

# 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

WINTER 2020

## POWER TO THE MOUNTAINS

By Robert B. Smith

California's recent furor over precautionary electrical shutdowns carried me back to my first experience with one. I was fairly new to Idyllwild then, but not to the San Jacinto Mountains. I'd grown up being taught to minimize the chances that our treasured family retreat would go up in smoke. Afternoon breezes up the San Jacinto River's North Fork were a pleasant moderator of summer heat, but also a daily reminder of how fire might invade our valley, which the 1996 Bee Canyon Fire came very close to doing.

So, in October 2003 when a strong Santa Ana episode loomed, with fire-fighting resources already thinned out by blazes toasting large expanses of Southern California, Edison's two-day notice that it would pull the plug on the Hill seemed utterly logical.

Adele and I packed our frozen food and retreated into the forest to enjoy a couple of delightful autumn days at our cabin, where sunshine and gravity supplied our needs via our solar panels and a spring-fed pipeline. When we returned to town, instead of complaints I heard grateful accounts of residents and



**Early power infrastructure.**

PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

authorities pulling together to patrol roads, supply flashlights, install generators, and share facilities. (Ah, Idyllwild!)

That 2003 incident was also a reminder of how dependent we've all become on electricity. But it was not always so. Four generations of my family vacationed comfortably for 75 years without power at our off-the-grid camp and cabin. Firewood for heat and kerosene or Coleman lanterns for light were quite adequate, at least until solar technology

became too seductive to ignore.

Idyllwild itself was completely off the grid until 1923. In fact, for a time it seemed that electricity actually might first flow from the Hill rather than to it. Between 1910 and 1912 a series of hastily created power companies laid plans to dam every sizable creek in the San Jacintos for hydroelectric plants that would serve customers down in the flatlands. Suspicious-sounding grants of rights-of-way and water rights by the Forest Service piqued federal curiosity.

To investigate on-site, the Justice Department recalled Beverly Hills attorney Oscar Lawler from his

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Board meetings are open to the membership  
and are held in the office on the  
2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month at 4 p.m.

Current Volunteer Staff

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*Editor:* Carolyn Levitski  
*Feature Writer:* Bob Smith  
*Layout:* Halie Wilson

A big Happy New Year to all of the wonderful members and volunteers who support the museum and its mission to continue preserving the history of Idyllwild and the surrounding San Jacintos. We have a special community in Idyllwild and sometimes a few bumps (or should I say boulders) in the road remind us of this. What a year it was, and one we will remember for a long time. We had torrential rains, road closures, and who can forget the "pilot truck" that helped us up and down the highway. Wouldn't you know it, one last weather-related incident had to happen, and a large section from the top of the pine tree in front of our little museum broke off during the "big" snowstorm and went through the roof. All is well, however, and repairs were not difficult, and accomplished quickly.

Even with everything that happened last year, Idyllwild Area Historical Society had many successes. Many members and visitors came to our August annual meeting where we learned about the upcoming 100th Anniversary of the Riverside County Parks. Idyllwild has the distinction of having the first county park, and the year-long celebration will start in Idyllwild in July.

The free Ice Cream Social in September continues to be a wonderful experience for the community. Many members and visitors enjoyed the best ice cream sundaes, and especially, our root beer floats.

The Home Tour is the only fund raiser we hold each year, and the proceeds from that event support the museum activities throughout the year. The 2019 Home Tour was a success, even with the road issues. Over 550 people enjoyed touring the beautiful and iconic homes on this year's tour. We had many first-time visitors to Idyllwild who were not only thrilled with the Home Tour, but with Idyllwild as well.

Please put these dates on your calendar for the 2020 year:

September 5 for the Ice Cream Social and  
September 19 for the 20th IAHS Home Tour

Thank you so much for your generous support of our very special museum. The board of directors, and especially our docents, look forward to your visits to the museum. ♪

Sincerely,  
Charlotte Groty  
President

## POWER

(continued from page 1)

