Deja vu?
Maine’s boutique ski and snowboard builders

By Scott Andrews
Editor, Snow Trail

When the popularity of skiing began to soar in the 1920s and 1930s, approximately half a dozen Maine firms manufactured skis, and our state was a significant factor on the equipment side of the nascent sport. In 1965 the largest and last of these firms abandoned the ski business.

Half a century later there’s been a significant resurgence in ski building in Maine. Five firms are currently building top-tier skis — and snowboards too. All of these companies’ are tiny, selling fewer than 100 units per year. Most of these companies’ production facilities are squeezed into their owners’ basements and garages.

Among these entrepreneurs, the passion for skiing and snowboarding runs high. Ditto pride in their products. But profits are slim to non-existent.

“Made in Maine” is a cornerstone concept at the Ski Museum. This issue of Snow Trail looks at our state’s current crop of “new school” ski and snowboard builders.
Founded in 1995, the Ski Museum of Maine is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization established with the mission to celebrate and preserve the history and heritage of Maine skiing. The Ski Museum exhibits artifacts, photographs, artwork and documents at its location in Kingfield, conducts educational programs to ski clubs, schools, libraries, historical and civic organizations, and hosts social events and activities throughout the year.

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**Upcoming Ski Museum Events**

**Monday, June 6**  
4th Annual Ski Maine Golf Classic  
Val Halla Golf Course – Cumberland

**Friday, June 24**  
Opening of the New England Ski Museum’s Exhibit:  
“The Mountains of Maine — Skiing in the Pine Tree State”  
Bethel Historical Society – Bethel

**Saturday, June 25**  
Kingfield POps  
with Bangor Symphony Orchestra  
Ski Museum reopens for summer  
Kingfield

**Friday through Sunday, July 15-17**  
Kingfield Bicentennial kickoff  
Kingfield

**Saturday, October 29**  
Maine Ski Hall of Fame Induction  
Sunday River Mountain Resort – Newry
This month we say “bon voyage” to our executive director, Bruce Miles, and “welcome aboard” to our Museum administrator, Kirsten Brown Burbank.

When the Ski Museum relocated to Kingfield from Farmington in 2010, Bruce, a longtime Sugarloaf skier, coach, race official and Carrabassett Valley resident, resigned his seat on the Ski Museum’s board of directors to become our executive director. Bruce has set the Ski Museum on a sound financial footing through maintaining the membership and support of the statewide Sugarloaf community. His passion for Maine skiing history has translated into a wealth of acquisitions which he has formally catalogued and displayed not only in our Kingfield location but travelling with our booth to events throughout the state.

Although retiring from his position with the Ski Museum, Bruce will remain active in the Sugarloaf community as president of the Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club, a trustee of the Carrabassett Valley Academy, and treasurer of the Sugarloaf Regional Ski Educational Foundation. The Ski Museum of Maine board of directors thanks Bruce for his dedicated service and commitment to the museum for his six years of dedicated service.

Kirsten Brown Burbank begins her position as Museum administrator this summer to carry on the daily operations. A resident of Salem, a neighboring town to Kingfield, Kirsten has a love of history and has been actively working with the Kingfield Historical Society for the past 10 years. She comes to the Ski Museum well versed in PastPerfect, our museum’s database management system.

Kirsten is an adjunct professor of English at the University of Maine at Farmington and has a background in non-profit development, management and grant writing. She has an associate’s degree in graphic arts, bachelor’s degree in fine art and creative writing and a master’s in education. As an historical connection, Kirsten’s dad operated the Sugarloaf gondola mid-station in the 1970s and her mom was the director of the Sugarloaf nursery.

We’re in the midst of transition. The past six years have been exciting, and Bruce deserves thanks for his efforts to establish our physical space and our cultural foothold in Kingfield. Kirsten brings her own set of unique talents and is poised to continue the Ski Museum’s evolution into the future. Let’s wish them both well!

