

ARTI-FACTS

The Newsletter of the Idyllwild Area Historical Society

Volume VI Issue 1

Winter 2006

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

THREE THOUSAND YEARS AND COUNTING

By Ben Killingsworth

No accounting of the history of Idyllwild would be complete without telling the story of the first people who ever inhabited the area – the Cahuilla Indians.

It is generally agreed that there were aboriginal people living in parts of what is now Southern California, about 10,000 years ago, or even earlier, but most archaeologists believe the Cahuilla Indians first came to the mountains we now call home, and to the surrounding deserts in and around Palm Springs, about 3,000 years ago. They were a peace loving and happy tribe, once believed by some to be 10,000 strong. Archaeologists believe they probably came to the area from what is now Arizona and part of Utah and from what is referred to as the "Great Basin," a large desert situated between the Sierra Nevadas and the Rocky Mountains.

It's interesting to note that at that time the climate was "moist and wet" until about 6,000 years ago when it began to alternate between "cool and wet", and "warm and dry." Then, around 1500 to 3000 years ago, it settled into the weather we see today. Sounds like a little global warming might have been going on even way back then.

The Cahuillas spent much of their time in the desert around Palm Springs where it was warm and pleasant during the winter and fall months.

They established dozens of permanent villages near the foothills beside streams that flowed from the mountains. They were also very active in what are now Anza Valley, Indio and the Salton Sea. All in all, they covered about 2400 square miles.

During the warmer months they ventured into the high forests to hunt game, and to catch fish in Strawberry Creek, as evidenced by the arrowheads found in the forest and remnants of fish traps found in the creek.

Since traveling from their villages in the desert and foothills to the higher elevations required considerable time and effort, they built semi-permanent campsites in the area, which they occupied when weather permitted.

The shelters they constructed in the permanent villages consisted of a small area of hollowed out earth, surrounded by a wall of boulders and covered with brush. Later on they were to build homes with four walls arranged in a square, plastered with mud and covered with a thatched roof. (Cont. on page 2)



Don't miss this –

Sunday Afternoon Serenade

March 19, 2006 2 - 3 pm At the Rustic Theatre, 54290 N Circle Drive

General Admission \$20 Students \$10 - Featuring Selections from popular musical theatre favorites such as Oklahoma and South Pacific

Tickets available by calling the Idyllwild Historical Society Museum at (951) 659 2717, or at the Museum on Sat and Sun, 11 am - 4 pm

All proceeds will go to the Historical Society and Idyllwild Arts

(Cahuillas – Cont. from page 1)

Villages also included a large structure, up to fifty feet in diameter, used for ceremonial purposes.

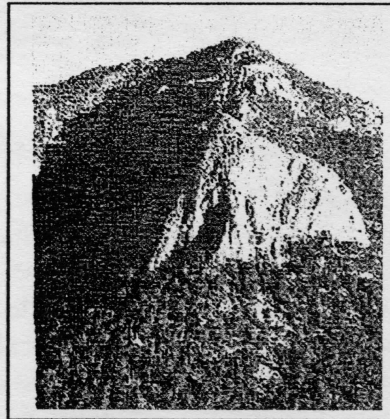
Like other North American Indians, they were primarily hunters and gatherers. The women gathered seeds, mesquite beans, pinion, acorns, cactus buds and chia, and processed them into food for their families. A number of large rock surfaces covered with grinding holes where the women ground the seeds, along with their grinding tools, have been found near Idyllwild and the surrounding area. They also made baskets and pottery, making use of a skill developed over centuries.

The men used spears, at first, then began using bows and arrows, possibly when game became less plentiful when the climate became warmer, to hunt deer, antelope and Bighorn Sheep. They also set traps and threw sticks and clubs to kill rabbits and other smaller animals.

Later on the tribe began growing crops near streams, which were used for irrigation.

The location of some of the trails they used to travel to and from the desert into and through the mountains bear a remarkable resemblance to our present day highways in terms of the routes they followed. One ran parallel to what is now highway 79 from Beaumont, then followed along the present day path of highway 74 over the mountain and down into Palm Desert. One can only imagine that early white settlers built their wagon trails along the same routes, which were later followed by modern day highway engineers.

