

# **Alpine Haven: The Fabulous Tale of a Chalet Community in Northern Vermont, A Personal Recollection by Hubert Daberer and the Early Pioneers of Alpine Haven. October 4, 1993**

It all started with a drive over the notch from Jay Peak. Hubert was in a jeep with Father Sutvin. The sun was getting low that afternoon in April 1959 as they drove on the new dirt road over the mountain pass. After skiing all day, they were to have dinner in Montgomery Center.

Where the land levels out (just about where the entrance sign to Alpine Haven now stands), the jeep got stuck in the mud. Hubert got out and looked around. Ahead of him was the impressive profile of Cold Hollow Mountain. To the left were Burnt Mountain and Hazen's Notch. Behind him, the slopes steepened back toward Little Jay. The scene was breath-taking, and the tale of an Austrian-type chalet community in northern Vermont began right then and there. Hubert decided that this was the place where he would realize the dream of his life.

## **I. Before the Beginning**

Before white men settled in what is now Vermont, forest covered the land. By the 1850's, 70-75% of the state had been cleared for pasture and crops. Since then most of the farms have been abandoned, and today 75% of Vermont is again woodland. ["The Nature of Vermont" by Charles W. Johnson, pages 44 & 50] Dull statistics? Then try this: All of the land now occupied by Alpine Haven was once farmed.

Halfway up the mountain from Alpine Haven on Route 242, Bidell's sawmill ran on waterpower from Jay Brook. The mill employed enough people to support a school! The foundations of that school can still be seen just off the road by the stopping space and the mill machinery haunts Jay Brook about a quarter mile above chalet #83. About 1000 meters behind Chalet NO.5 is the site of a house and several barns.

The settlers of the last century were tough enough to clear away trees and rocks for their cattle and crops, but they could not survive economic decline. So they left their farms. Forest reclaimed the land.

## **II. Jay Peak Ski Area**

In 1956-57, a group of people in North Troy wanted a winter recreation area for themselves and their children. Their focus centered on nearby Jay Peak with its annual snowfall of 300 inches. The prime movers in this effort were Father St. Onge, the Roman Catholic priest of Richford/North Troy, and Harold Haynes, the North Troy realtor who became president of the newly-formed Jay Peak Inc. The state (which owned the land) gave the company permission to build a Pomalift and a shelter. Shares were sold for \$10. Don McNally became the first manager of the ski area.

The next problem was to find someone to teach the children how to ski. Rudolf Mattesich of the Austrian Travel Bureau in New York City was approached. Rudi roused the interest of the government in Vienna, which came up with the name of Walter Foeger. (Walter was the complete athlete -- European Downhill Champion and member of the Austrian hockey and Davis Cup. tennis teams) At this time he was coach of the Spanish Olympic Team and was persuaded to come to what he thought was a full-fledged ski area in northern Vermont. When he saw the single, short Pomalift at Jay Peak, he almost headed straight back to Europe (see his book "To Heaven and Hell on Skis") -- but he saw potential in the mountain and stayed through the first season of '57-'58. Unlike today, the skiers were local. During that season, 1461 cars parked at Jay Peak: 1233 from Vermont, 118 from Canada, 110 from elsewhere.

Hubert Daberer arrived at Jay Peak as the second instructor in 1958, the year the Jet T-Bar was installed. Hubert recalls how they carried concrete for this T-Bar up the hill in buckets by hand.

Walter's parallel skiing technique (Natur Teknik) caught on quickly, especially when Hubert (not to be outdone by Sears & Roebuck) introduced the concept of "ski parallel within one week or your money back". Hubert frequently taught classes of 40-50 students of all ages and abilities. The '58-'59 season was a success, but not without a bit of "promotion".

Occasionally on slack days Hubert would turn up incognito at Stowe in a long, flowing loden coat with a pipe in his mouth. After executing a few series of graceful wedels with the pipe shifting from side to side with each turn, Hubert would have attracted (like the Pied Piper) an interested following. When asked how he did it, his reply was "Come to Jay Peak and find out". Next day's class at Jay Peak was always larger.

### **III. The Carinthia Inn**

Although the new ski area was beginning to take off, the basic problem for visitors was accommodations. The old Reba hotel in North Troy offered rudimentary lodging and little else was available.

Enter Father Sutvin of St. Isidore's Church in Montgomery Center. In those days Montgomery Center was as sleepy a Vermont village as one could imagine. You could have a picnic on the main street with little risk of being disturbed.

