

# 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

SUMMER 2014

## SO HOW DID IDYLLWILD BECOME A LILAC HAVEN?

*By John Blodgett*

The lilac is an increasingly visible part of Idyllwild. Planning is under way for a festival to celebrate the flower, and in the past few years alone hundreds of bushes have been planted around town, including in the IAHS Museum's Village Garden. It's therefore timely to profile Reva Ballreich, a former symphony orchestra pianist whose legacy as the "lilac lady" had already blossomed long before her death on Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009.

Gary Parton, who opened Alpenglow Lilac Gardens on Fern Valley Rd. in 2009, is the catalyst for both the festival and the recent plantings. It was Ballreich who sparked his interest in lilacs. He estimates that 99 percent of his garden comes from her plants. "I wouldn't have the gardens without her," he says. She even helped name the gardens after the alpenglow they witnessed on Lily Rock as they drank wine in his backyard one evening.

Parton, who wouldn't retire to Idyllwild until 1998, started attending Idyllwild Garden Club meetings in 1996. He'd occasionally take a day off from teaching in Torrance to drive up The Hill, intending to connect with the gardening scene. It was at these meetings he met Ballreich.

"I didn't know I'd be in lilacs until I met Reva," says Parton, who was "hooked" on the flower after three visits to her home garden. "When they're in bloom there's not much you can do."

But there was something else going on. "She



**Reva Ballreich at home in 2001.**  
*Julie Masterson photo, IAHS Archive*

chose me," Parton explains. "She didn't quickly warm up to people. It was always her choice to do it. I think it was because of what was set upon her as an artist."

To note the lilacs' increasing visibility isn't to suggest they were invisible before. On the contrary, Ballreich's own gardens are legendary. By many accounts she had 887 varieties, and for many years, before moving out of the Marian View Rd. cabin built by her father in the 1920s, she held garden tours when the lilacs bloomed in May. (Parton says her gardens have not been maintained in the years since she sold the property and moved to Franklin Dr.)

Born on Feb. 5, 1925, Ballreich was 3 or 4 years old when her family began spending summers in the aforementioned cabin. Her mother started her on piano lessons at age 4, and she took to the instrument.

Ballreich eventually studied at The Juilliard School by way of music conservatories in Cincinnati and Oberlin, Ohio, and went on to a career of some renown as a concert pianist. According to her obituary in the Idyllwild Town Crier of Feb. 15, 2009, she had studied with Vladimir Horowitz — who said she possessed "the purest God-given talent I have ever known" — and had performed with the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Leonard Bernstein.

Carpal tunnel syndrome cut short Ballreich's concert career in 1971. It wasn't until 1982, when

*(See Lilac, 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 (on leave)  
Linda Turner  
Adele Voell  
Jeff Wu

*Board meetings are open to the membership and are held at the museum on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month 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, Bob Smith, Cecilia Tepel  
*Digital Media/Website:* 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 Operation:* George Groty  
*Museum Shop:* Nancy Borchers  
*Oral Histories:* Corrinne Brown, Lynnda Hart  
*Raffle:* Marlene Pierce  
*Research:* John Blodgett, Lynnda Hart, Patrick Kennedy, Betty Parks, Robert Reyes, Bob Smith

### **Arti-Facts**

*Co-Editors:* Adele & Bob Smith  
*Layout:* Halie Johnson  
*Feature Writer:* John Blodgett

## **Annual Meeting**

IAHS members will return to the Creekstone Inn at Fern Valley Corners on Sunday, August 10 at 4 p.m. for our annual membership meeting. Come join us for conversation, information, and refreshments.

The guest speaker this year will be Dr. William (Pete) Lee, who has been serving for several years on the board of our sister organization, the Hamilton Museum in Anza. He will be sharing his museum experiences during a distinguished professional career as an anthropologist and curator, climaxed by directing three major Southern California museums, including the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana and the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum.

Reports on the state of the society and election of officers and directors constitute the business portion of the meeting.

