

# 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

AUTUMN 2016

## AN IDYLLWILD LANDMARK

By Robert B. Smith

Down at the quiet end of Cedar Street overlooking Strawberry Creek stands Silver Pines Lodge. Known as a favorite getaway of the late California TV personality Huell Howser, it's a quintessential Idyllwild hostelry with a long and varied history. Its earliest chapters revolve around a family who migrated here when the village was first becoming a summer residential community and stayed to have a lasting influence.

The story begins in 1923, when newlyweds Howell Holcomb and Pauline Poates honeymooned in Idyllwild. So taken with the setting, Hal and Polly immediately decided to settle here. Neighbors along River Drive and Cedar Street arriving to spend the summer of 1924 quietly at their cabins were taken aback to find a big commercial building rising in their midst. Holcomb, a contractor and master carpenter, needed both living and shop space to run his business.

Then Polly's mother, Anna "Ma" Poates, impressed by her daughter's enthusiasm for Idyllwild, quickly picked up the rest of the family and moved to town. Her motherly helpfulness quickly endeared her to the neighbors, and they adjusted to their neighbor's new business. To support her family Anna decided to try turning her cooking skill into a livelihood, first at a local golf club, then launching the "Rustic Shop Tavern" in half of Holcomb's building.



**Hal Holcomb**  
*IAHS archive*



**Poates's Rustic Tavern and Holcomb's Rustic Man Furniture shop in the late 1920s**  
*IAHS archive*

The other half housed his shop and showroom for craftsman furniture.

Pioneering an Idyllwild industry that would persist for 35 years, Holcomb used local pine as a basic working material, but his specialty was manzanita. Billing himself as "The Rustic Man," he offered to duplicate any furniture piece made of wood "in rustic." By 1927, buoyed by the village's first population boom, Hal had three assistants working in the shop. At that time his most memorable job was building all the clubhouse furnishings for the Mount San Jacinto Golf Club being developed on Saunders Meadow. (That clubhouse lives on today as the Astrocamp dining hall.)

Life was good for the Holcombs, and they became deeply involved in mountain life. In 1928, for example, Hal and Polly joined fellow residents in what would today be termed a demonstration: a two-day, 100-person "march" to the top of San Jacinto Peak in support of creating the proposed state park.

By 1932 the Rustic had become something of a regional attraction. Holcomb had built a toboggan run modeled after a bobsled track down the bank behind

*See Landmark, page 3*

## IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Board of Directors

*President:* Marlene Pierce  
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Linda Turner

*Board meetings are open to the membership and  
are held in the archive building  
on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month at 4 p.m..*

### Current Volunteer Staff

*Accounting:* Laura Caster, George Groty  
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### Arti-Facts

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

## President's Corner

Our **Annual Membership Meeting** was held at the Idyllwild Library this year, on Saturday, August 6<sup>th</sup>, with members and visitors stopping by the museum afterwards for refreshments and a tour of the Archive Building.



Thanks to our dedicated board members for continuing to serve IAHS and our Idyllwild area community. Our very special archivist and historian Bob Smith is no longer on our board, but continues to pursue his passion for Idyllwild area history by writing another book (in collaboration with John Drake and Rebecca Frazier). We look forward to a preview next summer.

Sadly, three of our board members recently lost family members. George Hall, passed away in July, and Carolyn is now living off the hill to be closer to family. Linda Turner's sister Sue Miller, who was such an asset in our IAHS office, also passed away this summer. Nancy Borchers's sister passed away in early September. Our sincere condolences to all of our special board members and their families.

Under the expertise and guidance of Charlotte Groty, our Vice President and Home Tour Chairperson, our team of board members, diligent docents, friends and members, created a successful 2016 event, with over 500 tickets sold. We are already looking forward to 2017. **Remember to "Save the Date - September 16, 2017."**

Thank you all for your continuing support of IAHS. Best wishes for a colorful autumn and wonderful holiday season. 🍂

Marlene Pierce  
IAHS President

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*Can't get to the museum? Follow our weekly "micro-exhibits" in the Idyllwild Area Historical Society page on **Facebook**.*

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

the main building to Strawberry Creek's flood plain. Riverside newspapers carried ads for a gala New Year's Eve "sliding party."

