hugging Salt Lake Valley will take its place in the winter sports world as perhaps the greatest skischport [sic] area of its kind in close proximity [sic] to a large center of population in existence.

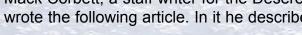
In the next two paragraphs, Corbett noted the much longer distances skiers in Colorado, California, the northwestern United States, and Europe had to travel to reach ski resorts:

Seventy-five miles is about the nether limit elsewhere when it comes to the distance of powder snow accessible to skiers in communities of 100,000 or more. That is Denver's nearest ski area. Skiers on the [California] coast and in the northwest [Oregon and Washington] have to travel farther than that, to our knowledge. The famous skiing fields of Scandinavia and Europe are said to be even more remote.

Corbett somewhat overstated the comforts of the "under-developed facilities"

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# Bill Levitt — Alta's First "Elected" Mayor (1917-2009)

In the Who's Who of Alta over the past half century, the name William "Bill" Levitt stands among the first rank. Although not a native to Utah, as he once said, "I am one of Utah's most loyal patriots." Bill sadly passed away at his beloved Alta Lodge on December 29, 2009, while enjoying the company of his many guests.

Levitt, born February 18, 1917, started his skiing interest in the early 1930s. At age 14 while at scout winter camp in New York State, he strapped on a friend's pair of old wooden skis, without metal edges, and proceeded to slide down a sloped roadway leading to a lake covered with ice. Says Levitt, "I must have gone a quarter of a mile across the lake before I came to a stop. I thought this was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me. I went back up the hill and tried it again, but this time something went wrong and I fell head first into a snow bank. That was my introduction to the sport of skiing."

Many years went by before Levitt tried skiing again. His second experience was with a business associate at a small area called Big Bromley in the mid 1950s. After getting outfitted, he took his first ski lessons and became hooked. Shortly after, he and his wife decided to go west and try skiing over the Thanksgiving holiday. Their plans were to go to Aspen, which had marginal snow conditions that year. Friedl Pfeifer, who was at that time the ski school director at Aspen, recommended that they go to Alta instead. The Levitts followed Pfeifer's suggestion in 1954 and so began a long-lasting love affair with that location high in the towering Wasatch Mountains of Utah. As Levitt tells the story, "I had to make a choice, buy United Airlines so I could afford to continue coming to Alta on a frequent basis or purchase the Alta Lodge. I decided to do the latter and bought the lodge in 1959 from J Laughlin."

Alta incorporated as a township in 1970, largely due to a growing need to gain United States Federal funding to construct a sewer line linking the town to the Salt Lake Valley's sewer system. Levitt was elected the town's president in 1971 until 1975 when the Utah Legislature changed the designation from President to Mayor—at which time he was re-elected, becoming Alta's first elected Mayor. The only other person who carried that title was George Watson who self-appointed himself as Mayor in the late 1930s.

Also, during his tenure as Mayor of Alta, he was involved in overseeing the planting of over 2,500 trees, and was a member of the Tourism Planning Commission. When reflecting on his many contributions, perhaps his greatest legacy has been in his firm resolve to keep Alta protected from never ending demands for commercial development.

Bill Levitt was Alta's Mayor from 1972 through 2005. His contributions have and continue to have a lasting impact on the Town of Alta. Under his guidance, the Town of Alta gained a fire department, a small police force, a community center and a modern communications center that handles emergencies on a 24-hour 7-day-a-week basis.

Levitt, in addition to his mayoral duties, was a founding member of the Utah Ski Association and served as President for 2 years. He served on the organization's Board of Directors Executive Committee during the mid- to late-1970s. He was also appointed to the Board and served as President of the Utah League of Cities and Towns, and received the prestigious title of "Utah's Outstanding Mayor" by the Utah League of Cities and Towns. For his outstanding contributions to the promotion of winter sports, he was inducted into the Utah Tourism Hall of Fame in 1988.

In addition to running day-to-day operations of the Alta Lodge with his wife, Mimi, he was an active member of the Professional Ski Instructors Association—Intermountain Division, and participated as a certified ski instructor in the Alf Engen Ski School. For his years of continuing significant support to the ski school, Alf Engen awarded him ski school "honorary status" in the mid-1970s.

