

# ARTI-FACTS

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Idyllwild Area Historical Society

Preserving the History of Idyllwild and the surrounding  
communities in the San Jacinto Mountains

January 2008

## THE LONG BATTLE TO SAVE OUR FOREST

By Ben Killingsworth

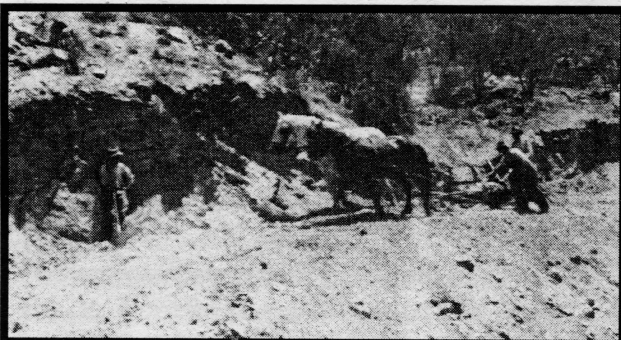
Everyone has their reasons for loving Idyllwild. Maybe it's the occasional snow flurry, a view of the mountain peaks, climbing one of our famous rocks, listening to the sound of a trickling brook; perhaps even browsing through our many fine shops and galleries, or enjoying a tasty meal in one of our restaurants. But I'll bet there's one thing we all enjoy the most: maybe wouldn't live here, or even visit, without their presence. I'm talking about the trees, of course.

To be sure, it's the trees that close the deal, that make this a special place; not unique, maybe, but compared to our immediate surroundings, very special. They, unlike any of our other attractions, satisfy all of our senses. We can see them, smell them, hear them, and touch them, if we choose to. One thing that makes them special is that they were here long before we were—long before any of us were even born.

But, as romantic as that sounds, I'm afraid it's a little misleading. Yes, some of the trees have been here for centuries, but most have not. Most, in fact, have only been around for a short time when compared to a tree's normal lifespan. Jeffrey pines usually live 400 to 500 years, Ponderosa pines may last 300 years, and Incense cedars can live to be 500 years old.

The battle began in 1875 when the Southern Pacific Railroad began laying tracks eastward from Los Angeles to Yuma through the San Geronio Pass. Since one of the key components of a railroad track is the wooden ties upon which the steel tracks are laid, there was a great need for a nearby supply of lumber, and Colonel Milton Sanders Hall leaped at the opportunity.

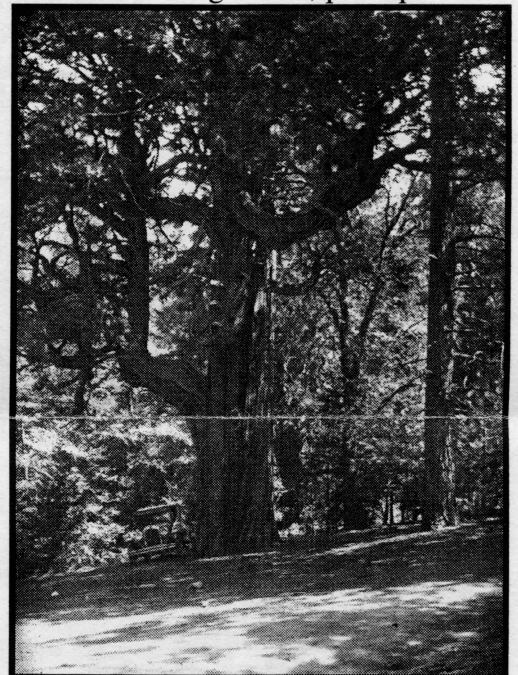
Already an independent grading contractor for the railroad, Hall secured another contract to provide 300,000 railroad ties,



Building roads in 1875 required hard work by both men and horses, shown here using a Fresno scraper. From "The San Jacintos" by Robinson and Risher. U.S. Forest Service Photo

along with wood to fire the steam-powered railroad engines. He was well aware of the old growth forest high in the San Jacinto Mountains, but getting the lumber from the mountains to the desert posed quite a problem.

