

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

SUMMER 2020

IDYLLWILD'S OWN THIRTY-YEARS WAR

By Robert B. Smith

Wildfires, devastating floods, pandemic virus—lately Idyllwild's welfare has been undermined by everything but a major earthquake. Yet in the eyes of many earlier Hill dwellers, an even greater threat once loomed: liquor sales! From 1938 to 1968 this issue haunted village development.

Idyllwild's earliest reported liquor license, awarded in 1908 to the Idyllwild Inn, could not survive the resort's sale to Claudius Lee Emerson's syndicate in 1917. The devout and abstemious Emerson would never think of allowing alcohol sales on his property, which included most of the land from today's Fern Valley Corners to Idyllwild Arts. And until 1937 his corporation, Idyllwild Inc., ran the growing village essentially as a company town. Folks attracted to buying his building lots naturally tended to be like-minded, as were the sponsors of religious summer camps Emerson had recruited.

The 1933 repeal of Prohibition, however, found Emerson's control waning. Devastated by the 1929 stock market crash, Idyllwild Inc. was selling property merely to stay afloat. Newcomers John and Mary Postle had just bought a choice tract near the top of South Circle Drive, where they were building what would grow into the Fern Valley Lodge. Despite opposition from the County Board of Supervisors, but apparently below Emerson's radar, Postle in 1934 obtained a liquor license for his café.

When that license came up for renewal in 1938, however, the landscape had changed. Idyllwild Inc. was bankrupt; the Emerson family was moving off the Hill; and the Inn had been leased to Ruth Curry Burns. She was an experienced resort owner from an iconic California family, but her 10-year-old Camp



Fern Valley Lodge c 1940
PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

Baldy had recently been closed down by a flood.

Curry's first project was remodeling to create the Wagon Wheel cocktail lounge. But when she applied to the State Board of Equalization for a license, opponents were ready for a fight. The first volley was a petition to outlaw all liquor sales within 17 miles of Idyllwild. (This would also rescind the license of Tahquitz Lodge, the resort just down the mountain at Keen Camp that had long been Emerson's main competition.) Then sponsors of Idyllwild's youth camps solicited petitions from church groups throughout Southern California.

At the Equalization Board hearing the camps' legal counsel argued that liquor sales would cause Idyllwild property values to drop; noisy crowds would disturb the mountain peace; automobile accidents on winding highways would multiply; but mainly their own summer campers would be exposed to moral hazards. Charles Culver of Tahquitz Pines summed up their plea: "Camp Baldy was destroyed by an act of God; don't let Idyllwild be destroyed by an act of man."

Curry claimed letters of support from 276 local property owners and assured the board that she

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IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Directors: Nancy Borchers, Suzi Bowman
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Board meetings are open to the membership
and are held in the office on the
2nd Friday of each month at 4 p.m.

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Charlotte Groty, IAHS President

Hello to all of our members,

I sincerely hope all of you are safe and well during these troubling times. The last couple of years have been very trying for our Historical Society as well as our community in Idyllwild. We have weathered the Cranston Fire, the heavy rains on Valentine's Day which severely damaged our roads, the long road closures and repairs, the top of a pine tree piercing through the roof of the museum, and now the continuing pandemic. We made it through these events, and we will continue to persevere.

Our museum is closed and will remain so until it is safe to reopen. Last year we had one of our most successful Ice Cream Socials and most importantly, a fabulous turnout for our Home Tour. I am very sad to say that these two events, so looked forward to, must be postponed until next year. Please put on your calendars that our **20th Annual Home Tour will be on Saturday, September 16, 2021.**

The museum has a dedicated group of board members who are maintaining our museum. We give a very big thank you to Carolyn and Richard Levitski, who are taking such good care of the museum and grounds. Also thanks to Marlene Pierce, who takes care of the day to day items as they occur.

The Historical Society is blessed to have so many interested members. We thank you for all of your support in your memberships and your donations. Because the museum has been closed since March and will be for the foreseeable future, we look forward to your continued support, and especially to the time when we can get together at the museum. ✍

Stay safe,
Charlotte Groty, President

WAR

(continued from page 1)

runs “a high-class operation, not a honky-tonk.” At an emergency meeting in Idyllwild led by Hugo Guenther of Murrieta Hot Springs, thirty members of a regional resort operators association voiced their support of Burns. (The Guenthers were long-time Idyllwild property owners.)

