

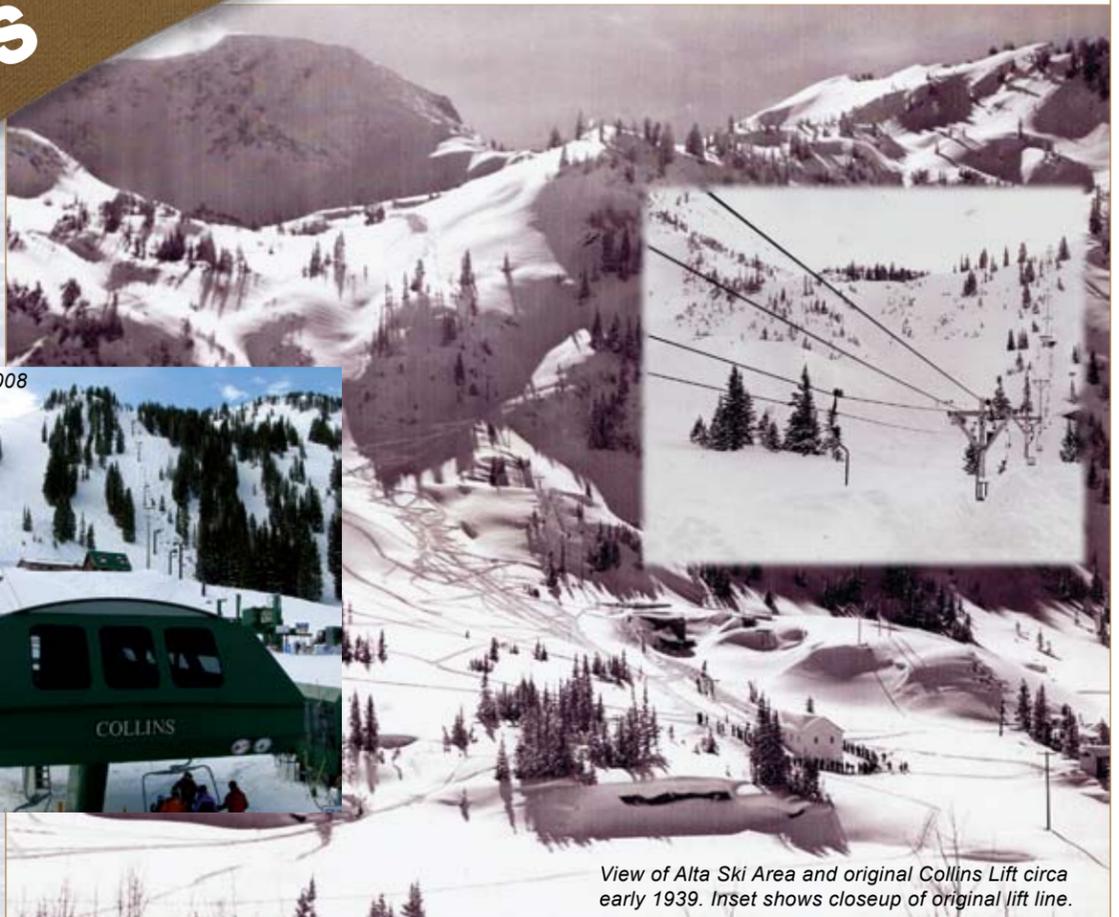


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# ALTA POWDER NEWS

## HISTORICAL EDITION

Online edition available at [alta.com](http://alta.com)



Collins Lift as of 2008



View of Alta Ski Area and original Collins Lift circa early 1939. Inset shows closeup of original lift line.

## A brief history of Alta's chairlifts

During 1938 and very early in 1939, the Alta Ski Lifts Company built its first chair lift—the Collins Lift, the first in the Wasatch Mountains, the fifth in the United States, and probably the fifth in the world. The Collins Lift first carried paying skiers up Collins Gulch on 15 January 1939, missing a hoped-for opening by a month or two.

Sun Valley near Ketchum, Idaho, was the first ski area to design, construct, and operate chair lifts.