But with the Great Depression life began to sour. The Holcombs' two-year-old daughter Barbara died in 1931. Business gradually dried up, and in 1934 they lost some property to foreclosure. So Hal and Polly moved on, settling in Nevada City in the Sierra gold country, where Hal resumed a construction career.

The rest of the Poates family stayed put. Ma Poates, by now the owner of the Rustic property, turned the furniture shop into a soda fountain and continued to run the thriving Rustic Shop Tavern until 1944. She then sold the property to Paul Foster (namesake of Foster Lake), a Los Angeles physician who was simultaneously buying up most of the depressed assets



**Liane & Bill Poates, 1947**  
*IAHS archive*

lost to bankruptcy by Idyllwild's original developer, Claudius Emerson.

Ma Poates's three sons, Lem, Vic, and Bill, had followed brother-in-law Hal Holcomb into construction before branching out. Led by Lem, the brothers built a number of local homes, as well as the 1933 Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp on Alvin Meadow just below Strawberry Valley, which housed the manpower for building many of our existing forest campgrounds, trails, and administrative facilities. Lem in particular would become a local hero by directing volunteer crews in the construction of Town Hall.

When Bill Poates returned from the war, he met and married an exotic newcomer. Liane Popelik, a Czech-German escapee from the Holocaust, had landed in South America, where she had a brief marriage and career singing with dance bands until her brother, Karl-Heinz Popelik, brought her here. Known locally under his assumed American name, Tommi Tyndall. Karl-Heinz was ski instructor at Hidden Lodge, the short-lived Fern Valley resort. (Quickly realizing there was no skiing future in Idyllwild's climate and terrain, Tyndall moved on to Big Bear and founded the Snow Summit resort.) Bill and Liane Poates moved north to Grass Valley, bought a gold mine on the Yuba River, and spent their life together as miners before eventually retiring back in Idyllwild.

Ma Poates's second daughter, Lavenia, married and moved away, but her youngest daughter, Eleanor, remained to become one of Idyllwild's leading citizens. She married Gerald "Jerry" Johnson, who came to town in 1928, worked first as Holcomb's bookkeeper

*See Rustic, page 5*



**(l-r) Polly Holcomb, Jerry Johnson, Ma Poates, Eleanor Johnson, LaVenia Miller**  
*IAHS archive*



**Jerry Johnson (dark shirt) & CCC workers ready to dine at the Rustic, c. 1934**  
*IAHS archive*

# THE COMPANY WE KEEP

## New and Renewing Members - July through September 2016

### NEW MEMBERS

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| Mark Boettger          | Idyllwild    |
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| Chris Singer                         | Idyllwild            |
| Jimmie & Hedy Tyson                  | Riverside            |

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| Jack Ganoung             | Costa Mesa        |
| Bobbie & Gary Glasheen   | Idyllwild         |
| Terry & Diana Kurr       | Idyllwild         |
| Heloise Marsh            | Hemet             |
| Joan McCullough          | Idyllwild         |
| Marianne McConnell Smith | Eagle Mountain UT |
| Carson & Donna Struthers | San Diego         |
| Larry & Linda Turner     | Idyllwild         |

#### Family

|                                   |                 |
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| Darlene & Jerry Beebe             | Idyllwild       |
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| Cal & Nancy McIntosh              | Palm Desert     |
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| Bob & Brad Simpson & Karen Morton | San Luis Obispo |
| Deidre Vail                       | Walnut          |
| Gary & Susie Weber                | Idyllwild       |
| Stephanie Yost & Steve Olson      | Glendale        |

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| Adele Marks       | Mariposa             |
| Larissa Moss      | Idyllwild            |
| Jeannine Sherrick | Reno NV              |
| Sallie Warwick    | Idyllwild            |

Recent donors of artifacts for our collection include Roland Gaebert and Karin Sinclair of Idyllwild, Terry Bauman of San Diego, Maureen Boren of Palm Desert, Gina Genis of Washington DC, Richard Glover of San Jacinto, and Dr. Robert Reyes of Laguna Woods. Most notable was Reyes's gift of his entire collection of research materials for his new book on Saunders Meadow. We thank them all for their generosity.