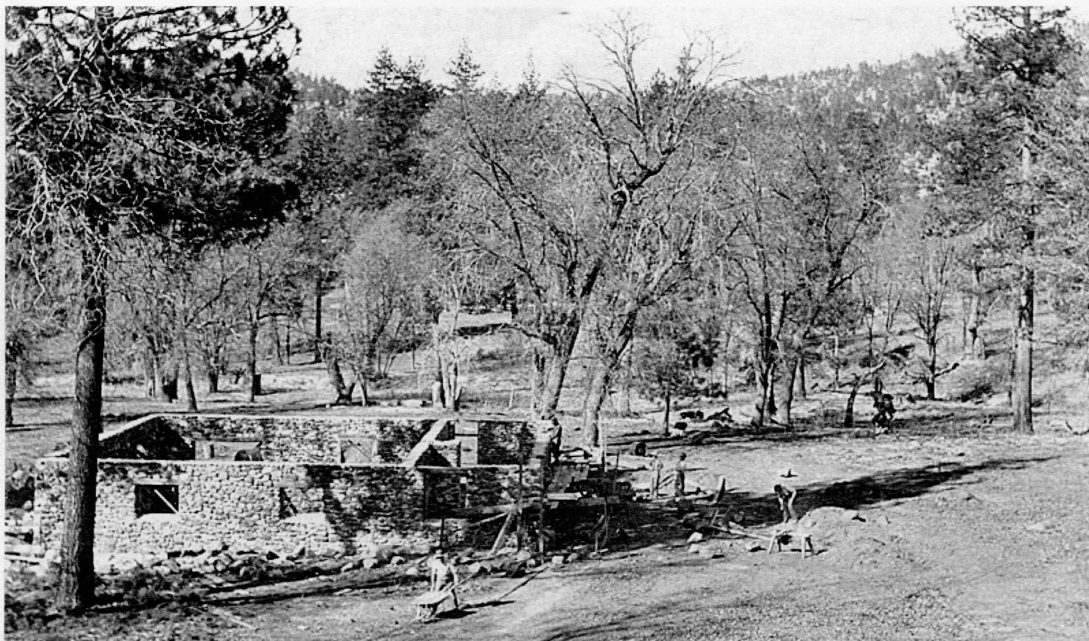
premature retirement as assistant attorney general for the Interior Department. (He'd gotten entangled in a trumped-up scandal involving Alaskan land use.) The hydroelectric schemes ultimately proved infeasible, but while nosing around Lawler fell in love with the San Jacintos and built a Yosemite-style lodge on the North Fork. Some 40 years later we got the county park at Lawler Lodge as his memorial.

Electricity first came to Idyllwild in 1901. Dr. Walter Lindley's tuberculosis sanatorium included a picturesque river-rock building that housed a steam generator, built where the Fort stands today. But that plant fed only the resort's main lodge and a few satellite cabins.

When fire razed the lodge, Lindley overhauled the system for his new "Bungalow" inn. After Frank Strong and George Dickinson bought the elegant resort from Lindley in 1906, renaming it Idyllwild Inn, they extended the electrical service to a new general store, built in



**Hardware on oak**  
PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES



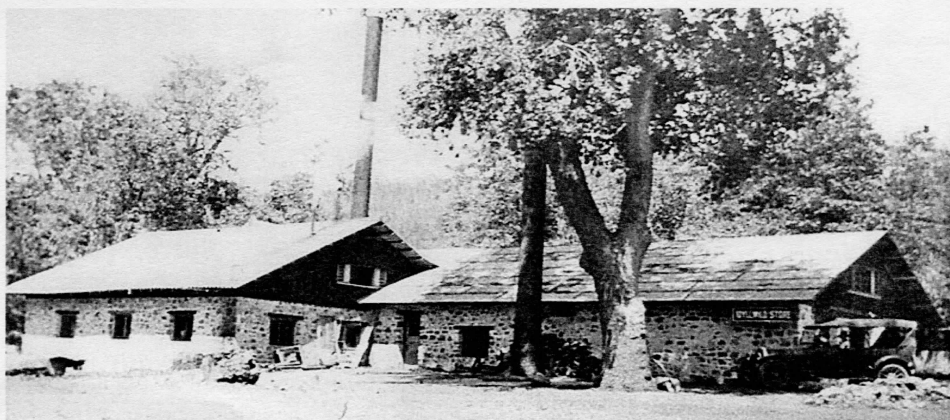
**Power plant construction 1900**  
PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

front of the power plant in matching style.

The generating plant was seriously damaged by the 1918 San Jacinto earthquake, but its new owner at that time, Claudius Lee Emerson, got it back in operation for the new season. Idyllwild in those days was strictly a summer vacation destination. The inn closed down after Labor Day, and only a tiny crew of resident caretakers maintained facilities throughout the winter. Come June, the generator was fired up to electrify the resort and some nearby cabins only until 10 p.m. each day (11 p.m. on weekends).

