

Jules M. Eichorn

1912 – 2000

A Final Tribute
to a Honorary Member of the SPS

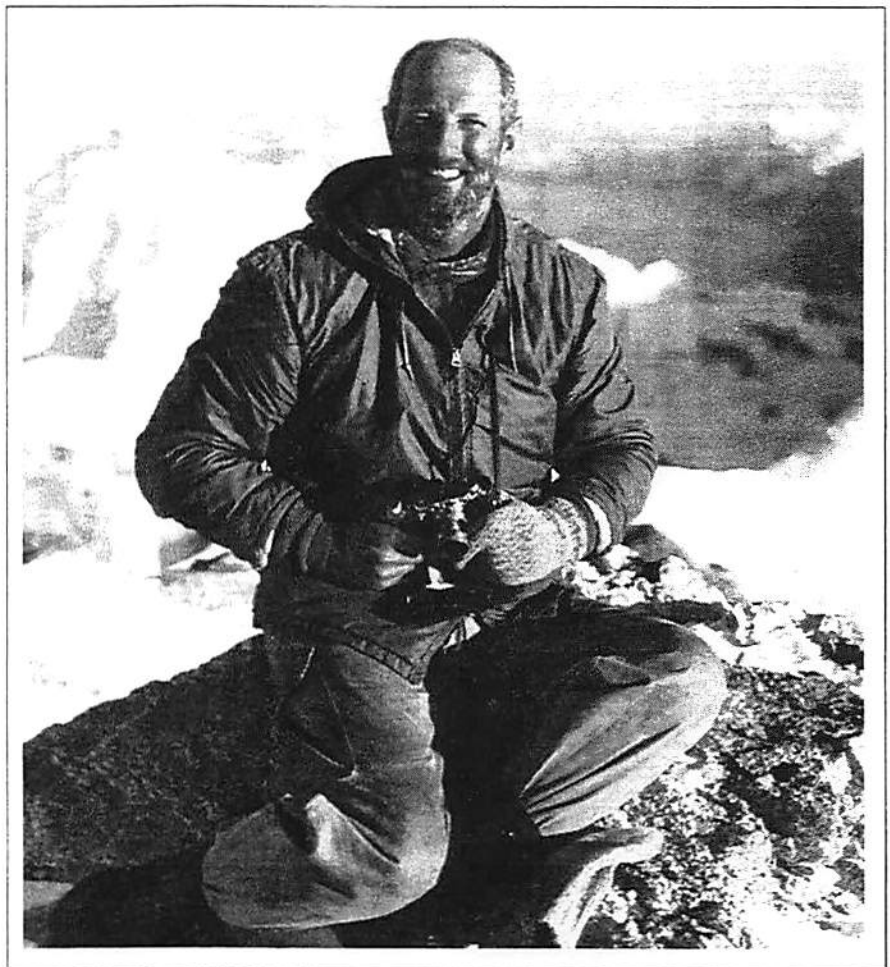
Written By Bill Oliver

Sierra Peaks Section bylaws allow for honorary membership. This honor was extended first to Norman Clyde, who accepted at the Angeles Chapter banquet of 19 October 1960. It has since been extended only twice more: to Jules Eichorn and Glen Dawson at the SPS banquet of 13 December 1989. Glen was the featured speaker at this exceptional event – combining his sharp memory and dry wit with a broad array of early local and Sierra High Trip mountaineering photos. Jules, of course, was co-featured. However, a brief illness at the time precluded him from traveling south. In lieu of this, he did manage on very short notice to send a video with some of his recollections.

As the person responsible for the banquet program, and SPS chair at the time, the opportunity developed for me to meet, and quickly become befriended by, these two legendary climbers. [I remember being surprised that they were both still living.] Over the course of a few years I was Jules' houseguest in Redwood City several times, and he mine in L.A. I am one lucky dude. In tribute to our three honorary members, I penned what so far is a two-part series on early Sierra Club mountaineering, which appeared in the SPS Echoes of 12/89 and 4/92. [Part III remains quite late!]