During a parallel hearing for Postle’s renewal, the Tahquitz Conference Association, representing a large network of Southern California churches, upped the ante, seeking a blanket ban on liquor sales throughout Strawberry Valley. They were countered by Hill property owners who argued that the Tahquitz group represented only 111 of Idyllwild’s several thousand acres, operated for only two weeks a year, and was unrepresentative of the local population. The Board of Equalization agreed, and Postle’s license was renewed.

Then, surprisingly, the board denied Idyllwild Inn its license. Curry bitterly claimed that her opposition consisted largely of people living “hundreds” of miles from Idyllwild, many of them never having heard of the place. She saw the hand of Gov. Frank Merriam, desperately bidding for the church vote in a doomed reelection campaign. And the Board of Equalization did have an established reputation for being politically malleable, if not corrupt, so much so that eventually the Legislature would strip it of its power to issue liquor licenses. Three months later Curry cancelled her lease and moved back off the Hill.

Peace descended on Idyllwild through World War II, but postwar population growth continued to change the complexion of the village. On the one hand, during the 1940s Idyllwild had started sprouting organized churches, which provided ready-made local allies for the summer camps. On the other hand,



Idyllwild Mountain Inn

PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

small business interests were increasingly vocal in the atypically broad-based membership of the Chamber of Commerce.

The 1946 opening of the new Idyllwild Mountain Inn, which replaced the fire-razed old Idyllwild Inn, set the stage for renewed conflict. When the Chamber’s board of directors in 1949 endorsed the Inn’s successful bid for a license, it was over the strenuous objection of one of its leaders, Dr. Marion Null. Within a year the Idyllwild Arts Foundation bought the inn, and its founder Max Krone joined the other summer camp leaders in cultivating Idyllwild’s growing reputation as the only alcohol-free resort in California.

A 1954 license application by the owners of Rock Hill Lodge on Marion View Drive was easily repulsed, given its location in a residential neighborhood. A more serious call to arms went out in 1956, when yet another Idyllwild Mountain Inn owner, Martin Sousa, applied to open a cocktail lounge, The Pine Room. This was soon followed by Village Market owners Leigh and Maggie Dutton seeking to sell beer and wine in their Idyllwild Gourmet shop across the highway.

It was time to organize. Dr. Null joined fellow Chamber leader Hunter McConnell and David Hunt, Sr. of Camp Maranatha to create the “Idyllwild Protective League.” Its stated mission was to “conserve the natural resources and preserve the natural beauty and charm of the Idyllwild area” and “protect this area from degrading influences, and to make it a center of education, culture, and spiritual enlightenment.”

For three years the battle raged, the two sides sparring before County Supervisors, the state

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Curry's Idyllwild Inn c 1938 by EB Gray

PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

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We are grateful for the support of our members during these difficult times.

Thank You!

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If a gift membership, please enter your name and address:

Name _____ Address _____

WAR

(continued from page 3)

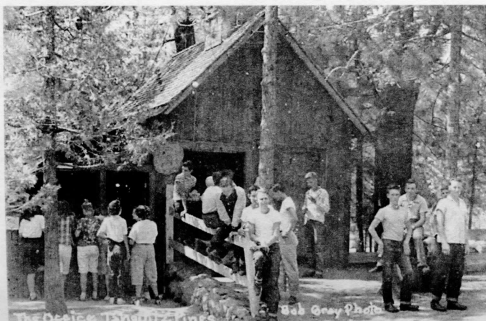
Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, its appeals board, and the courts, with decisions bouncing back and forth like a badminton shuttlecock. Duttons managed to keep their Gourmet Shop license, and Sousa's Pine Room was open for several months in 1959 before finally being shut down. With that he sold out to a local corporation headed by Dutton.

One highlight of the long battle was the appearance of a hundred or so pro-license citizens at a routine League meeting, asking questions and spreading an inflammatory rumor that Sousa planned to sell the inn to an African-American church. A week later some 250 locals, mostly businessmen, met to organize the

"Idyllwild Association" supporting Sousa in his appeals. The volatility left both the Chamber of Commerce board and the County Board of Supervisors declining to take a stand.

Claiming not to be against alcohol, just its public sale in Idyllwild, the Idyllwild Protective League pressed on, but its crusade faltered in 1961, as a new player entered the arena: Rudi and Elfriede Kloeble were creating their Schwarzwaldhaus restaurant at Fern Valley Corners, and authenticity dictated beer on the menu. Simultaneously Leigh Dutton sought both to reopen the Mountain Inn's cocktail lounge and to expand his Gourmet business to general liquor sales. After 23 days of hearings stretching to summer 1962, the control board announced a landmark decision: all three licenses were approved.

