

ARTI-FACTS

The Newsletter of the Award-Winning Idyllwild Area Historical Society

Preserving the History of Idyllwild and Surrounding Communities
in the San Jacinto Mountains

SPRING 2012

Family Values Drive Idyllwild Founder Claudius Lee Emerson

By Marcia Torrey-Jay

He was a quiet man of few words, not given to the hyperbole that marks today's real estate promoter, but still, Claudius Lee Emerson, known to friends as Lee, was a very savvy marketing man.

According to Florence Churchill Casebeer, a long-time Idyllwild resident, Emerson didn't hype the properties he had for sale when she came up the mountain in the early 1920s, he simply told her to "go and look." She did, fell in love with what she saw "across the brook to the far side" from the Idyllwild Inn, and *Deseo del Corazon* ("Heart's Desire") became her mountain home on South Circle Drive for nearly four decades.

From the beginning, Emerson was not driven so much by money as by his religious values and his vision of a family-oriented summer resort. The wealth he gained and later lost in the Great Depression was something of a side effect. Casebeer wrote, "There was no end to Lee Emerson's goodness and generosity."

Emerson first visited Strawberry Valley around

1890 via the old toll-gate trail, a grade so steep that Emerson's horse refused the climb and had to be led part of the way. He, along with a group of friends that included Harry Cree, later editor of the *Riverside Enterprise*, stayed at the Keen House hotel that



An Emerson family reunion at the Idyllwild Inn (l-r): Lee Sr. & Zelma; Marge & Greg Esgate Sr. & Jr.; Burdette & Alice Nelson with Burdette Jr; John; Nell; and Lee Jr.

stood where the Idyllwild School is today.

Emerson married in 1900 and with his family made frequent trips to Idyllwild over the following years. In 1917, then a San Jacinto merchant and banker, Emerson with two friends bought The Idyllwild Inn along with 1,000 acres that were to become the heart of today's Idyllwild.

According to Emerson himself, a major earthquake in April 1918 did considerable damage to his holdings. It "leveled the power plant, threw down all the fireplaces, and crumbled the foundations (of the buildings)." As a result, Emerson's partners wanted out, and he managed to buy their interests, becoming sole owner of what was to become the resort community of Idyllwild.

After repairing the earthquake damage, his first challenge was to attract visitors to the mountain resort.
(See Emerson, page 3)

IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Arti-Facts

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IAHS Archive, pp. 1 & 3
Cid Castillo, Town Crier, p. 2
Bob Smith, pp. 4, 5 & 7
FrazierDrake, p. 6
Carolyn Levitski, p. 7

ARTI-FACTS STAFF ADDITION

Marcia Torrey-Jay began contributing feature stories to *Arti-Facts* with the recent Winter 2012 edition.



Marcia Torrey-Jay

She is a Web designer and developer, writer, and Internet marketing professional based here in Idyllwild CA. As founder and president of Vision Quest Multimedia, she brands, custom-designs, and develops websites small businesses and non-profits, including her own special project, LAspirit.com, a holistic lifestyle portal.

Previously she headed the development team and served as editor in chief for a 16-channel healthcare news Web portal, a project that included a weekly E-newsletter in content syndication.

An experienced journalist, Ms. Torrey-Jay was managing editor and new media director for Coastal Community Newspapers, a Los Angeles area group. She also designed, developed and managed CulverCityOnline.com, a Website launched in 1994.

Prior to relocating to Los Angeles in 1992, she was president of Marketing & Communications Group, Inc., a company that focused on the marketing needs of entrepreneurial enterprises in the \$5-30-million range. Her firm also handled marketing communications for the National Business Incubation Association.

Before founding M&CG, she was with Spiro & Associates, a full-services advertising agency in Philadelphia, where she directed marketing communications and public affairs programs for such clients as ARAServices, 3-M Corporation, Boeing Helicopters, Comcast Corporation, Planned Parenthood, Southland Corporation (7-Eleven), and the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

We are pleased to have Marcia's expertise and interest in local history now expanding our capacity to share Idyllwild area history.