First of all, there was no road, so Hall's first order of business was to build one. The finished product, which cost \$30,000 to build, was incredibly steep and dangerous, but it served the purpose. Hall also had a plan to recoup at least some of the cost by making it a toll road, charging 75 cents



This beautiful cedar tree, named the George Thomas Cedar, once stood proudly somewhere in Fern Valley. It was photographed by Avery Field during the 1920's. *The photo is now part of the Avery Field Exhibit in the Idyllwild Historical Society Museum.*

(Continued on page 3) See **BATTLE TO SAVE**

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If you have a special interest or area of expertise and would like to serve on one or more of the above committees, please let President Marcia Donnell or the committee chairman know. Your participation would be welcomed.

## BATTLE TO SAVE *(Continued from page 1)*

for each wagon and 10 cents for each horseback rider.

Hall erected his first sawmill, a portable affair, near Vista Grande, a spot about 15 miles NW of Idyllwild near what is now Highway 243, then soon moved it about 3 miles SE to Hall Canyon. There he was able to produce 100,000 board feet of lumber a day, plus shingles and lathes. Hall's long term goal was to supply lumber for all of Southern California.

He also established Hall City just south of Cabazon, which included a hotel, two saloons, a blacksmith shop, a Chinese laundry, a dance hall, and a boarding house for his employees. One can only imagine how thrilled he was, but within just over a year the economy took a nosedive; his bank refused to lend him anymore money, he couldn't pay his workers, and he closed down, losing everything.

But that didn't stop three Sacramento businessmen named Bartholomew, Gilbert and Moore. In May of 1876 they bought Hall's repossessed machinery, hauled it up to Hall Camp and started anew. For awhile they did well, but as soon as the Southern Pacific had finished building the rail bed to Yuma, there was no longer a market for ties. So, in February, 1879 they too, shut down.

Then came a man named Fuller, whose name is familiar to most of us because of the two places named after him: Fuller Ridge and Fuller Mill Creek. Curiously, no one seems to know his

An 1895 photo of the Fuller Mill site taken shortly after the mill closed for the last time. Thirty years later the site became the heart of IAHS Treasurer Bob Smith's family retreat.

*Photo provided by Bob Smith,  
Courtesy of the Banning Public Library*

first name, but sometime in 1878 or 1879 he took over an abandoned, small, water-powered sawmill he found near Hall Camp, then moved it over what is now called Fuller Ridge to what is now called Fuller Mill Creek. And although Fuller Mill was operated until sometime in 1895, there were several operators during the time of its existence.

At about the same time Hall built his road to the Banning-Beaumont area, another important road was built, this time by a man named Joseph Crawford, and he too, made it a toll road. His road, also incredibly steep and dangerous, made possible the shipment of lumber to the San Jacinto Valley, which in turn made it more feasible to cut down trees in

Strawberry Valley. Although the sawmills in this area turned out 3 to 4 thousand board feet of lumber on a daily basis, it was not enough to supply the building boom in San Jacinto Valley.

During the period 1879 to 1906, sometimes called the "Great Lumbering Era," a number of other lumbering companies and individuals played a role in cutting down most of the trees in the area in order to meet the demands of the fast developing communities below.

There was Amasa Saunders, after whom Saunders Meadow is named (even though he never owned that particular piece of property), and Anton Sherman, who was perhaps one of the most successful

loggers, especially after he convinced the San Diego

*(Continued on page 4) See BATTLE TO SAVE*



A 1917 photo of the William Tripp Sawmill using machinery from the Sherman Mill which had burned down. The mill operated from 1908—1918. *Photo from "The San Jacintos" by Robinson and Risher*

## BATTLE TO SAVE *(Continued from page 3)*

Board of Supervisors to cancel Joseph Crawford's 50-year franchise to operate his toll road and make it a public roadway. Sherman moved his sawmill at least seven times; then, in 1889, he joined George Hannahs to form the Strawberry Valley Lumber Company.