Father Sutvin was determined to bring new dynamism into his parish. One of the steps he took was to introduce the Daberers to Bob and Lucy Murphy, who ran the Montgomery Inn in Montgomery Center. This inn had once been the elegant home of C.T. Hall -- the timber baron of this part of Vermont in the previous century. ["Montgomery, Vermont" by Branthoover & Taylor]

The Daberers saw the potential of opening the first genuine ski lodge in the area to serve Jay Peak only 8 miles away. Hubert approached Guy Hubbard of the Enosburg Falls National Bank, who extended the first commercial loan ever made by that bank (to a non-agricultural customer). The inn and 7 acres were deeded to the Daberers for \$13,000. In honor of Hubert's native province in Austria, the place was renamed the Carinthia Inn and, after extensive painting and refurbishing, opened for business at Christmas 1959

The Carinthia boasted six bedrooms and two bathrooms. On registering, Caroline gave each guest a ticket showing the time at which he or she could use the bathroom in the morning. One morning the whole place was woken up by a rumpus at 5:30. Everyone had gotten up early to beat everyone else to the bathroom! The daily rate was \$8.50 for room and two meals. During the '59-'60 season the Carinthia was fully booked and made money. Even the fabled Gen. "Hunter" Harris of SAC had to move across the street to Rosannas when his reserved time ran out.

(Editor's note: According to a subsequent interview with Hubert in 2013, in those days the Center's water system was run by "Frenchy" Dupres and suffered from benign neglect. Dupres would show up once every 6 months to collect the \$8 fee from his customers. The system wasn't the cleanest or most reliable, often failing testing by the State Health Dept. Since the Carinthian was the only commercial user serving the public, Hubert borrowed \$600 from Mr. Martell, C.T. Hall's chauffeur and owner of a garage on the site of today's Sylvester's market, and had a chlorinator installed near the site of today's Public Safety Building. The State pronounced the water fit for human consumption for the first time, but customers complained about the smell and taste of the healthy water.)

#### **IV. Route 242**

It is impossible to understand the history of Alpine Haven without knowing something about Route 242 which links Montgomery Center with Jay Village. Prior to 1955, a single-lane dirt track with grass growing in the middle ran up "East Hill" from Montgomery Center. It ended at the Deuso farm, opposite what is now the T-shirt factory. The only way to cross over Jay Notch was by footpath.

Carl "Joe" Scott was Road Commissioner and a Selectman in Montgomery. He saw that unless the town were linked with the new ski area on the other side, Montgomery would miss out on everything. Carl cajoled, argued and fought for a 7 mile road link over the pass. The road was opened with great fanfare in 1957, paved in 1959, and accepted by the state as Route 242 in 1964. As the St. Albans Messenger said: "It was almost strictly a one man show." [St. Albans Messenger, 6 July, 1964] Carl died early in 1994, but his wife Irene continues to operate the well-known "Eagle Lodge" adjoining Alpine Haven.

If Route 242 had been paved sooner, Hubert and Father Sutvin would not have gotten stuck in April 1959 and our tale would probably have turned out differently.

As a final background note, it is worth mentioning that, although the people of North Troy must be credited with getting the ski area going, they failed to follow up with providing satisfactory accommodation for skiers on the east side of the mountain. The fact that Montgomery Center picked up the ball more quickly helps explain some of the rivalry which exists on opposite sides of the mountain even today. And a key player in the development on the western side was Hubert Daberer.

### **V. Hubert & Caroline Daberer**

Hubert Daberer was born in Bosnia in the former Yugoslavia on 6 April, 1922. His father had been working in that part of the Austro-Hungarian empire prior to World War I. With jobs scarce back in Austria after the Armistice, he decided to stay on in Bosnia, where he became hunting guide and eventually manager of the estates of King Alexander of Yugoslavia. During World War II he was burgenmeister of Kreinburg in Slovenia, where he became a legend in his own lifetime for his fair treatment of the local populace.

So Hubert spent the first 18 years of his life growing up in Yugoslavia -- a country for which he retains a deep affection. As he matured into a local ski champion, his pals were Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Sarajevo was his "home city" and life for the young man was idyllic.

All this changed abruptly in 1940 when he was drafted into the German army. The First German Ski Brigade was formed outside Koenigsburg in the summer of 1942 and it was here he met Walter Foeger. Home on furlough when many of his colleagues were killed in the Canadian assault on Dieppe in August 1942, Hubert spent the period 1942-44 on the Russian front, where he was wounded five times. In the massive tank battle at Kursk, he attributes his survival to having been wounded on the first day of that titanic struggle.

On 15 May, 1945 Hubert was captured by the Russians in Prague and sent into concentration camp for 10 months. After a diet of 1/4 kg. of bread per day, he weighed 50 kg when he was released. But he was one of the 1% of his age group to have survived the war with body intact. On release, Hubert made his way back to his father's hometown of Radenthein in the Austrian province of Carinthia.