In 1936-37, Sun Valley installed two chair lifts—one on Proctor Mountain and one on Dollar Mountain. In 1937-38, Sun Valley constructed a third chair lift, this one on Ruud Mountain. Also in 1937-38, Balknap, Laconia, New Hampshire, built its first chair lift—which became America's fourth chair lift. The Collins Lift, constructed in 1938, at Alta, Utah, came next—the first built in Utah and the fifth in the U.S. Alta opened the lift to the public in early 1939 and became the nation's third ski area to have an uphill chairlift conveyance system.

Below we list and date all the chair lifts that have been constructed and/or modified at Alta. Then we present a few key facts about the original Collins Lift, and finally we briefly mention two other scarcely known chair lifts at Alta.

### Alta's Chair Lifts

- 1939 – Collins Lift (*wooden towers, single chairs*)
- 1940 – The Barge Lift
- 1941 – Peruvian Lift (*wooden towers, single chairs, no back rests*)
- 1942 – Lucky Boy Lift (*single chairs*)
- 1944 – Rustler Lift (*made from some parts of the Lucky Boy Lift*)
- 1945 – Peruvian upgrade (*backs added to the chair seats*)
- 1949 – Collins upgrade (*fabricated steel towers replaced wooden towers*)
- 1954 – Germania Lift (*double chair*)
- 1954 – Peruvian Lift (*top terminal burns, dismantled, and removed*)
- 1959 – Wildcat Lift (*fabricated steel towers, double chair*)
- 1963 – Albion Lift (*double chair*)
- 1967 – Sugarloaf Lift (*double chair*)
- 1970 – Sunnyside Lift (*double chair*)
- 1973 – Collins Lift (*single chair upgrade to double chair*)
- 1974 – Germania Lift (*alignment changed from Fred's Slot to its present location, which is now the top section of the present Collins Lift*)
- 1976 – Albion Lift (*major upgrade; motor moved to bottom; new sheave trains*)
- 1980 – Wildcat Lift (*new lift, single mass towers, on the same alignment*)

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Peruvian J-Bar lift with no back circa 1942

## ALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### 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.

- 1981 – Cecret Lift (*double chair*)
- 1981 – Supreme Lift (*double chair*)
- 1991 – Germania Lift (*upgraded to a triple chair*)
- 1992 – Sugarloaf Lift (*upgraded to fixed-grip triple chair from fixed-grip double chair*). Also during this year, the surface rope tow between Wildcat and Albion bases was replaced and upgraded with a unique, first of its kind, YAN Company designed Transfer Tow which combined features of a ski lift and rope tow.
- 1999 – Sunnyside Lift (*new alignment; upgraded from double to detachable triple*)
- 2002 – Sugarloaf Lift (*major upgrade; fixed-grip triple to detachable quad*)
- 2002 – Supreme Lift (*double chair upgraded to triple chair*)
- 2004 – Collins Lift (*new detachable quad with an angle station; replaced both the Collins and the Germania lifts; runs from the bottom of Collins Gulch to Collins Pass on the top of Germania ridge*)

### The Original Collins Lift

The Collins Lift was named after Charles H. Collins, who prospected at Alta in the late 1800s. In the 1870s, Alta had a population of about 5,000 people. Collins struck rich ore on the east side of the Peruvian Hill in 1900, near where the Alta Peruvian Lodge now stands. He formed a small mining business called the Collins Group. A few years later he sold his mining interests to investors in Park City, Utah. The mountain area known as Collins Gulch and the ski run called Collins Face obviously carry this man's namesake.

During the Great Depression in the early 1930s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service began searching for areas that could be developed for recreational skiing. Alf Engen, ski pioneer and legend, was retained by the Forest Service to explore possible locations that could be developed in the Intermountain West. In 1935, he recommended that Alta be a prime candidate. The Forest Service accepted Alf's recommendation. In the spirit of community service, a group of Salt Lake City businessmen formed the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association with the primary goal of developing Alta as a place for local citizens to ski. Those comprising the group included Joe Quinney, W. J. O'Connor, V. R. Parkinson, L. R. Ure, Paul F. Keyser, Bartlett Wicks, Stewart Cosgriff, and P.H. Kittle. In time, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association became what we know today as the Alta Ski Lifts Company.

