

# 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 2014

## PEELING THE ONION: A METAPHOR FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

*By Bob Smith*

Recapturing history is often like peeling an onion. There always seems to be another layer to uncover. Consider this recent research project.

It began with a message left on the museum phone this past January. Charles Marvin was seeking a copy of a 1990 article he'd written for the *Town Crier* about property he owned at the time, known as "The Epicurean." A delightful conversation with him rekindled my curiosity about this location, a large, densely forested lot containing two obviously old buildings, just across North Circle Drive from Café Aroma.

They'd been pointed out to me a dozen years ago, shortly after I settled in Idyllwild. I'd even gotten a quick visit inside one of the then-unoccupied buildings. John Robinson's authoritative history, *The San Jacintos*, revealed only a passing reference to the place as a "unique resort," created in 1924 by a Dr. and Mrs. Bell of Pasadena, that had a long history as a summer home before its conversion to a commercial purpose. With details of that uniqueness unavailable, I moved on to other projects.

Now, after my chat with Marvin, our increasingly helpful archive records quickly led me to his article, buried among the papers of our prime chronicler of early Idyllwild life, Louise Cole Campbell. In return for a photocopy Marvin sent us his summary history of the place, cautioning that some of the details drawn from memories of old-timers like Ernie Maxwell were probably inaccurate.

In this way I learned the Bells also built a pump house for a well, along with the residence and carriage house. The latter served as a garage for their huge Packard, with upstairs living quarters for a chauffeur. A one-way driveway from North Circle



**The 80-year-old carriage house.  
*IAHS archive photo***

curved into the building, then exited the opposite side, eventually merging with the street a few doors down.

"Dr. Bell," a term that usually meant a physician, had a love for horticulture and set about converting the entire creekside property to shaded gardens crisscrossed with paths and filled with plants gathered from around the world. At the same time Strong & Dickinson were opening their Fern Valley development just upstream, so the Bells adopted the name "Fern Valley Gardens," which would prevail for 65 years.

As the Bells aged and stopped visiting Idyllwild in the 1940s, they hired as caretaker Lloyd Wood, who had a landscaping business before he became Idyllwild's postmaster. When Mrs. Bell died in the early 1960s, she left the property to the "City of Idyllwild," a nonexistent entity. Lora Steere, the famed sculptor who played a major role in creating

*(See Onion, page 3)*

# IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Board of Directors

*President:* Marlene Pierce  
*Vice President:* Charlotte Groty  
*Past President:* Carolyn Levitski  
*Secretary:* Barbara Jones  
*Treasurer:* Bob Smith  
*Directors:* Nancy Borchers  
Laura Caster  
George Groty  
Carolyn Hall  
\*Joan McCullough  
Linda Turner  
Adele Voell  
Jeff Wu  
(\*on leave)

Board meetings are held monthly  
on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday at 4 p.m.

## Special Advisors

Harry Bubb, Kay Cenicerros, Janice Lyle,  
Walter Parks, Kent Steele, Lynn Voorheis

