

# Arti-facts

The Newsletter of the  
Idyllwild Area Historical Society

Volume IV Issue 3

Fall 2004

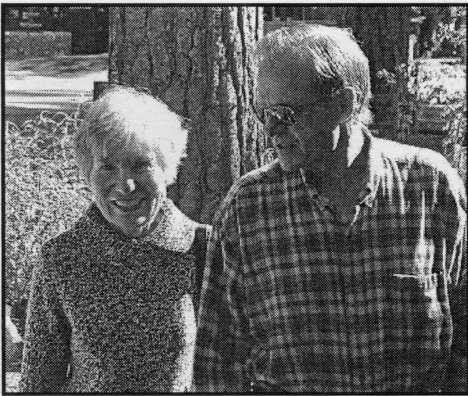
Preserving the History of Idyllwild and Neighboring Communities in the San Jacinto Mountains

## A Fond Farewell

**B**y the time you receive this newsletter, George and I will be somewhere on the Oregon Coast, house hunting and exploring lake, river, and ocean view property.

For the last 15 years, we have enjoyed living in this very special place and treasure the friendships we have made here.

Four years ago, a small group of people got together and talked about



the idea of a museum for the Idyllwild area. Seeing the dream of a museum and archives grow into a reality has been one

of the most rewarding experience of my life. The thrill of meeting and interacting with so many interesting people has been the best part of serv-



ing as president over the last four years. It has been a joy to work with two Boards of Directors and our Museum Director / Curator, Lynnda Hart.

Lastly, we would not succeed without the support of our membership, museum docents and other volunteers. Thank you for taking an active part in this vibrant, growing organization. And thanks to all

of you who attended our wonderful going away party at the museum patio. It was indeed a memorable event.



*by Sheila Meyer, ex-president*

**All members are invited to attend the ANNUAL MEETING  
of the Idyllwild Area Historical Society**

**Friday, December 3, 2004 7:00 p.m.**

**Riverside County Nature Center**

**25225 Highway 243**

**(Between Idyllwild and Pine Cove)**

**Idyllwild, California**

**Steve Lech, Speaker**

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## Museum Shop Officially Opened

The eagerly awaited Museum Shop has officially opened! It is located in the "Kitchen Area" of the museum. Charmingly displayed are a wide variety of items which are of interest to people of all ages and, most importantly, exclusive to the Museum.

Replicas of old-time children's toys, matted vintage photos, artisan jewelry, and a collection of books on local history line the shelves. T-shirts with crisp images of an Idyllwild snow scene or a high country cabin share space with coffee mugs with the IAHS logo.

Wonderful Mata Ortiz style pottery, hand-painted brooms by Donna Struthers, and porcelain pieces by Idyllwild and New Zealand artist, Jan Priestly, would be special gifts for anyone or even to keep for yourself.

Drop by the Museum soon and prepare to be dazzled. Remember, Society members get a 10% discount!

## Meet Steve Lech Annual Meeting Speaker

Steve is a native Riversider who has been interested in local history for nearly 30 years. Steve has been a docent with the Mission Inn for the past 16 years, coordinates the docent program for the historic Riverside County Courthouse and has given lectures for the Mission Inn docent training program for nearly 10 years.

Steve has been employed by Riverside County in various roles for over 18 years and he became interested in the history of the county through his travels due to work. Beginning a few years ago, he started researching and writing articles that have been printed in various historic organizations' pamphlets and newsletters.

Starting more than four years ago, Steve began to take an in-depth look at how Riverside County was formed. The culmination of that and other research was published in July 2004 as the book titled "*Along the Old Roads- A History of the Portion of Southern California That Became Riverside County.*" (Available in the Museum Shop)

## A Glimpse into Idyllwild's Past

*One of the Society's main goals is to properly archive the many documents and artifacts that have been entrusted to the Museum. The process often involves typing an exact copy of a letter or manuscript so that the original can be carefully preserved while the copy is available to read and enjoy. The following 1952 deposition is a document that was recently copied and provides an interesting glimpse into the past history of Idyllwild and gives a personal touch to the life of one of this area's early businessmen, Claudius Lee Emerson.*

