

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 2021

MA KETTLE AT HOME IN FERN VALLEY

By John Blodgett

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It was a scene fit for a comedy film. An installment of "Ma and Pa Kettle," perhaps.

Marjorie Main, who famously portrayed Ma Kettle in nine movies from 1949 to 1957, had built a part-time residence in Fern Valley in the late 1950s.

In the fall of 1968, she periodically had been calling Pargas to complain that her gas stove would not shut off.

The propane company finally dispatched appliance repairman Pat Boss to her home on Dickinson Road to see what the problem was.

After some chitchat, Boss got down on his hands and knees in front of Main's kitchen stove and peered underneath. He found the pilot light standing by for duty, its flickering flame reflecting into the oven.

"Miss Main, Marjorie if I may, do me a favor," Boss said he said. "Turn on your oven."

"It's on."

"No, turn the knob."

Main turned the knob, causing blue flames to jump up with a whoosh.

"Now turn it off."

Main turned the knob again, extinguishing the flames.

"Now come look."



Reluctantly Main got down on her hands and knees and watched as Boss explained what a pilot light is and demonstrated how it works. "That's all it is?" Main said. "Well, OK. I guess I'm wrong."

"She called the company and apologized about being such a pain," said Boss, now of the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council. "And we laughed about it."

Main was synonymous with humor. In her article "Good for a Lot of Laughs," Sylvia C. Henricks suggested that Main is best remembered "for her raspy-voiced Ma Kettle, with her tumbledown hairdo, flock of children and indolent husband" (played by Percy Kilbride).

Yet there was more to Main's career. Over the course of 85 films she became a movie star whose work "critics almost always praised" and "saved many a bad picture and made the good ones better," wrote Henricks.

Still, the "Ma and Pa Kettle" series exposed Main to her broadest audience, beginning in 1947. In a movie based on a novel by Betty MacDonald, two newlyweds buy a chicken farm in the Pacific Northwest. Their neighbors are the Kettles, a poor farming family with thirteen children watched over by the crazy Ma Kettle and the lazy Pa Kettle.

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2021 HOME TOUR CANCELLED

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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.

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Arti-Facts

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A big hello to all of our members,

Our beautiful museum has finally reopened. We want to thank you, our members, for your continued support during this closure. Your memberships and donations made a huge difference while the museum was closed. We look forward to seeing you again at the museum and upcoming events.

The museum is presently open on a reduced schedule on Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. until further notice. This is because of the continuing pandemic and the shortage of docents. Our **Ice Cream Social** is back, and will be held on **Saturday, September 4, 2021**. We serve the best root beer floats and scrumptious sundaes with all the trimmings, and they are free. It's our way of saying thank you to the community. Our anxiously awaited **Home Tour** will be back next year on **Saturday, September 17th, 2022**. Even though its more than a year away, put the date on your calendar. We know that it will be fabulous and worth waiting for.

During the last few months, we have had several valued board members and docents who have left the hill. A heartfelt thank you goes to David Martin and Barbara Jones for all of their tireless work on the board of directors and also for being docents for the museum. Our valued membership person, Darlene Beebe, has moved to Menifee, and we will miss her. Also, thank you to Dan and Sharla Carpenter for their many years as docents for the museum and the Home Tour.

If you would like to learn more about the history of Idyllwild and the San Jacintos, plus have a wonderful day in the museum, we need you! If you are interested in becoming a docent, please come into the museum or call us.

I would now like to welcome and introduce two new board members, Nancy Killingsworth and Ed Warner. Nancy has been part of the museum volunteers for many years. She chaired the home tour and continues to be an integral part of the home tour today. Ed has been a docent for both the museum and home tour. We are very excited about Nancy and Ed joining the Idyllwild Area Historical Society's family of volunteers.

It seemed like such a long time before we could reopen the museum, but we are open now, and look forward to your visits.

Sincerely,
Charlotte Groty
IAHS President.

MA KETTLE...

(continued from page 1)

The movie's success — it grossed \$5.5 million and resulted in Main's only Academy Award nomination — convinced Universal to make a series out of it, releasing one movie a year starting in 1949. Kilbride left after seven movies, Main stayed on for two more, and after all was said and done the series had grossed approximately \$35 million.