**RUSTIC ...** (continued from page 3)

and briefly joined the CCC, but then found his niche in real estate and steadily assumed Emerson's mantle as Idyllwild's primary postwar developer. After the old Idyllwild Inn's fire-ravaged ruins were cleared in 1945, Eleanor single-handedly engineered creation of a beloved park on the site in the village center. Until shortly after her death in 1982, "Eleanor Park" remained a monument to her influence on Idyllwild. The land then reverted to commercial use and is now occupied by Jo'An's Restaurant.

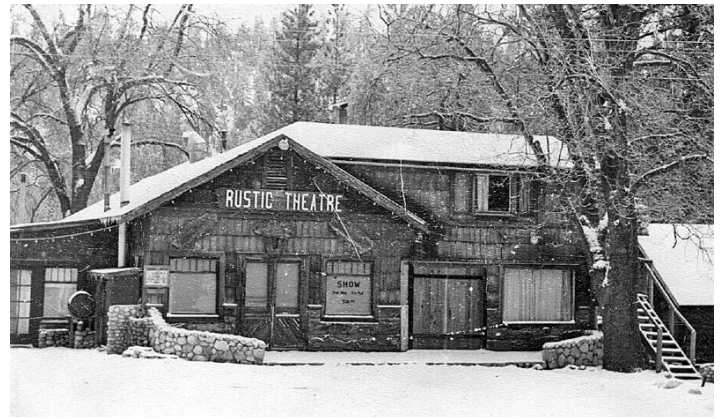


**Ma Poates (at left) & friends, c. 1950**  
*IAHS archive*

Hal Holcomb himself returned to Idyllwild once more for a few months in 1954, when he brought his company, Tim-Buk-Too Construction (slogan: "We'd go to Tim-Buk-Too to build a house that's handsome!"), to build a classy new motel for Johnson.

And what became of Ma Poates's Rustic Tavern? Absentee owner Paul Foster leased the former restaurant space to Bill and Prudence Underhill of Twenty-nine Palms, who brought in 145 seats and began showing movies for the public, as well as offering the space as a meeting room. For example, Queen of Angels Catholic Church moved its services there after a heavy 1944 snowstorm collapsed the roof of its original cabin, and they continued to use the Rustic for three years until its present building on North Circle Drive was completed.

In the spring of 1946 Jerry Johnson's company bought the Rustic property from Foster, then flipped it to local buyers Glenn and Nina Froehlich. The Froehlichs renamed it "Rustic Theatre," installed real theater seating, and scheduled films every night during the summer season, four nights over weekends in the off-season. Even after Town Hall was finished in 1947, the Rustic remained a popular gathering spot until 1952, when the Froehlichs built and opened the present movie



**Rustic Theatre, 1948**  
*IAHS archive*



**The Silver Pines lobby/meeting room/dance hall/ theater/ church**  
*IAHS archive*



*FrazierDrake photo*

house on North Circle Drive, taking the name "Rustic" with them.

The former Rustic property faded into obscurity until Phyllis & Stan Peterson discovered it in 1955. Phyllis had been enjoying the summer program at Idyllwild Arts so much, she couldn't face returning to the drabness of the family farm in San Jacinto. Casting about for a way to make a living on the Hill, the Petersons imagined in the Rustic a potential outlet for their life-long enjoyment of square dancing.

