

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 2017

HEART OF THE VILLAGE

By Robert B. Smith

Park Lane may be the shortest street in Idyllwild. Extending only from the historic Log Cabin Real Estate office on North Circle to Fratello's superb Italian restaurant on Ridgeview, flanked by The Center of Idyllwild shopping mall (a.k.a. The Fort) and Jo'An's Restaurant, it hardly qualifies as a beauty spot. But for 113 years it has been at the center of village life.

In 1904 Dr. Walter Lindley, who was exceedingly well connected in Southern California, engaged architect John Austin, designer of such landmarks as LA City Hall and Griffith Observatory, to plan a new resort replacing his fire-ravaged Strawberry Valley Lodge (a.k.a. Idyllwild Sanatorium).

"The Bungalow," as it was first named, arose at the end of the oldest road from Hemet, which then approached via Lower Pine Crest Avenue before circling into a broad drive to the hotel's main entrance. This driveway was the precursor of Park Lane.

The Bungalow's first season, 1905, was as disastrous financially as the sanatorium, and Lindley's rebellious investors forced its immediate sale. The buyers, Los Angeles developers Frank Strong and George Dickinson, renamed it "Idyllwild Inn" and leased it out to resident managers—initially, Lindley himself. Their primary interest was to subdivide and sell the surrounding 5,000+ acres included in the deal.

In 1911 Strong & Dickinson bought out Lindley's remaining interest and sent him packing. Without Lindley's marketing genius, the resort languished until the end of 1917. At that point a group from San Jacinto headed by banker Claudius Lee Emerson bought 1,000



Park Lane today, looking toward the log cabin realty office, with the Fort at left and Jo'An's at right.

FrazierDrake photo

acres including the inn.

Emerson was inauspiciously greeted in the spring by a magnitude-6.7 quake centered in San Jacinto. But once the modest damage was repaired, he set about developing his summer vacation village, starting with a general store facing the inn across future Park Lane. A preexisting power plant behind the store supplied daytime electricity for the resort. The store also housed the post office, making it a popular gathering place for summer residents.

Next to the power plant in 1927 Emerson built the Idyllwild Plunge, a public swimming pool. Together with croquet courts and horseshoe pits, this marked the beginnings of a recreation center. By the 1930s the driveway approaching the inn had been part of a circular roadway approximating today's loop along Highway 243. North Circle Drive, Park Lane, and Ridgeview Drive.

As the Great Depression and war years dragged on, the Park Lane corridor deteriorated. The Idyllwild Inn

See Park Lane, 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 2nd Friday of each month at 4 p.m..*

Current Volunteer Staff

Accounting: George Groty
Archive: Terry Bauman, Nancy Borchers,
Bob Greenamyer, Lynnda Hart, Barbara Jones,
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Arti-Facts

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

President's Corner



After a wonderfully wet winter the Village Garden came alive this spring with yellow spotlights of daffodils and colorful tulips all welcoming visitors. Our native plants and trees are happily thriving. The Idyllwild Garden Club has monthly plans for maintenance and planting to keep everything spruced up and happy. Thanks especially to Carolyn and Richard Levitski and to Mike Feyder working with his gardening gurus.

We invite you to stop by the museum any weekend from 11:00 to 4:00 p.m., to visit our exhibits, including a fascinating new display featuring movies made over the years in Idyllwild. Browse our Museum Shop, which hosts a varied selection of books and other historical items. Come autumn, we will be offering a new book for sale titled *Idyllwild Through Time*, by our volunteer photographers, John Drake and Rebecca Frazier, in collaboration with well-known writer, Bob Smith. They will be presenting a preview of their new book at our August 4th IAHS Annual Meeting, to be held from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Idyllwild Library.

We value our docents, members and friends who volunteer to help us achieve our mission of preserving & sharing the history of the Idyllwild Area. We are especially grateful for all of the assistance and expertise offered over the years by both Bob and Adele Smith. As they retire from active involvement, we send them our sincere thanks and best wishes for their all their future endeavors and plans.