Levitt's reign as Alta's Mayor lasted 34 years and is the longest span of time of any mayor in Utah's history. Throughout his years of dedicated service, Levitt chose to limit his annual mayoral salary to \$1.00. Tom Pollard, Alta's current elected mayor and Bill's replacement, gave this comment: "Bill Levitt's passion for the job and his dedication to the community is something I hope to match—but it will be a daunting task to adequately fill his shoes." That it will... and his passing leaves a hole in the Alta community that will remain for many years to come.

..continued from page 3...

at Alta, the capabilities of the newly opened road to Alta (which then did not include the Alta Bypass Road), the continuing threat of avalanches (especially from Mount Superior), and the weekly bus service:

... Alta and Brighton—possessing unsurpassed though still somewhat undeveloped facilities for the most discriminating skier—are only 26 and 28 miles, respectively, from the heart of Salt Lake City and its 160,000 inhabitants. Wide highways, kept open all winter by county and Forest Service snowplows, provide swift and easy automobile transportation. So accessible in fact that regular weekly bus service has been established.

With a slight contradiction, Corbett then lamented that Brighton and Alta—even though they have earlier, better, and more snow than Sun Valley—did not have the necessary facilities to care for skiers and other tourists. Corbett mentioned Sun Valley's now well-known lodge and its operating chair lifts.

He also could have but chose not to mention Sun Valley's heated swimming pool, its ice skating rink, its horse-drawn sleighs, the Union Pacific's Pullman sleepers that regularly brought the rich and famous in comfort from far away places—for example, Hollywood. Corbett then laments the absence of facilities at Alta and Brighton, but praises them for their early-season snow:

Yet the true significance of these facts will not be realized nor appreciated until we have available such man-made facilities as have made Sun Valley a world-wide ski mecca with little more than expert publicity and timber-free slopes. It is a fact that you will find powder snow in the 8,000-foot basins of Alta and Brighton when Sun Valley's only setting is the black earth. The recent Inter-collegiate championships at the Idaho resort were a case in point.

Corbett then zinged and assigned blame unfairly to the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association's bad management as the cause for the delayed opening of the Collins Lift. But he did note the partially built facilities that might be finished in a year's time—the winter ski season of 1939-40:

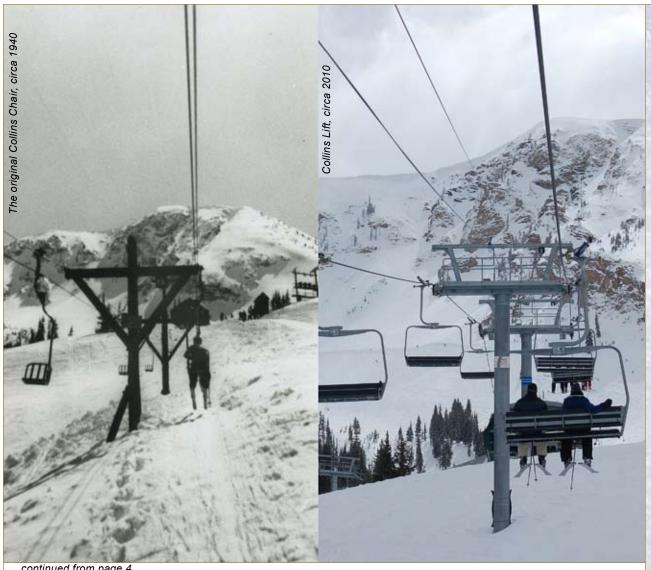
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[At Alta] man-made resources consist of lifts and lodges. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association has already taken laudable initiative in this regard. The [Snowpine] Lodge at Alta, not to omit another structure already partially completed by the Forest Service in the same basin, is projected and though it won't be ready this winter probably will before another twelve-month [sic] passes. The [Collins] Lift, one that does Sun Valley's Proctor Mountain credit, is completed to all outward appearances and was scheduled to commence operation several weeks ago.

By the fall of 1939 Sun Valley indeed had three chairlifts operating—one on Half-Dollar Mountain, one on Dollar Mountain, and one on Proctor Mountain—each longer and better than the last.