Hannahs, perhaps more than any other businessman of that period, played an important role in the development of Idyllwild. Among other things he founded a small community named Rayneta, established a post office, built and managed a hotel, and in 1890 opened a resort he and his wife, Sarah, named Camp Idylwilde.

Even Claudius Emerson, who, until he went broke during the late 1930's, did perhaps more than anyone before or since to develop Idyllwild, had a saw mill and lumber company.

Meanwhile, logging continued unabated, but Crawford's now toll-free road, along with the many new amenities the Hannahs and others had provided, made this an attractive place to visit, and hundreds of families began making the arduous trip by horse and buggy, eager to enjoy the clean air, the beautiful views, and, probably most of all, the trees. As a result, resistance to logging grew by leaps and bounds.

Of course, this was not a problem peculiar to the San Jacinto Mountains. Logging was becoming big business wherever great stands of large trees grew, and the federal government began receiving more and more complaints asking for more protection of the forests.

A number of government-sponsored acts took place in the late 1880's and early 1890's, but the first real sign of relief came in 1896 with the establishment of the National Forest Commission.

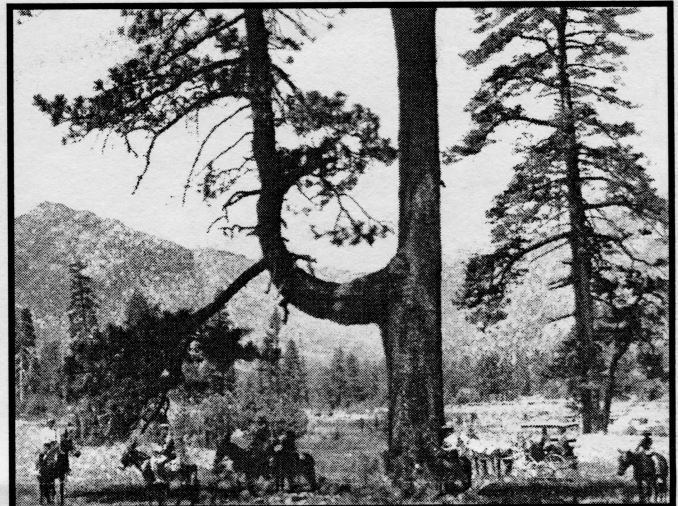
Consisting of a number of forestry experts, including John Muir for a short time, the commission was asked to lay out a plan for managing the nation's western timberlands.

Meanwhile, in 1893, President Harrison had designated 13 million acres of western forests, including 50,000 acres in Trabuco Canyon, as National Forest Reserves. Following that, in 1897, President Cleveland designated another 21 million acres as forest reserves, which included the 700,000-acre San Jacinto Forest Reserve. However, neither of these actions had any effect on the lumber industry.

There was, in fact, a Division of Forestry within the U.S. Department of Agriculture at that time, but it had only a small staff, and little money, and no forests under its supervision.

Not surprisingly, there was considerable opposition to any sort of control over the forests, much of it coming from the lumber industry along with cattle and sheep ranchers who depended on free grazing lands within the forests. On the other side of the argument, especially in California, were the farmers and other settlers who relied on a healthy forest to provide water runoff to feed the streams and rivers that provided water for their crops and general use. In addition to logging, fires, which burned unabated with no one responsible for fighting them, were of great concern for the same reason.

Then, in 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt combined the San Jacinto Reserve with the Trabuco Canyon Reserve to form the Cleveland National Forest, which, by then, covered 1,904,826 acres.



