



The Ancient Skier

P. O. Box 331 Kirkland, WA 98083

Winter 2013-2014

ANCIENT SKIERS 31ST ANNUAL SUN VALLEY REUNION SET FOR JANUARY 18 - 25, 2014

The Sun Valley week will start with registration on Saturday, January 18, 3 to 6 p.m., in the Sun Valley Inn Continental Room. You will get your packet with name tags, reunion event schedule, information about ticket exchange privileges, and a coupon for a free drink. If you still are thirsty, there will be a no-host bar. Sign-up sheets will be available for the various activities during the week.

Come early, too, and, as some would say, mingle and mangle with old friends, new friends, and first-year new members. A drawing will be held for one person to ride the Sun Valley "Beast." This is one of the largest snow-grooming machines in North America.

Highlights for the week will include the Monday Western Dinner night, so be sure to bring your finest western wear. Tuesday, we will be hosted by the Ketchum Sun Valley Historical Society Heritage & Ski Museum. Wednesday will be Nordic Day with both cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on tap, along with lunch, at the Sun Valley Club. Thursday morning will be the Masters' alpine race at Warm Springs. Thursday afternoon will feature a presentation by Lou Whittaker at the Sun Valley Opera House, and the Friday evening windup will include awards and a dinner-dance, so be prepared "to trip the light fantastic."

Throughout the week, various art and craft works created by our talented members will be on display.

Note: Due to difficulties encountered last year with registration forms sent as attachments to e-mailed Newsletters, all Ancient Skier members are being

mailed a hard copy of the Newsletter and the two registration forms.

With this Newsletter are two forms: "REGISTRATION FORM" and "RETAIN THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS." Fill out the Registration Form, total the event charges, and mail the completed form with your check made out to and mailed to ANCIENT SKIERS, P.O. Box 1295, Sun Valley, ID 83353, postmarked no later than November 28, 2013. (No e-mail responses.) Copy the information from the Registration Form on to the Retain This Copy For Your Records form and bring it to the Saturday registration in case any discrepancies need to be resolved.

Those who did not book a combined package of lodging and lifts with the Sun Valley Company may purchase discount lift tickets at the inside ticket counter at River Run Lodge.

Your questions?
Call Marlys Gerber,
Registration Chair,
(206) 271-1575.



NEW-MEMBER INFO AVAILABLE

E-mail, mailing addresses and telephone numbers of new members may be obtained from Membership Chair Leland Rosenlund, 425-890-5090, or at his email: lelandr@sports-unlmt.com

ANDERSON & THOMPSON SKI COMPANY WAS SKI INDUSTRY PIONEER

The information in this article was given to the Ancient Skiers by Lois Simonson from her files and is printed with her permission. The article was prepared October 19, 1966 by Ada Lou Wheeler, a Seattle public relations consultant.



Two of our Ancient Skier members were partners and owners of this firm, Henry "Hank" Simonson (deceased), left, and John Woodward, right.

The A & T Ski Company was notable for holding the first patent for a laminated wood ski, which was very successful, and the firm went on to making and distributing many different items for skiers. A page of their catalog accompanies this article. In 1966, Ada Lou Wheeler wrote:



Everybody knows that Seattle has hordes of skiers and numerous ski areas nearby. Not so well known is the fact that Seattle is the home of a company which pioneered such major changes in ski equipment as the first laminated ski and the first successful safety binding. That firm is Anderson & Thompson Ski Co., now one of the four largest manufacturers and importers of ski equipment in the nation.

The sports climate in which the company was born was far different from today's. In the early 1930s, skiing called for more physical stamina and devotion than most of today's stretch pant-set could probably muster.

A&T Sales Manager John Woodward recalls skiing on Mt. Rainier as a teen-ager. "Chair lifts hadn't been invented, and there wasn't a rope tow until about 1935. We her-ringboned up the hills, with canvas 'socks' on the tails of our skis for traction. For bindings, we used leather straps and toe irons. Our poles were bamboo, with huge baskets."

In those days, the better skis were unpainted but heavily shellacked. (Ed. note: John Woodward states "varnish" was used.) Wood grain and color added to the beauty and value, as is the case with water skis today. The biggest problems were warping and splitting. "I used to break about one pair a year," Woodward added.

