

# 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 2016

## THAT MYSTERIOUS LODGE ON HIGHWAY 243

By John M. Blodgett

Set deep in the shadows of Dark Canyon north of Pine Cove on Highway 243, Lawler Lodge seems unusually hidden and quiet for a Riverside County group camping facility. It's a fitting legacy for the lodge's namesake, an attorney whose prominence caught the attention of two United States Presidents – and almost got him and his wife killed in a nighttime bombing of their Los Angeles home.

Oscar Lawler was born on April 2, 1875 in Marshalltown, Iowa, to a machinist and his wife. When Oscar was 13, his parents moved their 10 children to Los Angeles in hopes of a prosperous future. The land boom that drew them there, however, crashed soon after they arrived.

Young as he was, Oscar went to work to help support his family. In the process he set in motion the workings of his own success. After a stint as a Western Union messenger, Oscar became a newsboy. One day while hawking newspapers at a street corner, he caught the attention of Harry Chandler of the Los Angeles Times circulation department. Chandler helped Oscar get a job as bellboy in the prestigious California Club where Oscar was in turn noticed by the influential



**Oscar Lawler**  
*IAHS archive*



**Hilda and Oscar at the Dark Canyon lodge, 1951**  
*IAHS archive*

attorney Henry O'Melveny. That encounter led Oscar to an apprenticeship in O'Melveny's office and eventual admittance to the California bar in 1896.

In 1901, Oscar married Hilda Clara Brode, the daughter of a wealthy Los Angeles merchant and property owner. The couple eventually had four children, one of whom, Ross, would eventually say his father "lived and breathed the law, spending little time in conventional family and social activities."

Oscar's devotion to the law would pay dividends. He first worked for Frank Flint, and managed Flint's successful 1905 campaign to become a U.S. senator. Afterward, Oscar was appointed U.S. Attorney for Southern California by President Theodore Roosevelt.

In 1908, Oscar was tapped into service by

*See Lodge, page 3*

## IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*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  
*Feature Writer:* John Blodgett  
*Layout:* Halie Wilson

## President's Corner



Our museum garden came alive this spring, with yellow spotlights of daffodils welcoming visitors. Plants and trees are happily thriving, especially after our very welcome spring rain storms. Take a deep breath and enjoy the varied scents of spring, including our lilac blooms.

Gary Parton of Alpenglow Gardens will be giving IAHS an "Ernie Maxwell" lilac this year to grace our garden. Also, his 2016 blue lilac, "Mayor Max," was announced at his lecture on April 16<sup>th</sup>, with plants available for your lilac garden next year. Special thanks to Gary, the Idyllwild Garden Club and our own Carolyn Levitski for their diligent care and maintenance of the garden.

We also invite you to stop by any weekend to visit our museum's exhibits, with a new exhibit now open, featuring renowned Town Crier cartoonist John Marshall. If you are looking for something special from Idyllwild, be sure and check our museum gift shop, which hosts a varied selection of books and other items.

As always, our docents, friends and members continue to help us achieve our mission of preserving & sharing the history of the Idyllwild Area. Thank you all for your support.....and **stop by and smell the lilacs!** 🌸

Marlene Pierce  
IAHS President

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## Save the Date: Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup> IAHS Annual HOME TOUR

Docent at one of the homes and enjoy a free preview of all this year's homes.

Call: Charlotte Groty at 951-201-1400  
or Carolyn Hall at 951-317-4613



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

another President, Howard Taft, who called Oscar to Washington, D.C. to serve as Assistant U.S. Attorney General.

Oscar returned to Los Angeles and private practice in 1910, where he soon found himself in charge of gathering evidence for the prosecution in a case where pro-union anarchists had bombed the headquarters of the Los Angeles Times. As a result of his work on this case, his home was broken into and ransacked one night in January 1912 while he and his family slept.

As senior member of two firms bearing his name, Oscar represented entities including the Southern California Telephone Company, Farmers & Merchants National Bank of Los Angeles and the Standard Oil Company of California.