It was here he got his first experience in the field of recreation by helping a friend open a campground at Doebriach am Milstattersee. From 1948 to 1953, Hubert worked for Magnasit A.G. buying wood on the stump for its insulated Heraklit building panels. Then, with Austria subsidizing the export of lumber, he got into business for himself, shipping boards to as far away as Argentina. After his best Italian customer failed to pay for 30 carloads of lumber, Hubert decided to move to America and start over again. But before leaving Austria, he became a certified civilian ski instructor at the Austrian Ski Association school at St. Cristof in the Alberg.

On the basis of this certification, Hubert obtained a position as ski instructor in Aspen, Colorado. In the summer of 1957 he sailed from Bremen to New York and went on to Cleveland, Ohio where his two sisters were living. His objective was to learn English before going on to Aspen. But things did not work out exactly as planned.

While thumbing through a ski magazine in Cleveland, he read that his old pal Walter Foeger was at some place called Jay Peak, Vermont. He contacted Walter, who persuaded him to come to Vermont instead.

While in Cleveland, Hubert did more than read ski magazines and improve his English. He showed up at the Sunday afternoon social events at the Deutches Centrale on Pearl Road in Parma where he approached an attractive young lady with the question: "Wilst du tanzen?" This should explode the myth that Hubert and Caroline met on the ski slopes; their first encounter was on the flat surface of a dance floor.

Caroline Wick grew up in Brooklyn, a suburb southwest of the city of Cleveland. Her grandmother had come to the U.S. as a child in 1889 and operated a grocery store in the neighborhood for many years. Caroline's father was a carpenter who, with his brothers, built the house in which she grew up.

After graduating from high school, Caroline became an exercise instructor at a local health club. When the U.S. entered World War II, she took a course in riveting and built parts for the B-29 bomber. From 1954 to 1959, Caroline was a mathematics aide at the NASA space lab in Cleveland where she had hands-on experience with the new vacuum-tube computers and the Bell and Fortran languages in the early days of America's space program. But the dashing Austrian who had asked "wilst du tanzen?" back in 1957 was now an established ski instructor in faraway Vermont and was being persistent. This led to the termination of Caroline's career with NASA.

The Daberers were married in Cleveland on 10 May, 1959. On their honeymoon they came up to Montgomery Center and bought the C.T. Hall place. The young couple arrived up here for good on 25 October, 1959 and embarked on a new way of life for both of them.

## **VI. The Creation of Alpine Haven**

From 1959 through 1961, the Carinthia Inn thrived under the Daberers' management. Their son Michael was born on 16 September, 1960. Hubert continued as a ski instructor at Jay Peak while Caroline devoted her full time to the inn. Every day Hubert travelled Route 242 past the spot where he and Father Sutvin had gotten stuck and which had made such an impression on him. The last two farmhouses on the road up to the pass were empty and abandoned. These were the Cousens farm (now the Eagle lodge) and the Deuso farm (opposite the T-shirt factory).

All the land up on the "East Hill" had originally been granted to the University of Vermont when the townships in this part of the state were first surveyed: Neither Cousens

nor Deuso actually owned their farms -- they leased them from UVM "so long as grass is green and water flows downhill" -- and paid no taxes; only a nominal fee to UVM.

In February 1954, ice and wind brought down the barn on the Cousens farm, killing Walter Cousens and several cattle. (Part of that barn's foundation is now the attractive rock wall garden of the Dean Scott residence). After the farm ceased to function and pay the taxes which the town of Westfield had begun to impose, the town seized the 200-acre property for \$2,000 in arrears. Hubert offered to purchase the 200-acre farm for \$10,000 in 1961. but the town refused because the selectmen feared the appearance of children who would have to be provided with schooling. Meanwhile, Carl and Irene Scott had bought the house and 4 acres with the stipulation that no children would ever have to be provided with schooling.

Hubert still wanted the 200 acres. so he approached the selectmen of Westfield with a proposal to build a lodge and vacation chalets. The selectmen agreed to deed him the land at no cost if he would commit to invest \$100,000 during 1962.

What did Hubert have in mind with all this grandiose planning? Put simply, he perceived what most Vermonters who had been here for generations failed to see -- that city folks had money and were prepared to pay fancy prices for their recreation. He understood what these people from the city were like because he taught them in his ski classes and accommodated them at the Carinthia Inn.

Coming from Carinthia and having been close to the land all his life, he perceived something else. He perceived how many people felt trapped in the urban environment and dreamed of ways to get away from it during their time off work. They wanted to reach back to rural roots. They wanted to breathe fresh country air and drink in the mountain scenery. At the same time, they wanted all the modern conveniences. And why not?