The Sierra Club Bulletin (SCB), now Sierra magazine, was arguably the premier American mountaineering journal in the period between the world wars, especially while under the editorship of Francis Farquhar. It was the primary source for my research on the annual Club High Trips. These four-week, mid-summer outings generally rotated among large expanses of the Sierra Nevada. They brought together about 200 high trippers - and a fairly large pack train! Beginning in 1901, with John Muir's attendance, they were organized by Bill Colby and always provided some mountain climbing options – sometimes projecting large numbers onto the summits, e.g., 175 on Whitney on the 1916 outing. As time went on, the mountaineering got gnarlier! Let us now pick up the thread of this bygone era - near the end of the High Trip of 1929, when Jules Eichorn and Glen Dawson, both then 17, first connected.

In the hardest climb of the trip, on July 26 Bill



Jules Eichorn - 1961, Mt. McKinley

Horsfall, John Nixon and Glen made the second ascent of Clyde Minaret, first topped by Norman Clyde the prior year. In a 1982 Sierra Club interview, Jules recollected this event. "I just thought that was the most terrific thing! I climbed Ritter that particular day, and when we got back to the campfire, we all talked about it. ... I got to know Glen, and we made arrangements to climb together the following year."

1930

1930: Arrangements? [Focusing only on the harder climbs.] Well, for starters, often accompanied by John Olmsted (just a little older), they topped, in order, Mt. Abbot, Bear Creek Spire, Mt. Darwin and The Hermit, followed by the first recorded ascent of Pk 13,701 (now Mt. Mendel). Then on July 23rd they approached a fearsome peak first climbed by Charles Michael in 1913. There had subsequently been a few unsuccessful attempts – including at least a recon by Norman Clyde.

Employing both a rope and skillful route-finding, they finally pulled off the second ascent of Devil's Crags. Glen would later write: "Three boys not yet of age were very happy."

Wrapping up the trip in the Palisades Basin, our trio also climbed Middle Palisade. The next day, not satisfied with only an ascent of Mt. Sill, they proceeded west in the first traverse to North Palisade, also summitting enroute what is now Polemonium Pk. The last day of the outing found them atop Winchell and Agassiz. Writing of this

High Trip in the SCB, Will Colby noted: "Some youthful enthusiasts, including Glen Dawson, Jules Eichorn and John Olmsted, swarmed over everything that looked formidable in the way of a mountain peak."

1931

If 1930 was a good year for formidable swarming by these lads, the 1931 High Trip would prove to be a spectacular year. Frances Farquhar had recently learned proper rope climbing techniques from Robert Underhill. The latter, a philosophy lecturer at Harvard, had mastered these

skills in the Swiss Alps and was applying them with great daring in the Tetons of Wyoming. On July 12th Farquhar led a small school of climbers up the north face of Unicorn Peak. He referred to this as: "The first properly roped climb made in the Sierra, so far as can be ascertained." Then, completing the first traverse of the Unicorn high points, Jules and Glen



North Palisade - Robert Underhill, Glen Dawson, Jules Eichorn and others. (right to left).
Photo by Norman Clyde

continued south to Cockscomb Peak, making its second ascent.

After achieving first ascents in northern Yosemite on Finger Peaks, on Matterhorn by the NW face and on The Dragtooth, the boys were back to Tuolumne for a climb of Cathedral Peak on July 24th. Before descending the mountain, they had the opportunity to employ their new roped climbing skills with the first ascent of the prominent pinnacle west of the summit – later

named **Eichorn Pinnacle!**

Relocating to the Garnet Lake region, our duo was joined by fellow teenager Walter Brem. July 31st turned into a 14-hour day for them as they topped the three highest Minarets. They began with a climb of Michael Minaret (#2), traversed over to Third Minaret (#3) – a first ascent - and then continued along the gnarly ridge to Clyde Minaret (#1). “Third” would later be named **Eichorn Minaret**. [Dawson Minaret would first be climbed in 1933 – by Glen, Jules and Dick Jones.]

As previously arranged by Farquhar, Robert Underhill caught up with the High Trip at Garnet Lake, fresh from new triumphs in the Tetons. He immediately organized a climbing school that practiced on the steep slopes of Ritter and Banner.

