



CURTIS DARLING
1918 - 2005

After a courageous battle with cancer, long-time Kern County Historical Society board member, past President, and Honorary President Curtis Darling passed away peacefully in his sleep at home on January 8, 2005. Curtis was born in Mt. Solo, Washington, but he was raised in Whittier, California. He married Jane Strickland Darling in 1940. He received his B.S. Degree from the University of California at Berkeley and also received his C.P.A. certificate. He worked as an accountant for Lockheed Aircraft and then as a partner with his father at Darling, Burton and Wold C.P.A.s in Whittier.

He served his country in World War II as Lt. Commander in the Navy, stationed in the Aleutian Islands. After the war he then attended Stanford University Law School from 1946 to 1949. After pass-

ing the California State Bar in 1949, his father, James, suggested he open his law practice in the growing community of Bakersfield. So on a hot August day he took his father's advice and drove Jane and daughter, Laurie Ann to start a new life in the San Joaquin Valley. It didn't take long for Curtis to get a reputation as a very capable tax attorney and a man who wasn't afraid to say exactly what was on his mind. As his law practice grew, so did his family. Curtis and Jane had two sons, Todd and James.

Curtis was very community minded. His involvement in other local organizations included: President of the Kern County Bar Association, President of the Kern County Philharmonic, President of the YMCA, Counsel for the Joshua Tree Council for Girl Scouts, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Cal State Bakersfield, President of the Bakersfield Chapter of C.P.A.s, founder of the Kern County Community Foundation, member of the Board of Directors, Bakersfield Museum of Art, and President of the Hot Jazz Society. For the past few years, Curtis was the editor of *Historic Kern*. His knowledge of local history was tremendous and he could always be counted on if anyone needed information. He wrote the Historical Society's latest publication, *Kern County Place Names* (2nd Edition).

His legal prowess spread well beyond Kern County. The Stanford Law Review published him. He was a five-time lecturer at the New York University on Federal Taxation, and he served as Chairman of the Conference of Estate Planning, New York University.

After 49 years of marriage Jane passed away in 1989. A year later at a Stanford Law School reunion, Curtis reconnected with a former law school classmate, Peggy Stern Cole. They soon became inseparable and were married in 1990.

The void left by Curtis in the Historical Society is a large one. His deep desire to preserve the history of the County he called home is not something you see very often. His forthrightness and wit-ness will be missed.

(This memoriam was modified from the obituary that appeared in the Bakersfield Californian)

On a personal note: Curtis taught me a great deal about Kern County history and how to handle myself in certain situations. I am indebted to him, and consider myself fortunate to have worked with him.
Jeff



JANE KINSEY
1918 - 2004

Educator, historian, and devoted west side volunteer, Jane Kinsey was born in 1918 at the Standard Oil Midway Pipeline Division B Camp in Taft. For a time, she also lived in Standard's pipeline camp located on Enos Lane. Jane graduated from Taft High School and the University of California at Berkeley where she earned a Bachelor's degree in English with a minor in History (1940). She then returned to Taft to teach for the Taft City School District. During her tenure with the school district she taught First, Second, and Sixth grades, as well as Physical Education and Drama. Jane also worked as a counselor at Lincoln Junior High School. In all, she worked thirty-eight years for the district.

It was at that time that Jane started her sec-

ond career. Plans for establishing an oil museum on the West Side of Kern County began in 1972. The Taft Branch of the American Association of University Women headed the effort. Jane and her husband Harold became charter members of the West Kern Oil Museum in 1973. In 1974, she began serving on the Board of Directors and served continuously for thirty years.

When the museum opened to the public in 1980 with one building and three acres, Jane was appointed Curator/Director. During Jane's twenty-four year tenure, the West Kern Oil Museum grew to twelve buildings on eight acres. The membership of the museum is now over 700 strong. Before her illness, it is estimated that Jane volunteered more than 2000 hours per year leading tours, writing grants and exhibit materials, and presenting programs explaining the importance of oil production on the West Side – not only from the standpoint of the oil production itself and the effect it has had on the world, but also the people who worked and lived in the oil camps, leases, etc.

Jane made the stories of the West Side come alive. Her dedication and devotion were the hallmark of how she will be remembered. Jane believed in the West Side, and the people of the West Side, the oil community, and the historians of Kern County believed in her. For those of you who may not have seen the West Kern Oil Museum in some time, or ever, this is an excellent opportunity to see what a true historian accomplished and pay tribute to Jane Kinsey's memory. The West Kern Oil Museum is located at 1168 Wood Street, Taft, California, 93628. The phone number is 661-765-6664.