Thank you all for continuing to support IAHS. 🌱

Marlene Pierce
IAHS President

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**Save the Date! Saturday, September 16<sup>th</sup>**  
**IAHS 17<sup>th</sup> Annual HOME TOUR**  
*Volunteer and/or docent at our Home Tour and  
enjoy a free preview of this year's homes.*  
Call: Charlotte Groty at 951-201-1400  
or Marlene Pierce at 951-808-3632

## PARK LANE ...

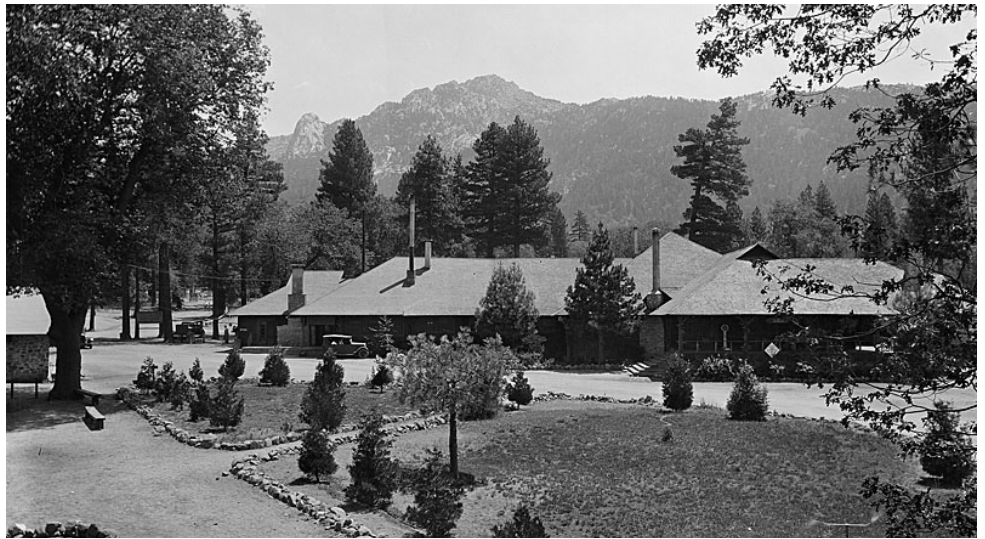
(continued from page 1)

went bankrupt in 1936, driving Emerson out of town. In 1941 the store and post office burned down. The Idyllwild Inn did likewise in 1945, leaving the land on both sides of Park Lane empty except for the plunge.

But 1946 ushered in a renaissance, when a local group headed by developer Jerry Johnson bought up all of Emerson's former holdings. One of Johnson's first projects was building a recreation center called Sportland next to the plunge. It boasted five bowling lanes, a snack bar, and an amusement center, but alas, it, too, burned down after two seasons.

By then folks were beginning to refer to the inn site bordered by Ridgeview, Village Center, and Circle drives as "Village Circle." Its abandoned look particularly perturbed. Jerry Johnson's wife Eleanor, a daughter of Ma Poates, the legendary Rustic Tavern's creator. So Eleanor undertook to develop the circle into a park.

The first step in 1949 was building the low river-rock wall that still surrounds Jo'An's restaurant. The next spring, walkways went in, and the area was planted with over 800 perennials, shrubs, and trees, among them snowball, purple barberry, Weigela rose, white bridal wreath, forsythia, redwood, black locust, dogwood, lilac, catalpa, purple-leaf plum, white birch, and silver



The elegant Idyllwild Inn in its heyday, viewed from the future site of the Fort.

*IAHS archive*

maple. (The sequoias, including Idyllwild's community Christmas Tree, came later.) The plot was enriched by fertilizer trucked in from the Gates turkey farm down by the new ISOMATA campus. The resulting enclave was named "Eleanor Park" in recognition of the woman who created it.

Across Park Lane, meanwhile, new owners renovated the plunge and rebuilt Sportland with bowling, pool, snooker, a coffee shop, and an arcade and shooting gallery. Under Jay Burton's management (1952-1957) the main building was remodeled with Alpine decor. Burton renamed it "Idyll-Hof" and added ping-pong, a Shetland pony merry-go-round, and a "beach" for sunbathing and volleyball. Subsequent manager Don Otto developed a miniature golf course and a redecorated café, soda fountain, and banquet room.

Eleanor Park got an elaborate water fountain in

1961, just in time to be featured in Elvis Presley's "Kid Galahad" movie. A year later Sportland Park got another face-lift, with new owners Avery and June Fisher developing a roller skating rink and a burger bar, ice cream shop, two restaurants (Sportsmen Grill and Carriage Room), an art gallery, and small shops.

But maintaining essentially seasonal recreation facilities proved financially prohibitive, and in 1965 Fishers sold Sportland Park. Buyer E.J. Coffey converted it

*See Inn, page 5*



Winter on the drive to the inn, early 1920s; buildings include (l-r) power plant, general store, log cabin really, future post office, Idyllwild Inn.