Candidates for election to two-year terms as directors include returning directors George Groty, Carolyn Hall, and Joan McCullough, plus newcomer Susie Bowman. Laura Caster has been nominated for the office of Treasurer, replacing Bob Smith, who is stepping aside after 10 years to concentrate on research, writing, and continuing development of our archives. He is, however, a candidate to remain on the board as a Director.

We will also be bidding a reluctant farewell to long-time Secretary and Director Adele Voell. She has contributed greatly to the smooth operation of the society as Secretary and membership coordinator, and her many community contacts have enriched our outreach. We're pleased that she has volunteered to continue handling membership renewals. ♪



### ***Arti-facts* Staff Newcomer**

With this edition of *Arti-Facts* we welcome John Blodgett as a feature writer. A newcomer to Idyllwild, John is a journalist who brings us experience as a news photographer, newspaper reporter, and magazine editor in Utah, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Upon arrival on the Hill, he could think of no better way to get acquainted and become part of our village than as an IAHS volunteer. ♪

## LILAC ... (continued from page 1)

she moved to Idyllwild to live full-time, that her love of lilacs expanded.

“I just traded music for lilacs,” Ballreich told Lynnda Hart, founder and then-curator of the IAHS museum, in 2003. “I didn’t feel like being sorry for myself.” Parton suggests the transition actually hadn’t been that easy, saying that for years she didn’t want to hear the music or “deal with” that part of her past.

“Lilacs opened the gates of paradise for her, because emotionally she was hammered,” he explains. “[They] knocked on her doors and she threw the doors open wide.”

More specifically, the knock came in the form of Idyllwild resident Ron “Tommy” Emanuel, known as the “lilac king,” who, Parton says, “tempted her and brought her to his [lilac] garden. She was taken aback by their scent and power.” Emanuel became a mentor to Ballreich, providing lilac plants for her own gardens.

After Emanuel died in October 1985 as a result of a traffic accident, Ballreich found herself wondering who she would talk to about lilacs. Within months she discovered and joined the International Lilac Society (ILS), an organization she would eventually preside over for six consecutive year-long terms.

David Gressley had been membership secretary of the ILS for about a year when Ballreich was first elected president in 1992. He remembers her as a great leader and as a person of great dignity. “She spoke quietly but her words were profound and people listened to her,” he says.

According to Gressley, perhaps Ballreich’s biggest contribution as president was an article she wrote about lilacs for *Country Woman* magazine in 1992 or



**The International Lilac Society dedicated the Spring 2009 issue of its journal, *Lilacs*, to its former president and board member.**

*IAHS Archive*



**Reva Ballreich’s Steinway, elegantly faced in cedar by Selden Belden to harmonize with her living room decor.**

*Julie Masterson photo, IAHS Archive*

1993. It generated over 500 requests for information at a time when the ILS had about 400 members. Of those 500 requests, about 50 resulted in new memberships, a number Gressley calls substantial.

During her early ILS years Ballreich nurtured a talent for hybridizing lilacs — simply put, the careful breeding and selection of plants with desirable characteristics, such as color and form, resulting in what is known as a cultivar. Among her better-known cultivars is “Spokane,” created for that city’s own lilac collection, and let’s not forget “Idyllwild,” a cultivar she let the Idyllwild Garden Club choose from among a few she had yet to name.

One day, Parton was helping Ballreich move boxes in her home when they stumbled across a collection of reel-to-reel tapes. They were from that part of the past she hadn’t wanted to confront: recordings of a handful of her performances. She wasn’t particularly keen to do anything with them, but Parton was; he brought them to a recording studio in Hemet. The resulting CD, titled “A Celebration of Music and Lilacs,” showcases Ballreich performing concertos with the Boston Symphony, Istanbul Symphony and Philadelphia orchestras.

Parton, who was Ballreich’s primary caregiver in her final years, frequently played the CD in the car as he drove Ballreich around on errands. He believes doing so eventually helped her reconnect with her life on the stage. “She slowly warmed up to the fact that she was good,” he says.