An idea whose time had come

The idea that sparked the founding of Anderson & Thompson Ski Co. came not from a hotshot skier, but from a skilled cabinet maker who skied occasionally. George Aaland got to wondering why a laminated ski wouldn't have greater strength and less warpage than skis made from a single piece of wood and steamed into shape. George took his idea to Ray Anderson, president of General Furniture Co., which had the woodworking equipment and laminating know-how to produce such a ski.

Ray liked the idea. He talked ski instructor Ben Thompson into becoming sales manager, hired Aaland as shop supervisor, and started making the first laminated skis in America.

The earliest experimental models had a soft core of Philippine mahogany sandwiched between hickory. One slushy, rainy day on Mt. Rainier, the A&T skis started curling up like pretzels. The company made good on every pair and thereafter used ash or hickory in the core.

Anderson applied for a patent on May 13, 1933. Within ten days, Splitkein of Norway also asked for a U.S. patent on a laminated ski. Since neither firm knew about the oth-

er's product, the Patent Office allowed both to be patented, a most unusual procedure.

Not content to rest on its ski laurels, in 1934 Anderson & Thompson introduced the first steel ski pole in the U.S. It was so much stronger than bamboo that it could be guaranteed against breakage for a year. That year, A&T also produced the first cable binding in the U.S., a considerable improvement over leather heel straps.

In 1937, the firm manufactured the first auto ski rack, crude by today's standards. It was a hickory slat and three blocks undercoated with rubber, held onto the car by two-inch webbing threaded through the car windows.

Sun Valley model ski best in nation

The quality of the skis steadily improved, and, when the Sun Valley model was introduced, it soon earned the reputation of best in the nation. It was also the most expensive, retailing for \$22.95!

"There were so few people in the ski business that we all knew each other," recalls Karl Hostetter, who later became sales manager. "The salesmen fought each other for business all day, but spent evenings and skiing weekends together. In fact, Ben Thompson roomed with his competitor Jack Hillyer when they were on the road!

"We were jacks-of-all-trades. When we weren't selling we were inventing, or out in the shop helping make bindings and poles."

Sid Gerber becomes new owner

One of the men in this small circle of ski industry pioneers was Sid Gerber. An ardent outdoorsman, Gerber had been manufacturing bindings and poles in Seattle since 1935 and was distributor for Groswood skis. When he heard that Anderson wanted to sell A&T, Gerber jumped at the chance to buy. Anderson, on the other hand, was slated for the presidency of a Skinner & Eddy corporation and told his sales manager, "The ski company is just too small to play with."

Gerber was the first person to import skis to America. On a trip to Japan in 1934, he had observed that Japanese-made skis were smooth and fast, but too heavy, and they warped badly. Some were made of bamboo.

The next time he visited Japan, he found the people making crude copies of his skis! They were literally manufacturing skis by hand, using a hand plane to smooth each piece of wood before laminating them together. There was no interpreter in this little village in the Japanese Alps, so Gerber

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pulled out a Japanese-American dictionary and began negotiating and teaching.

His goal was to bring their production techniques up to American standards, and this was gradually done at several Japanese factories. Today, Japan produces more skis than any other country in the world, and they are of excellent quality.

World War II stops sports equipment production

Sid Gerber scarcely had time to get used to his expanded company before World War II put a stop to production of sports equipment. Facilities were strained to capacity making skis for the Army. The 3rd Infantry Division headquartered at Mt. Rainier was issued skis, binding, poles and rucksacks made by A&T.

Wally Burr, famous today for his custom-made water skis, (Ed. note: Also father of Jannette Burr Johnson, Olympic team member '52 and member of Ancient Skiers) had worked for A&T as inspector of skis made for the government.

"I also had to train the green help," he remembers. "Toward the end of the war we were using women on the production line because there just weren't enough men. The last two years, we made wooden parts for B-17 and B-29 bombers, instrument panels, cabinets for radio equipment, things like that."

Company produces successful safety binding

After the war, the company launched into another period of product innovations. Most important was the first successful safety binding. Its toe piece that released under excessive lateral strain greatly reduced the possibility of a broken leg or sprained ankle. Other new products were the first ski boot tree and a forerunner of today's step-in binding.

Protected by its patent, the company continued to be the only manufacturer of laminated skis. These were improved with lock edges, plastic base, and laminations in the core.