Thunderbolt

Following the conclusion of this productive High Trip, Farquhar, Underhill and six others relocated up the North Fork of Big Pine Creek to pursue postgraduate studies. Along the way they picked up Norman Clyde – the first meeting between Jules and the solitary Sierra legend! Regarding his first impressions of Norman, in 1971 Jules penned the following account in his prologue to “Norman Clyde of the Sierra Nevada”:

I first saw Clyde standing in the sun in front of Glacier Lodge, a jut-jawed, blue-eyed, ruddy complexioned, animated block of granite, something resembling a soldier – mainly, I think, because of his campaign hat, which never (as I learned) left his head. My impression was that here was a man who had made up his mind what he had to do and would never swerve from his objectives. But, I asked myself, “How could a man with a build like Norman’s be such a good mountain climber?” I was soon to find out.

On August 9th all nine climbed North Palisade from the U Notch – and then moved on to its next highest subpeak (now Starlight) – second ascent (after Clyde), first traverse. Two days later Underhill, Clyde, Dawson and Eichorn, a team that soon would make history, did a new route on Temple Crag’s north face, in spite of stormy weather! On August 13, these four plus Farquhar, Bestor Robinson and Lewis Clark set out to attempt a peak that Norman had been targeting for some time – the unclimbed “Northwest Peak of North

Palisade.” The following narrative is based upon a recollection made by Jules to this author some 58 years after the event:

“The weather had been unsettled for several days. At the start of the climb bad weather was off over Middle Pal and didn’t look very threatening to us. We watched it but it didn’t seem to be doing anything. The roped climb up the couloir [later named for Underhill] had been slow with seven climbers. At the summit, I may have climbed the monolith first or it may have been Glen. Anything I could climb, Dawson could too. We climbed it free, which the others weren’t agile enough to do.

“Within five minutes, it seemed, the storm moved north and suddenly enveloped the whole peak. Norman, being much more aware and experienced, didn’t think it would happen so soon. There were sparks coming off my fingers and off the ice ax. I had never experienced this before, and Norman felt strongly that we should get off the damn thing immediately. I was the last man down. It seemed that there was an unbelievable force of electrical energy around the area. I was about 25 yards from the pinnacle when suddenly there was a tremendous explosion right in my face. The electric blast immobilized me for a moment – I felt paralyzed. Then almost as quickly, I got back my faculties and strength. It was a very uncomfortable feeling, to say the least. I felt very lucky I wasn’t directly struck by the lightning.”

The Northwest Peak is still there, of course – but they promptly renamed it **Thunderbolt Pk.**

The East Face

Shifting southward once again, our gnarly cohort was down to five to face their ultimate challenge – the “pretty sheer” east face of Mt. Whitney. Both Clyde and Underhill wrote accounts of this daring climb. Quoting only from the latter in what follows (SCB- 1932):

“At Farquhar’s invitation and under his expert arrangement of program, I was enjoying a first climbing season in the High Sierra. The unclimbed east face of Mt. Whitney had been in both our minds from the start. True, whenever the subject came up for express discussion

Farquhar was wont to observe with a chuckle that the face was pretty much of a precipice; but this seemed to diminish in nowise his estimate of the value of paying it a visit, and I eventually became highly stimulated by his view that sleek verticality was merely the normal terrain for rock climbing activities. Clyde, when he joined the party, gave a guarded confirmation of the topographic point, by judging from his more intimate acquaintance with the mountain, that the face was "pretty sheer." However, he showed himself completely indulgent to the enterprise, and gave us the immense benefit of his practical knowledge, without which we should have lost much time in coming to grips with our problem. The other members of the group – Jules Eichorn, of San Francisco, and Glen Dawson, of Los Angeles, young natural-born rock climbers of the first water – had never seen the mountain; but neither had they seen any up and down the Sierra that they could not climb, and they were all enthusiasm."

[Perhaps Underhill meant "seen" the east face up close. Jules had summited Whitney from the west on his first High Trip in 1927.] Regarding ages, Jules and Glen were then both 19, Underhill 42, Farquhar 43, and Clyde 46.

Their camp up the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek was sited at what Underhill described as "the most beautiful campground I had yet seen in the Sierra" – which they promptly named "Clyde Meadow." Setting off at 7:00 on August 16th, Clyde led them first up to Iceberg Lake. Continually scanning the east face, Underhill was not encouraged by what was unfolding:

"It continued to look, I must confess, downright unclimbable. We had rather grown into the feeling, in the Palisades, that every Sierra mountain wall could be climbed, if only one tackled it properly; but at the present juncture I personally found myself becoming shaken in this conviction and wondering whether we weren't at last up against the so-called exception that proves the rule."