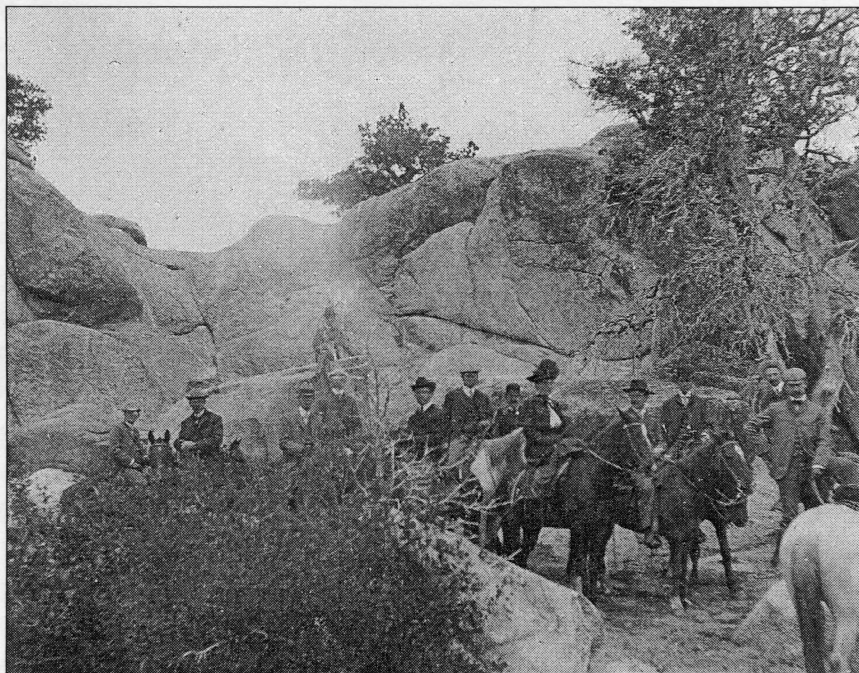
**M**y first visit to Idyllwild was in the summer of 1888. I rode up from San Jacinto on a Saturday night with Harry Cree (later editor of the Riverside Enterprise), Claude Rainey, and several other boys. We arrived at Saunders' Meadow late at night and unsaddled our horses, turned them out in the meadow to graze and then walked down to Strawberry Valley to the Keen Hotel. (The old Keen Hotel stood about where the Idyllwild School is today.) Finding the place all shut up for the night but wishing some sort of entertainment we came upon the croquet court. It was a bright moonlit night so we decided to play croquet. We had played awhile when we were startled by a ghost-like apparition which seemed to be floating toward us through the trees. It proved to be a very irate lady, Mrs. John Keen, the owner of the hotel who came out in her long nightdress to berate us for our noise. She asked us if we were not Christians to so break the Sabbath, for, though and away we hadn't realized it, Sunday morning had already come. We slunk away and one of our group was so chagrined that he stayed in camp at Saunders' Meadow all the next day, not stirring until time to start home!

About a year later I was working in a general merchandise store in San Jacinto. With three of my pals planned another trip to Strawberry Valley. We hoped to leave at six o'clock on a Saturday night but my boss said

that eight o'clock would be the earliest that I could get off. The other boys started at six as planned and I said that I would come when I could and would try to catch up with them on the road. The boys each had livery horses at a cost of \$2.50 each, which price was way out of my reach, so I found a friendly Indian who let me have his horse, saddle and bridle for 50 cents!

At about ten minutes of eight, and I was eagerly looking forward to eight o'clock, Mrs. Keen came in the store with a long list of groceries she wanted for her

hotel and on the list was twenty five pounds of coffee to be ground, which took the better part of half an hour to grind and put up so that it was nine o'clock before I was able to climb aboard my trusty horse. I had no hopes of overtaking the other boys but I plodded along through the night until I reached the foot of the old toll grade. This grade was steep and



rocky, nothing more than a trail. When I turned the horse's nose toward this rocky climb, he stopped in his tracks and said "no," not any of this for me! Despite the use of the quirt and spurs he still said "no." I then had to get off and lead him all the way up the grade! Several times I got on thinking he had forgotten his past meanness, but each time I got a decided "no," and had to get off again. Finally I reached Chimney Flats, the head of