The Lawlers first became acquainted with the San Jacinto Mountains about 1912, when Oscar was engaged by the U.S. Attorney General to look into suspicious corporate water filings on public land in the area.

An avid hiker, he had grown attached to the San Gabriel Mountains above Los Angeles and had done legal work to protect campers' facilities there. A 6,000-foot peak near the Angeles Highway, "Mt. Lawlor," is named for him, albeit misspelled by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey..

He quickly became enchanted by the San Jacintos. In 1916 the Lawlers purchased land in Dark Canyon, where they would eventually have a lodge built by the contractor responsible for Yosemite Lodge in Yosemite National Park.



**Structure of the lodge's main room and balcony**  
*Riverside Co. Parks*

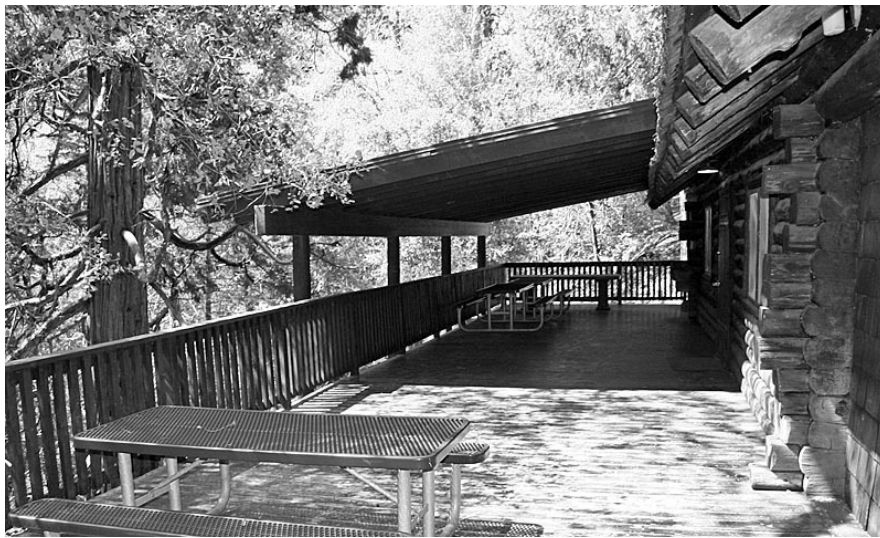
The Lawlers' lodge was finished in 1919, but the milestone was overshadowed by a somber event. At about the same time, while Oscar and Hilda slept, a bomb tore through their Los Angeles home. Both escaped, though scarred for life. The blast was tied to

an estate settlement case Oscar had worked on.

The Lawlers next settled in Beverly Hills, where they counted among their neighbors Gloria Swanson and Will Rogers, the latter of whom would occasionally entertain at the Lawler's Dark Canyon retreat.

Hilda Lawler was active in charities

benefitting children in Southern California. To honor her after death in 1954, Oscar donated Lawler Lodge to the county for use primarily as a youth camp. The county eventually added a series of cabins in the surrounding 80 acres that now go by the name Lawler Alpine Cabins. Altogether the reservation-required facility can accommodate up to 126 people. ♪



**Deck overlooking the North Fork**  
*Riverside Co. Parks*

**THE COMPANY WE KEEP**  
**New and Renewing Members - January through March 2016**

**NEW MEMBERS**

**Sponsor**

David & Laurie Fraser                      Idyllwild

**RENEWING MEMBERS**

**Founders Circle**

Karen & Thomas Higgins                      Idyllwild

**Benefactor**

Howard Sherman & Gregg Houston              North Hollywood

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Sanders & Mary Chase                      Los Angeles  
 Norma Brandel Gibbs                      Huntington Beach  
 Sharen Metz                      Idyllwild

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**MORE WAYS TO DONATE TO IAHS**

There are many ways to contribute to IAHS resources and programs, most importantly by donating your time and skills. Many such opportunities are outlined on page 5.