Having analyzed the market intuitively, Hubert set out to satisfy the demand. He would build ski chalets in the country with all the services of the city. Using modern American materials, he would price these places within reach of a city person earning a reasonable salary. Moreover, he would build these chalets on land which he sold, converting at one stroke a city slicker into a country gentleman.

One final consideration in his plan. Remembering the neat Alpine villages of his homeland, and having seen many shabby living conditions in Vermont, from the outset he imposed standards on this new development of his. This was not to be low-income housing. A mobile home ("trailer") had no place here. He enlisted the help of his cousin Franz Pichler, architect and mauermeister (master mason) to create an Alpine community with class.

Although he was unable to construct the lodge during 1962, Hubert did build the first 3 chalets. This satisfied the selectmen and he was granted the 200 acres' of the old Cousens farm.

To the east of this acreage was the 120-acre Deuso farm. In 1963, Hubert acquired this property from Albert Deuso of Springfield, Mass. for \$18,000 plus an undertaking to build Mr. Deuso a chalet (#5). A total of 5 chalets were built in 1963 and 8 more in 1964, bringing to total on site to 16.

On 27 October, 1964, Hubert began construction of the Waldhof Lodge. Two crews worked continuously on the project, which was opened on Christmas Day of that year with a temporary plywood top to the downstairs bar. The opening took place in the midst of pouring rain, which ruined the skiing and drove people into the lounge, where a 7-piece band from Connecticut played steadily for 7 days. The opening was a splash in every sense.

Roger Mitchell, from the Country Club of Montreal, was the Waldhof's first chef. Paul Santella, a summer cook, was such a good fisherman that brown trout was a regular feature on the Waldhof menu.

Alpine Haven Inc. had been incorporated as a private corporation in 1963, with Hubert and Caroline Daberer as the shareholders.

By the end of 1964, Alpine Haven ~as well established as an upscale ski accommodation facility with a lodge (charging \$10 a night!) and 16 surrounding chalets.

Hubert and Caroline sold the Carinthia Inn to David and Blanka Baker in 1964 and had shifted their operation "up the hill" -- precisely the way the villagers viewed it. Many locals must have thought that Alpine Haven had "gone about as far as it could go"; in fact it was just poised for the big boom in construction.

## **VII. The Construction Boom**

By 1965 (when Hubert built 6 chalets), the Jay Peak ski area had become the victim of its own success. What had begun as a local recreational project had quickly changed into a successful commercial venture, but had not yet reached its potential. The top of the spectacular mountain was not being used, but getting to it was beyond the resources of the Jay Peak Inc. shareholders.

Much of the land with potential belonged to the Weyerhaeuser Company - a lumber giant headquartered in the state of Washington. By coincidence, Weyerhaeuser was embarking on a policy of diversifying away from timber (a policy which the company would later regret). So in 1965, Weyerhaeuser bought a controlling interest in Jay Peak Inc. In that first year of 1966, Weyerhaeuser invested \$ 9 million at Jay Peak as helicopters buzzed away all day carrying loads of concrete to the peak of the mountain for the upper station of an Aerial Tramway.

Carpenters' rates doubled that summer of '66 and many locals must have felt the whole place was going to perdition. While Weyerhaeuser was doing its thing on the east slope of Jay Peak, what was happening on the back side at Alpine Haven? Hubert built 11 chalets

that season. Ben Lamieux and Paul Boudreau kept their French-speaking crews hopping as they closed in one place after another. 21 carpenters worked on site that season and the Waldhof was filled with Weyerhaeuser construction people.

In 1967(?) Hubert purchased 250 acres from Carmi Levis in Montgomery township - Franklin county. (Bloody corner)

10 more chalets were built in 1967, and a further 4 in 1968, bringing Hubert to nearly half of his goal of one hundred.

1969 was the biggest construction year ever at Alpine Haven. 12 new chalets were built in that year, as well as the swimming pool and bath house. And then there was the "Swiss chalet" on top of it all. The components of what is now \_ Chalet #60 arrived at Alpine Haven in two containers, having been railed from Switzerland to Rotterdam, shipped to Montreal and trucked from there. 3 Swiss carpenters arrived with all their tools. With local carpenters helping, and despite the problems of converting from metric, the structure went up quickly. Although it attracted great attention and was as photographed as a new baby, it was slow to sell and is therefore unique in the Alpine Haven story.

The swimming pool was built in 1969, adding greatly to the attractiveness of Alpine Haven as a summer resort. Thanks to the initiative of Woody Palmer, the tennis court was opened in 1970.

