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Roland E. Peabody

Born: 1900 Died: 1950

Roland Peabody was proprietor of the local S.S. Pierce store in Franconia, New Hampshire, and an early employee of Peckett's on Sugar Hill. He was working on skis – guiding groups of guests on winter trips to Butternut Lodge, helping guests learn to ski and snowshoe – before Sig Buchmayr established the first ski school in America at Peckett's. When that school was established, Roland Peabody was the first graduate of the first class, and for the rest of his life held badge #1 issued by the Professional Ski Instructors of America.

Roland Peabody was born on May 15, 1900, in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire. From an early age, he became interested in winter sports and was instrumental in the development of skiing as a sport in the Franconia area.

Racing was well established in the Franconia area in the early 1930s, using the Taft Trail which had been cut by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). Roland was involved in organizing the first Hochgebirge Race on that trail in 1933. In 1935, he joined with Alec Bright and Leroy Bateman in developing a plan for an aerial tramway for Cannon Mountain.

Roland personally took the plan before the state legislature in that year, hoping to get a federal grant for construction, but was turned down. The state did come up with an appropriation in its next session, however, and using New Hampshire state funds, construction of the tramway began in September of 1937. The first aerial tramway in the United States was completed and dedicated in June of 1938, with Roland Peabody as the first manager, answering to an independent tramway commission. (What is now Franconia Notch State Park was at that time under the aegis of the Society for the Preservation of New Hampshire Forests.)

First, trails on Cannon Mountain – in part connecting with the already existing Taft Trail – were being cut as the tramway was constructed, and Cannon Mountain skiing, complete with high-capacity aerial tramway, became a reality in 1938. Peabody continued to manage the tram and the ski area until his death in 1950. He was heavily active in the promotion of junior racing, of interscholastic events, and in particular of training camps for racers, including the first girls' training camp ever held, attended by such future Olympians as Joan Hannah, Penny Pitou, and Betsy Snite. Peabody functioned as a racing official throughout his ski career, and was responsible for bringing the National Championships to Cannon Mountain in 1946-47.

A lifelong promoter of recreational skiing, Peabody was responsible for organization of the skiing demonstration at Madison Square Garden in 1936 (his son Roger was one of the performers). He made certain that Cannon Mountain and New Hampshire were always well represented at the New York and Boston ski shows. "Nobody," says son Roger – already a Hall of Fame member – "traveled farther or spoke more frequently in promotion of the sport of skiing."

Roland Peabody was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1979.