

# History of the



The high country you find here at Snowbird Mountain Lodge is more than a place to which to escape. Here exists a place full of wonder, where mountains stretch toward the sky and rich forests, lakes, fast-flowing streams and rivers welcome hikers, bikers, fishermen, canoeists and kayakers alike. Indeed, if you're an outdoorsman or just enjoy nature in its most pure form this is the area for you.

Some of the highest mountains in the eastern United States reside in this area. Here lie the headwaters of rivers that flow to the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico...some of which are still wild and free, ready to soothe your spirit and challenge your adventurous side.

Here you can still find virgin forest...preserved for us in the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, remnants of a carpet of green that once covered the continent. There are views within the forest that have changed little in hundreds of years.

You are now in a land of surprises. A place where there is as much or as little as you want to do. Founded on the principles of southern mountain hospitality, Snowbird Mountain Lodge carries on that tradition today.

This history of the Lodge and its surroundings is only a brief survey of the forces that made this area what it is today. May you enjoy your stay with us and return often.

Welcome to some of the most rugged country in the United States. This area of North Carolina was one of the last areas in the east to be settled. With approximately 70% of the county preserved as National Forest and 8% that belongs to the Cherokee Indians, Graham County only has a year-round population of 5,000. These mountains that we call home contain a fascinating history, one that can never be completely told.

If you think it took a long time to reach the Lodge today, think back to 1941 when Snowbird was first opened. Just one mile outside of Robbinsville, your car would have left the pavement. Traveling on the old gravel road you would wind your way an additional 16 miles up to the driveway of the Lodge. Generators supplied power, which we take for granted today, until 1949, when Nantahala Power and Light ran lines to the Lodge. Telephones were not available until early 1960 and water was and is still supplied by natural springs located here on the property.

The first records of this area show that in 1838 there wasn't a road in what was to become Graham County except for old Indian trading paths. There are not even records of travel by a white man across the mountains of Western North Carolina prior to the pilgrimage of Daniel Boone in 1769, although it is generally believed that Hernando Desoto of Spain was the first white man to see these mountains in 1540. One of the first white men to spend any amount of time here was William Bartram. This American-born botanist was one of the first white men to see what is today Graham County during the month of May 1776. At this time he was collecting plant specimens and notes on wildlife for a government survey. It is even likely that one of the early white families, the Stratton family, followed one of these trading paths when they crossed over from Tennessee to settle in an area on the western side of the county. Stratton Meadows and Bob Stratton Bald, which are located just off the Chero-

hala Skyway, was where they settled and where many members of the family are buried in the old meadow.

Ironically, the “Trail of Tears”, the removal of the Cherokee Indians, brought about the first road in the county. In early 1836, United States soldiers under orders from General Winfield Scott moved into the area and built Fort Montgomery on a hill overlooking present day Robbinsville. During the years of 1836-1838 the soldiers built a makeshift highway across the mountains from the fort to “Old Valley Town” which is present day Andrews. Known today as the Tatham Gap Road, this gravel road begins beside the old Bemis Lumber Mill at the junction of NC 143/ Business and Long Creek Road. It continues across the mountains to Andrews following much the same route as it did in 1838.

In October of that year, the removal began. About 14,000 Cherokee, including the young, old and sick began the walk west to the new reservation in Oklahoma. Fortunately, not all of the Cherokee in Graham County were caught up in the army roundup. A small number escaped into the mountains around the Lodge and many of their descendants reside here today. Calling themselves the “real people”, many of these Cherokee would have been caught and forced to Oklahoma had it not been for the negotiations of Will Thomas, a white trader, and the sacrifice of a Cherokee named Tsali. Tsali and his sons gave their lives so that others of the tribe would be allowed to remain in this area.