The Cahuillas, like most Indian tribes, led very spiritual



lives and often designated certain spots, such as mountaintops. For example, they believed that Tahquitz, a supernatural being who controlled thunder and lightning, earthquakes, and meteors, used what we now call Tahquitz Peak, San Jacinto Peak, and Lily Rock and the surrounding area, as his dwelling place when he came to

visit the earth. According to legend Tahquitz once kidnapped a boy who ventured too close and told the animals to kill him, but they refused to do so. Tahquitz then decided to release the boy, but only on one condition; that he not tell anyone what happened for four or five days. The boy complied, and it was only on the sixth day after Tahquitz set him free that he told anyone of his experience. Unfortunately, Tahquitz had meant to say four or five years, and the boy was found dead the next day.

Another story concerned a beautiful young Indian maiden, who Tahquitz took a liking to. He kidnapped her and took her to his dwelling place

(Cont. on next page)

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(Cont. from previous page)

on Tahquitz Peak where he forced other captives to wait on her, hand and foot.

But after several years the girl convinced Tahquitz to release her, and he agreed, on one condition; that she not tell anyone where she had been until three years had passed. The girl was so excited to be reunited with her family she forgot about Tahquitz's warning, and immediately told what had happened to her. She too, was found dead the next day. Such was the legendary power of Tahquitz, and who knows – he could still be up there.

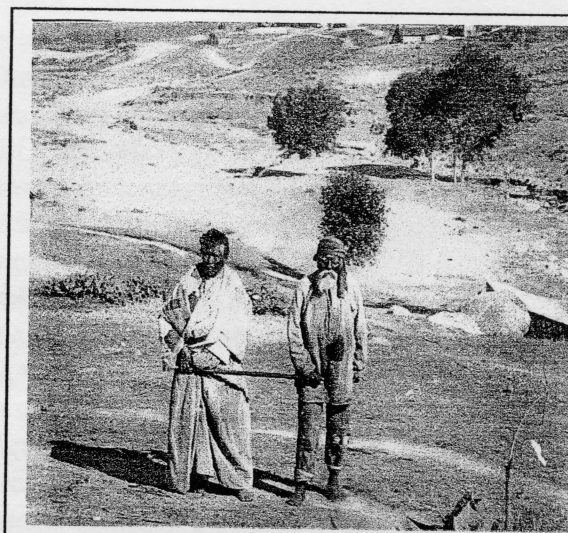
Fortunately for the Cahuillas, early settlers and explorers had little regard for the area where they

lived and so left them pretty much alone. However, in the late 1700s explorers came into the area, bringing with them what turned out to be a catastrophic disease – small pox, a disease the Indians had never been exposed to before and had little or no resistance to, nor did they have the means to treat those who became ill. As a result of what was probably a peaceful, chance exposure to the outside world, approximately three quarters of the Cahuillas died of the disease, leaving them with a population of about 2,500.

Inevitably, however, following the recommendations of promoters, settlers began to arrive in the area, and to establish ranches and farms. As a result, the Cahuillas were faced with a decision: they could fight to protect their land, they could leave the area and start fresh somewhere else, or they could cooperate and try to coexist, which meant giving up almost everything of importance, including their land, their culture and their customs, forever.

Most tried the latter course of action, often working for

the white settlers, but the end was in sight. Soon the government began taking their land away to help promote the building of railroads. As if all that wasn't enough, they were then herded onto reservations.



Today there are approximately 290 registered Cahuilla Indians.

The one and only saving grace is the fact that they now own and operate three casinos – the Agua Caliente Casino in Ranch Mirage, the Spa Resort Casino in Palm Springs, and the Cahuilla Creek Casino east of Temecula, near Anza.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

**The twenty-two new members listed below
Joined the Historical Society between
November 1, 2005 and February 14, 2006
Welcome to you all**

FOUNDERS CIRCLE

Lynn and Mitchell Lathrop, San Diego, CA

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Tony Jankowicz, Idyllwild, CA
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CONTRIBUTING

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Diana Gordon, Idyllwild, CA
Paula Panich, Los Angeles, CA
Bob Romano, San Jacinto, CA

*For a much more complete history of the Cahuilla Indians, please consult the wonderful book, *The San Jacintos*, by John W. Robinson and Bruce D. Risher, from which most of the material for this article was gleaned. It is on sale at both the Historical Society Museum and the Idyllwild Nature Center.*

IAHS Launches New Project

By Bob Smith

The Idyllwild Area Historical Society's Board of Directors is now planning the next stage of development for our museum property. This will be a storage facility, to be located behind the museum itself.

