

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 2013

A PATH TO THE IDYLLWILD COUNTY CAMPGROUND

By Ben Killingsworth

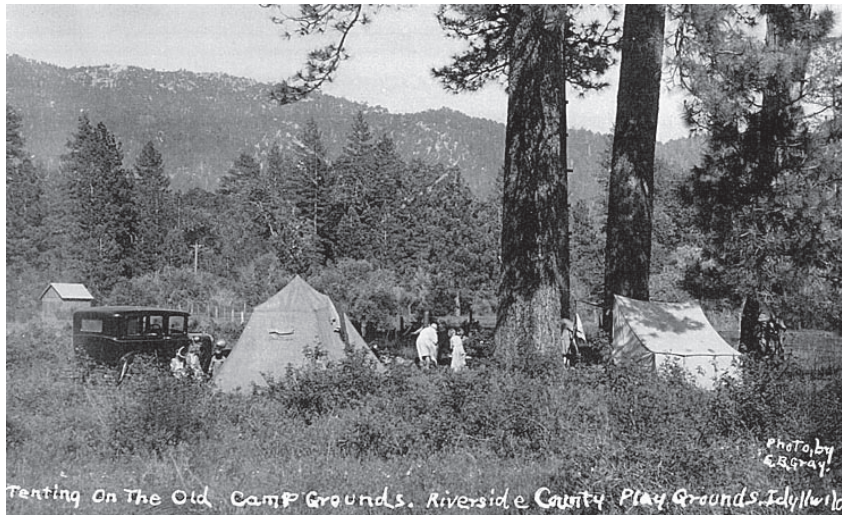
Most of us who make our homes on the Hill probably don't pay a great deal of attention to the Idyllwild County Park. We know it's there, but although we may have camped there sometime in the past, the fact that we decided to make Idyllwild our home, pitching a tent or dragging an RV into the local campgrounds no longer has much appeal.

Nevertheless, we shouldn't forget that our county park once played a significant role in the development of our town and the surrounding areas.

In the early, early days, starting in the late 1800s well before there was a county park, many people were drawn to our mountains because they were, even then, a wonderful place to go camping, especially during the summer months when the temperatures down below were unbearably high.

The one big drawback was that even in the early 1900s just getting here was a feat in itself given that there were no actual roads, at least as we know them today. Even if there had been, only a handful of people owned cars in those days and it's doubtful that most automobiles of the day could have made it up the hill, anyway.

For most people coming up the mountain was either by horseback or horse and buggy. Either way, traversing the existing roads leading to Idyllwild was



Credit: IAHS archive

a real adventure, but the promise of spending a few days under the trees with temperatures 15 to 20 degrees lower than where they came from was enough to spur them ever onward and upward.

One of the "roads" that people used in those days was the one built in

1876 by George Crawford which led from San Jacinto to Strawberry Valley, which we now call Idyllwild. Not only did it feature grades as steep as 30 percent, it was a toll road to boot. It was called the Strawberry Valley Toll Road, and it cost travelers on horseback 10 cents (later raised to 25 cents) and horses pulling buggies or wagons 75 cents.

One traveler who made the trip in 1877 with a team of horses and a "medium sized" wagon told how it had taken 5½ hours to travel 2¼ miles up one of the steepest parts of the mountain road. And it was a common practice then to follow the wagon carrying blocks of wood to be quickly placed in back of the wagon wheels to keep the whole rig from sliding back down to oblivion when the exhausted horses had to stop to catch their breath.

The roads that existed in those days were built primarily for logging purposes, along with one built to facilitate the 1894 construction of the Hemet Lake Dam.