During this time, one of the most prominent leaders of the Cherokee in Graham County was Junaluska. Historians and scholars generally accept that Junaluska saved Andrew Jackson’s life at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. Ironically it was President Andrew Jackson that ordered the removal of the Cherokee from their lands in 1836. Junaluska was one of the Indians forced to march to Oklahoma. Upon his arrival at the new reservation he promptly turned around and walked back to Robbinsville

-- a round trip of some 2,500 miles. Shortly after his return, the state of North Carolina granted him citizenship and gave him a large tract of land in present day Robbinsville. Chief Junaluska died in 1858 after a long and hard struggle to keep his people in the mountains. He is buried next to his wife on a ridge just outside town on NC 143. A large memorial was erected in 1910 and a museum dedicated to his life and the struggle of the Cherokee is located next to it.

Graham County was not officially formed until 1872 and the town of Robbinsville was established some twenty years later in 1893. The population in the area in an 1884 census was listed as 200 hardy souls. There was little development in this area until about 1910 when The Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) began to investigate the Little Tennessee River watershed for power sites for their aluminum plant located in Maryville, TN. In March 1917 Alcoa began construction of Cheoah Dam. Not able to meet the growing demand for their products, Alcoa formed the Santeetlah Development Company in 1926 and began construction of Santeetlah Dam. The lake created by this dam is the one that you drive by as you approach Snowbird. This unique dam doesn’t generate power at the facility itself, but sends water over 5 miles through a complex combination of steel pipe and concrete tunnels to a power plant on Cheoah Lake.

About this same time, the Great Smoky Mountain Land and Timber Company sold an expansive tract of mountain land to Whiting Manufacturing of England. An agent of the company, George Moore was given 1600 acres of mountain land to establish a European- type shooting preserve for the entertainment of wealthy clients and friends of the company. Moore selected as his location a remote section of the mountains known as Hooper Bald. Hooper Bald is 5,429 feet high and is located just 12 miles from Snowbird Lodge. Until the completion of

the Cherochala Skyway in 1996, the only way to get to the bald was on a rutted road suitable only for 4-wheel drive vehicles. Three years were spent in preparation before operation of the hunting preserve could begin. It was no small task to even build a road to the bald, after all, the road was very steep and could only be used by ox wagons.

The preserve's clubhouse was constructed of chestnut logs and was 90 feet long and 40 feet wide. It held all of the modern conveniences of the time, containing 10 bedrooms, two baths, a kitchen and a dining room. The lobby was 45 x 20 feet. There was another house that was built as a caretaker's cabin and telephone lines were strung across the mountains linking it to Marble, NC.

Huge enclosures appropriate for various animals were constructed including a 600-acre boar enclosure and a pen for buffalo over a mile in circumference. It is said that 25 tons of double-strand barbed wire was hauled in by wagon to fence the various game lots. The wild boar lot was built of huge chestnut rails nine rails high.

At last, in 1912 the selected game animals began to arrive. They were shipped in wooden crates by railroad to Murphy and Andrews. A retired cavalry officer from Andrews was hired to serve as master of the wagon train that transported the animals up to the bald. The moving process was a large one and took from early spring until the end of that summer. Finally all of the animals were assembled on the bald. There were eight buffalo, fourteen young wild boar, fourteen elk, six Colorado mule deer, thirty four bears, including six huge Russian brown bear, two hundred wild turkey and ten thousand eggs of the English ring-necked pheasant. Moore purchased additional turkeys and scattered them about the mountain in an effort to get them started.

Not long after the opening of the hunting lodge Moore became disenchanted with the project. In fact, the camp proved too remote for English gentlemen. The journey to

get there was too long and difficult. The winters at that elevation were extremely long and bitter; for example, in 1917, the temperature plunged to 35 below zero, bursting plumbing pipes and killing several animals. A vast number of the animals brought there were not able to adapt to the area, but the boar proved himself very adaptable to this new environment. The boar learned that they could root their way out of the enclosure and continued to multiply. Many mated with feral pigs in the area and created an extremely large version of the Russian strain of boar. The big Russian bears learned to climb out of the stockade to search for food and were killed by poachers. Poachers also killed most of the turkeys. The buffalo did poorly and were driven to Andrews and sold. The elk and mule deer thrived, but they were eventually sold too. By the late 1920's only the caretaker, a local Robbinsville man named Cotton McGuire, remained. He had been keeper of the preserve and when Moore departed, Cotton was given full ownership. Although the old Lodge burned in 1939, Cotton and his family continued to live on the bald for over 30 years. No one else has lived so high, for so long, season after season, in the Southern Appalachians. Cotton died in 1957.