Gene Erwin, inventor of A&T's safety binding, and sales manager at that time, emphasized the importance of children's equipment. "Whenever we made important changes in a product, we usually designed models for children. We discovered that they didn't want toys, they wanted good equipment that looked like their parents'. But it had to be specially designed to compensate for their lighter weight."

Simonson and Woodward take A&T ownership

In 1955, ownership of Anderson & Thompson Ski Co. changed again, in the deceptively simple manner that seems

typical of the ski industry. Seattle businessman Henry Simonson was riding the chair lift at Squaw Valley with Bob Mickelson, sales manager for Edelweiss ski pants. Mickelson mentioned that Sid Gerber wanted to retire. Simonson happened to be looking for a company to purchase and a month later he owned A&T!

John Woodward, whose skiing background is as old as the company, joined A&T in 1953 as vice-president. Woodward was a member of the University of Washington's first ski team (1934) and coached the team after graduation. "It wasn't a paying job then," he adds with a chuckle.

Woodward, a ski retailer for 15 years, an officer in the 10th Mountain Division, and A&T sales manager for 13 years, probably knows more skiers throughout the U.S. than any other man in Seattle.

In 1959, the fast-growing ski company moved to larger quarters. It was this move that unexpectedly catapulted A&T into importing, which now constitutes more than fifty percent of its business.

"We planned to make skis at the new plant," Simonson explains, "but it became obvious we would have to install quite a lot of new equipment. I decided to take a closer look at importing, which A&T had been doing on a small scale for 20 years.

Production moves overseas

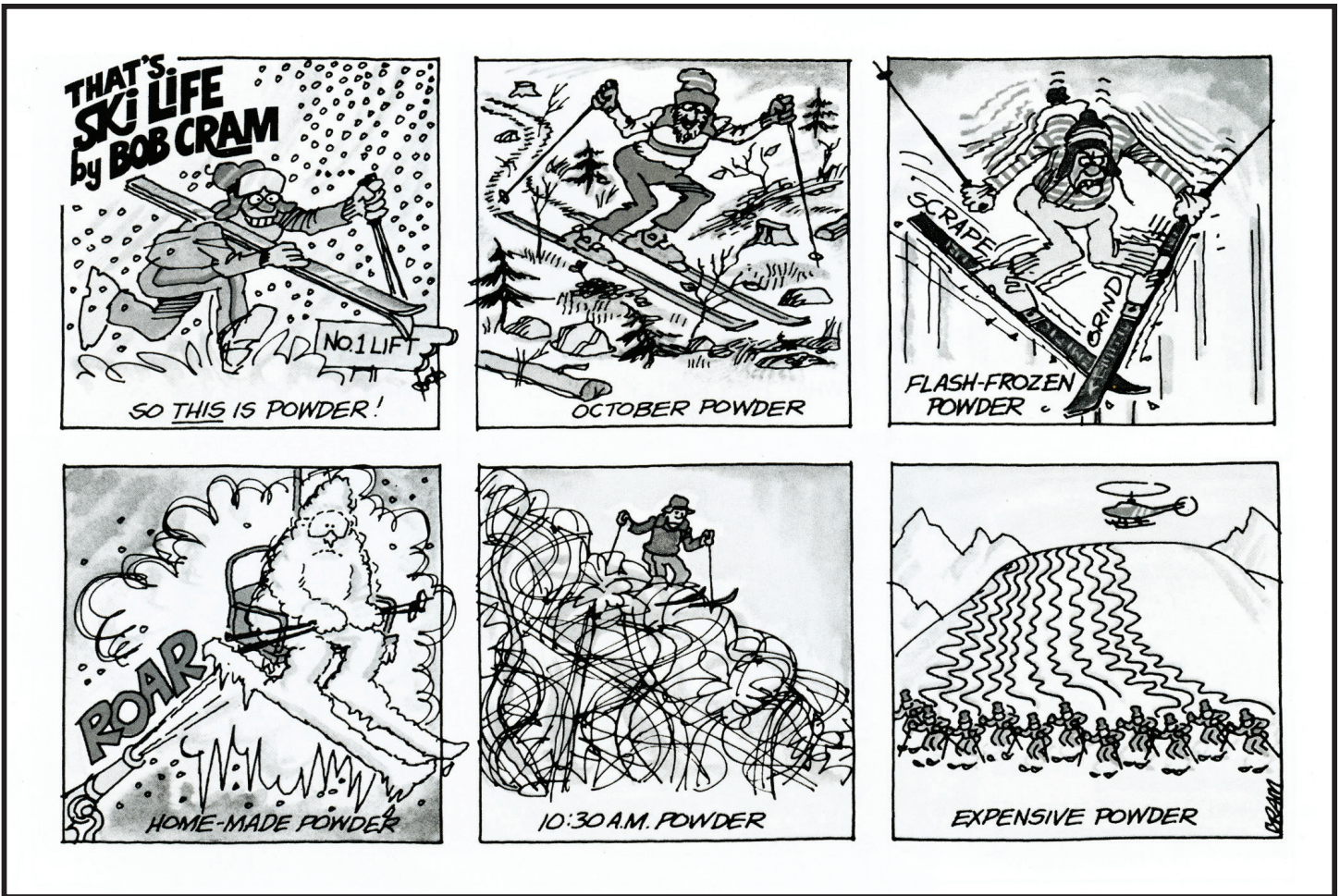
"The upshot was that we began having skis made to our specifications by manufacturers in Japan, France, Italy, Austria and Germany. We can sell these for less than American-made skis of equivalent quality. Today, only our K-2, a glass-epoxy ski made on Vashon Island, is not imported."