In Corbett's penultimate paragraph, he resumed carping about the mysterious construction delays of the Collins Lift:

What has delayed fruition of the \$11,000 [actual cost about \$19,000] multiple ski tramway is rapidly becoming "The Mystery of Alta." One report said that gears do not mesh. Another, that the clutch slips. Another, that the poles and cross-bars will not carry the load. Skiers meanwhile cross their fingers and fervently hope it is one of these mechanical deficiencies and not an engineering blunder that may necessitate months more delay while equipment is moved to attack the slopes at a lesser angle. Or, an engineering mistake that may require installation of additional power of prohibitive expense this winter.

In his final paragraph, Corbett proposed a solution—find more shareholders who have money to invest in Alta. This would have been no easy task during the depth of the Great Depression:

If more shareholders are needed for the Winter Sports Association to bring the lift to working order, maybe the skiing public can provide more funds. In any case, the Association is invited, nay urged, to share its problem to the end [that] the Alta ski lift may commence operation pronto, if not sooner. Fun on skis undreamed of awaits the masses when the lift runs. Until that time, the sport's amazing progress hereabouts stands still. And when things stand still, they tend to retrogress.

Meanwhile back at Alta, Fred Speyer [most of you know of Fred's Slot], Marthinius Strand, and their crew struggled mightily with complex mechanical problems that no amount of money could quickly solve. With repeated Herculean efforts in wind, snow, and cold, they opened the lift to the public on 15 January 1939.

Regardless of the delayed opening, the construction and operation of the Collins Lift secured the future of Alta as a ski area. The Collins Lift figuratively lifted Alta from an abandoned mining town into a ski area for the local people in the greater Salt Lake area and beyond.

In time as the Collins Lift was replaced/realigned three times, as other lifts were built that reached the tops of the mountains in Alta, as lodges and other facilities were completed, Alta has become internationally known, serving skiers from the greater Salt Lake Basin as originally intended and also serving skiers from many far away places with strange sounding names.

## Alta Quips from the 1870s

We have taken the following excerpts from selected publications written in the 1870s. They provide a glimpse of what life was like in Alta during this time. When the articles were written they, no doubt, were intended as serious reading. However, when reviewed more than a century later, a more humorous interpretation can be applied.

The Alta mining boom of the 1870s lasted until about 1880. At that point, most of the silver and other ore had been taken from the mines and interest in staying at Alta City began to falter. By the late 1880s, most of the inhabitants of Alta had departed leaving only a few hardy individuals behind to remember the brief period when Alta City prospered as a Western boom town.

The Cottonwood Observer – July 12, 1871: "We have had a case of small pox in Alta City, that has proved fatal. We have burned the corpse and burned the cabin in which he died. Dr. Chamblin says that in his opinion no further contagion need be apprehended."

The Cottonwood Observer – August 1871: "The editor of the Cottonwood Observer reported that he was passing down the main street of Alta City one July evening when he noticed a man stretched out on the ground, vainly endeavoring to sleep in his unpleasant predicament. He was somewhat under the influence of liquor, and had evidently been thrust from a neighboring dwelling as an unwelcome guest. There he lay, muttering curses, burden of which was, 'woman's inhumanity to man."

Deseret News - August 30, 1871:

"Alta City, Cottonwood Canyon. J.F. Fuller, on of the proprietors of the Central House, being annoyed night after night by the carousing and blac-guarding of parties in a house of ill fame near his hotel, went over to put a stop to it last evening. R.J. White, owner of the house drew a pistol, for the purpose of shooting Fuller, who quickly drew and fired at White, striking him in the leg above the knee. Dr. Chamblin extracted the ball. White is reported very weak this morning."