The first real growth in Robbinsville began in 1926 with the arrival of Bemis Lumber Company. It is a misconception to think that these mountains have always been covered with trees. At the turn of the century all of the Eastern United States had been clear-cut logged at least once and most areas several times. Small pockets of "virgin" timber remained. The largest of these is today known as the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. Logging companies were in the county as early as 1890, but none had operated on the same scale as Kanawah Hardwood Lumber Company and Bemis. Both of these companies installed miles of railroad track throughout the county, but today Graham County doesn't have any railroad track left. With the arrival of Bemis, the town got a complete

electric light system, which was operated by the lumber plant. Lumber companies owned most of the land surrounding the Lodge and what is now the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. Bemis even came within three months of reaching the Kilmer area when this tract was sold to the government in 1935. Bemis absorbed Kanawah and the combined companies continued to operate until the early 1970's when major logging ended in the area.

During the mid 1930's the Veterans of Foreign Wars wanted a fitting forest to honor the poet Joyce Kilmer, newspaperman and author of the poem "Trees." Kilmer was killed in France during World War I. After looking at millions of acres across the nation, the United States Forest Service decided on a 3,800 acre tract of land on the Little Santee Creek where the big timber was still left untouched by man. In this forest you can see more than one hundred kinds of native trees, some centuries old. You can glimpse what our country looked like just a short time ago in this wonderful canopy forest. About 2,500 additional acres of "virgin" timber were added to the original land in the late 1960's and the area is now called the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness. In this area botanists have recorded more than 1,400 species of flowering plants, 600 mosses, liverworts and lichen and more than 2,000 kinds of fungi. There are more than 20 species of snakes, 52 mammals, 70 kinds of fish and more than 200 species of birds that inhabit our region. This makes our area one of the most diverse places on earth.

The Snowbird Mountain Lodge, which opened to guests in the spring of 1941, is a relatively recent building in the history of resorts in western North Carolina. It has in its origins the same appreciation of climate and mountain scenery that sparked the development of "mountain resorts" in the late 1800's. Many people, trying to escape the heat and humidity of southern summers began to build summer cottages in the mountains. Entre-

preneurs developed mountain resorts in places like Linville, Tryon, Lake Toxaway and Asheville. Families came by railroad to spend the summer months in the mountains. Perhaps the best example of this is George Washington Vanderbilt's summer residence – The Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC.

In the period of time between WWI and WWII there was a rapid increase in the number of mountain hotels. Amos Frye, a local timber baron completed the Fryemont Inn located in Bryson City, NC in 1923. Alcoa, following the completion of the Cheoah Dam built the Tapoco Lodge in Robbinsville, NC in 1930. The railroads constructed a number of hotels including the Balsam Mountain Inn near Waynesville, NC. The Blue Ridge Parkway was constructed in the 1930's and hotels and inns were built at points along its length. With the creation of the Nantahala National Forest and the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, a lodge built near them became inevitable.

Tours, by railroad, automobile, and an early form of bus travel were becoming increasingly popular. One of these tours was organized by a Chicago travel agent in the 1930s to take advantage of all the attractions in this area. In 1924, Arthur Wolfe opened a travel office in Chicago and in the 1930's he developed a weeklong tour into the Great Smoky Mountain region. The tour began by train in Chicago on Southern Railroad's famous "Carolina Special" bound for Knoxville, TN. Tour buses belonging to Smoky Mountain Trailways, headquartered in Asheville, NC met tourists at the station. These buses were topless and had the appearance of elongated touring cars. The tour began in Knoxville and proceeded to Gatlinburg. Then they crossed into North Carolina, to Bryson City and the Fryemont Inn and then on to Cherokee. They spent time in Asheville at the Grove Park Inn, taking time to tour Mount Mitchell and the Biltmore Estate. Then the travelers headed back to Knoxville via Tapoco Lodge on the NC/TN border.