Cash contributions are always welcome, of course. San Diegans Charles & Charlotte Bird, despite being Founders Circle life members, have continued to make a donation each winter in lieu of dues.

We're always happy to receive historical artifacts of the Idyllwild area—documents, photographs, three-dimensional objects—to consider as possible additions to our collection. This past quarter saw new items coming in from museum visitor Hollis Reinhartson, Idyllwild resident Juli Gary, and part-timer Donna Acosta of Downey. They included legal documents for property in one of Idyllwild's earliest developments (George Hannahs' "Wildwood"), a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, vintage local brochures, and a 1980s hiking guide.

In one new development for IAHS, we've received word of forthcoming cash and major artifact bequests from two estates of recently deceased members. Now there's an idea for many of us old-timers to consider!

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**“History’s written from what can be found; what isn’t saved is lost, sunken and rotted, eaten by earth.”**  
 ----Jill Lepore



## IAHS'S LIFE BLOOD

The 75 or so volunteers who carry out the work of our society are irreplaceable. We have no paid staff, a decision made years ago, when the Board of Directors decided that IAHS should remain a high-quality volunteer organization spending its money on programs and facilities. So what do all these people do?

Our most familiar face is the museum, staffed by docents. Others insure that the museum is opened and closed on time; that docents are recruited, trained, and scheduled for duty; that the Museum Shop is stocked; and that new exhibits are created periodically.

Apart from the museum our largest activity is the annual Idyllwild Home Tour. For that event an experienced committee does the planning, arranging for homes, and recruiting home hosts, docents, and parking attendants. But long before tour day mailing lists are updated; mass mailings, media releases, fliers, and posters are prepared and distributed; the homes are mapped and described; ads are sold, and the tour guidebook is produced; musicians and artists are recruited to enliven venues; and directional signs are prepared. On tour day the signs must be posted, tickets sold, and bookkeeping done on the revenue.

Behind the scenes, the museum, office, and archive buildings and their surrounding grounds get maintained and repaired. The historical artifact collection (now some 12,000 items) is preserved and documented in detail in electronic records and its contents systematically screened by a committee for consistency with our mission. Dozens of inquiries every year are answered, some generating major research and writing projects. Oral history interviews are conducted and recorded on video. Quarterly newsletters are written, edited, produced, and distributed. Weekly mini-exhibits are posted on Facebook.

There are many administrative tasks to keep all this humming: financial accounting, periodic reporting to county, state, and federal agencies, phone and e-mail monitoring, maintaining



Diners at this year's annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon at historic Silver Pines Lodge

*Tom Pierce photo*



Gary Parton (right) of Alpenglow Lilac Gardens talks about the history of lilacs in Idyllwild.

*Tom Pierce photo*

membership records, publicizing events, and maintaining computers and a website.

Ultimate responsibility for all this activity rests on the shoulders of the Board of Directors, whose thirteen members meet monthly to set policy, manage the society's affairs, oversee collaborations with other organizations, and plan such events as membership meetings, volunteer luncheons, lectures, and other special occasions, not to mention preparing needed amenities like meals and refreshments.

Somewhere in all this activity there's bound to be a job that can use your special talent and experience. Let us know what that may be, and join the corps of volunteers who have made IAHS one of California's award-winning local history organizations. ♪

## STAGECOACH TRAVEL

Between 1890 and the mid-1910s, visitors to Idyllwild resorts often came by horse-drawn stagecoach from Hemet or San Jacinto. For a half-day trip under a summer sun, accommodations were spartan indeed. Here are two photos to illustrate. One depicts a 1901 stage from San Jacinto to the newly-opened Idyllwild Sanatorium. The other shows the upscale “White Special” (also called “The Owl”), a faster, more expensive service inaugurated for the new Idyllwild Inn in 1906, about to leave Hotel Hemet.

Open coaches like these provided plenty of fresh air, unlike the classic overland stages that threw passengers together in enclosed quarters for long periods of time. The latter called for some rules for passenger behavior, which were posted in stations (sometimes on the ceiling of the coach itself!).