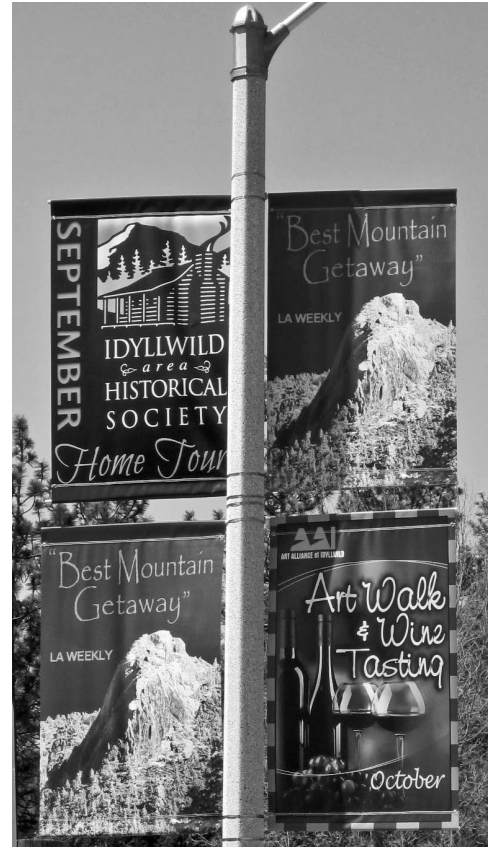
## Current Volunteer Staff

*Accounting:* George Groty  
*Archive:* Darlene Beebe, Nancy Borchers,  
Lynnda Hart, Barbara Jones,  
Shannon Houlihan Ng, Bob Smith, Cecilia Tepel  
*Digital Media:* John Drake, Rebecca Frazier  
*Docent Coordination:* Barbara Jones  
*Home Tour Coordination:* Charlotte Groty,  
Carolyn Hall, Nanci Killingsworth  
*Hospitality:* Linda & Larry Turner  
*Membership:* Darlene Beebe, Adele Voell  
*Museum Maintenance:* Richard Levitski  
*Museum Shop:* Nancy Borchers  
*Oral Histories:* Corrinne Brown, Lynnda Hart  
*Raffle:* Marlene Pierce  
*Research:* Lynnda Hart, Robert Reyes, Bob Smith  
*Webmaster:* John Drake

## Arti-Facts

*Co-Editors:* Adele & Bob Smith  
*Layout:* Halie Johnson

# COLLABORATIONS: Extending Our Reach



Historical Society & Alliance banners.  
IAHS staff photo

For many years we've helped host the Art Alliance of Idyllwild's extremely popular Art Walk & Wine Tasting. Now our ties with the alliance are rapidly growing stronger.

During the past year we've provided historical background for the alliance's public art project, "Idyllwild Deer Sightings." In return, five of the painted deer sculptures now grace our gardens. An additional spinoff is contributing our expertise to Scott Foster's forthcoming documentary film on the deer project.

We've also joined 16 other local organizations in the Art Alliance's effort to publicize local events by means of street banners. Our new banner touting the annual Home Tour (see above) now flies in front of the Fort in the center of the village.

Such a collaboration is nothing new for IAHS. Our longest-running example is the partnership with the Idyllwild Garden Club, which has beautified the museum grounds and produced an educational resource for the village at large. And we work,

(See Collaborations, page 4)

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

the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts, prevailed upon Bell's executor to interpret "City of Idyllwild" broadly enough for ISOMATA to receive the property.

Founder Max Krone then flipped the property to benefit the school, selling it to ISOMATA board member Ann Benedict. Along with supporting ISOMATA, she also wished to preserve Fern Valley Gardens, which she privately called "Timberlite" for the unique lighting afforded by its overhanging forest. It became a second home for her and her daughters. But eventually the gardens went untended and vegetation overgrew the trail network.

Mitchell Susnar rescued Fern Valley Gardens in 1987, restoring the gardens to award-winning quality. He meticulously remodeled both buildings, recycling original pine boards from the 1920s construction to create the wine, cheese, and household furnishings emporium called The Epicurean. He nearly abandoned the project midway, when workers excavating the basement detected a foul odor. Having heard that a prior owner had been murdered, Susnar had visions of discovering the handiwork of a serial killer. But the aroma's source proved to be nothing more than a freshly expired raccoon.

The shop had closed by 1990 when Charles and Kirsten Marvin bought the property. He set about restoring some of the original pathways, and she reopened The Epicurean as an eclectic gourmet foods, decorative arts, and apparel shop that lasted through the 1990s.

After serving as a summer home, a tourist attraction, and a commercial enterprise, today the original buildings and grounds have taken on a new life as full-time residence for well-known Idyllwilders Barnaby and Anne Finch.

To a curious person like me this was a fascinating tale, but not totally satisfying. There were just too many loose ends. Who was this Dr. Bell anyway? Who owned the place, and what purpose did it serve between the 1960s and 1980s? And what was that about a murder?