It may come as a surprise to learn that our

(See Campground, page 3)

IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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President: Carolyn Levitski
Vice President: Charlotte Groty
Secretary: Marlene Pierce
Treasurer: Bob Smith
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 George Groty
 Carolyn Hall
 Barbara Jones
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 *Shirl Reid
 Linda Turner
 Adele Voell
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*Board meetings are held monthly
 on the 2nd Friday at 4 p.m.*

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Feature Writer: Ben Killingsworth

OUR PREDECESSORS

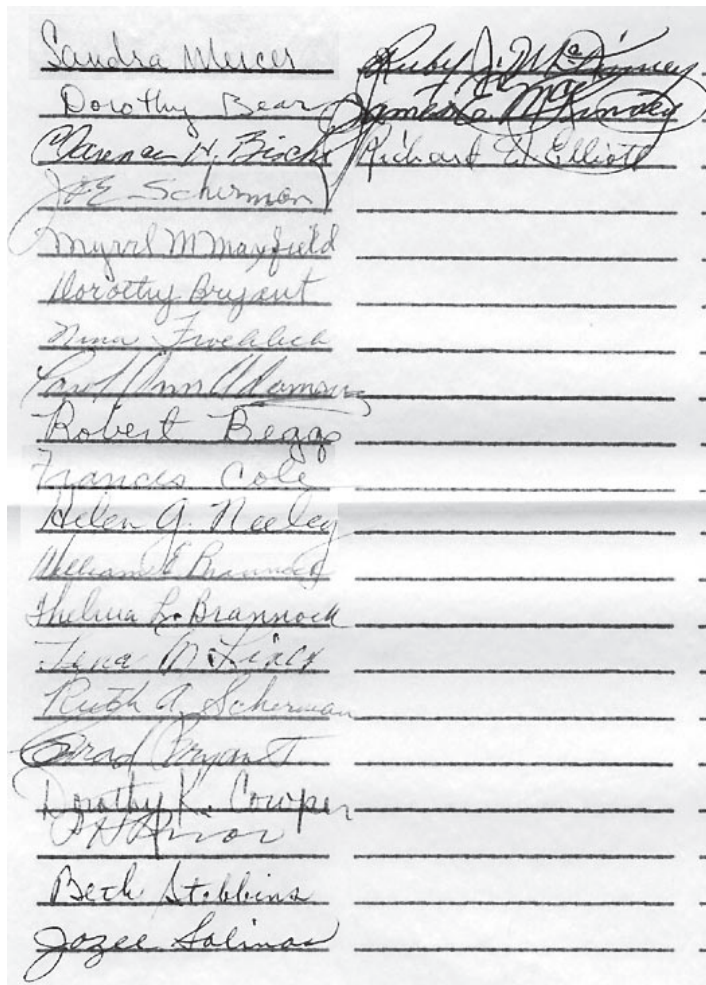
Amid our various activities and achievements it's useful to remember that the Idyllwild Area Historical Society was not the first group bent on preserving Idyllwild's past. We owe a debt to the group that preceded us, the ill-fated Idyllwild Historical Society (IHS) of the 1970s.

One of the many treasures now residing in the our archive is an extensive set of records left behind, when that organization dissolved in 1983.

Its founding Board of Directors in 1969 included Frances Cole, Myrrl Maxfield, Carl Lykken, Lora Woodhead Steere, Joe Scherman, Dorothy Bear, and Dorothy Bryant.

Many initial members appear as signatures in the accompanying list from a 1970 document. They include, in order, Sandra Mercer, Dorothy Bear, Clarence H. Bisch, Joe Scherman, Myrrl M. Maxfield, Dorothy Bryant, Nina Froehlich, Carol Ann Adamson, Robert Beggs, Frances Cole, Helen G. Neeley,

(See Predecessors, page 6)



Credit: IAHS archive

CAMPGROUND ... (continued from page 1)

Idyllwild County Park was the first county-owned park; however, it wasn't called a campground – it was called a “playground,” not for children to play in as the name would imply, but a place to go camping. Go figure.

It all started in the latter part of 1919 when the Riverside County Board of Supervisors decided it would be a great idea to establish an official campground in the mountains. First, they formed a committee called the Public Playground Committee which consisted of just two members, one of them Supervisor Rowley Smith and the other Supervisor Charles Hamilton. It was our good fortune that Supervisor Smith was a resident and future owner of a local resort in Idyllwild.

During the following year Claudius Lee Emerson, one of the most important players in the development of our town, who at the time owned the Idyllwild Inn and about 1,000 acres of land which now make up most of Idyllwild proper, donated five acres to be used as part of a county park. At about the same time he also donated land for what would become the Emerson Boy Scout Camp and the future Idyllwild Pines Camp.