Wende Gray
President, Ski Museum of Maine

Many Thanks to Our Event Volunteers

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Passion versus profit

Passion for skiing and snowboarding is the driving force behind the boom, and nobody exemplifies this zeal better than Seth Wescott, the two-time Olympic gold medalist in snowboard cross and Warren Miller film star. Last September Wescott, a Carrabassett Valley resident and restaurateur, joined the ownership group at Winterstick Snowboards.

This past season Winterstick focused its efforts on rehabbing the barn-like building at the lower terminal of Sugarloaf’s West Mountain chairlift and converting it into a snowboard factory. (In prior years, production had been subcontracted to a Colorado firm.)

Winterstick representative Kobi Cummings anticipates building and selling between 50 and 100 Wescott-designed snowboards this coming season — an exceptionally modest goal for a company with a superstar owner and national ambitions. Profits remain in the future, Cummings concedes, but the longterm goal is to build a national company with a significant market impact.

At Amalgam Skis, owners Phil and Amy Taisey are equally passionate. Amalgam is a new company that’s currently producing limited numbers in its owners’ basement garage. The Taiseys are Freeport residents but they can be found each weekend at Sugarloaf, where they have been part of the social and cultural landscape for decades.

Amalgam represents the Taiseys’ bold attempt to break free from the nine-to-five humdrum world. After several years of experimentation, building tools, machinery and prototype skis, Phil hopes to break even on retail sales this year, and both envision...
expanding the company in future years.

“We are passionate skiers,” avers Phil. Amy adds, “We’re trying to make a livelihood out of our lifestyle.”

**‘Sprouting up like weeds’**

Maine’s ski building boom is a microcosm of national trends. There are currently 107 small independent ski builders in the U.S., according to ExoticSkins.com, a website that has been run for 11 years by Eric Edelstein, a Vermont enthusiast. (Edelstein doesn’t count snowboard-only firms, such as Winterstick, on his website.)

“Ski companies are sprouting up like weeds — and brewpubs,” says Edelstein, who adds that today’s trend began in the West but has been spreading to the East in recent years.

“And some pretty good skis are coming out of Maine nowadays,” he comments.

Most of these new Maine companies share a set of common traits. For starters, most are startup enterprises working out of small shops that are located in basements and garages. Winterstick’s Sugarloaf factory is a notable exception to the general rule.

Most entrepreneurs build their own pneumatic ski presses, the heart of the
operation. Bethel-based YOPP Clandestine has even named theirs — “The Duchess.” An exception is New Gloucester-based Volition Skis, which bought a press thanks to a small business development grant.

Local loyalty and minimizing ecological impacts are paramount at all companies, again reflecting national trends. All Maine companies fabricate their cores from wood, and most use wood for the topsheet. Locally harvested lumber from responsible Maine foresters is sought. This is more important psychologically than in terms of actual environmental impact. After all, the total wood consumption by all Maine ski and snowboard builders combined amounts to less than a morning’s work by one professional logging crew.

Most products are sold directly from the builder to the customer, usually via face-to-face contact or via telephone and/or internet. Several offer customized graphics and other options.

A few companies, such as Winterstick and Gray-based Lucid Skis, set up demo tents at ski area events.

Terminology is an unsettled question. What nouns or adjectives best describe
these firms? Edelstein chooses “exotic.” One frequently heard word is “boutique.” Others are “craft” and “artisanal.” Take your pick.

Below are thumbnail sketches of the five Maine ski and snowboard companies (in alphabetical order) plus some salient points on each firm and its owners.

The home of **Amalgam Skis** may be in Freeport, but owners **Phil** and **Amy Taisey** can be found every weekend at Sugarloaf during the season, testing and demonstrating their product. Phil, a UMaine-trained engineer, recently quit his high-tech shipbuilding job to work full time at Amalgam; its shop is in the Taisey’s basement garage. Wife Amy, who still works a day job, is a lifelong ‘Loafer, beginning as a Bubblecuffer and graduating from Carrabassett Valley Academy in 2004. Amy still loves to race; in 2015 she showcased her product by riding a pair of Amalgams to second place in the Sugarloaf Sidecountry Showdown.