These tours were very successful and filled to overflowing most of the time. Then in 1938 Alcoa decided against accommodating any more guests at Tapoco Lodge. The beautiful scenery of Graham County, particularly the wild woodlands of the Nantahala National Forest and the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest were very important parts of the tour offered by Mr. Wolfe to his clients. During discussions with Mr. Bridges, president of the Smoky Mountain Tour Company who handled the local stage of the tour, it was suggested that Wolfe buy some property and build his own lodge. Bridges even offered his car and the services of his son and daughter-in-law to scout the region for a suitable location.

Arthur returned to Chicago and discussed the possibility with his brother Edwin, who was a realtor and builder. There were many obstacles facing these two brothers. They had to find property with a panoramic view, in a county that was mainly given over to the Cherokee Indians and National Forests. The land had to be easily accessible, had to have access to power and most importantly it must have a good source of fresh water. Last but not least, they needed a good building design and a considerable amount of money.

In the spring of 1939, Arthur and Edwin returned to Asheville and, along with Mr. Bridges' son and daughter-in-law, drove to Robbinsville. Once in town they stopped at a local drug store and discussed finding a suitable location with the owner of the store, Ed Ingram. Ed didn't have any suggestions on a piece of property, but did say that they should take a local boy with them on their search. According to Ed the natives were a little suspicious of outsiders. Many locals thought "furriners" might be "revenoors" attempting to locate the stills that made moonshine or white liquor in the area.

There was a young mountaineer in the store at the time and he agreed to help them in their search for 50 cents a day. They took Ingram's advice, hired the moun-

taineer and set out around Lake Santeetlah. They also found his warning about the locals to be true. The few natives they met were "poker faced" and volunteered no information. The traveling party was quite discouraged. About three miles from Joyce Kilmer, they saw a man and a young boy plowing a field beside a cabin. They stopped, hailed him and he motioned for them to come and meet him at the house. He seemed very friendly compared to the other people that they had met that day. His name was Wiley Underwood, and it was he and his wife Ruthy who proved to be so helpful in acquiring the site where Snowbird Mountain Lodge sits today.

When asked if he knew of any property that might be for sale, Wiley spit some tobacco juice and pointed to the mountain across from his cabin. He said that there was some land across the road that was for sale and it belonged to some of his wife's relations. He also volunteered to show them the property. Starting from Santeetlah Gap, they struggled to the top of the steep ridge, grasping for laurel bushes and trees to pull themselves to the top through thick brush. At the top there was a small clearing, and they gazed in breathless wonder towards the south where the Snowbird Mountain Range loomed up on the horizon, with Cedar Top on the extreme right and Joanna Bald on the left. Nearer and down in the valley, they could just glimpse Lake Santeetlah. Thrilled with the view, the next question was about water. Wiley told them there was a spring located about 100 yards away that had been flowing for the past thirty years with deliciously cool, clear water. That fixed it. The brothers decided then and there that they would try to obtain the property.