**Continued on page 4**

the steep grade, and once again I got on his back and this time he was willing to go on, slowly and quietly. Very shortly the road branched in several directions and I did not know which one to take, nor did the horse, or at least he said nothing. We took the wrong road and soon came to a place where the road ended. It was then about three or four o'clock in the morning and I decided to tie the horse to a tree and lie down and sleep until morning. I did not awaken until broad daylight and then had no trouble finding my way to Strawberry Valley where I soon found my friends. We were invited to breakfast with Mrs. Blackshaw, wife of Dr. Joseph Blackshaw of San Jacinto, (whose daughter, Annie, later married by brother, Albert.) I was in thoroughly good shape for breakfast after my night's travel and I'll never forget how good that food tasted. I remember that I had my first taste of orange marmalade that morning. I had heard of English marmalade but had never tasted any. When Mrs. Blackshaw asked me what I'd like for breakfast for some reason I said marmalade and what did the lady do but turn around and take some right out of her camp cupboard!

My friends and I spent a pleasant day and arrived back in San Jacinto early Monday morning in time for me to open the store at six a.m. My borrowed horse being somewhat more willing to travel downhill than up! Those were my hours at the store...six in the morning until nine at night! Later, when I was courting Zelma I was able to persuade the boss to let me off at eight on Wednesday nights. That was my courting night. Those Wednesday nights ended in my marrying Miss Zelma Shultz on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1900. By this time I had a store of my own which I operated until 1903 when I was drafted into the State Bank of San Jacinto where I served as cashier until 1920.

During these years we made frequent trips to Idyllwild and each trip heightened my love of the mountain. In the fall of 1917, backed by two associates, I bought the Idyllwild resort consisting of the Inn and other improvement and a thousand acres of land from Strong and Dickinson. Then, in April of 1919 disaster,

in the form of a severe earthquake leveled the power plant, threw down all the fireplaces and crumbled the foundations and in about 30 seconds did about \$25,000 worth of damage. My associates were heartsick and wanted their money, which I managed to pay them and I started out to try to rebuild. Lumber was unattainable, or nearly so, and to make matters worse I was on the ration board and couldn't allocate any lumber to myself if it was, so I bought a small saw mill from Will Tripp and moved it up to Idyllwild from Keen Camp and cut several hundred thousand feet of lumber to rebuild the resort. I personally selected the trees which were to be cut with an eye to preserving the beauty of the forest and it made it a pretty hit and miss operation, not the usual commercial logging operation by any means!

The rebuilding took about three months and by the middle of the summer we were ready for business. As I remember it we had good business the first summer. Among the first guests we had were a group of Los Angeles bankers who came up and spent three days with us as a gesture of good will to me in my new venture. While they were there a supply truck broke down on the grade and were without bread for the



*Idyllwild Sanitarium circa 1900-1901*

evening meal. I asked the two Japanese cooks if they could make biscuits and they said "sure" and they were the nicest lightest biscuits you ever saw.

We were at the Inn until 1939. We now live in Hemet. Our five children are Mrs. Gregory Esgate (Marjorie), of Geneva, Switzerland, Mrs. Louis B. Ziegler (Nell) of Hemet, Mrs. Burdette Nelson (Alice) of Hemet, John Emerson of Bishop and Lee Emerson, Jr. of San Marino.

(Obtained under duress the eighteenth day of July 1952. Further the deponent sayeth not.)

C. L. Emerson (signature)

Zelma A Emerson (signature)

*From C. L. Emerson's deposition, it is obvious that there were a lot of activities going on in the Idyllwild environs during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Excerpts from "The San Jacintos," a book by John W. Robinson and Bruce D Risher (available in the Museum Shop), provide further interesting information.*

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1889 was apparently the year that Strawberry Valley really caught on with campers. The toll road was now free and people swarmed up by horse and buggy, particularly when the lowlands sweltered under the hot summer sun. Anton Scherman's Strawberry Valley Lumber Company began charging campers 50 cents per month, "which entitles them to the use of wood and water, and the amusements of the grounds." The amusements included a comfortable hotel, a dance hall, several croquet sets, swings, etc.

George B. Hannahs and his wife Sarah had recently arrived in Strawberry Valley and erected a sawmill on upper Dutch Flat. They apparently joined with a Mrs. M. Mitchell in building a single-story wooden structure they first called the Strawberry Valley Hotel. Mrs. Mitchell was apparently the major owner, for advertisements in the summer of 1890 named her a proprietor and called the resort the Mitchell House. In the summer of 1890, George and Sarah Hannahs opened their own resort which they called Camp Idyllwilde, first mentioned in the San Jacinto Register of July 27, 1890.