The need for such a structure has been obvious since we first began receiving artifacts and documents. At first, members kept valuable objects for us in their homes. But such generosity has its limits.

When our museum opened in 2003, we knew we couldn't exhibit the full scope Idyllwild area history without rotating major exhibits. But there is simply no place to store treasured items when they're not on display.

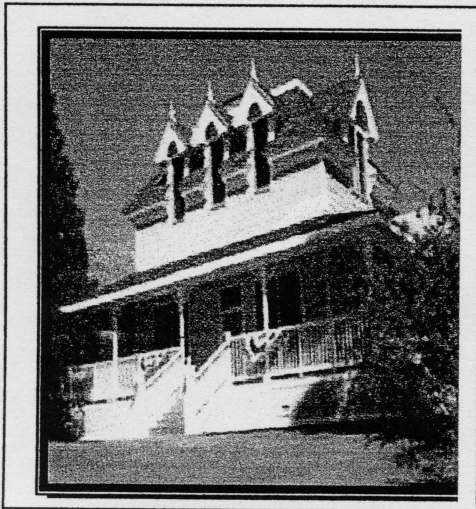
Because a dues-supported operating budget is not designed to cover major projects like this, last year we sought and won our first federal grant. With \$7,890 from the Conservation Assessment Program, we brought to Idyllwild an architect and an art conservator to evaluate both our buildings and our collection and to advise us on how best to preserve them.

In December the Board engaged an experienced architect/engineer to begin planning the new building. In April we'll know the outcome of our application to the California state funds to underwrite planning costs for the building.

Cultural & Historical Endowment for If grant money is not forthcoming, we'll tap our reserves to move the project forward \$10,848 in during 2006 to the point of soliciting construction bids. This will tell us how much additional support we'll need to attract to complete the storage building.

Here's Something Else You Don't Want to Miss

You're invited to join us on our next field trip. On April 22, 2006, we will be visiting the Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum in Banning. Call the Museum at (951) 659 2171 for further details.



Today, the Gilman Historic Ranch and the Gilman Wagon Museum preserves, celebrates and interprets the history of California from Cahuilla Indians to the exploration and settlement of Southern California and the San Geronio Pass, including the homestead ranch of James Marshall. The first permanent landmark in the Banning area was an adobe house constructed in 1854 on the present Gilman Ranch site by Jose Pope. Surrounded by cottonwoods and watered by three natural springs, the present Gilman Ranch site has attracted people throughout time. Although the Gilman ranch was a successful ranching and agricultural enterprise, it is best known in connection with the last great western manhunt of Willie Boy, a Paiute Indian who wished to marry Carlotta against her father's wishes. The young woman and her family were camped at the Gilman Ranch working on the fruit harvest when Willie Boy killed her father and escaped with Carlotta.

Attention Docents

Don't forget Docent Appreciation Day on March 26, 2006. We'll be meeting at the Rustic Theatre at 12 noon for a special showing of a short film we think you will enjoy very much. Hope to see you there.

The Annual Garden Club Tour

On June 17, 2006, the Garden Club will offer a tour of the many gardens in the area, plus a Tea and Raffle at the Museum. Plants will be offered for sale on the grounds, as well