The Cottonwood Observer – July 30, 1873: The people of the United States vs. J.N. and C. Dramer. "This was a criminal prosecution on the information of Mrs. Simmons and Peter Craft, charging that said defendants did, on the 27th of July, disturb the peace of Alta City, by drawing pistols, and threatening the life of the complainants....According to Mrs. Simmons, on the morning of July 27th, her husband told her that the refuse which had been thrown over the fence the previous day had all been thrown back into the yard. Peter Craft and a Chinaman were engaged to throw it over again. While they were so employed, Nicholas Dramer came out with a small pistol in his hand, called her bad names, and said he would shoot her. His brother, Charles Dramer, then came round the fence with a large revolver in his hand. She picked up a rock and told him she would strike him if he did not go away....She threw no rocks at anybody but did call Nicholas Dramer a 'nimp.' She did not exactly know what it meant, but it signified something very low....After considerable argument by counsel on each side, the case was submitted to the jury, who returned a verdict to the following effect: 'Defendants not guilty, the costs of court to be borne by

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# Passing of Evelyn Engen – 1917-2010

On March 1, 2010, Evelyn Pack Engen passed away peacefully at age 92 of natural causes. A recent Salt Lake Tribune article referred to her as the Grande Dame of Modern Utah Skiing. And to a large degree, that is exactly who she was.

Evelyn was born October 8, 1917, in Centerville, Utah. She married the late ski legend, Alf Engen, in December, 1937. She was Alf's partner in a lifetime of personal interface with dignitaries from all walks of life throughout the world. In many ways, she was the quiet "behind the scenes" engine that ran the Alf Engen competitive and ski teaching train from the late 1930s through the mid 1960s. She totally ran the Alf Engen Ski School business operation at Alta, from 1948 to 1964 and also ran the business side of the Alf Engen Company, which manufactured ski waxes and sun tan products during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. She helped in the development and promotion of "Summer Snow" which created a high attraction in the Utah and California regions in the mid 1950s through the early 1960s. As a dedicated certified ski teacher, she taught part-time in both the Alf Engen Ski School and the Deseret News Ski School and was Alf's personal ski jumping coach when he trained for national and international competition during his competitive days.

In later years, she played a significant support role in the creation of the Joe Quinney Winter Sports Center/Alf Engen Ski Museum located at Utah Olympic Park.

Through her tireless efforts, she made many valuable contributions to ski history in the Intermountain region... and in recognition of her efforts, she was named one of the Intermountain area's "Ten Outstanding Women Ski Pioneers" by the University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library Ski Archives in 2004.

Prepared by Alan K. Engen March 19, 2010

### Behind the scenes contributors to Alta's development as a ski area

Though not well publicized, three important organizations played key roles in helping the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association obtain the resources and support required to facilitate the transition of Alta from a location focused on mining activities to one dedicated to the enjoyment of skiing:

- Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
- CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps)
- WPA (Works Projects Administration)

#### Department of Agriculture, **Forest Service**

Central to the development of skiing in the Intermountain region was the role played by the U.S. Forest Service. In fact, without the support of the Forest Service, it is highly unlikely that development of ski areas along the Wasatch front would have proceeded as quickly in the late 1930s into the early 1940s. Felix C. Koziol, supervisor of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest in the early 1940s, wrote in the 1940-41 edition of the American Ski Annual:

Five years ago, the Forest Service, recognizing the need for more knowledge, better planning, and expert opinion, employed well-known Alf Engen to help. Alf prospected, investigated, and studied proposed winter developments on scores of suggested places on the Intermountain National Forests. He recommended and planned several of the best, and so from a small beginning, a number of centralized winter sports areas, such as Alta, are now being developed by the Forest Service in cooperation with towns, ski clubs, and private individuals.

Two of the important Forest Service personnel who were instrumental in the promotion and development of early Intermountain skiing were:

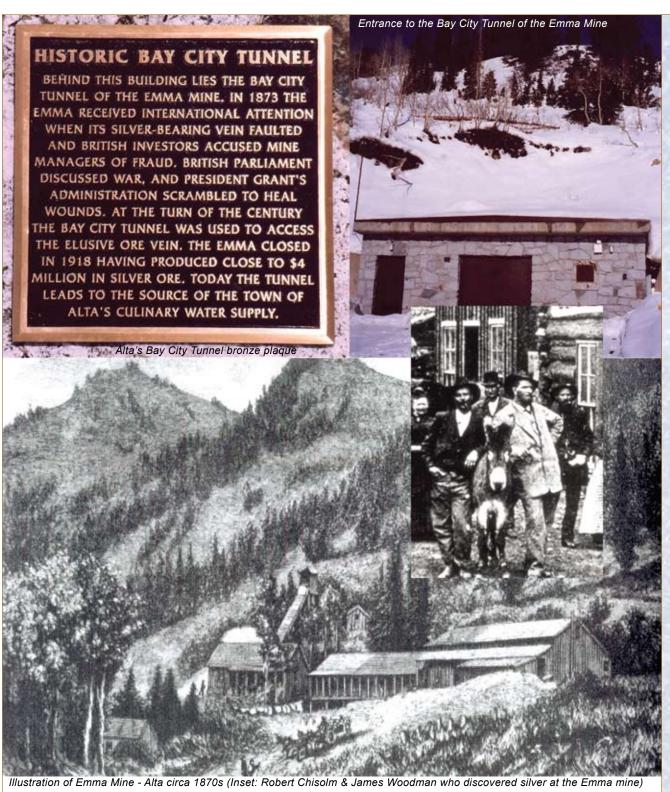
- · James E. Gurr, supervisor of the Wasatch National Forest (1930s)
- · Felix "Kozy" Koziol, supervisor of the Wasatch National Forest in the 1940s and 50s.

### **CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps)**

Also, during the same time period, under the supervision of the U.S. Forest Service, another group called the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC's) helped in the

ALTA POWOLEDITOR

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Snow Job at the Emma Mine

The Bay City Tunnel entrance is located a short walk east from the Snowpine Lodge in the Town of Alta, Utah. The Bay City Tunnel leads to the Emma Mine that is perhaps one of the most infamous mines in the annals of American history. According to the *Mining & Scientific Press*, September 30, 1873, "the operations of unscrupulous speculators in mining property, in Utah, are doing, and have done, more harm to the mining interests…than can well be computed in dollars and cents."

What has proved to be a historic fact was that many individuals, with marginal integrity, tried to swindle each other over the Emma Mine. At the end, some English and Scottish stockholders, far from Alta, were left with a worthless hole in the ground for which they had paid millions to obtain. A comprehensive account can be found in the book *A Hole in the Ground With a Liar at the Top*, by Dan Plazak, © 2006 by The University of Utah Press. However, the following highlights the infamous story.

In 1868, two prospectors, James F. Woodman and Robert B. Chisholm, discovered scatterings of high-quality silver ore on the hillside just above the Bay City Tunnel. Not long after the discovery, Woodman and Chisholm began a 6-month-long drilling of a shaft that penetrated 93 vertical feet of solid rock. At that depth, they hit a rich vein of silver ore in early 1869.

By way of explanation, this part of the Wasatch Range, focused at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon, contained several rich ore bodies found in a limestone formation or along the contact zone between limestone and quartzite layers. These limestone belts cross most of the northern slopes above Alta and run northwest over the ridge to Days and Cardiff Forks and across Big Cottonwood Canyon. Many of the ore veins were very narrow, but others quite wide. The veins contained both very low and extremely high-grade ore, depending on the location.

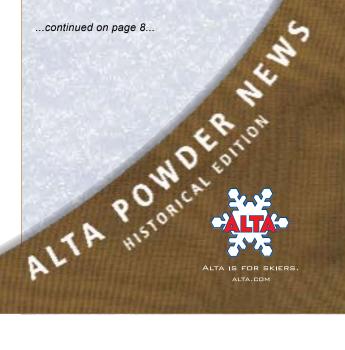
In some places, the fissures open into large cavities, very much like caves and result in a very rich lode...the type that miners and promoters and speculators dream of. Such was the Emma lode that Woodman and Chisholm found. So reported, Emma's great ore chamber was 70 feet long, 70 feet high, and 35 feet wide. The ore was removed so rapidly from this chamber that the structural integrity of the chamber was seriously degraded. Woodman and Chisholm's actual time in the mine was relatively short lived... which was by design.

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The name "Emma" came from Chisholm's youngest child and only daughter, who, at that time, was 10 years old. Emma often wrote her father begging him to come home to his "dear Emma." However, when he did not return in timely fashion, she took matters into her own hands and traveled from her home in Illinois to visit her father at Alta. In 1873, she wrote to other family members telling of her Alta experiences, including finding Alta miners smoking a brand of cigars called "Little Emma" and that they actually had a picture of her on the cigar box. The Emma Silver Mining shares were called Emma's, Emma shares.