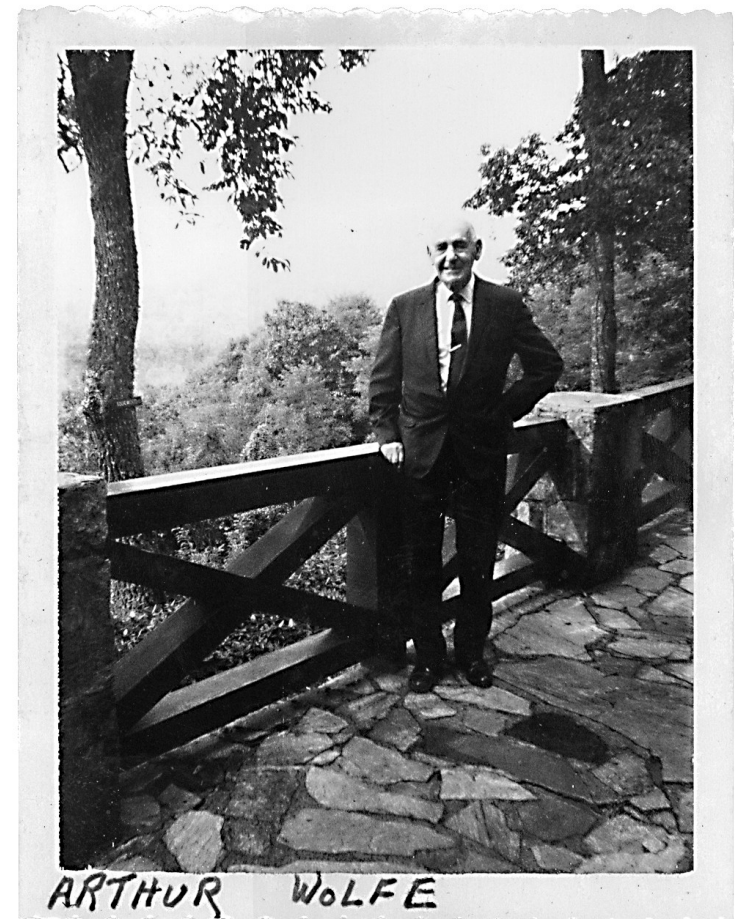
Two brothers supposedly owned the land in question. However, in tracing the matter further, Arthur found that there were eight heirs and it would be necessary to obtain all of their signatures to complete the sale. The heirs were scattered in several states, some in isolated areas of the

mountains, some in logging camps and others as far away as Florida. With the help of Wiley, Bruce Slaughter who was then mayor of Robbinsville, a lawyer from Asheville and one from town they were able to obtain all of the signatures and the sale was completed on July 23, 1940.

While waiting to purchase the land, Arthur Wolfe had several meetings with the Chief Forest Ranger for the Nantahala National Forest in Franklin, North Carolina. The ranger was very interested in their plans for a lodge in this area and because the property was almost surrounded by national forest, he promised to help with establishing a phone line to the facility. Nantahala Power and Light was also located in Franklin and it was here that Arthur was informed that it wouldn't be cost effective for them to run power to the new lodge. The Power Company suggested that he arrange to use generators to supply the needs of the Lodge, one for lights and another for the water system.

About this time Arthur also made contact with Ronald Greene, an Asheville architect. After several meetings they contracted with him to design the facility. Greene drove down from Asheville to look over the property and see if it was even feasible to build a lodge on a mountaintop at an elevation of 2,800 feet. He decided that, although not easy, and certainly not cheap, it was possible. Arthur and Edwin had traveled extensively throughout the world to many inns and lodges so they worked closely with Greene on the design of the building. Some of their ideas, including the idea of a Swiss Chalet style building with fireplaces capable of burning 5 foot logs, a massive window looking out over the mountains, an airy dining room and guestrooms with private baths were included in the final design.

In December 1939, surveyors were lined up for the leveling of the Lodge site and the grading of the driveway from the road to the top of the ridge. The Wolfes hired a local man, Bill Moore from Andrews to supervise



*Arthur Wolfe standing proudly on the veranda of his Snowbird Mountain Lodge. He had known from the first time that he had seen the view that this was the perfect place to build his dream.*

the actual construction. His only qualifications were that he was aware of the local labor and material markets and that he could read blueprints.

In August 1940 Wiley Underwood, his son Corbin, son-in-law Boyd and a few neighbors began cutting the trees and blasting the stumps on the ridge where the Lodge was to be built. They cleared an area large enough for a bulldozer to work. Bemis Lumber Company rented a bulldozer to the Wolfe brothers and transported it from town to the bottom of the current Lodge driveway. Wayne Ellis, who was a very skillful machinery operator, spent about 20 days building the road to the Lodge site and leveling the area for the actual construction. Now trucks could begin to deliver materials to the site.