Amalgam’s materials are locally sourced wherever possible, beginning with the hardwood core. Parts are cut and shaped
using CNC (Computer Numerical Control) milling machinery, and the heated ski press was constructed from scratch.

After several years of building and testing prototypes — plus a few retail sales — the Taiseys plan to produce more for customers for the 2016-2017 season, setting a goal of between 20 and 30 pairs. Two models are offered for the coming season. Demos are available at Happy Tunes in Carrabassett Valley.

A newly built 16x20-foot freestanding workshop in Gray is the home of Lucid, a company that builds both skis and snowboards. Lucid was founded in 2009 by Ian Reinholt, a master craftsman in wood whose eponymous gallery, featuring a variety of hand-crafted items, is a fixture of downtown Kingfield.

Lucid reorganized a year ago, with Reinholt retaining a small share of the company and the rest being picked up by three investor-craftsmen: Ej Martin of Gray and Corey Kelkenberg and Travis.
Legassie, both of Westbrook. The trio constructed the workshop last fall in Martin’s back yard and they plan to ramp up ski and snowboard production for the 2016-2017 season.

Three models of skis are offered, with more designs in the works. Some prototype snowboards were built and tested last season, and commercial board sales are anticipated for 2016-2017. The core of Lucid products is wood; ditto the veneer topsheet. The latter is highly polished. “We finish the veneer like a fine piece of furniture,” says Martin. And if your skis or snowboard get scratched up? Lucid offers a factory refinishing service.

Among Maine’s five active builders, Volition is probably the best known to the general public, mostly on the strength of Joe Cutts’ 2012 article in Ski and another by Josh Christie in the Maine Sunday Telegram. Volition is owned is Chris Bagley, who started making skis — under the Yeti brand name — in the greater Bangor area in 2009 as a college senior project enroute to a UMaine degree in new media. Bagley’s current day job is designing websites in southern Maine, which prompted his company’s recent move to New Gloucester.

After his first experiments with a handmade ski press, Bagley bought a “snazzy” commercial model with the aid of a $12,000 small business grant. Most of Volition’s materials are sourced in Maine or New England, although the core of his skis is laminated bamboo, with materials purchased from a California flooring supply company. The resin is two-thirds pine sap.

Volition’s line includes five models with varying degrees of rocker and camber. They are designed for various skiing environments around the country.
The most famous name in Maine snowsports is the public face of Winterstick Snowboards, a venerable company with roots that date back to 1972 and has traversed a number of ups and downs over the ensuing decades. Owners and investors hope that the charisma of Seth Wescott — two-time Olympic gold medalist in snowboard cross — will set Winterstick’s latest iteration on an uptick.

Wescott, a Carrabassett Valley resident, became Winterstick’s principal designer and a co-owner of the company last fall, joining Bigelow Mountain Partners, a Freeport-based investment group that owned the Winterstick brand.

Winterstick’s new factory is located in a re-purposed building adjacent to a Sugarloaf chairlift terminal. Prior to this year, Winterstick’s snowboard production was subcontracted to a Colorado firm.

Factory representative Kobi Cummings, a 2009 Carrabassett Valley Academy grad, boasts an incredible Sugarloaf pedigree: He is a grandson of King Cummings and nephew to Warren Cook.

The first Wescott-designed Winterstick snowboards were prototypes tested on Greenland glaciers this spring. Cummings anticipates production of about 50 boards for public sale this summer.

President Tom Fremont-Smith points out that Winterstick is the original snowboard company — pre-dating both Burton and Sims by several years. Winterstick was founded in 1972 by Dimitrije Milovich shortly after he dropped out of Cornell University and moved to Utah to develop the then-revolutionary concept of snowboarding.

Milovich originally focused on powder conditions in the backcountry, and his early boards won much praise and made a long-lasting impact on the nascent sport. But they never sold well enough to make the company profitable.

Winterstick has had its ups and downs over the decades, and Milovich is no longer involved with the firm. The present
iteration of Winterstick represents both the company’s continuation and a re-boot of the enterprise, according to Fremont-Smith.