One other event happened that made the development of Alta possible. In 1938 George Watson, one of the last remaining active miners at Alta, donated 700 acres of surface rights from about 80 mining claims to the Forest Service. This allowed the Forest Service to issue development permits to the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association.

Some years earlier, Watson had purchased most of these claims from miners when they left Alta because the remaining ore bodies had become unprofitable. As time passed, Watson had Federal delinquent-tax problems. To pay his tax debts, he proposed to convey title of much of his land holdings and surface rights to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, for \$1.00—a very large gift for a very small price—with the stipulation that the land be used for winter-sports recreation. The Forest Service accepted the offer and issued the initial permit to construct the Collins Lift to the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association on 19 October 1938.

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*Peruvian Lift with backs to chairs. Alta circa late 1940s*

To construct the original Collins Chair Lift, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association made a deal with the Michigan-Utah Mines to purchase the old aerial tram that had carried ore down Little Cottonwood Canyon in the early 1900s. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association raised \$10,000 for this effort. Marthinus (Mark) Strand, one of Utah's earliest ski promoters, was contracted to build the supports and install the ore tram up the face of the Collins Gulch. The first lift towers were constructed of timbers originally used to brace mine shafts. He was followed by Fred Speyer who supervised the completion of the lift and became Alta's first ski lift manager.

On Sunday, 15 January 1939, the original Collins Lift operated for the first time, carrying 350 people up Collins Gulch. Prices were \$0.25 for a single ride and \$1.50 for a full day. From January 1939 through April 1940, about 86,000 skiers rode the lift. In 1940, the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce announced that the Denver-Rio Grande Railroad had committed to invest \$25,000 for the further development of Alta as a ski area. Based on the success of the two previous ski seasons (1938-39 and 1939-40) and on this commitment, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association went on to develop Alta into the special place that it now is.

#### **The Barge Lift**

In 1940, the Alta Barge Lift was built as an experiment in an attempt to move skiers up the mountain side after unloading skiers from the top of the original Collins Lift, which stopped a few yards west of the present Collins Lift Angle Station. The Barge Lift started near where the now-removed second Watson Shelter was located and went up Aggies Alley. The life of the "Barge" was short, only operating for one ski season—1940-41. Because of the many mechanical difficulties, the Barge was dismantled and instead the Peruvian J-Bar Lift was built in the summer of 1941.

Years later, Alan Engen (now Director of Skiing at Alta) asked Chic Morton (then General Manager) if any remnants of the Barge Lift still existed. Chic told him that some of the parts had been used for other lift purposes, but the rest of it had been hauled away to the garbage dump in the late 1940s—and that was the end of the Barge.

The photograph to the right shows the Barge and the top of the first Watson Shelter in the background. D.W. Stickney, Lake Forest, Illinois, took this photograph during the 1940-41 ski season.

#### **The Peruvian Lift**

The Peruvian Lift was built in 1941—Alta's second chair lift. It ran from the flat near where the bottom of Aggies Alley intersects with Main Street westward up to the Peruvian Ridge near where the explosive-cache building is now located. The Peruvian Lift provided skiers access to the Wildcat area—from about Tower #17 on the present Wildcat Lift north-by-northwest to Johnson's Warm-Up and onward to Westward Ho, which overlooks the Alta Peruvian Lodge.

The Peruvian Lift had wooden towers and chairs that ran just above the ground. A lift-line trench had to be shoveled out after every major storm. For safety reasons skiers could not ski under the towers because of the trench and the low-hanging chairs. For the first four years of Peruvian lift operation the single chairs had no seat backs. In 1945, the lift was upgraded to include chairs with seat backs, much to the approval of the skiing public.

In 1954 the Peruvian's top terminal burned. Various after-dinner stories relate different causes of the fire—a bolt of lightning, an electrical short, an overheated pot-belly stove—take your pick. Frank "Buck" Sasaki, who worked for many years as Alta's Lift Superintendent, adds to the story: "We closed the lift for lunch. Hans Brogle, who was the top operator, skied down to the bottom of the lift to eat lunch with me. While we were eating we saw smoke coming from the top terminal of the lift. Because the motor to run the lift was at the top terminal, there was no way of getting to the top except to hike up in the snow. Because that was not practical and there was no water to put the fire out. From the bottom, we just watched it burn."