In 1871, the mining claim was surveyed for a patent and a company was formed named the American Emma Mining Company. During this time, the Emma Mine produced 31 carloads of ore so rich that even after hauling it by wagon to Salt Lake City...then by rail to New Jersey, it still turned a grand profit, making Emma at that time the foremost mine in Utah. It was reported that at the Emma Mine's high point, daily shipments of ore worth \$5,000 was extracted (big money in those days).

Within a few months, the American Emma Mining Company was sold to a New York firm, quickly followed by a subsequent sale to a British consortium of promoters and speculators, most of whom were "scallywags." To raise capital for expanding the mine, promoters made several exaggerated claims about the size of the silver ore vein. At that time, the Emma Mine had produced some \$3 million worth of ore; however, because of worries that the vein would shortly play out, the promoters needed to convince prospective investors that it would continue to produce high levels of silver ore well into the future. To do this the promoters hired a professor of chemistry at Yale, named Benjamin Stilliman Jr., to examine the mine...resulting in a very optimistic finding that the Emma ore body was indeed a "true mineral vein" which would extend much further into the earth than had been mined up to that time. This proved to be totally unsupported and, in fact, what the investors ultimately put their money into was nothing more than an empty shell. Serious technical problems ensued, one of which included unwanted water in the mineshaft, resulting in no promised expansion of ore production. The plum had been picked and eaten. By 1872, no low-hanging fruit remained and the





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construction of overnight shelters and ski trails, improve access to and within the canyons, and plant trees on the denuded mountain slopes to control erosion and improve appearance.

Alta, in particular, required much re-planting because the miners had cut almost every tree in the Alta Basin for timber to shore up the mine tunnels. Today, Alta owes special thanks to the CCCs for their efforts in planting many of the trees which are in evidence on the mountain sides. One of the many Alta photographs show a comparison of what the Alta hillsides looked like in the 1880s as compared to what the same scene looked like almost a century later due to CCC planting efforts, under Forest Service supervision.

### WPA (Works Projects Administration)

The third group who played a lesser, yet still significant role at Alta was a group called the WPA. In particular, it was through the efforts of the WPA that the old Alta general store during the mining era was rebuilt so it could be used as one of Alta's first public winter shelters for skiers who were starting to frequent Alta in the late 1930s. When completed, the facility was initially named "Rock Shelter" because of the granite stone facade involved. Eventually, the shelter was renamed "Snowpine" and is currently known as Snowpine Lodge.

In the annals of Alta history, these three groups certainly deserve credit and appreciation for the important roles they played.

Rock Shelter (now Snowpine Lodge) being rebuilt by the WPA

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value of Emma stock had been dramatically reduced, causing an international uproar.

British investors became highly incensed. They made charges of fraud and swindle, which focused substantial negative attention on those who owned or had owned the Emma Mine. Lawsuits and counter lawsuits flew on both sides of the ocean at a rapid pace, resulting in a full-blown U.S. Congressional investigation. Ultimately, a 879-page report was produced which basically exonerated the principals of the Emma Mine. However, negative feelings at home and abroad hovered over the mine and its owners for many years to follow. Low esteem of the scandal-plagued President Ulysses S. Grant administration at that time further contributed to decline in value of the Emma Mine stock. This in turn caused the reputation of virtually all American stocks in London to fall.

Four plus decades later, in 1916, the American Emma Mining Company, Ltd. initiated several new drillings out of the Bay City Tunnel. These drillings resulted in about 10,400 tons of ore being produced and sold to the U.S. Smelting and Refining Company, which had built a refinery at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon. However, within two years, the quality and amount of ore from the Emma Mine declined so much that active mining was permanently discontinued. All that remained was a worthless hole in the ground.

Today, the Emma Mine serves as the principal source of water for the Town of Alta... but that is a story for a future issue of the *Alta Powder News*.

CCC Camp 3240 at the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon. (Inset: foreman Alf Engen)

### **Editorial Staff:**

Alan Engen

Sid Jensen

Connie Marshall
Thad Bookman

Felix Kozoil of the USFS

circa early 50s

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