I first consulted a 1919 plat map in the IAHS archive to verify the boundaries of the original property. This also showed that the Bell property bordered a strip of land along Strawberry Creek designated by Strong & Dickinson as "playground,"



**The Epicurean building in the early 2000s.**  
*IAHS archive photo*

a term then used for campgrounds. Such open space might have made their property especially appealing to the Bells.

Next I turned to a unique Idyllwild asset, the 2009 Historic Resources Survey report that provided the basis for creating the Idyllwild Historic District. There I learned that Fern Valley Gardens was actually owned by Mrs. Arabella Bell from the outset, and that the two main buildings were built in 1922 and 1924, although it remains unclear which came first. The report also identified the owner at that time as Larry Richards of Del Mar.

Conversations followed with Lloyd Wood and Lynnda Hart, each of whom tended the gardens at different times. I learned that Susnar had appropriated the name "The Epicurean" from a restaurant he owned in Florida.

Then I turned to the Idyllwild Library's complete run of Town Crier, especially the annual summer visitor guides. Susnar apparently did not advertise The Epicurean locally, so the absence of ads emanating from this address during 1987-89 defined its short, but illustrious, lifetime.

Earlier ads show the footprints of several arts and crafts shops located in Fern Valley Gardens during the early 1980s, among them Ethnic Artisans, Creative Hands, and Forest Knoll Gallery. In the summer of 1990, while Susnar had the property on the market, he rented to Stephens Book Company. After Kirsten Marvin reopened The Epicurean in 1991, the advertising trail resumed.

To learn more about the infamous murder, I returned to the Town Crier. Searching bound volumes is tedious and time-consuming—that's what makes  
*(See Research, next page)*

## COLLABORATIONS ... *(continued from page 2)*

for another example, with Idyllwild Arts Academy students and faculty on their film projects.

Our research collaborations are less visible, but even more central to our mission. Recurring research projects with colleagues in the U.S. Forest Service and California State Parks, as well as with individual researchers and writers here and around the world—bless the Internet—are enriching our knowledge and understanding of local history.

Most recently we've discovered common interests with colleagues focused on photographer Stephen Willard and Pinecraft furniture. And what do they have in common? Willard was the best known photographer Idyllwild ever attracted, although most of his work here was concentrated in a single summer (1920). It seems he also took a liking to Pinecraft.

In 2012 art dealers Robert and Susan Joki of Portland OR bought and began restoring "The Gallery at Twin Lakes," Willard's former studio at Mammoth. They started collecting Pinecraft to furnish it and now have over 100 pieces, but knew little about their Idyllwild maker, Selden Belden.



**Sue & Robert Joki at work in the IAHS archive.**  
*IAHS staff photo*

They also knew nothing about Willard's time in Idyllwild, so this winter they approached us through Willard expert Dick Westman of Portland to learn more.

The Jokis' visits have provided a great chance for us to share Pinecraft lore and at the same time learn more about Willard. Already we've found, for example, there are more of his postcards in our collection than we'd recognized. This mutually productive partnership is continuing. 📖

---

## RESEARCH ... *(continued from previous page)*

searchable, on-line newspapers so appealing—but the annual summaries of the prior year's news stories can speed it up, and I quickly found two key stories.

In September 1978 the paper reported the discovery by police of the mutilated body of Dr. Richard Carter in his cabin on Linger Lane. He was a wealthy psychiatrist and art collector, who also owned Fern Valley Gardens, and when the two- to three-week-old corpse was found, it was unclear where the murder actually occurred. The fact that Carter's Cadillac limousine had turned up in New York City between the murder and its discovery lent mystery that went unsolved for a year. In those bygone days, rumors that murderer and victim were gay added an overtone of scandal.

Carter's property was put up for auction, and Fern Valley Gardens was sold to Santa Barbara developer Dan Eidelson. A year passed before an anonymous tip to police in Detroit fingered Carter's Idyllwild housemate of a few weeks. Eidelson leased

the property to the commercial tenants noted earlier, before he sold it to Susnar.