A little later they reached the lake:

"On the shore of this lake, just under the peak, we gathered for a final intensive bit of observation. Suddenly I saw what seemed a just possible route,

and simultaneously Dawson and Eichorn exclaimed to the same effect. It turned out that we all had exactly the same thing in mind. Through the field glasses we now examined it in detail as well as we could, noting that much of it seemed possible, but that there were several very critical places. Rating our chances of success about fifty-fifty, we were eager to go ahead with the attempt." Not wanting to hold them up, Farquhar elected to meet them on top, via the Mountaineer's Route.

They departed the lake at 9:30 and roped up at 10:00, commencing the climb behind what became the Second Tower – the route now used at the start of the climb of the East Buttress. The now-common Tower Traverse (also known as the **Eichorn Traverse**) was pioneered three years later by Jules with Marjory Bridge, the first woman to ascend the East Face. Partnering were Jules with Clyde and Glen with Underhill. [Using site terminology invented a little later:] Following this traverse, it was up the Washboard, then over a small ridge and down to the Shaky Leg Crack, which Jules and Glen were eager to attempt. Reining them back, the older two spied a possible leftward route – the Fresh Air Traverse. Not much later they ascended the Grand Staircase. At 12:45, only three and a quarter hours from the lake, they were shaking hands with Farquhar on the summit! Not yet sated, Jules and Glen promptly went on to summit Mt. Muir.

"The route we had followed was exactly that which we had mapped out originally while standing by the little lake. Much of the fascination of our climb lay, in fact, in seeing the sections which we had marked out for ourselves as critical successively opening up to permit us a way. ... I believe a good climbing party that knew the route could ascend from the lake to the summit in something like half the time we required upon this first occasion. The beauty of the climb in general lies chiefly in its unexpected possibility, up the apparent precipice, and in the intimate contact it affords with the features that lend Mt. Whitney its real impressiveness."

Neither Clyde nor Underhill mentions the use of pitons in their accounts. Eichorn's recollection is that no pitons were used. Dawson thinks one may have been used at the Fresh Air Traverse, which Underhill led. With this exception, the teenagers led their partners throughout the climb.

Let us conclude with Norman's final observation:

"After an evening spent consuming enormous quantities of food and lounging about the campfire, we retired to our sleeping bags under nearby foxtail pines, solemn and silent beneath a sky spangled with countless stars overarching the mountains that loomed darkly around the basin. On the following morning we made up our packs and proceeded down the canyon, pleased at having added another outstanding climb to the many already discovered in the Sierra Nevada."