After this fire, the Peruvian Lift was dismantled and removed. In 1959 the first Wildcat Lift took its place.

#### **The Lucky Boy Lift**

This lift shows prominently on the 1940 Alta Master Plan. You can study its location and the lift line on the 1940 Master Plan, which is hanging on the top floor of the new Watson Shelter near the restrooms. The Lucky Boy Lift was built in 1942 to provide intermediate runs for skiers. Lucky Boy's bottom terminal was near Cottonwood Creek, a little east of the Landes Jump Hill. The top terminal was above and a bit north of the top of Snake Pit.

Unluckily, during the first winter of operation an avalanche swept over the Lucky Boy Lift and virtually wiped it out. For obvious safety reasons, the decision was made to not rebuild another lift in this area. However, in 1944 the usable parts of the Lucky Boy lift were dismantled and rebuilt several hundred yards to the west. It was renamed the Rustler Lift. In the early 1950s, it was deactivated and removed. Some years later, Cal and Dodie McPhie bought this chairlift and installed it at Gorgoza, a small, family-oriented ski area east of Parleys Summit. This ski area no longer exists.

#### **Sun Valley's and Alta's Enduring Influence**

The vision that led to the design, construction, and operation of the first three Sun Valley chair lifts certainly influenced the design and construction of many other chair lifts. The ore hauling tramways that had operated at Alta since the 1860s and Sun Valley's construction of its first chair lifts in 1937 directly influenced the building of the first Collins Lift at Alta.

Sun Valley, backed by Averell Harriman, the Chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, had millions of dollars to fund the construction of its lifts and the other skier amenities. These amenities made Sun Valley the United State's

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premier destination ski resort for many years. In the 1930s and 40s, Sun Valley's multi-million dollar financial backing was unlike all other ski resorts in the United States, and especially the ski areas in Utah.

The original Collins Lift cost about \$19,000. This price tag led others to realize that building a chair lift was indeed do-able, even during the Great Depression, and especially do-able after the end of World War II. The original Collins Lift at Alta became an impetus for the construction of later chair lifts in Utah in the 1940s, including Snow Basin, Brighton, Snow Park (now Deer Valley), Beaver Mountain in Logan, Timphaven in Provo, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which built a chair lift at Snow King in 1947.

In 1996, the State of Utah Museum officially recognized the Collins Lift's historic importance. As part of Utah's 1996 Statehood Centennial Celebration, the Utah Museum Association named the Collins Lift one of the "100 Treasures of Utah." Primary selection was based on its uniqueness to Utah's culture and heritage, combined with possessing a strong interpretive story.

A special historical display of the Collins Lift can currently be found at the Joe Quinney Winter Sports Center/Alf Engen Ski Museum located at Utah Olympic Park in Snyder Basin, near Park City, Utah. Stop by and see it, then come to Alta and ride the latest Collins Lift that has replaced both the original Collins Lift and the Germania Lift.

The present Collins Lift is a high-speed quad that starts near the Wildcat Ticket Office and ends where the Germania Lift ended—now four skiers at a time ride one lift from the bottom of Collins Gulch to the top of Collins Pass at about 1,000 linear feet per minute, which equates to about 6 minutes 30 seconds or thereabouts—a far cry from the original single-chair Collins Lift.

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- Book: For the Love of Skiing – A Visual History (1998) by Alan K. Engen
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- Document titled "First Ski Areas to use Chair Lifts in the West" by Alan Engen
- Alta history looseleaf binder book: Alta Memories prepared by Alan Engen



*The Barge Lift at Alta circa 1940*



*The Lucky Boy Lift being hit by an avalanche in the early 40's*

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# Principal contributors to Alta's development as a ski area

Few people know more than a sentence or two about those people who were the principal developers of Alta as a ski mecca. As part of the 70th Year Anniversary of Alta, we have prepared five short biographical sketches of people whom we consider principal contributors to Alta's conception, gestation, birth, and to some meaningful degree, Alta's longevity.

