



TRESSA "GRANDMA" PRISBREY/ BOTTLE VILLAGE

Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey (birthname- Thresie Luella Shafer) was born January 19 , 1896 in Easton, Minnesota. Her formal education consisted of attending public school until 1908, when her family moved to a homestead outside Minot, North Dakota. At 15 years of age, she married her first husband, 52 year old Theodore Grinolds, with whom she had 7 children, 6 of which would die in her lifetime. She left Theodore in the late 1920's or early 1930's, and worked as a waitress- known to play piano and sing for restaurant patrons, just as she did for Bottle Village visitors. During WWII, Prisbrey lived in Seattle and worked as a parts assembler for Boeing, before moving to California in 1950. While working on her first known construction, a house made of cement blocks, she met the man who would become her second husband. Albert Prisbrey and her would marry in 1954. The next year, they bought the 1/3 acre upon which Bottle Village would be built beginning c.1956.

Initially, Bottle Village was the result of Prisbrey's desire to make her land pay, to settle down ("...trailers don't get along so well without wheels. I hid the wheels, so we had to stay put"), and to have a room to store her pencil collection, which eventually numbered 17,000. Because cement blocks were too expensive, she made her first "Pencil House" out of bottles. She would spend the coming years driving her Studebaker truck to the dump daily, salvaging, among other things, hundreds of dolls, television tubes to create a walkway, intervenous feeding tubes to create a firescreen, car headlights, guns, and over "1,000,000" bottles with which she created her "Monument to showbiz". Many of these bottles were cobalt blue milk of magnesia bottles; "When I think of all the laxitives that were taken, in just my collection alone, I am sometimes astonished." Prisbrey worked at a sonic pace, creating the 13 major structures by 1960. Over time, she would add wishing wells, shrines, cactus gardens, bricollage walkways, chapels, a waterfall, and a "Leaning Tower of Bottle Village". Prisbrey saw Bottle Village as a hobby which she enjoyed creating and showing to others who would visit.

She continued working on the Village until 1982, when due to failing health, she left for good to live with her daughter in San Francisco. Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey died October 5, 1988. Bottle Village is now a Ventura county and State of California landmark, operated by the Preserve Bottle Village Committee, a private non-profit organization devoted to saving Prisbrey's environment. Currently the Committee is completing the application to put Bottle Village on the National Register of Historic Places and is awaiting word on possible rebuilding money from FEMA to help repair the damage from the 1994 Northridge earthquake. For more information contact the Preserve Bottle Village Committee- P.O. Box 1412, Simi Valley Ca., 93062. Phone= (805) 583-1627.

-- written by Daniel Paul