“We are the continuation of a storied brand,” says Fremont-Smith. “But we don’t want to rely on history. We want to create history ourselves.”

The prize for most curious brand name goes to YOPP Clandestine, a line of skis built in West Bethel. YOPP stands for “Ye Olde Perkins Place,” a family location in Cape Neddick that’s sentimentally important to principal owner Richard “Toby” Winkler. Clandestine? It’s a joking reference to “under the radar,” a term frequently used by boutique builders.

Winkler’s business partner is cousin Jake Bracy. Both are Maine Maritime Academy-trained engineers who spend much time at sea; building skis is a shoreside labor of love.

The core of every YOPP ski is crafted from vertically laminated hardwoods that were harvested in Maine. The topsheet is hardwood veneer, often birdseye maple, an attractively patterned wood which is found in some sugar maple trees. Graphics are simple — in deference to nature’s handsome birdseye pattern — but can be tailored to individual customers. Indeed, Winkler and Bracy emphasize that every YOPP ski is custom-built to some extent, and personalized graphics provides a marketing edge.

Three basic models are planned for the 2016-2017 season, including one specifically designed for women.
Come and gone

Designing and building skis and snowboards — and countless other specialty consumer products — is a dicey business. In addition to the half-dozen companies that built skis in the first half of the 20th century, three small ski and snowboard firms have come and gone in the past 25 years.

The heyday of The Claw was the mid-1990s, when John Howe built more than a thousand pairs in the basement of his Waterford farmhouse. Howe had been a design engineer for Head Skis. The Claw’s claim to fame was a vibration damping system especially designed to fiercely grip (hence the name) the surface on eastern hardpack. The Claw achieved some traction with western Maine skiers at nearby Sunday River and Mount Abram.

After Howe refocused his energies on other matters 12 years ago, production transferred to the Ski Depot in Jay and later to Lincoln Canoe and Kayak in Freeport. Production ended several years ago when Lincoln was purchased by a buyer who had no interest in the ski business. On a side note, before its sale, Lincoln’s longtime owner, Sandy Martin, built a prototype snowboard, but it never went into production. The Ski Museum holds an example.

In 2009 Team Eight Snowboards announced that it was open for business, working out of a small shop in Portland. Team Eight’s principal was Greg Johnston, who added seven partners — hence the name. Team Eight’s shtick was an exclusive online custom design-your-own-board process that Johnston had been developing for six years. After one year in business — production numbers unknown — the company quietly vanished. Its website is still up, but hasn’t been updated since 2010.

According to a listing in ExoticSki.com: “Barn Board Ski Company of Yarmouth, Maine, USA is a grassroots company started by Kris Parkin and Todd Wentworth. They handcraft their big mountain, freestyle, powder and all-mountain skis from locally sourced maple, ash and poplar wood, Durasurf 4001 (a premium brand of P-tex) bases, 23-oz. triaxial fiberglass and nylon topsheets.” Despite the implications of its name, Barn Board made only skis.

As of Snow Trail’s press time, Barn Board’s website has been taken down and no one has responded to voicemails and emails.
Growing up in South Paris it was only natural that our skis came from Paris Manufacturing Company, at that time in the late 1940s and early 1950s one of the top ski makers in the country. During World War II the 10th Mountain Division was mostly equipped with Paris skis. They were specially made, laminated wood, ridge top with steel edges. They had holes drilled in the tips, so they could be strung together for use as makeshift toboggans for hauling supplies or wounded soldiers. The skis were all white. Ditto the bamboo poles with huge six inch baskets.

In the late 1940s we could purchase a pair of ridge top laminated wood skis (hickory, ash or a combination of both) with cable bindings for $14 and a pair of bamboo poles were thrown in. Steel edges were an extra $3, and my folks — not being skiers — didn’t think I needed steel edges. By the time I was finished with those skis, the edges were pretty well rounded by wear. They were four-event skis, used for downhill, slalom, cross country and jumping. The cable bindings had two latches, one locking the heel down for alpine and the other allowing the heel to lift for cross-country. Release bindings had yet to be invented.