Although the five acres Emerson gave to the county is only a small fraction of the 202-acre size of today's county park, it appears to have been the spark that got the ball rolling; a couple of years later the county was able to convince the federal government to donate 80 contiguous acres to be used as part of the new “playground.” As it turned out, some of the 80 acres had already been used as an informal camping area for several years.



A 1916 visitor admires native pictographs at the site of the future “playground.” *Credit: IAHS archive*

And so it was that on September 22, 1920, the US Forest Service issued a special use permit to the county “for the purpose of maintaining a public playground.”

By now, of



Early auto camping, complete with home-made water heater and bathtub. *Credit: IAHS archive*

course, there were a lot more automobiles making the trip thanks to the 15 million Model Ts produced by Henry Ford between 1908 and 1927. Then, in 1929, what was called the “high gear” paved highway between Hemet and Idyllwild was built. The roadway is now called Highway 74. More paved roads were soon to follow including one from Banning to Idyllwild.

For all practical purposes, during the 1920s the park was merely a large area designated for camping. Few facilities were provided beyond a spot to pitch a tent or park a trailer, but by 1931, according to an article in the LA Times, water pipes and “rest rooms” had been added. In all probability the so called restrooms were in fact “outhouses,” which was probably the norm in those days.

During the tough times of the Great Depression camping became even more popular, since most people didn't have the money for more expensive recreational pursuits. And soon there were more and more automobiles towing trailers to the park to participate in what was popularly called “auto camping.”

Today the park has 88 camping sites, each equipped with water and electricity connections; the outhouses have been replaced with real restrooms, and there are coin-operated showers available.

The information contained in this article was found in the new book, “More Than Just a Place to Camp,” by Steve Lech, and the often used book, “The San Jacintos,” by John Robinson and Bruce Risher. Both of these excellent books may be purchased either at the Nature Center or the Idyllwild Area Historical Museum. 🪵

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

New and Renewing Members – January through March 2013

NEW MEMBERS

Family

William & Mary Coman, Glendale
Joan Wright & Gregory Hayes, Carson City, NV

Individual

Charlotte Brookelyn Freestone, Long Beach

RENEWING MEMBERS

Founders Circle

Rita Rothman, Studio City

Benefactor

Howard Sherman & Gregg Houston, North Hollywood

Sponsor

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Byron & Robyn Beck, Santa Barbara
Barbara Burgess, Idyllwild
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Pascal & Colette Simon, Idyllwild
John Thomford, San Diego

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Kathy & Ron Beaufort, Laguna Niguel
Sanders & Mary Chase, Los Angeles
John & JoAnne Curren, Idyllwild
Carolyn & George Hall, Idyllwild

Family (cont.)

Barbara & Bud Hunt, Idyllwild
David Pekrol & Anthony Jankowicz, Idyllwild
Dawn & Thomas Miller, Idyllwild
Burdette & Fran Nelson, San Clemente
Gina & Larry Randall, La Mesa

MEET OUR YOUNGEST MEMBER

Founders Circle member Stacy Ann Emmons of Long Beach wrote to tell us that her granddaughter, Charlotte Freestone, reads Arti-Facts, so Grandma decided it's time Charlotte had a subscription of her own.



Credit: Brooke Freestone

Individual

Ted Belden, Hesperia
Antoinette Berthelotte, Mountain Center
Bob Blankman, Idyllwild
Bonnie Doshier, Idyllwild
Francoise Frigola, Idyllwild
Norma Gibbs, Huntington Beach
Kathryn E Goddard, Huntington Beach
Mary Ann Miller, Idyllwild
Harry & Mary Rogers, Redlands
Celesta Wassell, Kingman, AZ
Patrick Wassell, Kingman, AZ
Elaine Weiler, Idyllwild

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name(s) _____ Email _____

Address _____ Telephone _____

_____ Individual (\$15) _____ Contributor (\$35) _____ Benefactor (\$250) _____ Business (\$35)

_____ Family (\$25) _____ Sponsor (\$100) _____ Patron (\$500) _____ Corporate (\$750)

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

If a gift membership, please enter your name and address:

Name _____ Address _____

MESSAGES FROM OUR POSTCARD ARCHIVE

Messages through the years, borne abroad on postcards, convey the changeless character of our mountain paradise. Here's a sampling culled recently:

1911 postcard of remote log cabin, sent to Miss Minnie A. Colburn, Hollis, NH:

Where one may commune with nature and nothing tells you nay. E.P.