An Idyllwild Inn tradition: Sunday Service in the natural creekside bowl below the site of today's Post Office.

EMERSON ... *(continued from page 1)*

He decided to tackle this by upgrading the Inn and tennis courts and adding a 9-hole golf course. Later a swimming pool, known as The Plunge, was built.

Dances were held at the Inn Monday through Saturday nights, bridge games and tournaments were a regular feature, and Sunday services were held in an outdoor area near Strawberry Creek called the Idyllwild Bowl. Because of Emerson's Methodist beliefs, "Sunday we couldn't play cards, couldn't dance and so on and so forth" said Lee Jr. in an Idyllwild Area Historical Society interview in June 2002.

The whole Emerson family was put to work. Emerson's wife Zelma (the former Miss Zelma Shultz of San Jacinto) managed the Inn and all five children, Nell, Marge, John, Alice, and Lee Jr., had assigned chores.

Lee Jr. said that he had to get up at 5 a.m. in order to build a fire for the water heater. That was followed by a long list of chores that lasted until noon. The sisters worked waiting tables, John was assigned to the store, and Lee Jr. had charge of the office.

In order to set the right tone, Emerson Sr. donated land to the Boy Scouts, which became camps Emerson and Tahquitz. He also gave land to various religious organizations, and to Riverside County for parks. The rest of the property was divided in half-acre lots, which he marketed as sites for summer homes.

In the early 1920s, Emerson launched a "newspaper," the *Idyllwild Breezes*, which was basically a promotional piece for his development

company, Idyllwild Inc. One of its most popular features was a listing of the names of all Idyllwild's recent visitors in every issue.

The resort prospered for quite a while. Visitors from the valleys below kept coming and Emerson's lots sold well.

As the 1920s boomed on, Emerson, who was no doubt aware of the desirability of the "lake front properties" at Big Bear Lake and Lake Arrowhead, proposed building his own lake, Lake Idyllwild. To that end, he bought additional property, some 450 acres on Domenigoni Flat, and planned to dam Strawberry Creek.

Created by building dams on mountain streams, the San Bernardino Mountain lakes were originally designed to create reservoirs to serve the communities below. Lake Idyllwild, however, would be created simply to enhance the resort. There would be fishing, boating, and picnicking. In fact, Emerson planned to do the competing resorts one better and add a landing strip to the ambitious plan.

But it was not to be. The 1929 stock market crash led to a downward spiral for Idyllwild Inc., and in 1937 bondholders seized the property.

Lee Jr., speculates that Emerson's refusal to get a liquor license when prohibition ended in 1933 was at least partly responsible for Idyllwild Inc.'s ultimate collapse. As a Methodist, the senior Emerson felt that alcohol was an evil. So while the competition, like Lake Arrowhead, soon attracted visitors with bars and cocktail lounges, Idyllwild stayed dry.

(See Idyllwild, Inc., page 6)

THE COMPANY WE KEEP
New and Renewing Members - January through March 2012

NEW MEMBERS

Sponsor

Marilyn Kemple Idyllwild

Family

Laurie & Red Corbett Idyllwild
 Susan Cowper & Larry Wedinger Idyllwild
 John & JoAnne Curren Idyllwild
 John & Carolyn Pairis Hemet

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RENEWING MEMBERS

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 Mary Ann Miller Idyllwild
 Carol Scanny Palm Desert
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AROUND THE MUSEUM GROUNDS



