

Jane Pinheiro

The “Great Poppy Lady”

September 9, 1907 – October 14, 1978

By Ann Gregg, Poppy Reserve Interpretive Association



The interpretive center at the California State Poppy Reserve west of Lancaster, California, is named in honor of the late Jane S. Pinheiro, the tireless conservationist who worked so diligently to make the park become a reality.

Born Jane Seymour in Denver, Colorado, on September 9, 1907, Jane spent her youth in Salt Lake City where she received her teaching credentials from the University of Utah. In the late 1920s she and her mother, Nellie Flick Seymour, moved to Pasadena, California, where Mrs. Seymour ran a boarding house. One of the guests was a young dairyman, Joseph Pinheiro, a native of the Azores. He and Jane were married in 1930.

In 1940 the Pinheiros moved to the Antelope Valley where Joe got a job working at "Pancho" Barnes' famed dude ranch. During this time, Jane became intrigued with the desert plants, and began to sketch and paint them. A self-taught artist and botanist, she was later to become an authority on local desert plants. Her watercolor renditions are so botanically correct that they are used for identification purposes. Her paintings hang across the country from coast to coast. To her, it was the ultimate compliment that over 100 of them hang in the Theodore Payne Foundation and Native Plant Guild. She served as a consultant to Sunset Magazine and other publications, as well as to the Nature Conservancy.

The Wildflower Preservation Committee of the Lancaster Woman's Club raised funds to purchase the 163 Pinheiro paintings presently housed at the interpretive center. They framed them with oak and used acid-proof mounting according to state specifications. Protective padded envelopes were made to protect them in storage and while transporting them.

The Antelope Valley California State Poppy Preserve was dedicated in 1976, an event Jane attended. The interpretive center was dedicated on April 17, 1982, after Jane's death, but her husband Joe lived to attend the event. He died shortly thereafter.

Pinheiro's accomplishments are too numerous to even begin to summarize. An overview shows that she and a neighbor started the annual Quartz Hill Almond Blossom Festival in 1950. She served for ten years on the Board of Directors of the Antelope Valley Fair. As early as 1950, Jane foresaw the necessity of water development in the valley. She was instrumental in the formation of the Feather River Project, later to be known as Antelope Valley East Kern Water Basin Association or Agency (AVEK). In 1949, Jane began work to establish what later was to become Antelope Valley Medical Center. After it became a hospital district, she served as its first secretary and remained on the board until her death.

Jane did whatever she thought necessary to protect the natural beauty of the desert. Toward the preservation of the Joshua trees, she enlisted the support of Assemblyman Allen Miller. The 2,720-acre Joshua Tree State Park became a reality in 1960. Later, to avoid confusion with the Joshua Tree National Monument, the name was changed to Saddleback Butte State Park. It is located on Avenue J at about 170th Street East, a short distance northeast of the Antelope Valley Indian Museum, another part of the state park system.

Pinheiro was instrumental in establishing at least eight wildflower and wildlife sanctuaries in Antelope Valley, ranging in size from 100 to 455 acres. Her fund raising efforts were directed toward Red Rock Canyon, Morongo, and Sand Ridge, as well.

To assist the many visitors who came to Antelope Valley to view the wildflowers each spring, Jane decided in 1963 to establish an information center. At first this was on Sierra Highway, then at the Fairgrounds, and now has been established at the Lancaster Art Gallery and Museum on Cedar Street. Her nearly three-dimensional watercolors, annotated with accurate botanical legends, were on display, together with informational books and maps. Eventually the Womans Club took over this project.

Under Pinheiro's guidance, the Antelope Valley Arts Association (now the Antelope Valley Allied Arts Association) was formed in 1946. The purpose of this organization was to bring together people with like interests in the field, sponsor exhibitions, and plan programs.

The formation of the Antelope Valley Universalist Fellowship Church, of which she was a member, was due in large part to Jane's vigorous efforts.

Jane was an active lobbyist in Sacramento on conservation issues. She was a friend of many political personages, including presidents and governors. Although she suffered ill health the last decade of her life, she never complained and continued to work for the preservation of her beloved desert. In addition to her many local and state projects, she brought great honor to the community when she earned two national awards in conservation: the coveted National Oak Leaf Service award from the Nature Conservancy, and the Sol Feinstein Environmental award. She was flown to Washington, D.C. and New York City, respectively, to receive these presentations.

It is with amazement that we view this great lady's accomplishments. It is even more astounding when we realize that she did all this on a very limited income. Her husband was a blue-collar worker who never earned more than \$8,000 a year. He was, however, a continual pillar of support for Jane, who often said that without Joe, she could not have made such great strides in the development of the Antelope Valley.

Jane died October 14, 1978; her beloved Joe, in August, 1982. Having no children, they left their estate to the Theodore Payne Foundation. The final chapter was closed on an active conservationist who was listed in six Who's Who of American Women, Who is Who in California (1958), Who's Who in the West Outstanding Civic Leaders of America, World's Who's Who of Women, and Two Thousand Women of Achievement. Her living legacy, however, will endure forever in her paintings, the organizations she founded, and the parks she helped to establish.

Revised 3-25-19 PRMDIA