

## VON TRAPP FAMILY

### Life in America: Family Rivalry

touring center and 100 time-share condominiums, all on 2,200 acres on a mountaintop in Stowe. The company also owns 80 percent of the royalty rights to "The Sound of Music." Stock in the original corporation was owned by 33 family members and could be sold only to other family members.

Although the family has been reluctant to discuss the matter, Johannes von Trapp, the youngest son of Baron Georg and Maria von Trapp and leader of the majority faction, said after the hearing that the tensions began to erupt after the death of his mother in 1987. "It's sad," he said. "Obviously it wouldn't have happened while my mother was alive."

Peter Langrock, the lawyer representing Johannes von Trapp and his allies, said Mr. von Trapp was ousted as president of the corporation in 1992 and replaced by a nephew. A year later, Johannes von Trapp regained his post as president and his nephew left the company.

In an effort to modernize the corporation, Mr. Langrock said, his client and the other majority shareholders decided to restructure the company, allowing stock to be sold outside the family for the first time. Shareholders who objected to the new arrangement were bought out for \$34 a share in January 1995. A month later, these minority shareholders, exercising their rights under Vermont statute, challenged the settlement and demanded a buyout price of \$61 a share.

The case went to Vermont Superior Court, and in May, Judge John P. Meaker ruled that "the fair value of a share of the common stock of Trapp Family Lodge Inc. on Jan. 28, 1995, was \$63.44" and ordered the new owners to pay the difference, plus interest, an amount that comes to nearly \$3 million.

Donald Rendall, lawyer for the minority shareholders, said his clients contend that "the value used by the corporation is inadequate." Now, he said, "the case is only about whether or not the trial court's decision will be upheld."

Mr. Langrock said his appeal "challenged Judge Meaker's decision on the grounds that he ignored a large body of evidence and took the view of only one appraiser."

There was no indication when the Vermont Supreme Court might issue a ruling.