*IAHS archive*



INN ... (continued from page 3)

to the Carriage Inn, an elaborate eating establishment adorned with small shops and an art gallery. Foreshadowing Joni Mitchell's memorable lament, he'd paved over Idyllwild children's summer paradise, the venerable plunge, to put up a parking lot.

A golden era was fading. Aerospace manufacturer Rodney Welch had come to town in 1957 with big plans to create Alandale, a residential community and amusement park on the Banning Highway. He also began buying up residential and commercial property in the village, including the venerable Koffee Kup (now the Red Kettle). By 1966, when Welch acquired the Carriage Inn, he was becoming deeply involved in village affairs through the Chamber of Commerce, and the restaurant complex would be a landmark social center for the next decade.

The end was also approaching, though more gradually, for Eleanor Park. In 1960 Eleanor Johnson had transplanted a large fir tree from Pine Cove on which to string Christmas lights; it died within two years, but a new seasonal tradition had begun. By 1967, however, she was becoming discouraged by the cost and effort of repairing sporadic vandalism in the park. And a new generation of the Johnson family was more attuned to costs than to public benefit.

While the Chamber lobbied for county acquisition of Eleanor Park, Jim Johnson put it on the open market in 1974. He did allow a temporary children's playground to be installed pending a sale, but the die was cast when



1930s Idyllwild from the air: the massive inn and plunge are easy to spot; the precursor to Park Lane passes in front of the inn.

*IAHS archive*



The store and post office, a daily social center during the 1920s.

*IAHS archive*

the county reclassified the property from public amenity to commercial, inflating its tax rate by a factor of 30. That led Johnson to build a pair of ice-cream and fast food stands, which opened in 1977 as "The Tax Shelter," renamed "Woodpecker's Hut" three years later.

By the time Eleanor Johnson died in 1982, her park's fate was sealed. The fountain, by then nonfunctional, was razed in 1985 and the fast-food huts morphed into a growing restaurant known successively as Tahquitz Inn, O'Sullivan's Tavern in the Pines, The Pines, and in 1997 Jo'An's.

Rod Welch had sold the Carriage Inn in 1975 to a group headed by Glenn Bell of Taco Bell fame. They

*See Village, next page*



View of the Idyll-Hof, looking past Eleanor Park; the plunge is just out of the picture at the right.

*IAHS archive*

## WHAT MAKES IAHS TICK

You can't just wind up an organization as complex as the Idyllwild Area Historical Society and let it run. It takes people committed to our mission—lots of them.

You can see on page 2 who's been doing the day-to-day work lately. In the last issue of *Arti-Facts* we identified the many folks who made last year's home tour such a rousing success. another vital group is our corps of museum docents, who keep the doors open and welcome curious visitors.

Some docents are on the Hill only in summertime, others serve year-round, and all do a job that too often goes unrecognized. Here we especially thank those who have been on duty over the past year:

Lynnette Banks  
 Maureen Boren  
 Nancy Borchers  
 Suzy Bowman  
 Corrinne Brown  
 Dan & Sharla Carpenter  
 Dianne Coate  
 Morry Copeland & Dick Dorisse  
 Barbara Cutter

Rabbi Malka Drucker  
 George & Charlotte Grotty  
 Lynnda Hart  
 Dianne & Terry Kurr  
 Carolyn Levitski  
 Virginia Lumb  
 David Martin  
 Art Mason  
 Sheri McClain  
 Joyce Miller  
 Dianne Pappalardo  
 Marlene Pierce  
 Jan Priestley  
 Shanna Robb  
 Linda & Larry Turner  
 Betty Wilcox  
 Sandy Wyckoff

Their ranks are always open to new recruits. If you'd like to learn more about our area's history and meet some of the interesting people who visit our mountain paradise by serving as a museum docent, give a call to Barbara Jones, our docent coordinator, at (760) 835-8387. ♪

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

demolished the restaurant and talked vaguely about a possible shopping mall, but the land sat idle until 1988, when Maureen Jones and Dick Krupp bought it.

The shopping center idea was resurrected in 1992, when Jones and Krupp opened the Fort (officially,

"The Center of Idyllwild"). Built of Idaho lumber from standing dead trees, it features the "world's largest" carved-wood mural, rendered by Jonathan LaBenne, creator of the Idyllwild Tree Monument—the totem pole long beloved by tourists and woodpeckers.