The movies made Main a fixture in Idyllwild even before she built a house in Fern Valley. Various Town Criers from 1949 through the early 1950s advertised her movies — including the original "Ma and Pa Kettle" and "Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki" — whenever they screened at the Rustic Theatre.

"Ma Kettle's coming round the mountain," reported the Town Crier of June 29, 1956. "Yes sir, Bob O'Donnell sold Marjorie Main a lot on Dickinson Rd. in Fern Valley. If you hear a war whoop, don't be frightened!" The newspaper reported the following June that Main had taken out an \$8,000 permit to build a home on the property.

Main also owned homes in Los Angeles and Palm Springs.

One of Main's co-stars paid Idyllwild a visit on March 29-30, 1958. Her name was Susan, and she was a black bear that appeared in "The Kettles on Old McDonald's Farm"

of 1957, the final movie in the series. Susan was part of Clark's Bears, a troupe that would entertain during Idyllwild's Bear Festival, according to the Town Crier of March 14, 1958.

Given the name Mary Tomlinson at birth in 1890, Main adopted her widely known stage name when she started touring the Chautauqua circuit in 1913. Henricks wrote that Tomlinson chose Marjorie Main because it was "a name easy to remember," yet that didn't always prove true for Idyllwild postal employees.



Just ask Marge Muir.

"She'd get my mail, I'd get hers, because Main and Muir looked alike," Muir said. The mix-up happened about four or five times, she said.

Muir remembers seeing Main drive around town

in her blue Ford Thunderbird, an occurrence reported in the "Notes of Interest" section of the Town Crier of June 27, 1958. Muir said Main always wore a bandana tied around her hair and spoke with a twang, just like in her movies.

"It wasn't a put on at all," Muir said.

When Muir waited

tables at the Alpine Pantry in the early 1970s, she'd often see Main come in for breakfast and for a chat with owner Kitty Thomas.

"(Main) would walk in, sit down at the deuce in front and order eggs," Muir said. "She was kind of loud."

Muir said after Main finished eating she'd toss leftover butter and sugar packets into her purse.

"Sometimes she'd pay, sometimes she'd forget," Muir said. "Kitty didn't care." ↴



THE COMPANY WE KEEP

New and renewing members January 1 to June 30, 2021

We welcome new members and thank renewing members for their continuing support.

Memberships have kept the Society afloat during the pandemic closure and the cancellation of our Home Tour fundraisers.

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Jimmie and Hedy Tyson Riverside

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Name(s): _____ Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Individual (\$15) Contributor (\$35) Benefactor (\$250) Business (\$25)
 Family (\$25) Sponsor (\$100) Patron (\$500) Corporate (\$750)

(Please make your tax-deductible dues check to IAHS and mail to PO Box 3320, Idyllwild, CA 92549)

If gift membership, please enter name and address:

Name(s): _____ Address: _____

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

Good-bye Old Friend

In spite of our determination to preserve and share the history of Idyllwild, an important part of the museum's history has disappeared. The ferocious winter winds destroyed the much loved sign that announced the museum to visitors. The sign had stood proudly since the opening of the museum, and had been refurbished by Richard Levitski with hand cut letters. Sadly, the supports could not withstand the winds, and this time it could not be salvaged. Watch for a new sign that the board will soon be choosing.



Photo by Ed Warner

SCE Cuts Venerable Pine

Southern California Edison cut the huge, ancient pine in their right-of-way, and left a surprisingly large and ugly stump at the street entrance to the museum. Our other sign hung from that tree, and may have been damaged by a falling limb as they cut.



Fortunately, new board member, Ed Warner, was able to disassemble the sign and is restoring it to hang again out front on a new post set by Richard Levitski and Larry Robertson. Post donated by Jay Johnson.



Photo by Jayne Hamil

A Surprise is Coming

From the old ugly stump left by Edison contractors, through the generosity of board member Dana Albano, a surprise will emerge.

Be sure to watch for the transformation.

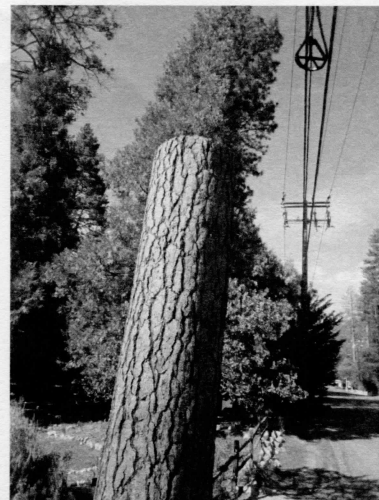


Photo by Ed Warner

You Can Help DOCENTS WANTED!