In the 1950s, plastic bottoms came along and we switched to these, but the skis were still laminated wood and the steel edges were screwed on. It was also in the 1950s that Head came out with metal skis, and by the end of the decade the company had captured a large segment of the market. But Paris was still making and selling wooden skis, as many skiers were not ready to invest $90-$100 for a pair of metal ones.

It was in this environment that Paris Manufacturing Company decided that to build a metal ski in order to compete. The result was the Paris Mark II. Unlike the Head and Hart metal skis which used only a thin wood core — or sawdust and glue in the case of Hart — the Mark II was built around a full laminated wood ski. It featured a sheet of aluminum, top and bottom, a multi-groove Kofix base, an offset screwed-on steel edge and a black plastic top with two grooves that exposed the aluminum. They carried a metal Germanic eagle which had been seen as a decal on several wood models. It was said these decorations alone cost $1.50 a pair.

These impressive looking skis retailed for $90 a pair, and boasting the Paris reputation, they sold well. Unfortunately the Kofix bottoms separated from the lower aluminum layer. Most were returned, and the factory had no choice but to take them back.

I remember one factory sale at the plant on Western Avenue in South Paris where these returns were sold at deep discounts. The Mark IIs sold as little as $20. Of course, the new owners had to find a way to re-glue the delaminations. This was done by drying the skis after each weekend of use, squeezing epoxy into the separations and clamping the skis until the next weekend. A season of this had them pretty well attached by the end of the season.

Coming unglued: The demise of Paris skis

By Dave Irons
Ski Museum of Maine
I used them to replace a pair of Paris White Mountains snapped off in a heavy wet mogul on the last pitch of Lower Cascades at Sunday River in full view of the lift line on the lower T-bar. My friends told me there were lots of oohs and aahs in the line as they witnessed what must have been a spectacular crash. Fortunately, the loud snap I heard was a ski and not a bone. With bear traps and long thongs a broken ski was the only release.

Switching to the Mark IIIs with the same binding setup was really hazardous as the ski would not break and the bindings would still not release. And this brings us to another problem with the Paris Mark II. Adding aluminum to a full wood ski created a ski so stiff that turning took a lot of effort in the form of unweighting. One of our trio weighed only about 135 pounds and standing with his weight equal on both skis he could not flatten them. With all the weight on one ski it would barely flatten. The skis worked only on firmly packed snow and only for strong aggressive skiers.

According to stories I heard at the time from people inside the factory, the employees in the ski department asked their glue supplier about bonding aluminum to plastic. They were told such a glue was available, but it would have cost about 10 times more than the glue they were using. So they decided to cut costs by staying with the glue they were using to bond wood to plastic. The failure of the Mark II ended Paris Manufacturing Company’s entry into the metal ski market and not long after, in 1965, Paris stopped making skis altogether.

One could speculate about Paris and their metal ski. Given their expertise in laminating wood, could they have developed a metal ski with a thinner wood core to give the ski more flexibility? It would seem possible but the use of the wrong glue doomed the Paris metal ski and further experimentation never happened.

Paris Manufacturing Company was a large woodworking enterprise that built skis between 1900 and 1965. This interior shot, picturing a milling machine, was taken sometime around 1960, when the company was trying to branch into metal skis. (Courtesy Paul Cote.)
Christie death a loss for Maine skiing

He moved to Vermont as general manager at Mount Snow where he took a leadership position in that state as president of the Vermont Ski Areas Association. In the early 1970s he returned to Maine as owner of Saddleback. After selling Saddleback, he took a hiatus from skiing until his twin sons Josh and Jason began skiing, and he returned to the sport with a vengeance, skiing 50 or more days each season.