*In addition to cited sources, this article relied upon an oral history from the IAHS archives for which Ballreich was interviewed by Lynnda Hart on Aug. 18, 2003. 🐾*



**THE COMPANY WE KEEP**  
**New and Renewing Members – April through June 2014**

**NEW MEMBERS**

**Contributor**

Sallie Warwick

Idyllwild

**Individual**

Judi Milin

Idyllwild

**Family**

Donna Elliott & Neil Jenkins

Idyllwild

Glen Doolittle

Trabuco Canyon

**RENEWING MEMBERS**

**Founders Circle**

Ben & Nanci Killingsworth

Idyllwild

**Family**

Karl & Joy Allgeier

Idyllwild

Irene & Lew Brahm

El Cajon

Jeanne & Jerry Buchanan

Idyllwild

Dan & Sharla Carpenter

Idyllwild

Rob & Laura Caster

Idyllwild

Chuck & Sara Clayton

Idyllwild

William & Mary Coman

Glendale

Helen Drummond

Yuma AZ

Joe & Leann Gudmundson

Idyllwild

Ron & Marcia Krull

Idyllwild

Dan & Mary Beth Lazzaro

San Diego

Dave & Shanna Robb

Idyllwild

Anthony Pearson

Glendale

Melinda & Ron St. Pierre

Idyllwild

Jimmie & Hedi Tyson

Riverside

Jean Waggoner & Cal Gogerty

Idyllwild

Kay Wanner & Charles Wix

Idyllwild

**Benefactor**

Chris & Catherine Allen

Encinitas

**Sponsor**

Phil & Carol Baily

Temecula

Jim & Doris Ferguson

Riverside

Bonnie Lynn Lawrie

Cerritos

Phyllis Marling

South Pasadena

Daniel & Jane Levy

Pasadena

Margaret McTague

Riverside

Joyce McGaugh Silberstein

Anaheim

**Business**

Mile High Café

Idyllwild

**Contributor**

Nancy Borchers

Idyllwild

Suzanne Bowman

Idyllwild

Barney & Jorgine Brause

Idyllwild

Gary & Karen Brown

Idyllwild

Bob & Val Cox

Idyllwild

David & Kim Leonard

Riverside

Susan Miller

Hemet

Ron Perry & Doris Lombard

Mountain Center

Marianne McConnell Smith

Eagle Mountain UT

Lloyd & Shirley Wood

Idyllwild

**Individual**

Ted Belden

Hesperia

Lorel Cornman

Idyllwild

Barbara Czescik

Del Mar

Christine Gary

Corona

Linda Otterbeck

Palm Springs

Julie Wright Reilly

Santa Ana

Barbara & Terry Richmond

Springfield OR

~~~~~

**OUR ARTIFACT DONORS**

The generosity of our members and friends keeps the IAHS collection growing steadily. During the past quarter we've received valuable items from locals Max Singer and Josh & Emily White, as well as from Peter Allen of Silverton OR, Terry Bauman of San Diego, Richard Mitsuoka of Irvine, Shirl Reid of Big Horn WY, and Robert Reyes & Patrick Kennedy of Long Beach.

Among the donations are a remarkable wool blanket inscribed "Idyllwild All-Year Resort" found by the Whites at Idyllwild Inn. But the major addition was four cartons of official records and ephemera gathered by Reyes & Kennedy while studying the history of the Saunders Meadow summer home tract since 1927.

## CALLING ALL HOME TOUR FANS!

'Tis the season to be anticipating the annual highlight for IAHS, our Idyllwild Home Tour. With a new selection of homes each year, there are always surprises and delights in store.

More than just a collection of houses, the tour offers a glimpse of the ways mountain folk order their lives. So what's on offer this year?

- We have an expansive Pine Cove residence with forever views to the outdoors and the flavor of an owner's native Germany indoors.
- We have a fabric artist's dwelling that echoes the ambience of her beloved Taos.
- We have the home of world travelers, who've brought together a lifetime of memories in art and treasures from many lands.

- We have a quaint cabin that will invite you to settle down and await the impending appearance of a mad hatter or white rabbit.

- And as always we have an early Idyllwild cabin, one that has been evolving since the 1920s to accommodate a growing family.

The advance team has been at work for months—in fact, planning is a year-round activity. Nanci Killingsworth never stops looking for candidate houses. Charlotte Groty and Carolyn Hall formulate publicity and recruit volunteers to docent



FrazierDrake photo