Horseback riders and buggies arrive in Strawberry Valley in 1898 after what must have been an extremely arduous trip. Photo from "The San Jacintos" by Robinson and Risher

*Continued on page 5) See BATTLE TO SAVE*

## BATTLE TO SAVE (Continued from page 4)

Finally, in 1925, President Calvin Coolidge created the San Bernardino National Forest, and, at the same time removed the San Jacinto component of the Cleveland National Forest and transferred it to the



Ernie Maxwell, founder and president of a local chapter of the Isaak Walton League, which played an important role in the fight to stop logging. From "The San Jacintos" by Robinson and Risher  
*Photo from the Town Crier*

newly established San Bernardino National Forest, which it remains a part of to this day.

Nevertheless, logging in the San Jacinto Mountains continued, and it wasn't until well into the early 1950's that it was finally brought to a close, thanks in large measure to the determined efforts of Idyllwild icon Ernie Maxwell, founder, publisher and editor of the Idyllwild

Town Crier. With the support of USFS District Ranger Don Bauer, Maxwell formed the San Jacinto Mountain Fish and Game Club in 1948. Needing more clout at the state and national levels, the club became a local chapter of the Isaak Walton League, a nationwide organization founded in 1922, dedicated to protecting nature and the outdoors. Today it has more than 40,000 members.

Given that most of the old growth trees had been cut down by logging companies, one of the Isaak Walton League's first undertakings was to reforest Strawberry Valley, mostly with Jeffrey pines, but perhaps their greatest contribution toward the preservation of our forest came just after WWII when they succeeded in stopping the USFS from "harvesting" our forest all over again.

It seems likely that the early lumber and logging companies, who at one time seemed destined to wipe out our forest once and for all, were only doing what others were doing all over our country. Nevertheless, there should be little doubt that

they played an important role in the settlement of our mountains and the surrounding area. Looking back, maybe we owe them a vote of thanks for doing what they did, but an even greater vote of thanks for those who stopped them.

*"Nature is always lovely, invincible, glad, whatever is done and suffered by her creatures. All scars she heals, whether in rocks or water or sky or hearts."*

*John Muir*

Much of the information for this article was found in the wonderful book, "The San Jacintos," by John Robinson and Bruce Risher. The book is sold at our museum and in several stores in Idyllwild.



Artist Dori Capitani and luck y drawing winner Françoise Frigola help each other hold up the beautiful metal sculpture created by Capitani in his studio near Mt Center. The sculpture was the prize in an Idyllwild Historical Society raffle to raise funds for the Museum.

# BEHIND THE SCENES

by Bob Smith

## A Record Year

On December 31 the 5,000<sup>th</sup> visitor of 2007 walked through the museum door. By day's end we had set a new annual record of 5,039 visitors. This is up 8% from the 4,685 we saw in 2007 and nearly 40% more than the 3,600 who visited in each of our first two full years of operation.

If your last visit to the museum came in its early days, you might want to drop by and check out its layout, exhibits, and Museum Shop offerings.

## Mark Your Calendar

On Wednesday, March 26, IAHS will co-sponsor with the Idyllwild Community Recreation Council a public lecture by our own San Jacinto Mountains historian, John Robinson. His topic will be "Historical Gateways to Southern California," also the subject of his latest book. Copies will be available for purchase and signing by the author.

The event is scheduled for 5:30 PM with a wine and cheese reception, the lecture following at 6:00 PM. (Location to be announced) The event is free to the public, with donations going to IAHS. For \$20 per person, you can enjoy dinner with John at the Rainbow Inn following the lecture. Make dinner reservations with Chris Singer, 659-4335.

## Ours, All Ours

On September 25, 2007, IAHS quietly passed another milestone. Back in 2002 we received a large grant from Riverside County to buy the museum property, but it came with a string attached. Until we demonstrated that we would use the property as a public museum for 5 years, it was held in trust by the county's Economic Development Agency. That probation expired in September, and we now hold clear title.

## An Early Alert

We will soon be changing our Website and E-mail addresses from the rather cumbersome "idyllwildareahistoricalandsociety.org" to the more streamlined "idyllwildhistory.org." But you won't be caught unawares: the old addresses will be active during a year-long transition period, and you'll be automatically transferred to the new website. For simplicity, once the new addresses are active, you'll want to revise your address book and bookmark list.

