

# The Story of a Dream

The Creation of the  
ANTELOPE VALLEY CALIFORNIA POPPY RESERVE  
15101 Lancaster Road, Lancaster, CA 93536  
661-724-1180

The story began when Jane Pinheiro (known as the "Poppy Lady" to many in the western Antelope Valley), a group of dedicated citizens, and the local Daughters of the Golden West had a dream. The dream envisioned establishing an area to protect and honor the California Poppy which has officially been the State Flower since 1903. Even as early as the 1950s it was apparent that urban development would endanger and destroy the vast local natural lands of the poppy along with the Joshua tree and other important wildflowers. It would be close to 30 years before the dream became reality.

Jane was a self-taught wildflower artist and botanist who started painting watercolors of the local plants during the 1940s while she and her husband were living on the Poncho Barnes Ranch (now a part of Edwards Air Force Base), where Joe was the dairyman.

By 1960, Jane was successful in persuading the State Assembly to set aside 2,720 acres to protect the Joshua tree in the area that is now Saddleback Butte State Park. Between 1960 and 1964, with astute political lobbying, there were eight wildlife and wildflower areas in the Antelope Valley ranging in size from 40 to 455 acres officially set aside. Jane was instrumental in enlisting the support of many citizens, local groups, The Theodore Payne Foundation, The Nature Conservancy and other national preservation groups to achieve this end.

Jane, together with members of the Lancaster Woman's Club, established the first Antelope Valley Wildflower Center in a rented building along Sierra Highway. At the Center, Jane's paintings were on display along with identified specimens of wildflowers in small containers. Directions were given to find the best wildflowers during the spring season. The popularity of the Center grew. After several years in various interim locations and facilities, it moved to the Fairmont Store near the present location of the Poppy Reserve. During these moves, the Lancaster Women's Club continued to provide volunteer staffing.

A University of California, Davis botanist visited one of these Wildflower Centers, and after examining Jane's watercolors, he declared them to be botanically correct and really a treasure. He urged the Woman's Club to buy as many as possible and preserve them for public view. In 1970, Dorothy Bolt, as chairman of the Conservation Committee of the Woman's Club, spearheaded a plan to buy 125 paintings which Jane agreed to sell for \$5,000. The money was raised through the involvement of fourteen other local organizations that formed The Wildflower Preservation Committee, an ad hoc committee of the Woman's Club.

About the same time, Jane was sent a copy of a five-year study done by the Resources Agency of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. This report recommended

that the best location for a State Park to preserve the State flower was around the Antelope and Fairmont Buttes, located 14 miles west of Lancaster. With this knowledge, the Preservation Committee decided that once they raised the money to buy the paintings, their next objective would be to raise funds to buy land for the "Poppy Park". Dorothy Bolt, from the Lancaster Woman's Club, contacted the President of the State Parks Foundation, (a private organization designed to raise money to benefit State Parks) and persuaded him of the merits of the land acquisition project.

To raise additional funds, the Committee developed brochures, and Jane designed "I GAVE TO SAVE" decals. The "Pennies for Poppies" program in local schools raised \$1,400. The State Superintendent of Schools agreed to make this a statewide program which raised an additional \$14,000. People donating to the program were given symbolic "deeds" to land ranging in size from 300 square feet for \$5 to a whole acre for \$625. The local group raised about \$67,000 and the State Parks Foundation received large donations from corporations, making a total of about \$350,000. Together with State and Federal matching funds, this made it possible to eventually purchase 1,755 acres of land on the Antelope Butte.

As a Bicentennial Event, a dedication ceremony was held April 24, 1976, and the State Parks Foundation officially turned the land over to the State of California. During the ceremony, it was announced that the building, to be built on the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve, would be called the Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center. Jane's paintings, purchased by the Wildflower Preservation Committee and donated to the State, would be displayed at the Center.

Not long after the dedication, a fifteen member Antelope Valley State Parks Advisory Committee formed to provide local input in the development of local state Parks, with Jane Pinheiro as chairman. Jane died October 14, 1978, and Milt Stark was elected to chair the group. The Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center building was dedicated and opened to visitors at the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve on April 17, 1982. The Advisory Committee was dissolved, but the Wildflower Preservation Committee continued as a private foundation for the purpose of raising additional funds to obtain land to expand the Reserve. A great amount of additional land is needed to adequately preserve the California Poppy in the Antelope Valley.

The non-profit State Park cooperating association, known as the Poppy Reserve/Mojave Desert Interpretive Association (PRMDIA), operates the gift shop at the Center. State Park volunteer docents answer questions and lead walks along the trails at the Poppy Reserve during the springtime wildflower season.

The dream was conceived, the dream was pursued, parts of the dream have been realized, there is more of the dream to achieve, --- and the dream goes on.

Poppy Reserve/Mojave Desert Interpretive Association

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