**Seymore Joseph Quinney** – *A Visionary, A Compass, and A Legal Linchpin*

**James "J" Laughlin** – *Promoter of Conservative Development*

**Charles "Chic" Morton** – *A Low Key, Low Price, High Enjoyment General Manager*

**Alf Engen** – *Skiing's and Alta's Greatest Ambassador*

**William "Bill" Levitt** – *Alta's First and Long-Time Elected Mayor*



## Seymore Joseph Quinney

*A Visionary, A Compass, and A Legal Linchpin*

S. Joe Quinney was a key player in the development of Alta as a ski area. He was born in Logan, Utah, in 1892 to English-Swiss parents, Joseph and Ida Theuer Quinney. Following graduation from Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, he served in the Army during World War I. Following discharge from the service, he enrolled at Harvard University, graduating with a law degree in 1919.

In 1921, Quinney was elected to the Utah House of Representatives. Here he gained a full understanding of the laws applicable to land under control of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.

While still attending Harvard Law School, he met his wife to be, Jessie Eccles, and they were married in 1917. Two children followed—a son, David Quinney Sr., and a daughter, Janet. Both became active competitors in ski events and it was because of their involvement in the sport that Joe Quinney found it better to participate than stand around as a spectator.

By the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, the local Utah citizens were becoming more aware of the sport of skiing because of the local press highlighting accounts of daring ski jumping activities centered at a place called Ecker Hill, near Park City. Because of his son's interest in ski jumping, Quinney soon met and became closely associated with the large Norwegian contingent of ski jumping enthusiasts. Among them were Marthinus "Mark" Strand, Axel Andreson, and Pete Ecker for whom Ecker Hill was named. This particular group were the primary forces behind the organization of the Utah Ski Club.

Joe Quinney soon became active in the club as a director and within a few years became president. He served from 1935 to 1938. Alf Engen once said, "There were more accomplishments during Joe Quinney's period as president than at any other time. The U.S. National Ski Jumping Championship held at Ecker Hill in 1937, under Joe Quinney's direction, was the biggest and best sporting event ever held in Utah up to that time."

From active participation in the Utah Ski Club and promotion of some of the world's largest Nordic ski jumping events of the 1930s, he turned his attention to another phase of the development of skisport in the Intermountain region—alpine skiing.

Public interest in skiing during the latter part of the 1930s was turning from being a "spectator" to "active participation" in the sport. The Forest Service, in an effort to create places for local people to enjoy skiing in a controlled environment, searched for suitable areas along the Wasatch mountains near Salt Lake City. One of those was Alta, well known as a former mining center but also holding promise as a possible site for ski development. The basic limitation was insufficient land under Forest Service control. Most of the land at Alta was owned through individual mining claims.

Joe Quinney's law firm, Ray, Quinney and Nebeker, in Salt Lake City represented the American Smelting and Refining Company which held mortgages on the Alta United Mines Company, owned by a gentleman named George H. Watson. Because of tax delinquency problems concerning the Alta claims he owned, Watson was looking for a way out of his predicament. After much discussion, a plan was set in motion where-by Alta United Mines Company would arrange the conveyance of the surface rights to its claims to the U.S. Forest Service. For that, Watson would be relieved of his delinquent tax obligations and the Forest Service would make the Alta area available to the skiing public.

Salt Lake promoters, under the leadership of S. Joe Quinney, agreed to organize a corporation which, under Forest Service permit, would "construct a ski lift and related facilities at Alta and would have the first rights for further and additional construction of such facilities in the Alta area." To that end, a corporation was set up called the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association. \$10,000 was raised through the organization to construct a chair lift in Collins Gulch at Alta. A subsequent contract was awarded to Marthinus (M.A.) Strand to build the lift. Joe Quinney did all the legal work associated with this effort and served as secretary-treasurer of the organization from 1939 to 1958, at which time he became its president, a position he held for the next 25 years.

Original incorporators of the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association included, in addition to Quinney, E.D. Nordquist, Paul Keyser, Stewart Cosgriff, Bartlett Wicks, W.J. O'Connor, Lincoln Ure, Percy Kittle and R.B. Parkinson. O'Connor served as the organization's first president from 1939 to 1958.