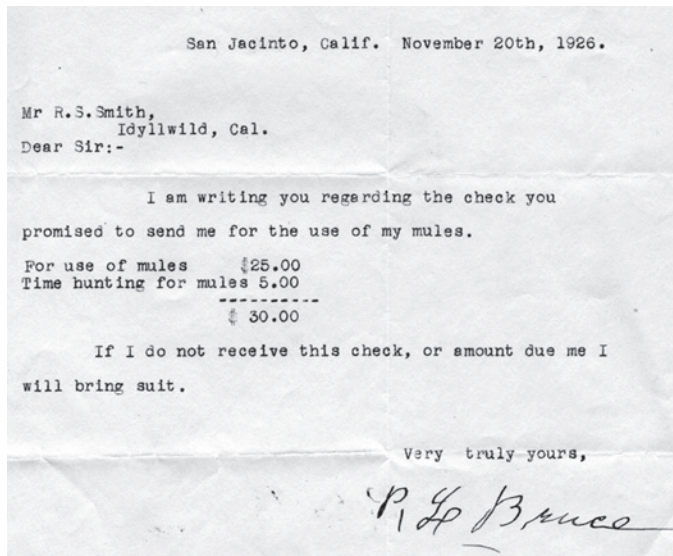
Thanks to the success of the 2011 Home Tour, the loyal support of our membership, and mild January weather, the museum building has gotten a long-overdue roof replacement. The work was expertly done by BC's Roofing Co.

BEHIND THE SCENES

New donations to the collection

Our most significant recent acquisition was found in an old, decaying suitcase brought to us by Robin Miller of Idyllwild. It contained over 150 documents pertaining to the short-lived Idyllwild Golf Club (a.k.a. Mount San Jacinto Golf Club), based on Saunders Meadow. Dating from 1925-1928, the letters, invoices, statements, brochures, and membership documents detailed the dramatic contrast between rosy publicity and financial reality.

Since this was mostly new information, the gift spawned a research project that produced articles in both the *Town Crier* and the Summer Visitors Guide. Here's a sample of the charming material now in our archive:



Our thanks for generous donations of artifacts this quarter go also to the following:

Terry Bauman, San Diego
Francis Blake, Fullerton
Laurie Corbett, Idyllwild
John DeLand, Carlsbad
Carolyn Levitski, Idyllwild
Walter Parks, Riverside
Adele & Bob Smith, Idyllwild

Our busy, busy world

A recent Wednesday morning dramatized the variety of activities that support an award-winning historical society. In one corner of the Moote Archive & Research Center, Joan McCullough was compiling a reference list of owners' names, dates, and locations of

early Idyllwild cabins, to help us respond to frequent questions about old family properties. Ruthe Donlon was finishing up a subject index to our 80 boxes of archive material. At the conference table, Corrinne Brown and Teresa Lease were going over archive photos with long-time resident Bud Hunt, preparing for his oral history interview. Out front, the Idyllwild Garden Club was at work preparing ground for the new heirloom rose garden. Back in the office building Bob Smith and Cecilia Tepel were documenting dozens of recent acquisitions for our computer records.

New items now on sale in the Museum Shop

In response to continual requests, Museum Shop manager Nancy Borchers has replenished our stock of the popular IAHS logo shirts, now including women's and children's sizes, plus sweatshirts. Get yours at the museum.

Also responding to inquiries following the winter issue of *Arti-Facts*, we've added a supply of Edna Price's book, *Burro Bill and Me*, which recounts the years she and Bill Price spent in the Mojave Desert. (See order coupon on page 7)

And wait, there's more: redesigned IAHS lapel pins, brand-new refrigerator magnets with our logo, and a new Arcadia book *Palm Springs Then & Now*.



IAHS director Laura Caster, husband Rob, and son Ethan model the new styles and sizes.

SCENES FROM RECENT IAHS EVENTS

COMMUNITY LECTURE SERIES



It was standing room only at the Idyllwild Community Lecture Series, when Bob Smith made a presentation on the current project of our media specialists, photographers John Drake and Rebecca Frazier.