But Emerson's plan to make the Idyllwild Inn a year-round destination presupposed year-round power. He was familiar with the Southern Sierras Power Company, which supplied power to the San Jacinto Valley cities, including Emerson's winter home in

*See Power, page 5*



**Power plant and store c. 1910**  
PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

# THE COMPANY WE KEEP

New and Renewing Members July 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019

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

Membership coupon below

## PATRON

J. H. Deal Riverside  
Babs & David Cutter Idyllwild

## BENEFACTOR

Kerry Berman Palm Desert

## SPONSOR

Charles & Jane Field Bainbridge Is. WA  
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Nancy Beddingfield & P Leverentz Idyllwild

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Leslie Jacobs Redondo Beach

Marianne Smith Eagle Mountain

Jimmie & Hedy Tyson Rubidoux

Phil & Carol Bailey Temecula

Jim & Dawn Deshefy Laguna Hills

Jane & Daniel Levy Idyllwild

Silver Pines Lodge Idyllwild

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Joyce & Bill Miller Santa Ana

Laura Long Valley Village

Diana & Terry Kurr Idyllwild

Heloise and Jim Marsh Hemet

Bob Simpson San Luis Obispo

Diann Coate Idyllwild

Larry & Linda Turner Idyllwild

Thomas & Sharon Killeen Placentia

Sheri McClain Idyllwild

Stephen Sutton Idyllwild

Sallie Warwick Idyllwild

Richard Dorisse & M. Copeland Rancho Mirage

Jorgine & Barney Brause Idyllwild

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Kathleed Masey Idyllwild

Keith & Sandy Froehlich Fallbrook

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Pamela & Tim Nunn Ontario

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Ron & Melinda Pierre Palm Desert

Robert Reyes & P. Kennedy Laguna Woods

Carol Anne Hayes Palm Springs

Jeanne & Jerry Buchanan Idyllwild

Stephan & Noreen Hudson Palm Desert

Anthony Pearson Glendale

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Ronn & Carol Rohe San Diego

Lisa & Tim Smith Agua Dulce

William & Mary Coman Glendale

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Jeannette & Scott Boller Venice

Lana Hapeman Riverside

Marge Muir Idyllwild

Bob & Corinne Greenamyre Idyllwild

Robert & Traci Grossman Glendale

## INDIVIDUAL

Larissa Moss Idyllwild

Richard Davis Moscow ID

Barbara Jones Idyllwild

Susan Avon Idyllwild

John Ganoung Costa Mesa

Mildred Kreuger Desert Hot Springs

John Steere Berkeley

Barbara Czescik Del Mar

Laurie Cole Van Nuys

Sylvia Rountree Desert Hot Springs

Jesse Sandoval San Diego

Catherine Miller Palm Desert

Larry Allen Indian Wells

Virginia Lumb Ojai

Alma Peters Mountain Center

Michael Duval Idyllwild

Kurt Leuschner Palm Desert

Kathleen Kieferdorf El Cajon

Janice Ulmer Oceanside

Bob Blankman Idyllwild

Fred Flores San Antonio TX

Edward Flores San Antonio TX

Judi Milin Idyllwild

Donald Giger Omaha NE

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Names(s) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

## POWER

*(continued from page 3)*

San Jacinto. (Although our mountains in earlier times were sometimes called "Southern Sierras," the name had nothing to do with the San Jacintos. The company had been created to generate hydroelectric power for the gold mines east of the Sierras, primarily in Nevada. But to stay in business in 1911, with mining on the wane, the company built the world's then-longest transmission line across the Mojave Desert to burgeoning inland Southern California.)

Lengthy negotiation with Southern Sierras resulted in an up-front cash payment exceeding \$15,000 in today's dollars, half paid by Emerson's Idyllwild Inc., half by other property owners, toward the total project cost of nearly a half-million dollars. The survey got underway in mid-June 1923 along a route paralleling the old Mayberry Road up from Hemet to the site of today's McCall Park, there splitting to serve Idyllwild and Keen Camp. Two months later Idyllwild finally had full-time power. This project accelerated Idyllwild's proliferation of vacation cabins, the boom that transformed it from merely a resort to a settled community.