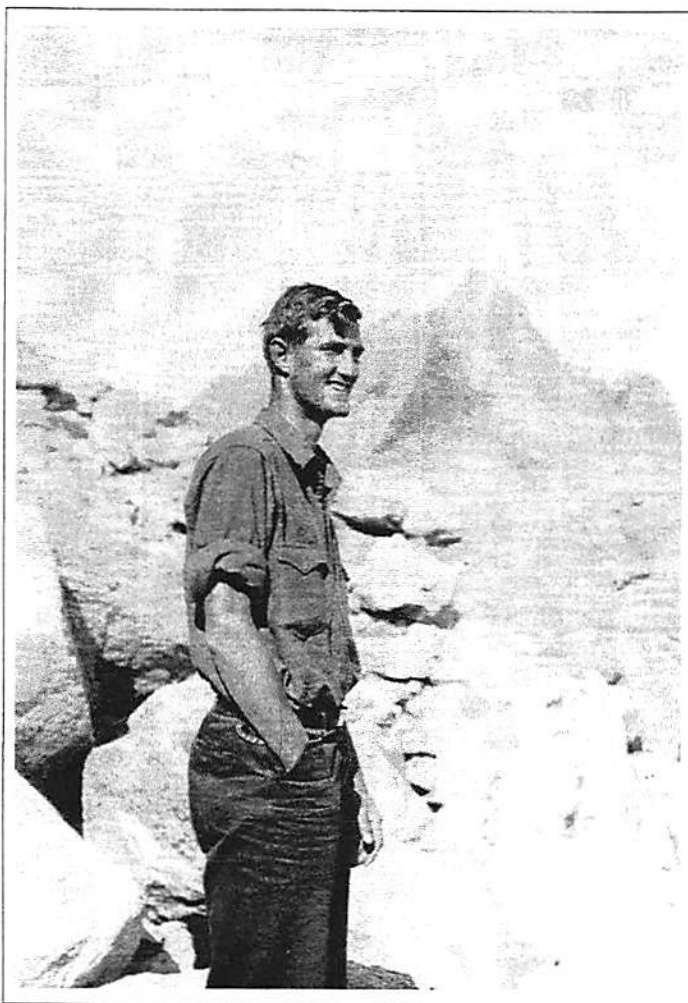
1932

The 1932 High Trip would reunite Jules, Glen and Norman – the latter along for the first time as a paid assistant. Earlier that spring Jules got inducted into Dick Leonard's new Cragmont Climbing Club (CCC) operating in the Berkeley hills. Dick had actually wanted to introduce a rock climbing section in the Club, but the Board would not sanction it – "it might be dangerous."

The Jules/Glen reunion got off to a promising start. On the initial meeting day of the four-week outing in Sequoia, the boys were climbing on Moro Rock. Concluding this effort, the two were home-free – almost. As they descended a smooth granite slab, Jules suddenly went airborne as he slipped on some lichen. Half a century later, in his 1982 SC interview, he recalled this episode: "It taught all of us the lesson, particularly me, that you never untie your rope until you're finished with the climb. We untied the rope one rope-length from our cars, and because Dawson had bigger feet and was light, he got across. I had smaller feet and was heavier - I didn't get across. In any case, I had dislocated my elbow and sprained my foot and hurt my knee, and scratched myself up pretty bad, and took most of the skin off the ends of my fingers.

"About three days later, a Sierra Club packer was going in with the mail, and I decided I could ride a horse in with him. Well, riding a horse with a sprained ankle and one hand, when you have never ridden in your life, for more or less a twenty-mile ride – I'm certain I was never so uncomfortable before or since in my life. My knee cleared up and everything came out just fine. In a couple of weeks I was climbing with one arm and it didn't seem to bother me."

Jules went on to join parties climbing Junction, Milestone and Table. Along with Glen and Clyde, they also put up a new route on Mt. Russell – ascending by the south face, west chute, and descending by the southwest face, west arete. In the trip's final climbs, the trio led Red Kaweah, and our duo topped Black Kaweah by the more



rarely climbed SW ridge – not bad for a climber with one arm in a sling.

Later yet in 1932 Francis Farquhar, a SC Board member for eight years, succeeded to its presidency. Concurrent with this Lewis Clark became chair of the San Francisco Bay Chapter. Both were members of the Cragmont Climbing Club. Almost immediately these personnel changes led to the sanctioning of the Club's first activity section – the Rock Climbing Section. It was chartered under the auspices of the Committee on Rock Climbing, which consisted of Jules Eichorn, Lewis Clark, Kenneth May, Marjory Bridge and Dick Leonard,

chair. One of Leonard's first actions was to disband the CCC!

1933

The eagerly awaited High Trip of '33 would encompass a large loop in northeast Kings Canyon – entering at North Lake and exiting at South Lake. It would entail a sustained high level of rock climbing by many of the new generation who had by now invested much time and effort at Cragmont Rock and cliffs, overcoming their natural hesitancy on exposed rock and mastering their dynamic belaying skills (with static ropes). As never before, this would be the year of the knapsackers – those who could overcome the temptations of complete laziness and wander off from the large encampments into the high country, sometimes for several days. The climbers adept in the use of the rope would make up “The Polemonium Club,” aptly named for the gnarly violet-colored flower common among the highest Sierra crags and crevices. Details of the peak scrambling, quoted below, were penned by Glen for the '34 SCB “Mountaineering Notes.”

Among major peaks, first to fall was Mt. Humphreys, led on two days by Clyde. Arriving for the outing a week behind schedule, Jules and Marjory Bridge also summited this prominent peak – a new route involving a traverse from a pinnacle on the southeast ridge. Darwin and Haeckel also fell in short order.

Midway on the long sharp ridge tenuously connecting Mts. Wallace and Powell, overlooking Echo Lake to the north, two granite spires jut

proudly skyward. This new challenge attracted a strong party on July 22nd headed by Clyde, Eichorn and Ted Waller. They and four others climbed the north spire, and then these three succeeded on the more difficult southern one. First ascents and unnamed, the appellation **Clyde Spires** was fittingly bestowed on the pair.

