

## Ski Touring in the Wasatch



Photo courtesy of the Utah Historical Society

Ski touring took off briefly thanks to James Laughlin (*pronounced Lock-lin*), owner of the Alta Lodge. He learned to ski in Switzerland where he enjoyed the European ski hut program. After WWII, the National Ski Association formed a special committee to begin such a program in the US. In 1942, Laughlin wrote an article titled *A Plea for Huts in America*. It read, in part:

*We must have ski huts in America for high mountain touring. Not just occasional isolated huts here and there, but groups of two and three related huts, because ski touring is the real cream of skiing.*

With encouragement from Felix Koziol, Wasatch National Forest Supervisor, the committee petitioned the Salt Lake County Commission for \$3900 to begin the project. The Commissioners were so impressed that they budgeted \$5000!

The first huts were constructed in 1948 by Wasatch Mountain Club volunteers. Each hut had a 2-burner stove, unisex toilet, and a deep powder front door near the roof. During construction, Mountain Club members knew it would be difficult to haul in the mattresses on foot, so they convinced some friends at the Utah National Guard to air-drop them during a training flight. But because of high winds on the day of the drop, the mattresses sailed joyfully into the sky like Frisbees, landing in canyons far and wide. All were later retrieved and hiked into place.

Another surprising wind problem surfaced when outhouse contents were whirled skyward and rained down on the pristine mountain experience. (Darn that Bernoulli principle!) The plan for 14 ski huts was never finished due to improved UDOT roads. The wooden hut near Snake Creek in Brighton burned in 1965. The prefab metal hut at Germania remained until the 1970's.

The old Quonset hut near the top of Alta's Supreme lift remains as a memory of Wasatch connections, dreams, & possibilities.

As back country skiing becomes more popular every year, ski huts may be revived as a means to create wide-ranging mountain adventures that could be the real cream of skiing (and hiking) envisioned by James Laughlin so long ago.