12 chalets were added in the 3 years 1970-72. Then Act 250 became law in Vermont, putting an end to the construction boom. Since 1973, 13 chalets have been built at Alpine Haven, bringing the total to 83.

### **VIII. Maturity and Its Problems**

As more people acquired chalets in Alpine Haven, problems began to arise. In part, this was because Alpine Haven had not been laid out according to any formalized long-term plan; in-part because not all owners understood or agreed with what Hubert had in mind. Either way, with the passage of time these misunderstandings and disagreements tended to become more widespread.

But Alpine Haven was booming. In the mid 60's, chalets were booked a year in advance. By 1970(?), Alpine Haven chalets and the Waldhof made up \_\_\_% of the vacation space in the local area.

In 1972 the Daberers sold the Waldhof to Amway and an extensive addition was made on the southwest side the following year. After the Amway scheme fell apart, a plan to have the Waldhof re-opened with financing from chalet owners was launched in 1979. This enabled the Daberers to re-open the Waldhof in 1980. They operated it until 1985.

Carlos Martinez purchased the Waldhof in 1986, but a bank foreclosure followed. Jean-Guy Carrier bought the building in 1988 and began to convert it into condos. Dave Chaudry and others .....

As this is being written the Waldhof conversion into 18 condominium units is "almost completed and the process of selling them off has begun.

#### VIII. Alpine Haven Today

As this is written in 1993; Alpine Haven consists of roughly 600 acres of land; 200 owned by Alpine Haven Inc., the remainder by the 83 chalet owners. 65 chalets and the Waldhof condominiums are located in Westfield; 18 chalets are located in Montgomery.

Alpine Haven Inc. provides certain common services: water supply (from 2 wells through a piped distribution system); access over 4.5 miles of: roads; snow plowing in winter; garbage collection; and recreational facilities (swimming pool, tennis court, volleyball court, cross-country ski trails). Each chalet owner is responsible for his or her septic system. :

In 1969 Hubert Daberer caused the Alpine Haven Property Owners Association to be established.

Of the 83 chalets built-in Alpine Haven, 25(?) are still in the hands of the original owners.

The recreational character of the community is testified by the fact that only 15 chalets are occupied by full-time residents. 55% of the non-residents live in Montreal.

The relationship between Alpine Haven people and the local community, particularly "the village of Montgomery Center 4.5 miles away, deserves a comment. Although there are several "developments" in the area, there is no single entity which comes, close to Alpine" Haven in importance to the economy of Montgomery Center. People like Puffer-Lumbra and Bob Cota were quick to capitalize on the spending power of the folks up there on East Hill. This is carried on by such as the Sylvester brothers, Lutz Sabrowski, John Bolog, and Dean Lumbra. And it works both ways. The standards met by all those who supply goods and services in Montgomery Center makes Alpine Haven that much more attractive.

The description of Alpine Haven today would not be complete without reference to Laurent "Sonny" Cote. Sonny has been employed by Alpine Haven Inc. for the past 26 years. He knows where pipes and wires run; he knows where septic tanks are located. Sonny is a certified operator of public water systems and monitors the quality of the water supply every day.

Other key players in the picture are the Daberers' son Michael and his wife Samantha who, with their children Carl and Danielle live in Chalet #50. Mike manages the Waldhof condos and performs a variety of other functions around Alpine Haven.

(Work in profiles to be added of characters like Ted Embry, Leland Snider, Eloise & Bud Demar, Paul 'the cook, etc.)

One of the basic problems in the structure of Alpine Haven is the fact that the county line between Franklin and Orleans counties runs straight through the community. The problem is aggravated by the fact that \_\_\_% of Alpine Haven's acreage lies in the Westfield township of Orleans county, which is separated from the main body of Westfield by the Green Mountains. Almost all the normal flow of activity to and from Alpine Haven is with Montgomery Center -- not with Westfield. This results in absurd situations like high school children being bussed 25 miles to Newport instead of Enosburg Falls, and Alpine Haven providing 28% of the tax revenue of Westfield but receiving next to nothing for it.

Alpine Haven has always had its share of critics, from those who said it would never work to those who begrudged its success when it did. But one fact is clear; Hubert Daberer did realize the dream of his lifetime and, with Caroline, has provided enormous satisfaction to a great number of people.

Alpine Haven is no longer growing. Its problems are not those of adolescence but of approaching old age. So far, there are few signs of the place "running down". Chalet owners continue to upgrade their properties.

And those of us who have been the beneficiaries of the Daberer dream keep coming back from all those other places where we live and work. Because we love it here.