## Some Special Visitors

The IAHS Museum is becoming better known all the time. In recent months we've given several special tours by request of groups unable to visit during regular hours. Among them were members of the intertwined Emerson and Field families, who came especially to see our featured exhibits on Claudius Emerson's Idyllwild Inn era and on the photographic art of Avery Field.

Another group included Ann Japenga, author of a forthcoming article in *Palm Springs Life* on the Palms to Pines Highway and local geologist-anthropologist (and IAHS member) Harry Quinn, who were fortuitously joined by author John Robinson for a look at the complete Avery Field collection. With a professional photographer also among them, they concluded that Field's photos rank with the work of Ansel Adams.

The counseling staff of Pathfinders Ranch in Garner Valley came to get better acquainted with mountain history, which they hope to teach their campers.

## A Healthy Treasury

IAHS finished 2007 in solid financial health, thanks to the generosity of our members, who have voluntarily increased their average annual dues payments to nearly \$50. (See list of recent new and renewing members in this issue.) Combined income from dues and other unrestricted donations, Home Tour, raffle, Museum Shop sales, and bank interest totaled \$30,361. After expenses of \$23,319, this gave our general fund a net income of \$7,042 to apply to future projects. On top of this unrestricted income, during 2007 we received \$15,000 in grants and gifts for the building fund. It's worth noting that, as an all-volunteer organization, only about 12% of our total spending goes to fund-raising or administration. The rest supports our two-fold mission of preserving and sharing Idyllwild's historical heritage through our archives, museum, and newsletter.

## THE COMPANY WE KEEP

With this issue, we begin the quarterly listing of all our renewing members. We are deeply grateful for your continuing support. We also thank all of you who renewed your annual membership earlier in 2007. You are equally appreciated!

### Founders Circle (\$1,000)

Terry Casella & Harris Demetre,  
Palm Springs

### Sponsor (\$100)

Glen & Rosemary Ashcraft, Idyllwild  
Carolyn & Jack Batzler, Del Mar  
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Bob & Cindi McKinney, Lakewood  
Earl & Peggy Parker, Idyllwild  
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Nigel & Jan Priestley, Idyllwild  
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(Mike Ahern & Jim Newcomb)  
Rita Rothman, Studio City  
Roy & Wendy Stephens, Anaheim  
Ron & Adele Voell, Idyllwild  
Doug & Anne Walker, Palm Desert

### Contributor (\$35)

Maurice & Sandra Black, Idyllwild  
Diann Coate, Idyllwild  
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Scott Solomon & Melinda Gardner,  
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### Individual (\$15)

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Susan Gonzalez, Mountain Center  
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Barbara Jones, Idyllwild  
Kathleen Kieferdorf, El Cajon  
Sharon Kokaska, Long Beach  
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Trish Tuley, Idyllwild

## Welcome New Members

### Sponsor (\$100)

Emanuel & Linda Rider, Palm Desert

### Business (\$35)

Willow Creek Gallery, Idyllwild  
(Steve Liebzeit)

Be sure to visit our wonderful museum, located at  
54470 North Circle Drive  
Our doors are open: May 31- September 3: Thurs through Sunday  
September 4 - May 25: Saturday and Sunday  
All 3 day Holiday weekends and July 4th  
Hours: 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM  
Telephone: (951) 659 2717  
Website: [www.Idyllwildareahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.Idyllwildareahistoricalsociety.org)

Admission is free

Donations are welcome

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

Please select one of the following categories:

Individual \$15     Family \$25     Contributing \$35     Business/Organization \$35  
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 Founder's Circle \$1,000 (one-time or cumulative) (Lifetime, with name on museum plaque)

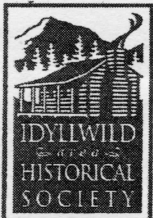
If this membership is a gift, please list donor's name and address:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to IAHS and mail with this application to  
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All dues and contributions are tax deductible.

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