The Forest Service, played an important role in Alta ski area development by arranging to keep Little Cottonwood Canyon open during winter months. They began using new avalanche control methods and granting permits, as needs came up, to further develop new lifts and related facilities in the Alta basin.

While Joe Quinney remained head of the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association, many advances were made at Alta. It was his personal conviction that skiing should not be a "rich person's sport." As a result, he made it a prime objective to maintain reasonable costs at Alta and only raise rates if it became absolutely necessary to adequately operate the lifts. He further felt Alta should remain a "low key" place where skiers could enjoy the beauty of the surrounding mountain peaks and the wonderful snow conditions it possessed.

For Joe Quinney's many contributions and accomplishments, he was the recipient of the Winter Sports Award by the Salt Lake Area Chamber of Commerce in 1967 and was inducted into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975. In 2002, he became one of the first recipients to be inducted, posthumously, into the

Intermountain Ski Hall of Fame.

S. Joe Quinney remained a guiding force at Alta until he passed away on November 22, 1983 at age 91. He leaves a lasting legacy as a true "skisport builder." His memory remains alive at the Joe Quinney Winter Sports Center/Alf Engen Ski Museum located at Utah Olympic Park near Park City.



## James Laughlin IV

*Promoter of Conservative Development*

James Laughlin played a significant role in skiing development, nationally as well as in the Intermountain region during the late 1930s through the 1950s. He preferred to be known as simply "J" with his

last name pronounced lock-lin.

Laughlin began skiing in 1935, at age 21, when he spent a year in Europe following a temporary leave from his intellectual pursuits at Harvard University. He spent the winter in St. Anton, Austria and took ski lessons. According to Laughlin, "I took lessons with the Hannes Schneider Ski School for about six weeks. I learned to turn and had some fun. As a result I graduated two years late, with the class of '39 . . . after two leaves of absence to study skiing."

During his time in the Alps, Laughlin fell in love with the European ski-hut program—people hiking for part of a day and then staying overnight in a ski hut, repeated each day for about 1 week. He felt the system was so useful and enjoyable that he introduced it to the United States upon his return with a series of writings, several of which ended up in the Ski Bulletin, currently a prime source for ski historical research.

On returning to the U.S., he finished his schooling at Harvard and started a publishing business under the name New Directions, which published many new authors, such as Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Dorothy Parker, and others.

During the early 1940s, he met the highest ranking ski star in the United States—Dick Durrance. They quickly developed a lasting friendship, primarily due to their common interest in skisport.

During the winter of 1940-41, Durrance was retained by the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association to head up the ski school at Alta, and do some finishing work on the Alta Lodge, which was under construction. Durrance and his new wife, Miggs, invited Laughlin to come out from his New England location and have a look at this place called Alta, high in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. Laughlin accepted Durrance's invitation and fell in love with the place.

According to Laughlin, Alta ". . . reminded me of Zurs, Austria, before it was developed." The following year, he returned to Alta and took over the lease on the Alta Lodge. One of the first things he did to stimulate interest in the new Alta ski area was to underwrite the cost of an annual springtime ski race which was called the Alta Cup. Local as well as nationally recognized ski racers participated during the years 1942 through 1946.

In 1952, Laughlin and Fred Speyer bought out the Rio Grande Railroad's interest in the Alta Lodge. Chic Morton, in turn, purchased Speyer's interest in the Lodge in 1958. Laughlin sold his lodge interest to Bill Levitt in 1959 and began devoting more of his energy in support of the Alta ski lift operations in which he had a vested interest.

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From his early investment in Alta to his passing, in late fall 1997, he played a significant role in Alta's conservative approach to development. He was a strong advocate for keeping the area as pristine as possible to avoid running the risk of spoiling Alta's beautiful surroundings in favor of growth and expansion. This philosophy has been shared by many of the Alta pioneers and visionaries and continues as a cornerstone of current local town direction.

Over J Laughlin's lifetime, he received a number of prestigious awards. Among those were "Distinguished Contribution to American Letters" by the National Book Foundation and "Lifetime Achievement Award" in Journalism by the International Skiing History Association in 1994.