Now only an occasional street festival echoes Park Lane's centrality in Idyllwild's past. ♪

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

**Names(s)** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail Address** \_\_\_\_\_ **Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Individual (\$15)**   
  **Contributor (\$35)**   
  **Benefactor (\$250)**   
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 **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** \_\_\_\_\_

## DIGITAL NEWSPAPER PROJECT NEARS COMPLETION

Chalk up another success story for collaboration among Idyllwild organizations.

Five years ago IAHS and the Idyllwild Town Crier together launched an effort to make old newspapers available on-line in a word-searchable format. Initial grants from the Idyllwild Community Fund and Rotary-Anns helped, as did targeted donations from generous IAHS members. But we

expected to spend many years just finding complete sets of the old papers and raising funds to have them professionally scanned.

Then Idyllwild Library director Shannon Houlihan Ng learned about the project. She gave us access to the library's complete newspaper collection and enlisted the Friends of the Library to join the collaboration. Suddenly the project was fully funded, with permission granted to make the on-line papers freely available to library users either at the library or from a remote location.

Today the Town Crier is on the Web from its founding in 1946 through 1980, and more issues are coming on line as fast as NewsBank can scan them.

They have already proven to be an invaluable resource for historical research on the Idyllwild area, but also for simply satisfying personal curiosity. ♪

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### EXPANDING ARCHIVE

Our collection of several thousand Idyllwild area artifacts continues to grow as members and friends donate documents, photos, and solid objects. Over the past several months we've benefitted from the generosity of the following far-flung donors:

Terry Bauman, San Diego  
Tess Bornstein, Costa Mesa  
Laurie Corbett, Idyllwild  
Susan Cowper, Idyllwild  
Charla Burton Elliott, San Jacinto  
Rob Fulton, Baker  
Lynnda Hart, Idyllwild  
Jan Jaspers-Fayer, Idyllwild  
Mary Kelley, Fries VA  
Nanci Killingsworth, Idyllwild  
Alice Lindsay, Idyllwild  
Sheri McClain, Idyllwild  
Teresa Nutter-Hoehn, Anza  
Tom Pierce, Idyllwild  
Sifton Priestley, Idyllwild  
Elaine Rahman, Idyllwild  
Robert Reyes, Laguna Woods  
Bob Smith, Idyllwild

The most significant of these donations was Laurie Corbett's several cartons of artwork, equipment, and other memorabilia from the home of her uncle, Ernie Maxwell. Several months worth of work lie ahead to sort, evaluate, document, and catalog the dozens of items in this cache.

The oddest item was a bottle of "Idyllwild" brand beard oil. A bit of investigation found that a principal of the Omaha, Nebraska company where it's produced regularly vacations in Idyllwild. Its scent reminded him so strongly of our evergreen forest that the name was a natural. ♪

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### AN EDITORIAL NOTE

For six years we have served as your Arti-Facts co-editors. Producing four issues a year has kept us busy, but it's an immensely rewarding privilege to serve such an outstanding volunteer organization in this way, chronicling its progress, keeping its amazingly loyal membership up to date on society activities, and sharing tales of the Idyllwild area's remarkable history. Inevitably, time and age take their toll, and now it's time for us to bow out of this role.

We're often reminded of the best advice Bob ever got: "Quit while it's still fun." This ensures good memories and preserves energy to take on whatever life offers next. (He does plan to continue supervising the IAHS archives, responding to inquiries about local history, and writing as time permits.)

Together we thank you for the encouragement so many members have shared in their comments and suggestions about the newsletter, and we wish an equally rewarding experience for our successors.

– Bob & Adele Smith



**Museum Hours**

11 am - 4 pm

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

Saturdays, Sundays, & Memorial Day

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

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

**Follow us on Facebook**

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

**Visit our website**

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

For special tours and other business,

call (951) 659-2717 or

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

**Admission Free**

**Donations Welcome**

**Dates to Remember:**

**Saturday, July 15 – “Eye of the Artist”**

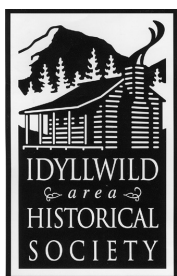
**(sponsored by Art Alliance of Idyllwild)**

**Saturday, August 6 – IAHS Annual Meeting**

**Saturday, September 2 – Annual Ice Cream Social**

**Saturday, September 16 – Annual Idyllwild Home Tour**

P O Box 3320  
Idyllwild, CA 92549



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