The handwriting was on the wall for the Protective League, its influence fading amid growing complaints about wasting taxpayers' money, as public agencies were forced to deal with its endless appeals. Finally, in 1962 League leaders listened to their lawyer and became convinced that continued appeals would be



Tahquitz Pines campers
PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES



Schwarzwaldhaus
PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES



Sportland

PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

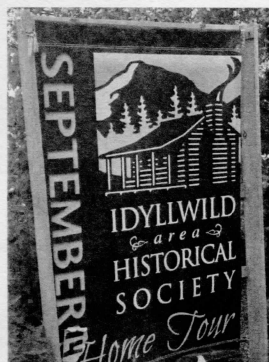
fruitless. Their parting message seemed to be, "You'll be sorry."

The League did enjoy a few more successes, such as stifling a tavern in place of the still-abandoned gas station at South Circle and Lodge and a cocktail lounge at a soon-to-fail golf club on Dutch Flat. In 1963 they joined with the Seventh Day Adventist Church and several wilderness preservation groups to protest a liquor license at the Mountain Station of the new Palm Springs Tramway, likely a quid pro quo for the Adventists' strong support in earlier battles. But that proposal got swallowed up in state parks politics and died in the State Senate.

The Protective League's last stand came in 1964, fighting a transfer of the Idyllwild Mountain Inn's license to Sportland, the popular recreation center on the future Fort site. Yet another ownership turnover had put that license up for grabs, and Sportland owners Jane and Avery Fisher proposed to take it for Sportland. They successfully finessed the obvious conflict between teenagers and alcohol by announcing that for economic reasons they already were planning to shut down their outdoor facilities (plunge, minigolf, skating rink). Their motivation was apparently to make the property more attractive to a buyer, as they quickly sold it. The new buyer renamed it Carriage Inn and, in the eyes of former patrons, literally "paved paradise, put up a parking lot."

Soundly defeated once again, the Idyllwild Protective League seemed to run out of steam. Like other of history's losers, its Board of Directors declared victory in 1968 and voted to disband. In a sense one might agree that their influence had prodded postwar Idyllwild to evolve into a decent place that could handle its liquor. Or maybe it had always been such. You can be the judge of that. ✍️

The Annual Home Tour 2020 Has Been Cancelled...



NEXT ANNUAL
HOME TOUR
SEPTEMBER 16,
2021

Mark your calendars
and join us then.



The 2020 Home Tour has been cancelled to ensure the safety of home owners, volunteers, and guests. The popular annual Home Tour is always well attended with close to 500 guests and a multitude of volunteer docents. It is our single yearly fund raiser and proceeds from the event help fund the museum and Society programs throughout the year.

We are looking forward to a fabulous Home Tour in 2021, when volunteers and visitors can safely enjoy the beautiful and historic mountain homes, and of course, the delightful refreshments provided by our Hospitality Team of Larry and Linda Turner, and the Oglesbys.

Nanci Killingsworth, who magically finds the most interesting homes each year, already has her eye on some delightful homes for the 2021 tour.

Please join us on September 16, 2021. ✍

IAHS Ice Cream Social, featuring Root Beer Floats

By Marlene Pierce, IAHS Vice President

For many years, IAHS has held a super Ice Cream Social, free to our Idyllwild area community, on the Saturday of Labor Day Weekend. The host servers from our board have included current President Charlotte Groty, her husband George, as well as Linda and Larry Turner, and Carolyn and Richard Levitski. Each year we serve up luscious ice cream sundaes with all the toppings, along with a crowd favorite, Root Beer Floats.

According to his biography, Charles Elmer Hires of Philadelphia developed a recipe of root beer tea. He worked up a formula carbonating the tea and introduced his root beer at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Others claimed they invented root beer floats, including Fred Sanders, Philip Mohr, George Gray, Robert Green and Frank J. Wisner. One of Green's employees absent-mindedly mixed vanilla ice cream with soda and made soda fountain

history. Frank Wisner of Colorado's Cripple Creek Brewing created a root beer float in 1893 when he noticed that the snowy mountain peaks looked similar to ice cream floating in soda.