Sent to Mrs. Fred Binkley of Clay Center, Kansas, 1914:

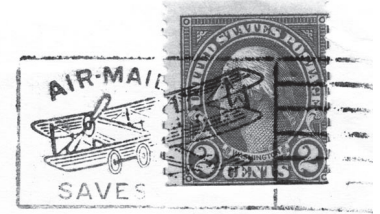
Dear Sister & Family, We are keeping cool in this lovely neck of the woods. A creek, ice cold, babbles over the rocks by our camp and the wind sighs through the pines. Your mother & Albert & my Father & Mother are with Reid & I. Ira brought us up last Wed. & is coming for us this week. Reid & Albert want to stay here a month. With love, Anne

1921 card, probably from Tahquitz Lodge, sent to Miss Anna Jacob, Flandre Occidentale, Belgium:

Dear Anna, Still in the mountains, and enjoying the rest. Wrote Alphonse a card a couple of days ago, and will soon write a big letter. Am feeling pretty good, but very tired. Eating a lot and laying around. How's everything with you? Love, Anita

1926 View of road leading to Idyllwild, sent to Miss Orpha M. Klinker, LA:

Dearest Miss Klinker, Here I am up at Idyllwild. You can see how nice it is by the picture. The pine trees and the mountains are so beautiful. I am taking for [sic] studies New Testament History and Training in Worship and the Devotional Life. We have little prayer circles in our tents every night. I was so glad to hear that you are better. Lots of love, Doris



1938 Idyllwild Pines postcard sent to Mr. & Mrs. Morris, Santa Ana:

Dear Mama & Papa Morris: How are you? Working hard? I m having a fair time but want to come home. I haven't been feeling so hot. There are about 250 girls here. I ll tell you all about it when I get home. Love, Ruthie

An early Woodland Craft postcard sent to Miss Hazel Benschhoff, Pasadena CA:

You would enjoy this little shop, many things made from Mt. Woods. Weather cold at night, but warm in sun also a very quiet place. We are going to Coachella Sept. 13. Mrs. Hansen

Sent to Vida Rea, 2467 W. 251, Lomita Calif, 8/21/1945:

Dear Mom: Well we got here all right although it rained on us all the time after we left Long Beach, until we got up here and it rained all day Sat. We got up here about 12 o clock. My car made the hill better than any of the rest of the cars did. It went all the way in high gear. Love, Wendell

1946 view of the road "Entering Idyllwild," sent to Miss Mary Buehler, Alhambra CA:

Dear Mary: Are you thumbing rides or is the Boss toting you or both. See the P.E. went out. Some mess! I found a nice large can of freestone peaches up here for you. Also picked up 2 small jars of Del Monte deluxe plums. Look nice. It's quite cool up here & some clouds, but also some sun. Have the septic tank in but no outgoing pipe so can't use it yet. Also no plumber has shown up. Ferns are coming out on the lot & lots of wildflowers on the hills. We expect to be home about Wed. Will call you. Love, Marie

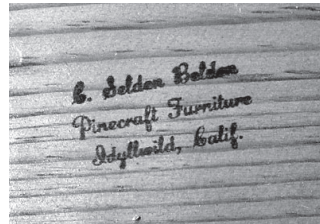
2013 RAFFLE OFFERS PREMIUM PRIZES

This year's raffle is our biggest and best yet. Through the generosity of two of our newer members, we'll be giving away prizes to not one, but two lucky winners.



Credit: Bob Smith

Marilyn Kemple has donated this set of four genuine Pinecraft bar stools, each bearing the mark of authenticity, C. Selden Belden's trademark logo on their undersides:



Credit: Bob Smith

In addition, Marlene Pierce is offering an exquisite antique trunk, measuring 30" wide by 19" tall by 16" deep. But wait, there's more: its interior has been lined with cedar, so it can also serve as a handy cedar chest.



Credit: Bob Smith

As usual, tickets sell for \$1 each or 6 for \$5. You buy tickets separately for each prize. The drawing will be held on December 13, and winners need not be present to claim their treasures.