At this point, I'd exhausted all obvious sources of information and had written my own Town Crier column. But just before submitting it for publication, I was annotating some of Louise Cole Campbell's letters to include in our permanent museum collection when I stumbled upon a partial answer to the question of Dr. Bell's identity. Campbell's father, A.W. Cole, was himself an avid gardener and looked up to Bell. Her comments about Bell revealed that he wasn't after all a physician, but a professional botanist. In fact, Fern Valley Gardens supplied data for a number of his scientific publications.

By this point I finally felt satisfied to leave the remains of the onion I'd been peeling undisturbed. We now have a reliable outline of the life of a property that typifies Idyllwild's charming blend of commercial and residential life. All we lack is a visual complement to the written account. If any readers have access to early photos from Fern Valley Gardens, we'd love to see them. 📖

## THE COMPANY WE KEEP

### New and Renewing Members

January through March 2014

#### NEW MEMBERS

##### Family

Walt & Lynne Tonneau	Escondido
Robert Hibbard	Olivette MO
Chuck & Marion Wilson	Riverside

#### RENEWING MEMBERS

##### Benefactor

Robert Reyes & Patrick Kennedy	Long Beach
--------------------------------	------------

##### Sponsor

West & Laura Allen	Corona
Dore Capitani & Trish Tuley	Mountain Center
Karen & Thomas Higgins	Idyllwild
Johnnie Johnson	Idyllwild

##### Contributor

Sandy Craig	Rancho Mirage
Kathryn Goddard	Huntington Beach
Dick & Sherry Hibbard	Prescott AZ
Marilyn Kemple	Idyllwild
Sheri McClain	Idyllwild
Pascal & Colette Simon	Idyllwild
John Thomford	San Diego

##### Family

Charlotte Anthony & William Sperling	Idyllwild
Kathy & Ron Beaufort	Laguna Niguel
Sanders & Mary Chase	Los Angeles
Linda Coda	San Francisco
Norma Gibbs	Huntington Beach
Carolyn & George Hall	Idyllwild
Hans & Birgit Iliw	Valley Center
Dawn & Thomas Miller	Idyllwild
Burdette & Fran Nelson	San Clemente
Harry Quinn	Mountain Center
Scott Solomon & Alyssa Love	San Francisco
Joanne Tenney	La Palma
Michael Voell	San Rafael
Celesta & Patrick Wassell	Kingman AZ
Mike Wimbrow	Trabuco Canyon
Joan Wright & Gregory Hayes	Carson City NV

##### Individual

Antoinette Berthelotte	Mountain Center
Ann Copeland	Palm Desert
Bonnie Doshier	Calimesa
Sharen Metz	Idyllwild
Mary Ann Miller	Fullerton
Lynn Wagman	Rockville MD
Elaine Weiler	Idyllwild

## FOUNDERS CIRCLE

Periodically we gratefully remember and pay tribute to those whose consistently strong support in IAHS's early years provided the strong financial foundation that we enjoy today.

Nick Adamenko	Big Horn WY
Byron & Robyn Beck	Santa Barbara
Charles & Charlotte Bird	San Diego
Corrinne & Ray Brown	Idyllwild
Harry & Berdie* Bubb	Newport Beach
Barbara Burgess	Idyllwild
David & Lois Butterfield	San Diego
Pete & Suzy Capparelli	Idyllwild
Carratello Family	Idyllwild
Terry Casella & Harris Demetre	Idyllwild
Blair & Kay Cenicerros	Claremont
Mike Clifford	Los Angeles
Ann & Dave Dunham	Idyllwild
Bob & Loraine Dyson	Del Mar
Lee Emerson*	Roseville
Stacy Ann & Richard Emmons	Long Beach
Stan Evenson	Culver City
Penelope Anne Frey	Idyllwild
Janet & Richard Goldberg	Idyllwild
Dottie & Mel Goldfarb	Idyllwild
Katie Grigsby	Idyllwild
Charlotte & George Groty	Moreno Valley
Hansen Family	Idyllwild
Rayburn Hanzlik*	Idyllwild
Don & Lynnda Hart	Idyllwild
Bob & Lorna Houck	La Mesa
Jim Johnson*	Idyllwild
Lynn & Mitchell Lathrop	San Diego
Carolyn & Richard Levitski	Idyllwild
Janice Lyle	Idyllwild
Jim Marsh	Hemet
Julie Masterson	Mendocino
Bob & Cindi McKinney	Lakewood
Bill Merkelson	Van Nuys
George & Sheila Meyer	Otter Rock OR
Allen & Lenore Miller	Idyllwild
Carol Murrel	Newport Beach
Betty & Walter Parks	Riverside
Jan & Nigel Priestley	Idyllwild
Shirl Reid	Big Horn WY
Rita Rothman	Studio City
Adele & Bob Smith	Idyllwild
Francie Spears	Cardiff-by-the-Sea
Judy & Kevin Underdahl	Columbia Falls MT
Bill & Margaret* Wootton	Oro Valley AZ
Jeff Wu	Irvine