The Southern Sierras label was retired in 1936

in favor of Nevada-California Electric Corporation, which became the California Electric Power Company in another corporate reshuffle in 1941. At that point Glenn and Nina Mae Froehlich were hired to run the local "Calectric" office. During their two decades at the helm they became one of Idyllwild's most prominent couples, well-known as founders and longtime operators of the Rustic Theatre, then in retirement as managers of the Idyllwild Inn motel.

With rising demand from the Idyllwild's postwar population boom, Calectric laid plans in 1963 to bring a second power line up the mountain. At that point the company was absorbed by Southern California Edison, which completed the new line in May 1964.

Edison struggled to maintain uninterrupted service in the face of continuing population growth, plagued by Santa Ana wind episodes, heavy snowfalls, dead tree limbs, curious squirrels, and nesting birds. That outage during the 2003 fire season came at a time when irritating unplanned shutdowns were all too common, reminding us not to take the centralized electrical grid for granted. A dark Christmas Day that same year was the last straw. We installed solar panels and storage batteries on our Idyllwild home and never again experienced a total blackout during our remaining 14 years on the Hill. ♫



**Village Center 1920s**

PHOTO FROM IAHS ARCHIVES

# 2019 Home Tour

Our home tour this year was a fantastic success. The homes were beautiful, and our visitors were excited to tour them. Sincere thanks to the home owners who graciously shared their iconic homes.

Without the participation and hard work of dedicated volunteers, our home tour would not be possible. We are indebted to the following volunteers. As you can see, it takes many people to make the home tour possible.

## HOMEOWNERS AND DOCENTS FOR 2019 HOME TOUR

### Homeowners:

Dan & Cheryl Dirkesherer  
Stephanie Long & Craig  
Snair  
Malka Drucker  
Sheila Zacker  
Celia Bonney

Hedy Zikratch  
Jimmie Tyson  
Julia Ledesma  
Sandy Wykoff  
Jayne Hamil  
April Palmer  
Diann Coate  
Lynn Kollar  
Jim Gilliland  
Dana Francis Albano  
Anthony Albano  
Gail Spiegle  
Sylvia Roundtree  
Cathy Lopes  
Kay Wanner  
Charlotte Anthony  
Joyce Miler  
Annamarie Padula  
Cheryl Rice

### Hosts/Hostesses:

Maureen Boren  
Diana Kurr  
Morey Copeland  
Dick Dorisse  
Marlene Pierce  
Melinda St. Pierre

### Parkers:

Chuck Lumia  
Chic Fojtik  
Teri Kurr  
Ed Warner  
Mike Kollar  
Thom Wallace  
Ed Ham  
Dan Carpenter  
Keith Mathahs

### Downtown:

Kathy Duncan  
Virginia Mathala  
Dawn Miller

### Hospitality:

Linda Turner  
Larry Turner  
Brian Oglesbee  
Lisa Oglesbee

### Museum:

Babara Jones  
Stephanie Yost  
Sharla Carpenter

### Musicians:

Paula King  
Vicki Jakubac

### Docents:

David Martin  
Martha Lumia  
Carol Simonet  
Nancy Borchers  
Karen Dorn  
Susan Judkins  
Bill Judkins  
Susan Avon  
Larry Robertson  
Ira Chomsky  
Suzy Bowman  
Brenda Warner

### Houses:

Nanci Killingsworth

### Finance:

George Groty

### Photographers/

### Designers:

Rebecca Frazier  
John Drake

### IAHS Board of Directors



PHOTO BY FRAZIER/DRAKE

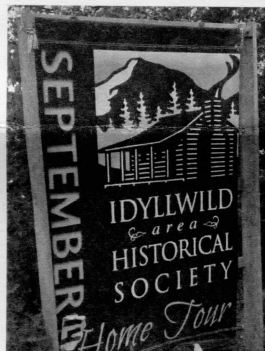


PHOTO BY HEDY TYSON



PHOTO BY FRAZIER/DRAKE



Visitors enjoy a refreshment break at the museum

PHOTO BY HEDY TYSON



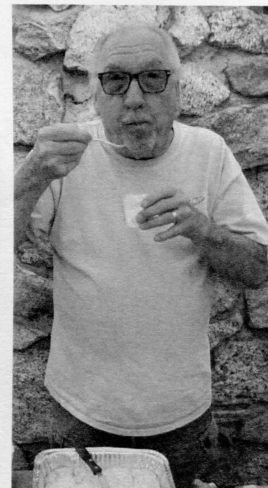
Linda Turner, hospitality chair, taking a break