From the very beginning it had been the intention of the Wolfes and Greene to use materials from the site in the actual construction. Large logs from the site were cut and hauled to Bemis to be milled into paneling for the rooms. Stone was brought from a quarry near Marble, NC. Electrical equipment came from Knoxville. Plumbing supplies and the giant steam boiler arrived from Chicago. An Illinois craftsman built the hanging fixtures in the dining room, lobby and lounge room. Most of the hardwoods came from the site, and those that didn't – some wild cherry, butternut, chestnut, maple and silver bell – came from mills in North Georgia. Stonemasons, carpenters and electricians came from as far away as 80 miles to work on the building, winding up the steep mountain roads all during the fall, winter and spring.

The first building constructed on the site stood where the Smith Cottage is today. This building was designed to house workers who felt it was too far for them to come to work everyday. The power generation house and spring reservoir houses were built just behind and downgrade from the main building. An additional reservoir was constructed at the Lodge entrance.

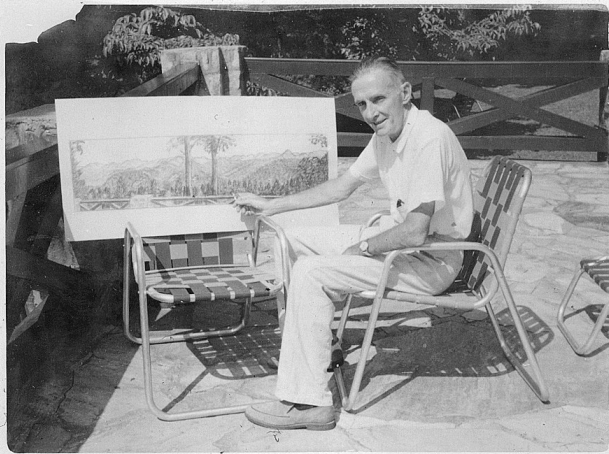
After the shell of the main building was completed,

Mr. Wolfe invited an interior decorator from Chicago to come down to select the furnishings and décor for the lounge and bedrooms. The decorator was also to confer with two local men, the Carver brothers, on the design of the furniture for the dining room and bedrooms. The Carvers rented a large barn where they made the beds, dressers, tables, luggage racks and other furniture for the Lodge. One of the techniques used in building the furniture was to finish the pieces with glass panes instead of sandpaper, as glass was much less expensive and produced a smoother finish and a better piece of furniture. Although the original upholstery pieces in the Lodge were replaced years ago, the furniture that the Carver brothers made is still in use today.

When the Wolfe brothers were trying to determine a name for the Lodge, they considered several. First they thought of Santeetlah, for the Lake. Then Nantahala, for the national forest. Finally Snowbird, for the mountain ranges that the Lodge faced. The first two, Santeetlah and Nantahala were beautiful sounding Indian names, but they would be hard to remember and spell. The Wolfes eventually chose Snowbird, a name easy to pronounce, not hard to remember and that sounded warm and inviting.

Prior to opening in 1941, the Wolfes secured the services of a first rate chef and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Harderer from Winter Park, FL. By all accounts Mr. Harderer was a wonderful man and his wife, a Frenchwoman, was a delightfully talented cook as well. Guests would find it well worthwhile to navigate the steep mountain roads to partake of gourmet meals, great views and accommodations. The Lodge was opened to guests in late April or early May of 1941. It had taken 3 long years of work, but only eight months of actual construction to get the doors open. It seems that the very first guests to Snowbird were sixty members of the American Society of Travel Agents who had just finished their annual meet-





*Fred Macklin - Covington, Ky.*

ing in Asheville.

When the Lodge opened its own generators supplied all the electricity, a capability we maintain today. Commercial electric power was brought to the Lodge in 1949. Phone service was not available and reservations were made with a booking agent in town. It wasn't until 1960 that phones were made available. Likewise, the roads around the Lodge and town were of packed clay and gravel until the early 1960's.