-----  
(\*deceased)

## FROM THE ARCHIVE

The following story tickled our fancy. It appeared in the December 17, 1898, issue of the Riverside Press & Horticulturalist, and we reprint it exactly as published, typographical errors and all:

### MORPHINE FIEND

-----  
Locked in a Cabin In Strawberry Valley Till Cured.

In Sunday's Examiner is a most picturesque yarn alleged to have been written by one John P. Dunn. Extacts follow:

During the second week in June a party of four of us went by cars to San Jacinto, California, and from there we went in wagons up the mountain road to Strawberry valley. The three persons beside myself were my wife, my brother and a retired doctor. I took my hypos of morphine right along and paid little attention to what the others were doing for my heroic cure. A cabin built of heavy pine logs and planks by the Schurman Lumber company several years ago was leased.. It was among the pine trees at an altitude of 6000 feet. There were two windows in the structure and a heavy door. The windows were slatted with strong pine scantlings bolted down on the outside. The door was fixed with four bars on the outside. Then a bed and chairs were borrowed and my three companions fixed the cabin up in a habitable shape while I slumbered in the tent.

When my wife came and told me, with tears streaming down her face, that my home was ready for me, and that I was to make for her sake the last and greatest effort to be a man again, I got up and gladly followed her to the cabin, happy in the thought that I would show my love for her by enduring the privation from my drug until I felt I would grow to loathe it.

I am not a responsible witness concerning all that occurred in and about that cabin until early in July, but I do have a lively recollection of some things there. I did not sleep a wink for six days and nights to start with. The purpose of keeping me in a strongly built cabin was to have me in a place where my cravings would be denied, and I could not possibly get out to get it for myself.

The first night was not so bad. I went to bed and my wife came in and bade me a cheerful good night. Ten minutes later the cravings for the hypo began. In an hour it became tormenting, and in two hours I was pacing the floor of the cabin. By morning the craving had become a craze. My brother came and asked how I was and I was so mad I would not answer. I thought that my head would break open. I was sure that my brains were cooking. I got up and sat down literally a thousand times an hour. My brother asked me through the key-hole if I was hungry. I could have struck him lifeless. Every bone in my body ached, and I felt every one of my ten thousand nerves twitching.

The second night I spent in walking back and forth. I wept and begged to be let out. I pleaded with my brother by everything I could think of to let me out at least to die on the grass outside. Over and over again I begged for deliverance from my horrible prison.

My brother asked me to think of anything I could eat or drink. I revolted at the thought of food, but I did want black coffee and lots of it. The coffee was handed me through the window. Then the indescribable craving for morphine came over me, and I would hurl the coffee pot, cup and all, on the floor, while I roared anathemas in those who had lured me into my death trap.

The third day I was practically insane all day. When my doctor

friend came in to see me (for I have since learned they were afraid for a time that I would not endure the heroic cure) I was lying on the floor with my clothes torn off from me. I have no recollection of the doctor, but I do recall dozens of frightful hallucinations that day. Once I moaned and begged for help from thousands of cats that had invaded the cabin. Some were as large as sheep and others had brass hoofs. Then there were a myriad of boilermakers hammering for all they were worth all about my cabin, until my eardrums were split by the horrible din. Then I was in a dissecting room and a lot of boys in black blouses were cutting my skull open and ripping out my vitals. So the hallucinations proceeded for a long time that day.

