

BY Lisa Densmore Ballard

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE Trapp Family Lodge

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE AT THE

Trapp Family Lodge

AN AMAZING FAMILY GIVES THE U.S. ITS FIRST
NORDIC SKIING RESORT





The Sound of Music, Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1959 hit Broadway musical and the subsequent Academy-award winning movie, was part of pop culture in my childhood. I have vivid memories of the film starring Julie Andrews, who played Maria—the witty, capable, and beautiful nanny to Baron Georg von Trapp's seven musically talented children. He fell in love with Maria and married her as the Nazis invaded Austria. The show and movie both end with the von Trapps fleeing over the Alps as the chorus sings "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." ▶▶▶

A decade later, as a camper at a YWCA near South Hero, Vermont, I swelled with pride when I got picked for the role of Liesl, the eldest von Trapp daughter who sang, "I am 16 going on 17" in the camp's revival of the popular musical. Little did I know that the real von Trapp family had settled only an hour away in Stowe.

In 1980 as a freshman at Dartmouth College and a member of the college's ski team, I had the opportunity to go cross-country skiing at the Trapp Family Lodge for the first time. A poor snow year, Dartmouth moved the Winter Carnival's Nordic events there. After competing in the alpine races, I spent the afternoon cheering on my teammates while enjoying a rare opportunity to be on my skinny skis.

Later as a longtime resident of Hanover, I regularly made the easy 90-minute drive to Trapp's to watch a competition, film a television show on its extensive trail system, or sometimes just to get a little fresh air, exercise, and Austrian *gemütlichkeit* (hospitality). But the connection between the lodge, the family, and Hanover goes much deeper than proximity, as I learned several years ago while filming a portion of the Emmy-nominated documentary, *Passion for Snow*.

In a special interview for the film with Johannes von Trapp, the youngest of the von Trapp children and the only one born in the United States, and his son Sam von Trapp, and then during a recent phone conversation with Sam, those connections became much clearer. >>



Top right: The original Trapp Family Lodge.

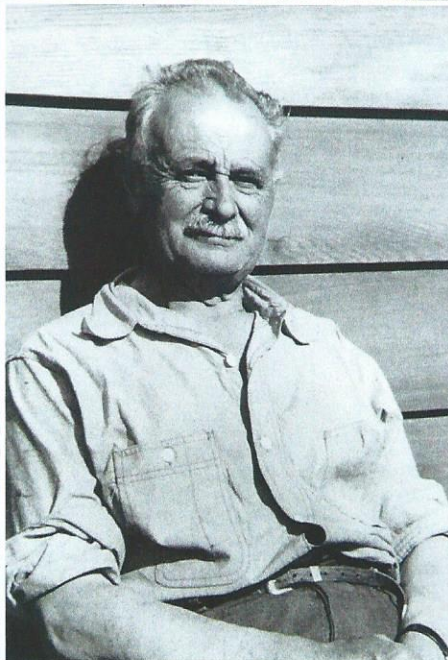
Bottom left: Maria and Johannes, circa 1942.

Above: The Baron Georg von Trapp and baroness Maria on the steps of the lodge.



Left: The Trapp Family Singers rehearsing in a field near the lodge.

Bottom, from left: A portrait of Maria that hangs today in the lodge. The Baron takes a break from farm work. The von Trapp family on tour in San Francisco, circa 1948.



“When the skiing began to grow on Mount Mansfield, we started taking guests,” recalls Johannes. “While we were away performing, the guests stayed in our rooms. That’s how we got into the hotel business.”



Top: Cross-country skiers pass by the Trapp Family Lodge.

Above left: A Nordic racer prepares to start during one of the many competitions hosted by the Trapp Family Lodge each winter.

Above right: Many top-level Nordic skiers train and race at Trapp's touring center.

THE FIRST-EVER NORDIC SKIING RESORT

When the von Trapps immigrated to the United States, they did not settle immediately in Stowe. “My family came to the states in 1938,” says Johannes von Trapp. “We traveled around the country performing during the fall, winter, and spring. In the summers we wanted to be at home. Home was Philadelphia, but Philadelphia in the summer was horrible, so we looked for a place to live that had a pleasant summer climate.”

In 1942, the von Trapps bought a farm on a hillside in Stowe where the Trapp Family Lodge is located today. Baron von Trapp envisioned earning a living as a farmer, but with a family that now numbered 10 children, a rocky farm in Northern Vermont couldn’t fully support them.

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Making the leap from renting rooms to alpine skiers to a full-service, destination cross-country skiing resort came much later. It was Johannes’s idea—and a risky one, since it had never been done in the United States.

“During the 1960s, the market in ski accommodations began to change,” recalls Johannes, who graduated from Dartmouth College in 1963. “People were not as interested in the lodge experience. They wanted the anonymity of motels. Our occupancy began to suffer, so I started looking around for something to bring people up the hill.”