Arthur and his brother Edwin had been confirmed bachelors when they built the Lodge, but both married members of an organized tour that stayed at the Lodge shortly after its opening. Arthur was in charge of the office, publicity and promotion while Edwin handled maintenance and food service. Snowbird Mountain Lodge managed to operate one complete season before WWII started. During the war years the Lodge had a difficult time operating and was closed for the 1943 season due to a lack of supplies. During this time the trails to "Happy Point", now known as Sunrise Point, the Ridge Trail and Santeetlah Gap trail were completed. Arthur and Edwin continued to run the Lodge until 1953.

Carl Vought and his wife had been guests at Snowbird for a number of years and had fallen in love with the Lodge. Arthur told them in late 1952 that he and his brother wanted to sell the Lodge due to advancing age and health concerns. Carl really wanted to buy the place, but he was already engaged in a very successful business in Cincinnati. One evening, when the Voughts were having dinner with friends, Gladys and Elmer Smith, the conversation turned to the pressure of city life, big business and how nice it would be to escape to the mountains to live. Carl then told them that he knew just the place that they would love. He proceeded to give them all of the details of Snowbird Mountain Lodge. The Smiths thought that it might be just a small place, or a motel near Gatlinburg. (You see, in the spring of 1953, Gatlinburg

was a much quieter place than it is today) They decided to investigate.

They arrived in North Carolina via Hwy129 from Knoxville and in driving up the clay and gravel road from Robbinsville, thought that Vought must have been teasing them! There was no way that there was a lodge of any sort this far out in the mountains. Several times during the trip they started to turn around, but were persistent. Driving up the one lane driveway to the Lodge, they were greeted with the incredible view and almost immediately fell in love. They walked the trails, enjoyed the Lodge, hiked in Joyce Kilmer Forest and stayed most of that season.

Gladys and Elmer purchased Snowbird from the Wolfes in October 1953 and continued to operate it in much the same fashion as the Wolfe brothers had. The Smiths began the tradition of mailing annual newsletters to inform guests of seasonal events beginning in 1954. The first organized wildflower hikes were held in 1955. They showed movies on the lawn every Saturday night for entertainment. Informal picnics and BBQs were held every so often. In their first newsletter they informed guests of their purchase of the Lodge and that they had installed a "television in a separate room for those who enjoy relaxing with a TV program". One of the very first TV's in the county, we are sure it got very poor reception and was probably located in rooms 1 or 8. The Smiths also installed the first icemaker in the county and local school children took field trips to the Lodge to see ice being made. Gladys and Elmer lived in the main lodge building during the time that they were here and had several pets. One of their dogs, Skipper, is in many old photos and is buried here on the property. Elmer was said to be a notorious drunk and hid his liquor behind the front desk. Gladys was known to have a hot temper and fired one employee 12 times!

After deciding to retire, the Smiths sold the Lodge to



*Gladys and Elmer Smith with their dog Skipper. Skipper appeared in many of the guest photos that were taken in the 1950s. Smith Cottage is named for these past owners of the Snowbird Mountain Lodge.*

Paul and Mildred Davis of Fort Lauderdale, FL for \$89,000 in June of 1964. There had been no announcement of this in the newsletter of 1964, but news was relayed that the driveway had been paved and that plans to build a screened summerhouse on the property were in the works. Mr. and Mrs. Davis ran the Lodge for the season but defaulted on their mortgage before Christmas. On February 8, 1966 Gladys and Elmer bought the Lodge back for \$81,000 at public auction. The newsletter of that year announced their return and how excited they were to be back. It also told of the completion of the summerhouse, a porch that had been added over the west terrace of the Lodge and the completion of a two-room cottage known as the Wolfe Cottage.

1969 proved to be a very eventful year for the Lodge when it opened on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. In early June, Elmer died unexpectedly. As you can tell, the Smiths were not your ordinary couple. They had a pact with each other that the Lodge was to be run through the season even if one of them should die during the year. According to locals, Gladys placed Elmer on ice in Murphy, NC and with the help of family members ran the Lodge for the rest of the year. At the end of the season, Gladys shipped Elmer off to Florida for burial.