This led to his involvement with the Ski Museum of Maine, where he served as president at the time the museum moved into its first home in Farmington. He was also one of the first members of the Maine Ski Hall of Fame Committee and served as one of the emcees at each of the annual induction banquets. Through his years of skiing John Christie served in many capacities, as president of the Maine Ski Council, the Sugarloaf Mountain Ski Club and the Ski Maine Association, always taking the lead in promoting the sport. He was also well known as a speaker, writer and author.

His book, "The Sugarloaf Story," won a Skade Award from the International Skiing History Association as an important contribution to skiing history. For his lifetime of devotion to the sport of skiing John Christie was voted into the Maine Ski Hall of Fame in 2006.

Few people have given more to the sport of skiing in Maine — and especially the Ski Museum of Maine — than John Christie. He will be sorely missed.

Dave Irons
Chairman,
Maine Ski Hall of Fame Committee
The Mountains of Maine: Skiing in the Pine Tree State Collaborative exhibit opens June 24, runs one year

BETHEL — The Ski Museum of Maine is teaming up with two other organizations to present an exhibit that will illustrate a large swath of skiing history in this state.

The exhibit is titled “The Mountains of Maine: Skiing in the Pine Tree State,” and it has been open to the public for the past year at the New England Ski Museum in Franconia, New Hampshire. NESM has graciously loaned it to the Ski Museum of Maine, which will re-mount it in the Robinson House of the Bethel Historical Society.

NESM’s display comprises about 60 photographs taken from its own collections and borrowed from others. It covers most of Maine skiing history, from the arrival of the first Swedish immigrants in Aroostook County in the late 1800s, and the narrative continues into the modern era. An example is shown opposite: Swedish-born Frederick Jorgensen, who immigrated to Maine in 1882.

The principal focus of the photo collection is the development of commercial and non-profit ski areas in the period after World War II. Many of these ski hills, particularly the smallest ones, disappeared decades ago. But others, such as Sunday River, Mount Abram, Black Mountain of Maine and Shawnee Peak, remain important to our state’s skiing lifestyle.

The exhibit will be supplemented with artifacts and photos from the collection of the Ski Museum of Maine.
The exhibit is the latest of a series of collaborations between the Ski Museum of Maine and the Bethel Historical Society. The Ski Museum seeks to broaden its programming and support in the Bethel area, with the goal of adding a permanent branch with a few years.

The Bethel Historical Society is currently marking its 50th anniversary, and executive director Randall Bennett notes that because skiing is such an important part of the local social and economic landscape, it’s totally appropriate to mount this exhibit for 2016-2017.

The exhibit will open June 24 and continue for a year. Hours are Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays in July and August 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Closed November 1 through Thanksgiving. Call 800-824-2910 or visit BethelHistorical.org.

The Maine Ski Hall of Fame Committee and Ski Museum Board of Directors would like to invite you to the 14th annual a Ski Hall of Fame Induction Dinner. The 8 members of the Class of 2016 have been influential in shaping the sport of skiing in Maine.

Nancy Fiddler ~ Walt Shepard ~ Dan Warner ~ Andy Shepard
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Saturday, October 29, 2016
Grand Summit Hotel ~ Sunday River Resort
Newry, Maine
4:30 pm to 6:30 - Inductee Reception
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm - Dinner and Awards
The dinner is $50 per person.
To make a reservation please visit www.skimaine.com/halloffame or call (207) 773-7669 ext 105
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4th Annual Ski Maine Golf Classic
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Val Halla, Cumberland, Maine

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$15,000 hole in one contest

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### Mission Statement

“To celebrate and preserve the history and heritage of Maine skiing.”
Save this date!
Monday, June 6
4th Annual Ski Maine Golf Classic
To benefit the Ski Museum of Maine
Details on page 18

On April 26 the Ski Museum of Maine visited two schools in MSAD 44, Woodstock Elementary and Crescent Park School in Bethel. Aided by a grant from the Sunday River Community Fund, the Ski Museum is developing an in-school education program for fourth-grade students. Grade four is the year Maine history is taught. Above: Teacher Karen Wilson’s class at Woodstock Elementary poses with a wooden ski from the 1930s. (Scott Andrews photo)