Below we offer a charming sample of such rules, taken from Alton Pryor’s *Little-Known Tales in California History*. 🐾



**Left: Tourists on the short-lived San Jacinto-Idyllwild Stage, 1901**  
*LAHS archive*



**Below: White Special loaded and ready to leave Hotel Hemet**  
*LAHS archive*

### STAGECOACH RULES

1. Abstinence from liquor is desired in our coaches. However, if you must imbibe, share the bottle and don't overlook the driver. To do otherwise makes you appear mean spirited and selfish.
2. If ladies are present, gentlemen are urged to forego the smoking of cigars and pipes as the odor of same is repugnant to the weaker sex. Chewing tobacco is permitted, if you spit with the wind, not against it.
3. Gentlemen passengers must refrain from the use of rough language in the presence of ladies and children. This rule does not apply to the driver whose team may not be able to understand genteel language.
4. Robes are provided for your comfort during cold or wet weather. Hogging robes will not be tolerated. The offender will be obliged to ride outside with the driver.
5. Snoring is disgusting. When you sleep, sleep quietly.
6. Do not use your fellow passenger's shoulder for a pillow. He or she may not understand and friction could result.
7. Firearms may be kept on your person for use in emergencies. Do not discharge them for pleasure, or shoot at wild animals along the roadsides. The noise riles the horses.
8. In the event of a runaway, remain calm and try to stay in your seat. Jumping from the coach may kill you or leave you injured and at the mercy of the elements, coyotes and highwaymen.
9. Topics to be avoided in conversation include those that have to do with religion, politics and above all, stagecoach robbery and accidents.
10. Gentlemen guilty of unchivalrous behavior toward lady passengers will be put off the stage. It can be a long, dangerous walk back to the last station. A word to the wise is sufficient.

# POEMS FROM IDYLLWILD BREEZES NEWSPAPER, AUGUST 29, 1929:

## In Appreciation of Idyllwild

Tired, weary, need a rest?  
Skies dreary, gray at best?  
Kinda like to get away?  
Be a kid again and play?  
Far beyond the city's whirl,  
To babbling brook and scampering squirrel?  
Whispering pine, woody fern,  
For these and more do you yearn?  
Wanta swim, ride, or hike?  
Coax back that appetite?  
Watch the birds and butterflies?  
Once again see blue skies?  
A restful haven may be found,  
Where all of these and more abound,  
You'll find nature undefiled.  
Know the name? "IDYLLWILD!"  
— Mrs. A. R. Koester.

## Among the Whispering Pines of the Wilds of Idyllwild

Sunshine and shade where the whispering  
Pines smile above sun-flecked mountain streams,  
And the birds sing a merry tune  
Among the cedar and pines  
In the green meadows and wood  
Where the wild flowers bloom.  
Laden the air with perfume rare  
In the mystical days of June  
In the land of charm  
In the wilds of Idyllwild.  
Oh, do come and live with us  
Among the whispering pines.

Glad the vacation days I spend  
In the heart of the land  
I love—Idyllwild!  
Where the sunlight streams in golden beams  
Through the awning of leaves above  
Oh, come you here with your burden of care  
And find a sweet surcease,  
Where the whispering pines smile above you  
In the wilds of Idyllwild.  
—Mae A. Patten

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_



**Museum Hours**

**11 am - 4 pm**

**Follow us on Facebook**

**<https://www.facebook.com/IdyllwildAreaHistoricalSociety>**

**Winter Schedule (September-June)**

**Saturdays, Sundays, & Monday holidays**

**Visit our website**

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

**Summer Schedule (June 17-Labor Day)**

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

**For special tours and other business,  
call (951) 659-2717 or  
e-mail to [info@idyllwildhistory.org](mailto:info@idyllwildhistory.org)**

**Admission Free**

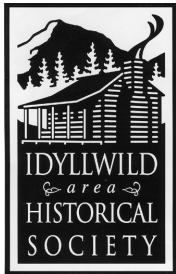
**Donations Welcome**

**What's this all about?**

**(See Page 1)**



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