### Charles "Chic" Morton

*Alta's Long-time Low Key, Low Price, High Enjoyment General Manager*

When we reflect on Alta's rich history and spin a yarn or two, one of the key names that inevitably comes to the fore is that of the late Charles "Chic" Morton.

Morton's beginnings at Alta in 1946 were a result of encouragement by then Alta Ski School Director, Sverre Engen. Sverre and Chic had developed a friendship several years earlier when an opening for a bartender came up at the Alta Lodge. Sverre insisted that Chic apply for the job so they could frequently ski together.

Morton landed that first bartender job. With it came the beginning of a career at Alta which lasted over 50 years. Other positions followed in short order which included managing the Alta Lodge from the early 1950s through the 1957 ski season, followed by taking the helm as General Manager of the Alta Ski Lifts Company in 1958. In 1976 Morton was named President and General Manager of Alta Ski Lifts Company, a position he retained until he relinquished his duties to Onno Wieringa in 1988. He remained active as President of Alta Ski Lifts until his death on July 14, 1997.

During the years that Chic Morton played a primary role in operations at Alta, he maintained a core philosophy of keeping skiing at Alta low key, at the lowest possible cost, with a special emphasis on customer enjoyment. That philosophy continues under the leadership of Alta's current president and general manager, Onno Wieringa.

During Morton's lifetime, he received many accolades. Perhaps the most significant testimonial for his years of outstanding accomplishments was highlighted by being named a recipient of the S. J. and J. E. Quinney Award for lifetime achievement to the Sport of Skiing by the University of Utah Marriott Library's Ski Archives in 1995.

Although Charles Morton is no longer among the living at Alta, his memory remains with us who do live and work here. A special photograph of him graces the wall of the Albion Grill along with several others—S. Joe Quinney, J Laughlin, and Alf Engen—all of whom played a role in the development of Alta as a world-recognized destination ski area.



### Alf M. Engen

*Skiing's Greatest Ambassador*

Alf Engen often said of his beloved Alta, "I have the most beautiful office in the world, here is where I want to be."

Alf was born in Mjondallen, Norway, in 1909 and first came to Alta in 1935 at the request of the Forest Service. At that time he was internationally recognized as a world champion ski jumper. Because of his ski prowess, he was retained by the Forest Service to look over Alta's terrain and make a recommendation as to whether the old mining town would make a reasonable site for a ski area. After a

couple of visits, Alf made a strong favorable recommendation regarding Alta's potential as a winter sports facility, and the rest is history.

Alf's record of achievements in American competitive skiing is perhaps without parallel. He was a sixteen-time winner of the U.S. National Championships in amateur and professional competitions, and is the only skier on record to have won the national title in all skiing disciplines (downhill, slalom, jumping, and cross-country), not just once, but twice. He was also the Canadian and North American ski jumping champion in 1937 and set several world ski jumping records, once breaking the world record twice in one day. Alf was coach of the United States Winter Olympic Ski Team in 1948, and he appeared in eight full-length motion pictures. As a ski developer, Alf laid out 31 ski areas including Alta and Snowbasin in Utah and Bogus Basin in Idaho.

Following Alf's coaching of the U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team in 1948, he moved his family from Sun Valley, Idaho, to Utah and took over the ski school at Alta from his brother, Sverre. The ski school quickly gained a strong reputation, known as the Alf Engen Ski School, which he directed until 1989 when he was given the honored title of Alta's Director of Skiing.

For Alf's many lifetime accomplishments, he was inducted into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1959. He passed away in July 1997 at the age of 88. In late 1999, the Salt Lake Tribune named Alf "Utah's Athlete of the 20th Century," an honor which considered outstanding representatives from all summer and winter sports.

Following the 2002 Winter Olympic Games held in Salt Lake City, a new "world class" ski museum carrying his namesake was opened to the public at Utah Olympic Park near Park City, Utah.



### Bill Levitt

*Alta's Second "Appointed" Mayor and Alta's First "Elected" Mayor*

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 puts it, he is "one of Utah's most loyal patriots."

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 Levitt's 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, 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 recently 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."

## Alta Powder News Historical Edition

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Online edition available at [alta.com](http://alta.com)

ALTA POWDER NEWS  
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