The summer of 1890 saw upwards of 500 campers enjoying the delights of Strawberry Valley. Joining the Mitchell House and Camp Idylwilde that summer was John and Mary Keen's Keen House, located in the lower valley just east of Domenigoni Flat. The Keen's owned the three-story Florida Hotel in Valle Vista. Mr. Keen apparently remained below to manage the Florida Hotel, while Mrs. Keen operated the mountain hostelry. The Keen House was described as "a long one-story structure, built for summer use only, comfortable and clean. Mrs. Keen is a born landlady, who makes guests feel perfectly at home, and who is thoughtful for every comfort. The table is well supplied with good food, well cooked and nicely served." G. D. Allen opened a general store nearby, carrying groceries, clothing, and sporting goods for campers and hunters.

A fourth Strawberry Valley resort opened in the summer of 1891-G. W. Henry's Henry House, located in "Idylwilde Camp," adjacent to the Hannahs' Camp Idylwilde. The following year the Henry House was sold to Mrs. Mitchell, who in turn apparently sold the property to George Hannahs. The details of the transaction are unclear, but by August 1892 Idyllwild Camp, which apparently encompassed the original Idyllwild

resort along with the Mitchell property, was listed in newspaper advertisements as under "G. B. Hannahs, Proprietor." Besides the hotel accommodation, George Hannahs and his wife Sarah supplied "excellent tents and portable cottages to let, all equipped with beds and clean, fresh bedding, easy chairs and the usual necessities of a sleeping room. He has a store well stocked with canned meats and fruits, fresh fruit, fresh meat, staple groceries, etc., for the convenience of those who camp and do their own cooking." Mail was delivered by stage three times a week.

On March 3, 1893 George Hannahs was named postmaster of the first post office in Strawberry Valley. It was located in his general store in the lower valley, about where the road today crosses Strawberry Creek to the Idyllwild Arts Academy.

Hannahs was so busy with his lumber business in San Jacinto and his sawmill on Dutch Flat that he was apparently unable to continue managing the Idylwilde Camp. In 1895 he sold it to Mrs. Celia Stokes. Mrs. Stokes was a warm hostess and quickly expanded the social activities at her resort. Newspapers that summer were full of accounts of social events at several Strawberry Valley resorts: dances, musical recitals, croquet and tennis matches, candy pulls, and grand bonfires.

During the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Southern California became a Mecca for thousands suffering from tuberculosis, or "consumption" as it was then called. To accommodate these health seekers, tuberculosis sanitariums were built all over the southern counties, from Santa Barbara to San Diego, much as convalescent hospitals and senior citizen facilities have multiplied in recent years. Some physicians believed that the clean, cool air and sunshine of the Southern California mountains offered the best cure for consumptives. They prescribed several months of rest in places like Strawberry Valley. As early as 1889, health seekers began to visit the valley.

With the growing popularity of Idyllwild as a health resort, it was only natural that valley entrepreneurs would offer stage service up the mountain. In May 1901, the San Jacinto-Idyllwild Transportation Company was incorporated by several San Jacinto

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businessmen with Dr. Walter Lindley of Idyllwild Sanatorium putting up half the capital. The new company reached an agreement with the Santa Fe Railroad for a reduced five dollar round trip fare from Los Angeles to Idyllwild via rail and stage. By June, San Jacinto hotels were filled with people enroute to Idyllwild.

When William Whittier, founder of Hemet and owner of much of the town, learned of this, he was furious. Whittier never did like San Jacinto, ostensibly because the San Jacinto Register has criticized his Hemet Land Company and Lake Hemet Water Company. In fact, he ordered his employees not to shop in the neighboring town.

Whittier hurried down from San Francisco and quickly organized the Hemet Livery Stage Company. He purchased horses and stage wagons, hired R. H. Stetson to run the operation, and began his own stage service to Idyllwild. Whittier's intention was to run the San Jacinto-based rival stage line out of business. Determined—some say ruthless—businessman that he was, this is just what he did. He persuaded the Santa Fe Railroad to offer his Hemet company reduced ticket fares. He offered reduced lodging and meal prices at his Hemet Hotel. He advertised his Idyllwild stage service all over Southern California. He had won, as he usually did in his long career as a businessman. He bought out the nearly bankrupt San Jacinto line and moved their equipment, stages and horses to Hemet.