and perform other tasks. Joyce Miller composes descriptive copy on each home. And our stalwart media team, John Drake and Rebecca Frazier, sells ads and designs and assembles the tour book itself.

The Home Tour's growing popularity in recent years has made it the foundation of our society's financial health. We urge one and all to share a relaxing and informative day sampling the Idyllwild life in its varied expressions.

See the box below for specific information. ↙



FrazierDrake photo

## 14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL HOME TOUR

**Saturday, September 13,**

**10 am to 4 pm**

**\$20 per person**

**Ticket booklets available from 9:30 am at  
Idyllwild Monument on Village Center Drive**

**More information:**

**(951) 317-4613 or (951) 201-1400**

**Volunteers Needed!**



## Amid a Busy Summer at the Museum.....

Past President Carolyn Levitski, at the wheel of her vintage MG sports car, takes Linda Turner for a ride in Idyllwild's 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade.



President Marlene Pierce gives an extended interview in the museum about IAHS activities to Jim Fordyce, news director for CoachellaValleyNews.com.

## COME SMELL THE ROSES!

This year the Village Garden on the museum grounds, a collaborative project of the Idyllwild Garden Club, has come into its own as an attraction for both tourists and residents. And its centerpiece is the bed of 26 heirloom rose bushes.

The idea of gracing the museum entrance with “old-fashioned” roses originated with several of our museum docents, who shared it with Garden Club planners Gary Parton and Harold Voorheis. They agreed that a collection of antique roses that might well have been planted during the early years of Idyllwild’s settlement as a community would be a fitting component of the overall plan.

Antique roses exist today because “they can take whatever is thrown their way,” says Voorheis. “They’re hardy and easy to grow and known for their fragrance.”

By definition heirloom roses date to before 1867, when hybrids were introduced that took over the commercial market.

To enact its plan, the Garden Club solicited donors to buy and dedicate rose bushes in honor of beloved family members. So we’re happy to acknowledge the benefactors of this magnificent addition to our museum grounds, who are identified below. ♣

### — ♣ VILLAGE GARDEN ROSE DONORS ♣ —

Toni Berthelotte  
 Laurie & Red Corbett  
 Sophia Dean  
 Bonnie Doshier  
 Sherry Edwards  
 Chic Fojtik  
 Charlotte & George Groty  
 George & Carolyn Hall  
 Dianne Johnson  
 Carolyn Levitski  
 Janice Lyle  
 Karen & Sharen Metz  
 Elizabeth Miller & Neill Bell  
 Marlene Pierce  
 Raphael Plunkett  
 Joan Read

Tom Sepko  
 Margie & Ron Smedley  
 Valerie Sobel  
 Linda & Larry Turner  
 Les Widerynski & Deborah Gmeiner

*Beat the Heat on Labor Day Weekend  
 with IAHS’s Annual Gift to the Community*

### **Old-Fashioned Ice Cream Social** **Free Ice Cream & Root Beer Floats**

**Saturday, August 30, 12-2 p.m.**  
 at the IAHS Museum & Village Garden

### 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:**

Open Hours 11 am - 4 pm

Summer Schedule (through Sept. 1):

Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays,

& Labor Day

Winter Schedule:

Saturdays, Sundays & selected holidays

Admission Free

Donations Always 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:**

**Sunday, August 10 — IAHS Annual Meeting (see pg. 2)**

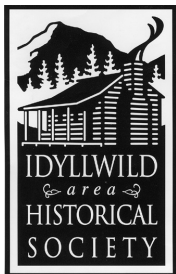
**Saturday, August 30 — Annual Ice Cream Social (see pg. 7)**

**Saturday, September 13 — 14th Annual Idyllwild Home Tour (see pg. 5)**

**Saturday, October 12 — Art Walk & Wine Tasting  
(sponsored by Art Alliance of Idyllwild)**

**Friday, December 12 — Annual Raffle Drawing**

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



Non-profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Idyllwild, CA

**Return Service Requested**