He didn’t need to look farther than his Norwegian college roommate. The two of them would drive to Stowe from Hanover, take a run or two on Mount Mansfield with alpine skis, and then when it got crowded, they went cross-country skiing on the logging roads on the von Trapp property. >>



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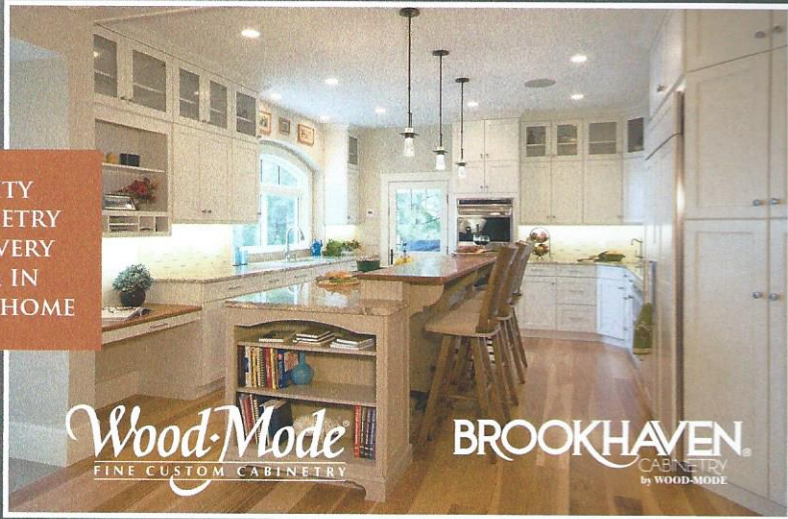
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“We had a great time,” says Johannes. “I thought there might be a market for it if it were presented properly. So we started a cross-country ski operation. Everyone said we were nuts. Didn’t that die in the 1940s? But I had a very charming Norwegian fellow running the program. People enjoyed themselves, and the program grew to what it is now, a major cross-country destination.”

THE NEXT GENERATION

Johannes’s son Sam, also a Dartmouth grad (class of 1994), joined his father over a decade ago to help run what’s now a year-round, 2,500-acre luxury resort. Other family members are also involved, and there’s plenty to do. In addition to operating the hotel, other on-site accommodations, and a Nordic center that becomes a mountain-biking mecca in the summer, the Trapp Family Lodge has three restaurants serving farm-to-table cuisine, opportunities for on-site snowshoeing, and an on-site brewery—its Bavarian Pilsner garnered a prestigious silver medal from the Great American Beer Festival.

“The brewery was my dad’s idea,” says Sam. “In the 1990s when craft beers were gaining popularity, my dad wondered why no one was making lagers. When he went to Austria, he



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really liked the crisp, clean lagers he drank there, so we started a brewery during the last recession. Classic von Trapp! Everyone thought we were crazy, but it gave our family, staff, and guests something to be excited about. Dad is always reticent to commercialize the von Trapp name, but the brewery made sense.”

Today, the microbrewery is not exactly small. The von Trapps brew their beer in a 36,000-square-foot production facility on the grounds of the lodge and sell it throughout Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. Next summer, they will add an Austrian-style beer hall to the brewery that will let visitors not only enjoy the brew but also see how it’s made.

BEER, SKIING, AND MORE

The von Trapp brewery is an unlikely complement to the lodge’s touring center, but one does support the other. The site of many high-level Nordic competitions, in 2015 the Trapp Family Lodge hosted the first-ever Trapp Lager Marathon. “It was a huge success,” says Sam. “We had 90 racers the first year! Our goal is to have 300 in the marathon in three years.”

This competition-friendly place will be even more so in the near future. >>



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The von Trapps are looking to upgrade their snowmaking system to make it the go-to place for the region's cross-country ski teams to train early in the season. Currently, teams must travel five or more hours to Canada to find snow before Mother Nature blankets the Green Mountains.

But the resort welcomes non-competitive cross-country skiers too. It's a place where you can park your car for the weekend, ski morning and afternoon, and never get bored. With 65 kilometers of groomed trails for both classic and skate skiing that connect with another 100 kilometers of trails maintained by the Mount Mansfield Touring Center, you'll certainly earn that award-winning lager at the end of the day. ←

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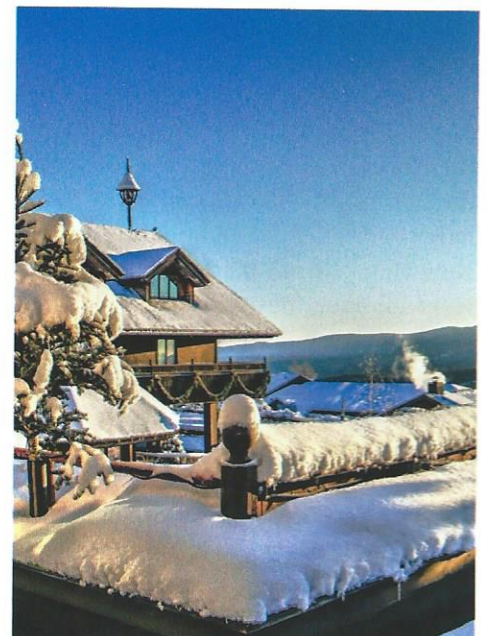


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