For several summers, travelers on the Hemet-Idyllwild Stage were "treated" to a mock hold-up. As the stage reached Chimney Flat on the old road, masked bandits on horseback sped out of the forest, brandished pistols, and forced the wagon to a halt. Amid shrieks and squeals, visitors were relieved of their cash, jewelry or anything else that looked valuable. Of course, this was all part of the fun, and all the "loot" was returned to the guests.

Although Strawberry Valley was crowded with summer visitors, the Idyllwild Sanatorium was a failure. The mile-high altitude was too high for invalids and the nights were too cold. It was said that the Sanatorium hauled its guests "up in buckboards and down in boxes." In July 1903, after only two years administering to consumptives, Idyllwild closed its doors, was remodeled, and reopened as a resort hotel a month later. Its name was changed to the Strawberry Valley Hotel, "the Pleasure Seeker's Paradise," and all persons with lung disease

were prohibited.

Fate was unkind to the big hotel. An early morning fire on April 20, 1904 completely destroyed it. The hotel had lasted only three years. Plans were made for rebuilding the hotel on a smaller scale. A new single-story structure was complete in time for the 1905 summer season and named the Bungalow. In 1913 C. J. Gilbert and Don Porter leased the property, renovated the Bungalow (now renamed the Idyllwild Inn) and expanded the facilities to accommodate the increasing number of visitors.

In November 1917 Claudius Lee Emerson, his brother Albert S. Emerson, Jack Hopkins and L.A. Williams bought the Idyllwild Inn and 1,000 surrounding acres for a consideration of \$100,000. The Emersons soon bought out Hopkins and Williams, and for twenty-one years Idyllwild Inn was an Emerson family operation with C. L. Emerson in charge.

Claudius Lee Emerson was born in Lodi, California in 1872. He came to San Jacinto in the 1890's and worked at various jobs before entering the banking business. He rose from bank clerk to cashier and finally to manager. In 1900 he married Zelma Schultz and from this union came five children—Marjorie, Nell, and a number years later Alice, John and Lee.

Emerson set out to make Idyllwild one of the premier resorts in Southern California. The Inn was modernized and forty new tent cabins were built. The tennis courts were refurbished and a nine-hole golf course replaced the old golf links. Tennis and golf tournaments brought in top players from all over California.

To build his "dream community," Emerson donated land to the Boy Scouts, religious groups, and to Riverside County for a public campground. The Riverside Boy Scouts' Camp Emerson opened in 1921. Idyllwild Public Campground, part of it on land given by Emerson, opened the same year. Emerson gave 35 acres to the Southern California Council of Religious Education for a summer leadership training camp in 1924. The Long Beach Boy Scouts' Camp Tahquitz, on land sold by Emerson at a greatly reduced price, opened in 1925. Thirteen acres were donated for the Idyllwild Pines religious school in 1928.

The social center of Strawberry Valley remained the Idyllwild Inn. The Inn with its recreational facilities was a family endeavor, run by Claudius Lee Emerson and his wife Zelda, with strong support from the five Emerson children.

## *A Year to Celebrate*

**W**ith the opening of the Museum Store and the Harvest Home Tour, all happening in the month of October, a very important date came and went without a celebration! On October 18, 2003, our wonderful little Idyllwild Area Historical Museum opened its doors for the first time.

Our mission was hopefully to excite our mountain communities and visitors about the rich history of our area through informative and creative displays, changing exhibits and out-reach programs, and to share our area's historical past through what we have all come to refer to as "The Idyllwild Experience!"

To all the volunteers who worked so hard lovingly repairing, building, scrubbing and creating stunning displays; the Cabin Club Docents who make it possible to keep our doors open; the Garden Club for creating an inviting and colorful front yard; the Home Tour Crew who do such a marvelous job; the volunteers behind the scenes; and the Office Staff without whom all of the above would not have been able to do such a spectacular job – I celebrate your dedication, hard work and love of our town. I am so honored to be a part of this organization.

