

Idylease Expands Public Historical Archive Documenting More Than a Century of Life in the New Jersey Highlands

Photographs, guest registers, census records and family collections document the people who stayed, worked and lived at a historic health resort in the New Jersey Highlands of northern New Jersey.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS — Idylease has expanded its public historical resource with newly assembled photographic collections, documentary records and research tracing more than 120 years of life at the former mountain health resort in northern New Jersey.

Available through Idylease.org, the growing collection brings together historic photographs, guest registers, federal census schedules, newspapers, architectural drawings, correspondence, institutional records, brochures, postcards and family collections. Examined together, the materials document not only the institution itself, but the people who stayed there, worked there and shaped its changing history.

Located in the Newfoundland section of West Milford, Idylease opened on January 1, 1903, and evolved over more than a century as a resort hotel, health resort, sanatorium, and nursing and convalescent home. Its surviving records provide a view of that evolution through the people who experienced and operated the institution.

Situated in the New Jersey Highlands, Idylease developed during a period when rail transportation, mountain tourism, immigration and changing medical practice were reshaping northern New Jersey. Its records place the institution within those broader regional and national developments.

Guest registers identify individuals whose lives intersected American history, including inventor Thomas Edison; social reformer and U.S. Children's Bureau chief Grace Abbott; Civil War veteran and Medal of Honor recipient Horatio Collins King; U.S. Rep. Mary Teresa Norton; educator and economist Joseph French Johnson; diplomat David Banks Sickels; and language educator Victor Harrison Berlitz.

But the historical record extends well beyond prominent guests.

Federal census schedules document the immigrant workforce that operated Idylease during the early twentieth century. Most of the employees recorded in the 1910 census were born in Ireland, while others came from Canada, England, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. A staff photograph taken the following year restores faces to many of the names preserved in the census.

Other photographs document African American support staff working around Idylease's service buildings and grounds. The images preserve Black men and women as part of the workforce whose daily labor sustained the institution and made its hospitality possible.

That history continues through Martel Carl Grays, a Black Army veteran who became maintenance supervisor after Dr. Arthur D. L. Zampella acquired Idylease in 1954. For more than two decades, Grays cared for the building's mechanical systems, grounds and daily operation before becoming the first employee formally recognized for long service. A surviving photograph records the presentation on the lobby staircase.

Historic photographs extend the record further, documenting guest rooms, porches, kitchens, service buildings, maintenance operations, automobiles and the ordinary routines of daily life. Rather than presenting Idylease only through formal architectural views or notable visitors, the expanded collection places those images alongside the people and work that allowed the institution to function.

The collection continues to grow as photographs, documents and artifacts are returned by descendants of former proprietors, guests, employees and families connected with Idylease. In some cases, those materials provide evidence not preserved in the institutional record and make it possible to identify people, events and relationships that had otherwise been lost.

The historical research follows a source-based approach. Photographs are examined alongside guest registers, census schedules, newspapers, correspondence and institutional records. Names, dates and recollections are compared across sources. When the evidence remains incomplete, the historical record remains open rather than being resolved through speculation.

"History carries an ethical obligation," said Richard Zampella, who assumed stewardship of Idylease in 2016. "If we're going to tell it, we have a responsibility to tell it honestly—not to embellish it, simplify it or abandon the difficult parts."

That approach also reflects Zampella's work as a producer and editor of historical documentaries with writer-director John Mulholland. Their films drew on archives, private collections, correspondence, photographs, contemporary reporting and recorded testimony to examine different chapters of the American experience. *Cooper & Hemingway: The True Gen*, which Zampella produced and edited, was selected as a **New York Times Critics' Pick**, and subsequent productions were distributed nationally by **American Public Television** for broadcast on **PBS stations**.

The historical work at Idylease continues alongside stewardship of the property itself. Maintaining an institution built in 1902 has also provided a practical understanding of the operational world recorded in its photographs and documents—the buildings, mechanical systems, service areas, landscape and daily work that existed behind the public face of a resort and later health-care facility.

For Zampella, the objective is not to create a new story for Idylease, but to make the surviving one increasingly accessible.

"The evidence is already here," he said. "The work is to preserve it, establish its context and allow people to see the history for themselves."

The photographic collections, historical essays and multimedia resources are available at www.Idylease.org, including the expanded photographic collection at www.Idylease.org/idylease-pictures.html.

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ABOUT IDYLEASE

Idylease is a historic former health resort in the Newfoundland section of West Milford, New Jersey, in the New Jersey Highlands. Built in 1902 and opened on January 1, 1903, it served successively as a resort hotel, health resort, sanatorium, and nursing and convalescent home.

Idylease was designated West Milford's first local historic landmark in 1988 and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Through ongoing stewardship, research, digitization and public interpretation, Idylease.org documents the property's architecture, people and place within the history of the New Jersey Highlands and the broader American experience.

MEDIA & SOURCE MATERIALS

Publication media: Publication-quality historical and contemporary photographs are available with captions and credits, including the 1911 Idylease staff photograph, the Martel Carl Grays employee-recognition photograph, historic exterior and institutional views, and selected guest-register imagery.

Supporting primary-source material: Federal census schedules, guest-register pages, newspaper records, correspondence and additional archival documentation are available for reference. Additional high-resolution images, research material and interview availability can be arranged for media at info@idylease.org.