After expansion and refurbishing of the lodge and cabins, newly renamed Hillbilly Lodge, they invited

*See Silver Pines, page 7*

# ANOTHER SUPERB HOME TOUR

Banking on the genius of Nanci Killingsworth in once again delivering a variety of interesting homes and the expert overall direction of Charlotte Groty, the 2016 Idyllwild Home Tour enjoyed another successful run. In excess of 500 tour-goers turned out in perfect weather. The only distressing note was our untimely midsummer loss of long-time docent coordinator Carolyn Hall due to family illness.



This year's homes ranged from a grand mountainside lodge to a cabin so tiny it substitutes alcoves for bedrooms.  
*FrazierDrake photos*

Next, our profound thanks to the homeowners: Barry and Vicki Haberman, Judy Hoyt and Pete Bodman, Lee and Kerilee Lanfried, Carolyn and Tony Pearson, and Rod and Cindra Stolk.

Finally, such an event could never take place without some 60 other volunteers, who prepared the tour booklet, generated publicity, handled logistics, sold tickets, hosted and docented at the homes, provided music, directed traffic, provided refreshments, and accounted for revenue. Here we recognize all of those loyal volunteers:



Nancy Borchers  
Maureen Boren  
Suzy Bowman  
Jorgine Brause  
Corrine Brown  
Dan & Sharla Carpenter  
Laura Caster  
Diann Coate  
Morry Copeland  
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Bob Smith  
Larry & Linda Turner family  
Jimmy Tyson  
Marilyn Van Herk  
Kay Wanner  
Sallie Warwick  
Mary Whittaker  
Betty Wilcox  
Sandy Wycuff  
Hedy Zikorach



**In August a group of nearly 30 Elvis Presley fans from Great Britain included Idyllwild in their tour of Tupelo, Memphis, Nashville, Las Vegas, Palm Springs, & Hollywood.  
Bob Smith photo**

**At this year's Ice Cream Social, author Robert Reyes signed copies of his new history, *Saunders Meadow: A Place without Fences*  
Bob Smith photo**



**SILVER PINES ... (continued from page 5)**

the public to an old-fashioned dance in January 1947. It drew an enthusiastic crowd of more than 100, who hatched the Hilltop Twirlers square dance club. As word spread to other clubs, the Petersons soon found themselves booking groups from throughout Southern California every weekend. In addition to housing dancers at the lodge, they would plan a full schedule of activity: shopping, nature walks with their right-hand man Bob Beggs, or just lounging around the fireplace.

As age took its toll on the Petersons, they sold Hillbilly Lodge to the Beggs family in 1961, and Bob Beggs became manager. Further remodeling of the main lodge, bunkhouse, and a cabin raised capacity to 70 lodgers, and that became its primary function. But it also remained a meeting place for local organizations, as well as a retreat center for off-Hill groups. It

appeared briefly as Hillbilly Lodge in the Peter Fonda movie "Wild Angels," which was partially filmed in Idyllwild in 1965.

That same year ownership changed once again. According to current owner Chris Singer, the new owners, Ed and Dorothy Stacy, quickly tired of being asked whether Hillbilly Lodge had running water and plumbing. The enchanting sight of moonlight on pine needles inspired the new name Silver Pines Lodge. And Silver Pines it has remained, through a series of subsequent owners.

Singer, who has been proprietor for the last 22 years, continues the tradition of hosting meetings of Idyllwild organizations in the historic old tavern/theater/dance hall/meeting room. Visitors continue to enjoy a taste of early Idyllwild. And the familiar facade at the end of Cedar Street beckons much as it has for 92 years. 🐿

**Museum Hours**

11 am - 4 pm

**Winter Schedule (September-June 12)**

Saturdays, Sundays, Nov. 25,  
Dec. 26-30, & major Monday holidays  
(closed Thanksgiving & Christmas Day)

**Summer Schedule (June 16-Labor Day)**

Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays,  
4<sup>th</sup> of July, Labor Day

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**Donations Welcome**

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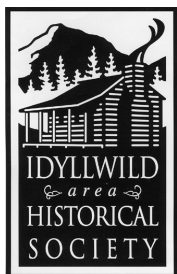
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