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL HOME TOUR

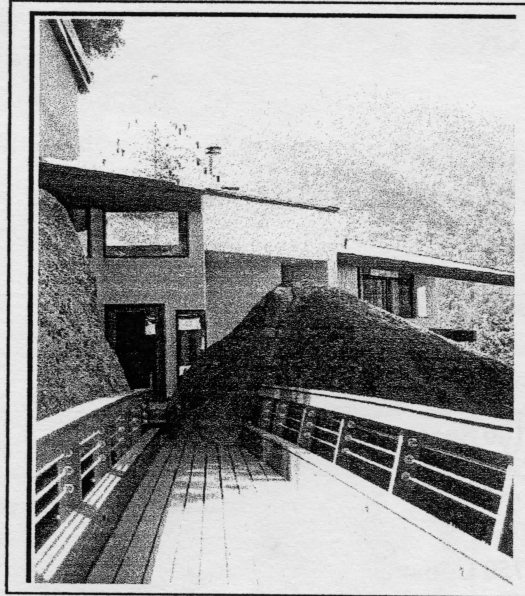
The 2005 October Home Tour was a fantastic success, mostly thanks to the wonderful people who so generously offered their homes for the occasion. Over 500 people bought tickets for the privilege of visiting the five interesting and unique homes, where they were greeted and shown around by the 65 volunteers who gave their time and energy to make the day the success that it was.

Every year, we scramble to find homes our visitors will enjoy, and this time, as in the past, we were very pleased with the five we were able to make a part of the tour. We owe some of that to luck, and a lot of it to plain old hard work. When we ask owners to make their homes available, and explain that anywhere up to 700 people will be walking through their front door and looking at all of their possessions during a five hour period, you can imagine what goes through their minds.

But after we explain how we go about it – how our docents are hand picked and well trained, how one will be assigned to each room in their house, and how we treat their homes as if they were our own, they agree to participate, more often than not. And, of course, the owners are invited to stay in their homes during the tour, and to participate in any way they feel comfortable with. And we don't hesitate to tell them that every person who enters their home as part of the tour will be asked to remove their shoes before crossing the threshold. So far, we've never had a complaint – to the contrary, our homeowners have usually enjoyed the event as much as their guests have.

In case you've forgotten, or weren't able to participate, the five homes were:

- The Webb home – a very spectacular home (*pictured*) with unbelievable views of the surrounding mountains and trees. We called this one, "A Gift of Nature."



- The Ashcraft home, recently remodeled, with many warm features that made it easy to name, "A Gift of Family and Friends."
- The Stewart home, filled with the owners prized possessions and art made the inside of this one a veritable antiques show room. We named it, "A Gift of Collecting."
- The Dunham home, a cabin built in 1922 beside Strawberry Creek, and barely altered, gave its visitors a sense of life as it once was. We called it, "A Gift of History."
- The Lowman home, a treasure trove of Asian art and artifacts, offered its visitors an opportunity to see international collections in a charming setting. We called this one, "A Gift of

Arts."

- And last, but certainly not least, we offered the Museum as an additional destination on our tour - something we hadn't done in the past, which gave us an opportunity to provide refreshments and an opportunity to exchange impressions and socialize. The Museum is housed in what was once a family home, built in 1923. We made one exception, though – we allowed our visitors to come in with their shoes on. We called it, "A Gift of Preservation."

Putting on the home tour is a year long project which begins the day after the last one ends. Sometimes we even begin our future planning during the show, as we learn on the spot from our docents, our car parkers, and our refreshment servers. The most important thing, of course, is being organized, almost to the nth degree. Details are crucial, and attending to them takes up much of the time spent planning the event.

Although we have already tentatively identified three of the five homes we need for the 2006 Home Tour, we are always looking for more prospects. If you, or anyone you know, is interested in making your home available, please let Lynnda Hart know.

Membership Information

Give a Gift Membership and they will receive . . .

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

Send A Gift Membership to:

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- ♦ \$1000 Founder's Circle:
Lifetime membership and plaque in museum
Installment plan available - \$100/year for 10 years

Send this membership form and check to:

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– We appreciate your support –

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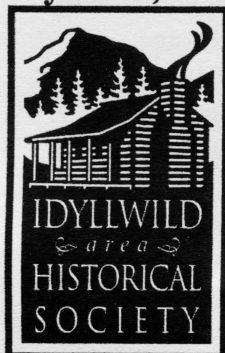
Museum: 54470 North Circle Drive, Idyllwild, CA 92549

Website: www.IdyllwildAreaHistoricalSociety.org

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Newsletter Editor – Ben Killingsworth

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