In October 1969, Gladys sold the Lodge to Bill Timmerman and Bob Stone, two colorful gentlemen from Pennsylvania. They had been previous guests at Snowbird and had run a resort on Lake Erie. According to a letter, the Lodge was in very poor shape when they took over. Bill and Bob replaced the large front window in the main room, upgraded the kitchen and guest rooms, refurbished the main room and replaced the oldest building on the property with what is known as the Smith Cottage. After all this they were ready to open for the 1970 season.....only to find that there was no road to the Lodge!

The North Carolina Department of Transportation had

started the re-routing and paving of the road to Joyce Kilmer in the winter of 1969. With construction beginning at the West Buffalo Bridge a little over three miles from the Lodge they were far from being finished by the start of the 1970 season. In fact, according to locals, the road was little more than a muddy trail due to the heavy rains that winter. Work was delayed weeks on end due to bad weather and the road was not completed until late in the fall of 1970. All of this meant that Timmerman and Stone spent much of the year pulling guests out of mud holes and towing them up the mountain. On many occasions, guests were “stuck” at the Lodge longer than they intended to stay because it was too muddy to leave.

Having had their fill of problems, Stone and Timmerman sold the Lodge to Ed and Mary Williams in June of 1972. Ed and Mary built a private residence, the round house just below the parking lot in 1973 and continued to run the Lodge until 1980. Tiring of the business, they contracted to sell Snowbird to Ken and Ann Hough. The Houghs didn't show up for the closing, forfeiting their earnest money. The Williams, afraid that they would be running the Lodge for yet another year received a phone call from Bob Rhudy. Bob and his wife Connie had heard about the Lodge and were interested in purchasing it. They purchased it in June of 1981. The Houghs later went on to create and run the Orchard Inn in Saluda, NC for many years. Ed and Mary Williams built a home across the road from the Lodge and continue to live there today.

Bob and Connie ran the lodge very successfully for 10 years. It was sold to Jim and Eleanor Burbank in 1990. The Burbanks had been guests at the Lodge while living in Knoxville where Jim had served for 25 years as a natural resource management officer for TVA. The Burbanks invested time and money on much needed repairs to the facility and after the 1993 season sold Snowbird back to the Rhudys. Jim and Eleanor still return

every year to see old friends and lead wildflower hikes.

The Rhudys returned for only one year, 1994, and sold the Lodge to the Lenz family. After opening in April of 1995, the family had already decided to get out of the innkeeping business by June, but ran the Lodge until the end of the 1995 season. We, Karen and Robert Rankin, had actually approached Jim and Eleanor in 1992 about buying Snowbird. We talked with Bob Rhudy in 1995 and again missed the opportunity. We didn't miss it in 1996.

In the winter of 1996 and spring of 1997 the Lodge underwent extensive renovations to preserve it for future generations. New wiring, plumbing, foundation and structural renovations and kitchen renovations were just some of the repairs undertaken. With the opening of the Cherohala Skyway in the late fall of 1996, traffic increased and it was decided to widen the driveway to better accommodate guests. A local operator was contracted for the work. In December 1996, Lonnie Underwood, grandson of Wiley, who had long ago been so helpful to the Wolfe brothers, completed the work. During this time a new phone system was installed and we were fortunate to have Melvin Carver, who is the son and nephew of the men that built the Lodge furniture, to do the work. It seems that no matter how much time passes here at Snowbird, we are always connected to our past.

We know that men with vision created Snowbird Mountain Lodge. Arthur and Edwin Wolfe had a vision of an inn with spectacular views, fabulous food, gracious hospitality and a peaceful setting in the middle of nature. The Lodge has had nine owners in 60 years. I think all of us have felt, or feel much the same about Snowbird—that this is indeed a very special place. All of us have been caretakers of the Lodge, preserving it for future guests, so they will be able to enjoy her special treasures as we do every day.