Buy early and often to improve your chances. Good luck! 🍀

IDYLLWILD

BY MRS. MARY J. BRADY

Idyllwild, September 10, 1910

*Oh, had I the wings of a bird to fly
To Idyllwild, in the days gone by;
When mountains, and wood, and rushing stream,
Peacefully rested in nature's dream*

*Before the road had been chiseled through,
On the mountain side, or the valley knew
The touch of man's hand, or his heavy tread,
When the limpid waters were in their bed.*

*Before the trees felt the hammer and saw
Or mechanical lines had become a law.
When everything was wild and free
Then, what a glorious sight to see.*

*It existed then as only in space
But now is known as a resting place.
Oh! beautiful, beautiful Idyllwild,
Open your arms to a weary child. 🍀*

PREDECESSORS ... continued from page 2

William E. Brannock, Thelma L. Brannock, Lena M. Lines, Ruth Scherman, Conrad Bryant, Dorothy K. Cowper, P. H. Prior, Beth Stebbins, Jozee Salinas, Ruby J. McKinney, James E. McKinney, and Richard E. Elliott.

They represent a cross-section of names familiar to anyone who studies Idyllwild's formative years before and after World War II. For example, we see the town librarian (Dorothy Bear), descendants of the leading 19th-century lumber baron (Schermans), a Town Crier columnist (Dorothy Bryant), an owner of the Idyllwild Inn cabins and Rustic Theatre (Nina Froelich), a daughter of leading postwar developer Jerry Johnson (Carol Ann Adamson), the mother of Idyllwild's most prolific chronicler of 1930s daily life, Louise Cole (Frances Cole), a well-known anthropologist, artist, and teacher (Dorothy Cowper), a Garner Ranch hand and prize-winning photographer (Jozee Salinas), and a cofounder and headmaster of Desert Sun School (Richard Elliott).

During its all-too-brief lifetime, this Idyllwild Historical Society laid valuable groundwork for us to build upon today. 🍀

COUNTY HISTORICAL SYMPOSIUM REVIVED

A group of some 80 Riverside County history buffs gathered on April 3 in the historic Bob Glass Gym in downtown Perris. The occasion was a revival of the annual symposium once sponsored by the county. Led by historian and author Steve Lech, a group of volunteers put together a day of varied talks, tours, and informal interaction.

Topics included drive-in movie theaters, colorful characters in the county past, the story of Mr. Rubidoux, and historic buildings of Perris. Also, IAHS's Bob Smith presented his research on the evolution of Fuller's Mill in the San Jacinto Mountains, from one-man sawmill to agricultural homestead to private vacation retreat.

Attendees found the program informative enough to make it an annual event once again. 📖



Symposium-goers begin gathering for a day of Riverside county history. *Credit: Lynnda Hart*

FULL HOUSE FOR BELDEN LECTURE



It was standing room only at the historic Silver Pines Lodge on March 15 for Ted Belden's appearance at the Community Lecture Series. More than 100 eager listeners turned out to hear his vignettes about the history of Pinecraft, the line of native pine furniture perfected in the 1930s by his father, C. Selden Belden.

The evening marked the launch of IAHS's annual raffle, this year offering a set of Pinecraft bar stools (see page 6). It also provided

the occasion for a reunion of the Belden family, who prepared the display of memorabilia pictured below. 📖



Photo Credits: Idyllwild Town Crier

Who knew?

The 1923 per capita net income of Californians (highest in the nation) was \$450.59, compared with \$237.27 for the U.S. as a whole.

[from the 1920s "Idyllwild Breezes"]

Museum Hours

11 am - 4 pm

Winter Schedule September 8 - June 16:
Saturdays, Sundays, & Monday holidays

Summer Schedule June 21 - September 2:
Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays & 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 11 — IAHS Annual Meeting

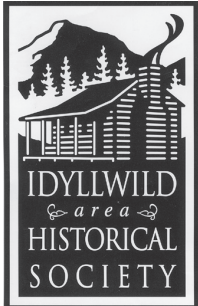
Sunday, September 1 — Ice Cream Social

Saturday, September 14 — 13th Annual Idyllwild Home Tour

Friday, December 13 — Annual Raffle Drawing

(See Page 6 for details)

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