Looking to learn more about the Idyllwild Area?

Hoping to meet people?

Do you love Idyllwild and want to preserve and share its History?

Then come join us at the **IDYLLWILD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY** and become a **DOCENT** at our Award-Winning Museum.

Our Board Members will train you--it's an easy learning curve and usually involves a 3 hour shift once a month at our vintage cabin museum on North Circle Drive.

You'll be amazed at the number of people from near and far who make the journey up the hill to visit our unique mountain; as well as all the locals who drop in. Plus we have Special Events, such as our September 2021 Ice Cream Social & Yard Sale, our upcoming 2022 Home Tour, and our annual Docents Luncheon.

If interested, contact our IAHS President, Charlotte Groty at:

Phone: (951) 201-1400

Email: ggroty@earthlink.net

We look forward to having you join us.

SIGN UP FOR AMAZON SMILE--HELP AT NO COST

As you know, like most museums, the Idyllwild Area Historical Society Museum has been closed an entire year. We were unable to host our biggest fundraiser, the 2020 Home Tour, and we've made the decision to err on the side of caution and have cancelled plans for the 2021 Home Tour as well. Our expenses, however, for maintaining the museum, archive, and office have continued.

Our IAHS volunteer board has been brainstorming about creative ways to assist IAHS. We'd like to suggest to our Idyllwild area friends, supporters and dedicated IAHS members that you consider joining the Amazon Smile program. If you sign up with Amazon Smile and select Idyllwild Area Historical Society as your charitable organization, every time you order through the Amazon Smile website, a portion of your purchase price will be donated to IAHS. You will find the same exact Amazon you know and love, with the added bonus of helping our organization at no extra cost.

Here's How:

1. Visit [smile.Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/smile) and sign in with your credentials
2. Choose Idyllwild Area Historical Society to receive donations
3. Start shopping

Thank you for considering supporting IAHS. We look forward to seeing you now that the museum is open, and of course at the 2022 Home Tour.

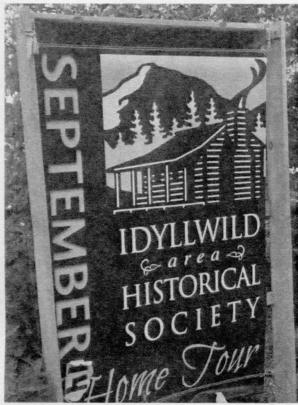
The Annual Home Tour 2022

Mark Your Calendars

**NEXT
ANNUAL HOME
TOUR
SEPTEMBER 17,
2022**

Mark your calendars and
join us then.

With great regret, we have cancelled the Home Tour for 2021. Until the pandemic is well behind us, we could not risk the health and safety of the homeowners, volunteer docents, or our visitors. We are looking forward to resuming this popular event which showcases some of the historic and interesting homes on the mountain in 2022, on September 17. Please join us then.



IAHS Ice Cream Social Returns

September 4, 2021

Featuring Root Beer Floats and delicious Sundaes

Come share in the fun with members of the Idyllwild community at the 2021 Ice Cream Social to be held in the beautiful garden area at the museum. Visit with your neighbors while enjoying a cool refreshment.

Best of all, it's our treat!



Select Yard Sale

Records, puzzles and CDs will be for sale during the Ice Cream Social on September 4. All proceeds benefit the museum.



A yard sale fundraiser at the museum in June was very successful.

Museum Hours

10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday

And Monday Holidays

Also daily between Christmas and New Year

**The museum is now open for visitors:
Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

Admission Free

54470 North Circle Drive

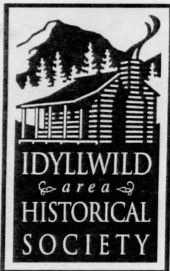
Donations Welcome

2021 Home Tour is cancelled

Join us in 2022 for the next fabulous Home Tour

Your continued support keeps us going. Thank you.

P O Box 3320
Idyllwild, CA 92549



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