Root beer floats are also known as a "Black Cow," or "Brown Cow." In Australia and New Zealand, they are known as "Spider," due to the web like foam on top. Ice cream floats can be made with the soda flavor of your choice. For instance made with Coca Cola or Pepsi or Vernors Ginger Ale, (known as a Boston Cooler in Detroit), or Helado Flotante in Mexico, made with cola and lemon sherbet. However, our crowd favorite remains the classic "Root Beer Float."

Due to Covid-19 our IAHS events have been postponed until 2021. We hope to see you next year, when we hope our events will return, including the yummy Ice Cream Social featuring refreshing Root Beer Floats. ✍

IAHS Happenings

The August annual meeting, the September Ice Cream Social, and the 2020 Home Tour have been cancelled for the safety of members and guests. We are looking forward to 2021 when we can safely resume these events. While the museum remains closed, the work of acquisitioning, cataloging and safely storing the many donated artifacts continues in the Archival Building. ✍

4th of July Parade

Although the 2020 4th of July Parade was cancelled, Hedy and Jimmie Tyson, who have provided the vintage cars for past parades, have plans to bring a vintage car pulling a teardrop trailer for the 2021 parade. There will even be an old style aluminum canoe atop the car. ✍

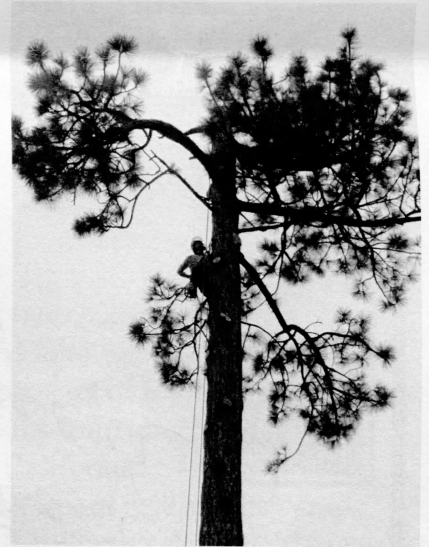
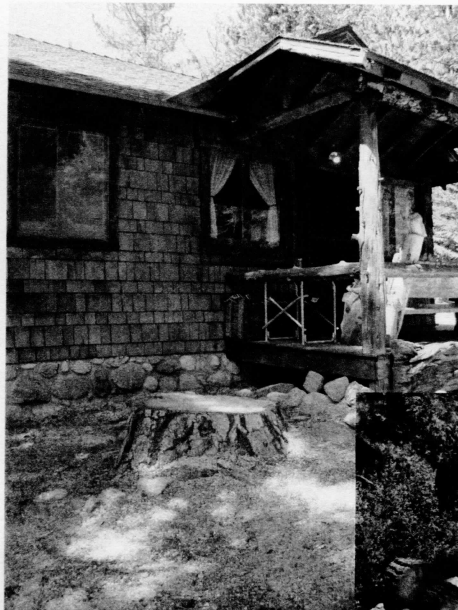
Docent Coordinator

When the museum reopens, and docents are again needed, a new Docent Coordinator will be calling. Diann Coate, a board member, and long time volunteer in many Idyllwild activities, will be recruiting and scheduling volunteers to be docents at the museum. If you would like to be a docent when normal life resumes, please contact Diann at 659 4333. Docenting involves only three hours once a month and in-service is provided.

Barbara Jones, who was our excellent and dedicated Docent Coordinator for well over 10 years, is taking a well deserved break. Barbara served countless hours and always filled in when a docent was unavailable. She often drove up the hill from the desert to open or close the museum. She has our gratitude for all of the many hours spent on behalf of IAHS. ✍

TREE REMOVAL

The closure of the museum afforded an opportunity to remove the unkind tree that put a large hole in the roof of the museum and caused roof and interior support timber damage. Two other large pines that were pressing hard against the back wall of the office were also removed. Work was carefully done with no damage to the museum or office by Pacific Slope Tree Service at a cost of \$3,400. ✍



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www.idyllwildhistory.org

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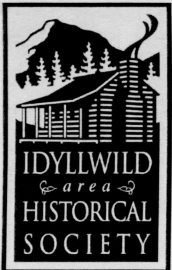
All events for 2020 are cancelled and the museum is closed to visitors.

2020 Home Tour is cancelled

Join us in 2021 for the next fabulous Home Tour

Your continued support keeps us going. Thank you.

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