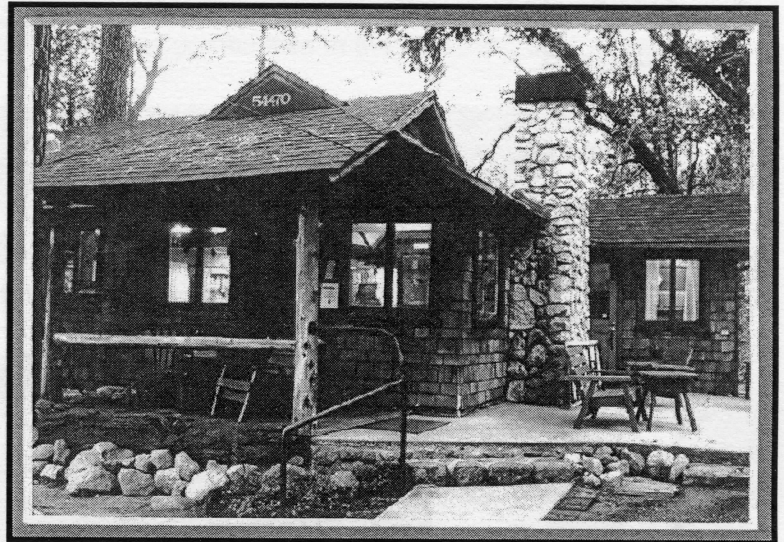
**Happy First Anniversary!**

**Thank You!**  
**Tenet Healthcare**

For the 3rd year in a row, the Tenet Healthcare Foundation has donated \$500 to the Idyllwild Area Historical Society as part of their Volunteer Involvement Program (VIP). This program makes donations to organizations for which Tenet employees have volunteered more than 30 hours during the previous year.

Tenet Healthcare operates Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs and owns JFK Memorial Hospital in Indio.

Desert Regional Medical Center has also generously donated the shoe covers used to protect the floors of the homes on our Harvest Home Tour.



## **Membership Update**

**W**elcome to our new members since the last newsletter. We look forward to seeing you at our *gatherings* and on our field trips. Your support is greatly appreciated!

### Individual Memberships:

Bob and Cindi McKinney, Lakewood  
Corrine and Ray Brown, Idyllwild  
The McLeod Family, Costa Mesa  
Jim Foley, Carlsbad  
Kannyn MacRae, Culver City  
Dean and Kathleen Abern, Eagle Rock  
Robert and Kathy Curtis, Sun City  
Bruce and Carolyn Ganoe, Fallbrook  
Sharon Kokaska, Long Beach  
Michelle and Rory Knepp, Mountain Center  
Mancy Condon, Lodi  
Paul Smith, Twentynine Palms  
Percy Schultz, Palm Springs  
Lana and Clark Hapeman, Riverside  
Will and Carol Summers, Laguna Niguel

Elizabeth and Herb Lightfoot, Westlake Village  
Kevin and Jodi Short, Anza  
Linda Otterbeck, Palm Springs

### Business Memberships:

Living Free  
Castles to Cabins  
Evenson Design Group  
Lodge at Pine Cove  
Fireside Inn  
Idyllwild Pharmacy  
Idyllwild Nature Center  
Coopersmith, The Family Business  
John Holt  
Kent Steele, Attorney  
Perez Landscaping

# Membership Information

## Join IAHS or Give a Gift Membership and Receive

- **Arti-facts** Newsletter
- Field Trips
- Gatherings
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Support of Historical Research, collection and documentation of photos and artifacts
- Support for the Idyllwild Area Museum
- 10% discount in Museum Shop

### Won't You Join Us? , , , , , Send Your Annual Membership to:

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Gift card from \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Individual                    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Family     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Contributing        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sponsor                      | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Patron    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Founder's Circle: |
| <b>Lifetime membership and plaque in museum</b>             |  |   |
| <b>Installment plan available - \$100/year for 10 years</b> |  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Business                      | <input type="checkbox"/> \$750 Corporate |   |

Send this membership form and check to:

**Idyllwild Area Historical Society, PO Box 3320, Idyllwild, CA 92549 • (951) 659-3569**

*- We appreciate your support -*

All dues and contributions are tax deductible.

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**Museum: 54470 North Circle Drive, Idyllwild, CA 92549**

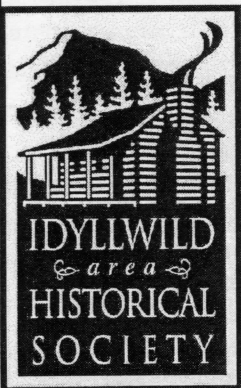
**Website: [www.IdyllwildAreaHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.IdyllwildAreaHistoricalSociety.org)**

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