PHOTO BY HEDY TYSON



Linda Turner with her son Brian and his wife, Lisa, are ready to serve delicious refreshments

PHOTO BY HEDY TYSON



Larry Turner samples breakfast items served to docents

PHOTO BY HEDY TYSON

# Winter Storm Damages Museum Building

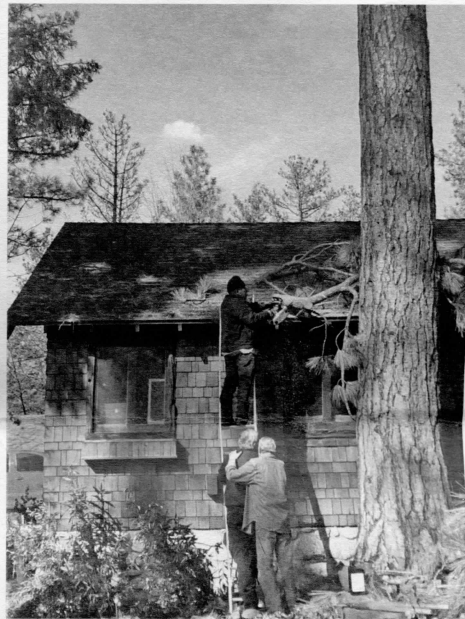
This winter's ferocious storms dealt an unwelcome surprise to the Historical Society Museum. When docent Nancy Borchers went to open the museum for visitors on Friday, December 6, she found quite a mess inside. A large section from the top of the huge pine tree directly in front of the museum had broken off and speared through the museum roof, creating a gaping hole in the roof, bringing down insulation and dry wall, and breaking a couple of rafters and a track light bar. The floor was a watery mess of broken branches and debris. What good luck that it missed all the glass display cases!



Richard Levitski, Manuel Guzman, and Larry Robertson quickly removed the tree limbs and debris and put a temporary repair of plywood and a tarp in place just ahead of the next storm. Marlene and Tom Pierce, Nancy Borchers and George Groty assisted.

How fortunate we are that board member David Martin arranged for Garret Woods construction crew to quickly and superbly make permanent repairs to the roof and inside structure. Later Richard Levitski and Larry Robertson repaired and re-hung the track light.

The museum is open again on our regular schedule and awaiting your next visit. 🐿



**Manuel Guzman removes the branch from the roof.**

PHOTO BY  
MELISSA DIAZ HERNANDEZ/  
COURTESY OF THE  
IDYLLWILD TOWN CRIER

## 2019 Annual Meeting

At our the IAHS August annual meeting, Tony Pierucci, representing the county of Riverside, presented a historical perspective with slides, about how the county parks were created, starting in 1920 with the donation of acreage by C.L. Emerson. Idyllwild County Park was number one. In spite of some objections to the county park proposal, they were finally approved. Steve Lech added additional information as referenced in his book *More Than a Place to Pitch a Tent*. Doug Austin will portray Claudius Emerson on July 4, 2020 for the celebration, ice cream social and games at Idyllwild County Park. An information packet will be available from Riverside County in 2020. 🐿



**County of Riverside — Celebrating 100th Anniversary  
County Parks July 2020**

PHOTO BY TOM PIERCE

**Museum Hours**

**10am to 5pm**

**Friday, Saturday, Sunday  
and Monday Holidays**

**Also daily between  
Christmas and New Year**

**Follow us on Facebook**

<http://www.facebook.com/IdyllwildAreaHistoricalSociety>

**Visit our website**

[www.idyllwildhistory.org](http://www.idyllwildhistory.org)

For special tours and other business,  
call (951) 659-2717 or  
email [info@idyllwildhistory.org](mailto:info@idyllwildhistory.org)

**Admission Free**

54470 North Circle Drive

**Donations Welcome**

**Dates to Remember:**

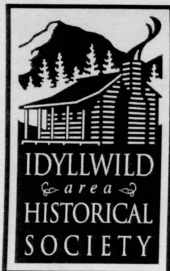
Ice Cream Social — Saturday, Sept. 5

Annual Meeting — August

20th Annual Home Tour — Saturday, Sept. 19

*See our Facebook page for maps of routes to Idyllwild.*

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