Another major import is boots. As distributor for French-made Le Trappeur boots throughout the U.S., Anderson & Thompson has 2,000 to 3,000 pairs of each model in its warehouse every fall.

Still manufactured at the Seattle plant are bindings, waxes, poles, car ski racks, Arlberg straps, rope tow grips, and other accessories.

Looking back over 34 years of history, the company's success seems almost too good to be true. "Some of our products were more popular than others, but the company never had a real lemon one that affected the profit picture," Simonson said.





THE CARTOON ABOVE IS FROM BOB CRAM'S "THAT'S SKI LIFE." This newly published book is a natural for every Ancient Skier's library. Our own skiing pasts are reflected in many of Bob's experiences shown by cartoons and comments. To order, call 206-922-2709, snail mail to 900 University St., #18FG, Seattle, WA 98101, or email Bob at: mcbc52@comcast.net. Cost is \$13.95 plus shipping.

REMEMBERING - Thomas T. Campbell and Evelyn E. Campbell were both Ancient Skiers emeritus. Evelyn passed away in August, 2012 at the age of 92. Thomas (TT to his friends) passed away September 2013 at the age of 97. Thomas was an avid skier and mountaineer – skiing and climbing into his 80s. He had been an instructor in the 10th Mountain Division until a climbing accident resulted in the loss of his right arm. He may have been one of the Campbells for whom Campbell Basin at Crystal Mountain was named.

ANDERSON & THOMPSON SKI COMPANY *Continued from page 3*

Unfortunately, most of the people responsible for the early success of Anderson & Thompson are not here to see that their fledgling firm has grown into a \$3 million business. Ray Anderson died in 1959. Ben Thompson has lived in the East for many years, having carved out a career as a top-flight cartoonist. George Aaland has returned to Norway. Sid Gerber died in the plane crash last year that killed City Councilman Wing Luke.

Yet the company remains the same in many respects. Henry Simonson continues to steer it along the path of quality and leadership. His stature in the industry is evidenced by his membership on the board of Ski Industries of America.

And, as always, Anderson & Thompson seems to have the right product at the right time for a sport that is growing at an almost exponential rate.

Editor's note: In November 1969, J.B Fuqua Industries of Atlanta, Ga., purchased A&T, which had four offices and warehouses across the U.S. and was doing \$10 million to \$20 million in sales a year. Simonson and Woodward held management contracts under the new arrangement until 1975, when Warren Swim was named president. Later that year, Fuqua sold A&T to a three-way partnership (Safety Systems, Inc., Chicago, known for Besser bindings; Kastinger of Austria, known for boots; and Skiform of Norway), and Swim, who called the group "K & B," continued in his role until 1977, as the A&T name slowly disappeared from the ski scene. It should be noted, too, that K2, which received early support from A&T, became a separate company in 1969.

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