(Modified from the remembrance letter written by the West Kern Oil Museum.)

HISTORY OF WEST KERN OIL MUSEUM BY JANE KINSEY; EDITED BY JEFF NICKELL

Once upon a time in the mid 1920s over 7000 wooden derricks covered the landscape from Sunset (Southeast of Maricopa), through the Midway Valley, the Elk Hills to McKittrick and Reward, a distance of approximately 21 miles in Southwest Kern County. It was indeed a veritable forest of derricks. By the late sixties, all these derricks except two were taken down. In 1974, Jameson #17 was scheduled to be torn down, too. The local American

Association of University Women and some dedicated people organized and with the Jameson Company donating the derrick and 3 acres of land, the West Kern Oil Museum, Inc. was born. The derrick was recently dismantled due to safety concerns, and is currently being reconstructed to its' original glory.

It seemed only fitting that a museum be on the Westside of Kern County, for even today almost one half (48.9%) of all the oil in California comes from these Westside oilfields. The Midway Sunset field (the oilfield on which the Museum sits) is still the top oil-producing field in the contiguous United States. Then, too, three of the giant oilfields of the U.S. lie within the Westside. They are the Midway Sunset Field, the Elk Hills Field, and the South Belridge Field. To be considered a giant field, an oilfield has to produce or be capable of producing 1 billion barrels of oil.

The Museum, run entirely by volunteers, is dedicated to collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting artifacts, books, and equipment that tell the story of oil in California, particularly in West Kern County. The Museum tries to tell of the businesses, communities and people affected by that industry and are dedicated to increasing the public understanding and appreciation of the oil industry itself.

The story starts with the Tulumne Yokuts Indians who lived here as far back as several thousand years ago, and who according to the Smithsonian Archeological dig in 1935, used the asphaltum (the oil from the seeps) as glue, a trade item, and a waterproofing agent. It continues with the miners and the McKittrick Tar Pits. Not only did the Indians get some of their asphaltum from these tar pits, but the first oil company in the San Joaquin Valley, the Buena Vista Petroleum Company, started near here in 1863. What they were after in the 1860s was kerosene. In 1859, Drake's well located in Pennsylvania, the first well drilled strictly for oil, was drilled for kerosene, an alternative to whale oil which in the 1850s had become scarce. The Buena Vista Petroleum Company, 200 miles from the nearest railhead, and far from any settlements, brought a distillery by ship from San Francisco, hauled it overland in spring wagons, and for four years distilled kerosene and sold axle grease for wagons. They hauled these products by wagon to their agent in Stockton. This was in spite of the fact that from their hand dug wells, 1/3 of the material was bones. The kerosene produced was considered of excellent

grade.

The start of the Midway Sunset Field dates from 1890. By 1915, one half of the oil in California came from this field, and California led the nation in oil production. The field became famous when the gushers started raining in. The Pritchett Act, passed in 1910 by Congress, stated (in simple terms) that everyone had to prove their claims, or the land would revert back to public domain. Oil had been classified as a mineral and therefore the land could be patented. The Westside contained a tremendous gas field, and so, as the producers drilled to prove their claims, gusher after gusher came in - 10,000 to 50,000 barrels a day. The most famous was the Lakeview Gusher which gushed for 544 days (a year and a half, at its peak hitting 90,000 to 100,000 barrels a day).

The story of the oil companies, of everyday life in the early oilfields and in the oil camps, as well as the story of oil itself are exhibited and interpreted. Outside one can press a button and witness a pumping unit produce oil.

The Museum, when completed according to the Master Plan, will represent an old time oil company camp set in the oilfields. In the 1910s and 1920s, workers had to live near their work place. Hence, oil companies on their oil leases provided, besides an office and the various company shops and warehouses, houses for families, bunkhouses for single men, a cookhouse, and a recreation hall. Near every lease there was a bus stop for the school children. In addition, the Museum is landscaped in native plants and special tours are given, pointing out particular plants and telling their uses by the Indians and early pioneers.

The Museum is open five days a week from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM Tuesday through Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Tours are given both for school children and adults, and tours may be arranged by calling (661) 765-6664.



This tiny house started life as a Tent House on an oil lease, possibly on 25 Hill. Sometime between 1913 and 1920 it was moved to South Taft and by adding a wooden roof and board and batten siding, it was turned into a three room shotgun house. It has been restored to what it might have looked like in the early 1930's.