Devil's Crags - Again

After a three-year absence, Jules and Glen were back now looking up at Devil's Crags. Five teams of three each, on three routes, were organized. Jules' team pioneered the northwest arete. “The arete has several difficult pitches, but is an ideal

route for a large party. This Sierra Club party of fifteen, all on top within a short time, constitutes the third ascent of the Devil's Crags.”

The next day Glen, Jules and Ted Waller successfully topped the next two Crags from the east. At this moment the weather, which had been favorable the whole trip, took a decidedly

different course. Glen Dawson: “With storm clouds rapidly gathering, we went down west in the chimney between Crag #2 and #3. As it began to sprinkle we traversed to the chimney between the main peak and Crag #2. Here we took refuge under a chockstone, expecting that the shower would be over, as usual, in a few minutes. We joked and talked as water began to drip in our shelter. The rain came harder than ever. Suddenly, with a great rushing sound, the chimney became filled with a torrent. Dirty water, gravel, and even large rocks came down in a series of waterfalls. We leaped out



Mt. Whitney - Glen Dawson, Frances Faquhar,
Robert Underhill, and Jules Eichorn
Photo by Norman Clyde

from under the chockstone, Jules to one side, Ted and I to the other. In a few moments the water had increased from a trickle which we could catch in our cups to a torrent of alarming proportions. Jules had gone out onto a narrow ledge, where he was soon drenched by water, and, what was more serious, was exposed to falling rocks. The roar of the water, the lightning and thunder, and the crashing of avalanches were stupendous, but not very pleasant to us at the time. Soaked with rain and spray, we were so cold that we shook all over every few minutes. We could see snowfields below us blotted out by slowly moving rockslides, and we could see gullies being dug ten feet deep.

Individual rocks came down, breaking into pieces on every side. The Devil's Crag seemed to be coming apart.

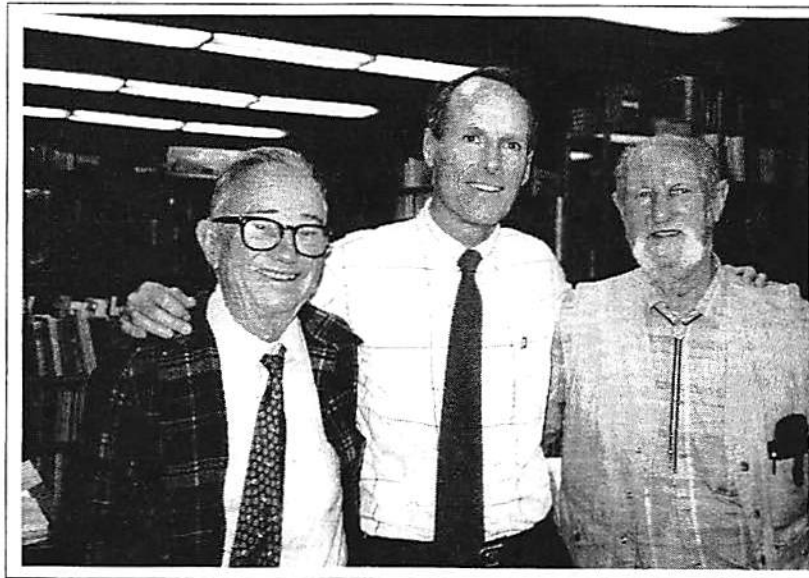
"For an hour Jules was forced to stay in an extremely precarious position on a narrow ledge, exposed to falling rocks and threatened with being swept off by the increasing force of the water. At last the storm abated, and Ted was able to pass a rope to Jules and assist him across

to our side of the chimney. Slowly we made our way down a few hundred feet of difficult wet rock. It was dusk before we got to timber and a chance to dry out. We tried to get to the Sierra Club camp at Palisade Creek that night, but our exhaustion was too much even for the promise of food." Recalling this event to me in 1989, Jules remarked that, while stuck on the ledge, the hip pockets of his jeans had filled with sand and gravel.