IDYLLWILD, INC. ... (continued from page 1)

“He was a strong Methodist and a strong supporter of prohibition,” Lee Jr. said. According to Jr., all the experts told the senior Emerson that he was running a resort and needed to get a liquor license. But Emerson didn’t budge and “stayed firm on that until the bondholders took over,” Lee Jr. said. 🐿

A FOOTNOTE ON C. L. EMERSON:

Documents unearthed very recently (see *New*

*donations...*page 5) shed new light on the personality of Lee Emerson, Sr. That calm exterior apparently masked a fiercely competitive streak, which emerged when rival developer Walter Wood opened his own golf course on Saunders Meadow in 1925. As the two kept raising the ante, Wood’s golf club was forced into bankruptcy, but not before he goaded Emerson into buying more land. This left Emerson’s Idyllwild Inc. in a precarious financial position, leading finally into receivership by 1936. 🐿

—Bob Smith

Order Form

***Burro Bill and Me*, by Edna Calkins Price**
Price: \$22.50 (includes sales tax, shipping, & handling)

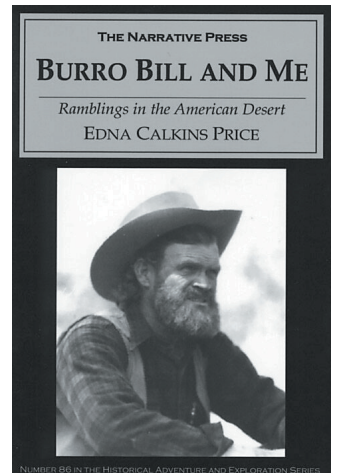
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Mail address: _____

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Please mail your check, payable to IAHS, with this form to IAHS, PO Box 3320, Idyllwild CA 92549



ANNUAL VOLUNTEER LUNCHEON



IAHS director Nancy Borchers confers with luncheon speaker Harold Voorheis, who outlined the Idyllwild Garden Club's plans for an Heirloom Rose Garden soon to appear in front of the museum.



Eager diners line up for the always delicious lunch prepared by hosts Linda & Larry Turner.



AROUND THE MUSEUM GROUNDS

The commemorative plaque that stood beside the Idyllwild Tree Monument downtown for many years is a new resident of our front yard.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM A FOUNDER

IAHS's founding president, Sheila Meyer, who now resides in Oregon, sent this message upon reading of our recent award from the California Council for the Promotion of History:

“When I read the words ‘It is always a pleasure to recognize a historical organization which has its act together and is doing things right’, I immediately thought of our first year as an organization when we took field trips to small museums, some of which

were run by historical societies. We would ask lots of questions about how they were able to succeed in getting funding for a museum, staffing, archives, displays, and other related topics. I now wonder if any historical societies come to our museum and are in awe of what has been accomplished and ask the same questions.

“I continue to be so grateful to...all the...volunteers for your hard work and dedication to the IAHS. You certainly are ‘doing things right’.”

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Telephone _____ E-mail _____

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(Please make your tax-deductible dues check out to IAHS & mail to PO Box 3320, Idyllwild, CA 92549)

If a gift membership, please enter donor's name and address:

Name _____ Address _____

Museum Hours

11 am - 4 pm

**Winter Schedule (Labor Day through June 17)
Saturdays & Sundays, plus Monday, May 28**

**Summer Schedule (June 22 through September 3)
Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays, plus Wednesday, July 4**

For special tours and other business, call (951) 659-2717

E-mail: info@idyllwildhistory.org

Website: www.idyllwildhistory.org

Admission Free

Donations Welcome

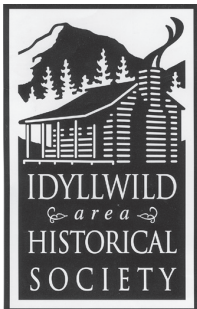
Dates to remember:

**Sunday, August 15 — IAHS Annual Meeting ,
(Speaker: Riverside County historian & author Steve Lech)**

Saturday, September 1 — Ice Cream Social

Saturday, September 15 — 12th Annual Idyllwild Home Tour

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