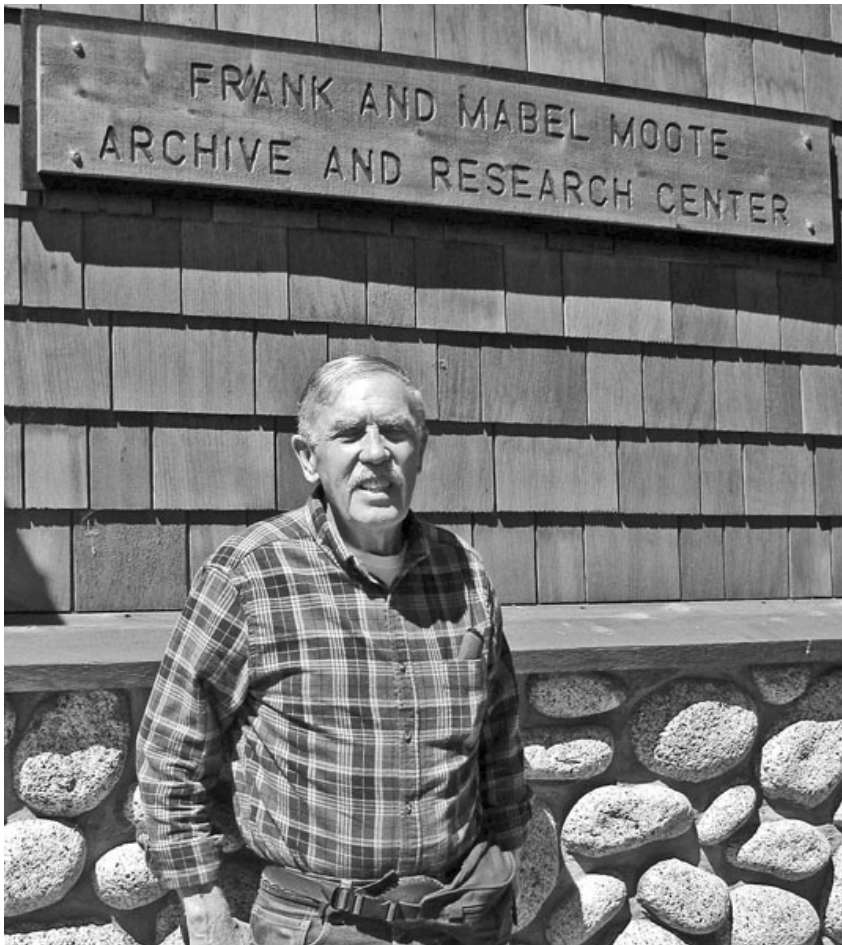
The fourth, fifth and sixth days are not so distinct in my memory that I can discriminate between them. It seems to me like a long succession of hallucinations, tossing on my bed, walking the floor, calling to those on the outside of the cabin to come and help me, and it drinking coffee and milk. I have been told that I never slept a wink in the time, and that I was as wide awake as a weasel every time anyone came in to help me and observe my condition. My hands were raw for ten days after from the beating I had given the boards in my delirious efforts to do something. The fiery sensation in my head abided, and it caused my worst hallucinations. I thought I was being garroted by the Spanish in Cuba, and I went through all the agony of a man who dies in that way. Another time I thought I was being attacked by ants as large as a teacup, and oh! what horrors I felt when I knew that they were biting holes as large as walnuts from the back of my head and shoulders. I raved and fought with them for hours, when I suddenly realized where I was and that I was undergoing the last effort to get away from morphine habit.

On the sixth day I was much easier. I drank milk and ate fruit. I felt a thousand years old and very weak. I would not have looked into a mirror for all the world. My bleeding, thin hands and emaciated legs told how I had lost flesh. Again in the early evening I felt drowsy, and I took a pillow from the bed and put it on the floor. I lay down there. Somehow the bed was abhorrent to me. I wanted something hard July on – the harder the better for my aching bones and racked nerves and withered flesh. I fell asleep, and I suppose my brother was the happiest man alive when he saw me, through the window, sound asleep.