The knapsackers next swept over Split Mtn and then Middle Pal. Jules and Glen had topped the latter during the '30 High Trip. They hatched a

bold plot. Peak 13,956 (now 13,920+), less than a half-mile northwest of Middle Pal, had first been climbed by Norman Clyde from the glacier side on June 9, 1930. Only ten days later he summited a second time – from the southwest. Jules and Glen now were keen to explore a daunting new route to Middle Pal. They first achieved the third ascent of Peak 13,956. "From this peak they followed the ridge toward the main peak of Middle Palisade, turning several minor pinnacles enroute, but climbing the big black gendarme about midway, on which they found no previous ascent. They continued up the ridge southwesterly to the main peak and descended by the usual route." The

gendarme is now called Bivouac Peak, and it is thought by some that the boys stayed the night there. I recently questioned Glen about this. His written response: "We were always prepared for a bivouac, and we made some unplanned camps at timberline with a fire, but never stayed out overnight on a peak."



Glen Dawson, Bill Oliver (author)
and Jules Eichorn
May 1990 photo at Dawson's Book Store

Norman was to climb Peak 13,956 many times, as it was one of his favorites. He is still there – his ashes scattered by Jules Eichorn from its hallowed summit – **Norman Clyde Peak**.

Relocating to Dusy Basin, many in the Polemonium Club claimed Mt. Sill and North Pal. Norman also led the second ascent of Thunderbolt. The High Trip ended on schedule at South Lake on Saturday, August 5th. Over the weekend everyone scrambled back to their mundane other lives – Jules to San Francisco and Glen to Los Angeles. Not

quite everyone, however. Norman Clyde's life was in the mountains! Also still in the high Sierra was one (Walter) Pete Starr, alone and close to finishing up his guide to the new John Muir Trail - camped near Lake Ediza, below Mt. Ritter and very close to the Minarets....

In fact, tragically, young Pete Starr already lay lifeless on a Michael Minaret ledge before the High Trip ended. A rendezvous with his father on August 7th was missed, but it was not until the 14th that a general alarm was issued. The search for Walter Starr, Jr. would unexpectedly reunite Jules, Glen, Norman and many others in a desperate, daring and, ultimately, disappointing combing of all the Minarets and the Ritter area. But this is another story.

On the 1933 High Trip, Ethel Boulware was the chronicler for the Sierra Club Bulletin. Of this outing she wrote much - and she wrote this: "If any old-timer has entertained pessimistic doubts of the continued existence of the Sierra Club, let him count the number of young people signing up for the outings, let him watch them taking eager instruction in rock climbing, and swarming, as never before up difficult peaks, and his conclusions may be radically changed. Yesterday, with the undue familiarity of youth, it was 'North Pal' that drew them; today, without a rest, it was another, equally fascinating. With a pocketful of ascents to their credit at the end of the summer, with their unbounded energy and enthusiasm, the presence of these youngsters on the outings indicates a cheerful and healthy outlook for the growth of the Club."

2000

In declining health, Jules Eichorn passed away at home on 15 February 2000.

Final Comment from Glen Dawson - March 20, 2000:

Jules took piano lessons from Ansel Adams, and Ansel took him on the 1927 High Trip. We were both fifteen-years-old at the time and each did some climbing with others. But it was not really until 1930 that we were climbing together most of the time in summers: 1930 through '34. We both participated in the search for Walter Starr in 1933. In 1935 and '36 I was in Europe and Asia.

We saw each other on only a few occasions after 1934, but kept in occasional touch by mail and phone. We were linked together by being part of the first ascent party of the East Face of Whitney. We shared the experience of two mountain storms: one on Thunderbolt Peak and one with Ted Waller on Devil's Crags.

Jules was taller than I am, expert in music, and expert in camp cookery. We considered ourselves co-leaders, usually climbing with one or two others but sometimes just the two of us. Jules was always a gentleman, kind and considerate. He climbed with the same verve as he played the piano.

"Night-time is the right time....." for picking up Inyo permits.

<http://www.r5.fs.us/inyo/whatsnew.htm>

"Picking up permits: all permits, except the main Mt. Whitney trail, will receive a confirmation letter and you will be able to pick up the actual permit at any of the following locations: Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center in Lee Vining, Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center, White Mtn Ranger Station in Bishop, and the Mt. Whitney Ranger Station in Lone Pine. We will be posting the summer hours for the ranger stations on our website later this Spring."

"In the confirmation letter there will also be an explanation for making arrangements to have your reserved permit available in the night boxes at one of the Inyo's ranger stations." **Note: you must make arrangements. Do not assume they will put the permits out at night/ they will not.**