I slept for ten hours, then was more milk and fruit I slept seven hours longer. It was the turning point in the battle. When I got up and had food I felt old and haggard, but I was glad that I had been a week without the poison. I resolved to die rather than abandon my contest for freedom. My old craving for tobacco came back to me – the first time in five years, and I smoked six cigars that day without the least effect upon me.

From that time on for a week it was a struggle to keep myself together, and I had more nervous pains and an unspeakable fatigue, but I never wavered in my zeal to fight the battle to a finish no matter how long or how painful it was. I did not dare trust myself, however, and I kept close in the cabin, where my brother and wife came hourly to see me. I need one or two meals daily, drink much milk and coffee, and slept well. In three weeks I felt much better, had an enormous appetite and smoked every day. I went out for short walks among the pine trees, and down to the part of the Valley where the campers came in, but I was always unaccompanied. The lassitude

*(See Morphine, next page)*



## OUR ARTIFACT DONORS

The IAHS archive continues to grow, thanks to the generosity of members and friends. During the past quarter we've received digital images, writings, photos, and letters from Robert & Sue Joki of Portland OR, Charles Marvin of Encinitas, Burdette & Frances Nelson of San Clemente, Drs. Ann Reynolds & Thomas Kirschbaum of Key West FL, the Idyllwild Public Library, and Hill residents Mark Dean, Susan DeAntonio, Lynda Hart, Tom Higgins, and Carolyn Levitski.

Especially noteworthy acquisitions were the original marriage certificate of Idyllwild founders Claudius Lee and Zelma Emerson (grandparents of Burdette Nelson) and three framed World War II military posters created by Ernie Maxwell, donated by Ann Reynolds. 📌

---

**Volunteer Extraordinaire Richard Levitski has created and installed a new sign for the IAHS archive building.**  
*IAHS staff photo*

---

**MORPHINE ...** *(continued from previous page)*

and fatigue continued in a milder degree. At times my craving for morphine return for an hour or so, but coffee and a cigar alleviated the feeling.

Gradually the longing for morphine wore away. I had not felt so well in years in that month. When the campers came to Strawberry valley I had much to interest me. By August 1, I had unconsciously formed even a dislike for morphine, and from that time the dislike

has grown into a horror of the stuff. The doctors tell me that is a symptom of a complete cure.

It is now over five months since I even saw morphine. I have been living at Colton with relatives for two months, and am now here in Riverside with some friends who are delighted to see the wonderful change in me in the last few months. I have no fear of going back to my old habit, for several positions have told me that a cured morphine fiend is the best hater of the drug there is. 📌

– JOHN P. DUNNING

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 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 donor's name and address:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Visit our Museum:**

**Winter Schedule (through June 15):  
Saturdays, Sundays, & Monday holidays**

**11 am - 4 pm**

**Summer Schedule**

**(June 20 through Labor Day):**

**Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays,**

**July 4, & Labor Day**

**11 am - 4 pm**

**Admission Free**

**Donations Welcome**

**Visit our Website:**

**[www.idyllwildhistory.org](http://www.idyllwildhistory.org)**

**For special tours and other business,**

**call (951) 659-2717 or**

**e-mail to [info@idyllwildhistory.org](mailto:info@idyllwildhistory.org)**

---

---

**Dates to Remember:**

**Saturday, June 7 – Annual Garden Tour  
(sponsored by Idyllwild Garden Club)**

**Sunday, August 10 – IAHS Annual Meeting**

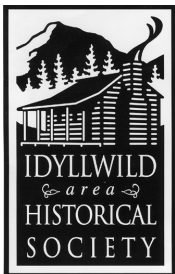
**Saturday, August 30 – Annual Ice Cream Social**

**Saturday, September 13 – 14<sup>th</sup> Idyllwild Home Tour**

**Saturday, October 12 – Art Walk & Wine Tasting**

**(sponsored by Art Alliance of Idyllwild)**

**P O Box 3320  
Idyllwild, CA 92549**



Non-profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Idyllwild, CA

**Return Service Requested**