

United States Department of the Interior •  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name GRANDMA PRISBREY'S BOTTLE VILLAGE

other names/site number BOTTLE VILLAGE

2. Location

street & number 4595 COCHRAN ST.  not for publication

city or town SIMI VALLEY  vicinity

state CALIFORNIA code CA county VENTURA code 111 zip code 93062

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State of Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Name of Property

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
1		sites
7	10	structures
9	3	objects
18	14	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture/ work of art

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture/work of art

Vacant/not in use

Work in progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Folk Art Environment

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete, earth

walls glass

concrete

roof plywood

other found discarded items throughout

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art  
Architecture: vernacular  
Landscape architecture

Period of Significance

1960-1965

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Prisbrey, Tressa "Grandma"

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Prisbrey, Tressa "Grandma"

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Bottle Village

GRANDMA PRISBREY'S BOTTLE VILLAGE  
Name of Property

VENTURA, CALIFORNIA  
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property one-third acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

11	34	3	16	10	3	7	94	2	00
Zone	Easting			Northing					

3 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

4 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Daniel Dereck Paul

organization Preserve Bottle Village Committee date July 2, 1996

street & number 1625 East Willow telephone (714) 776-6175

city or town Anaheim state CA zip code 92805

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Preserve Bottle Village

street & number PO Box 1412 telephone (805) 583-1627

city or town Simi Valley state CA zip code 93062

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# **National Register of Historic Places**

## **Continuation Sheet**

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verbal boundary description: 625-0-080-400 and 625-0-091-1850  
boundary justification: The present lot lines encompass  
the historical property.

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VENTURA COUNTY, CA

Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village is a 1/3-acre folk art environment type district consisting of various shrines, wishing wells, follies, connected walkways, cactus gradens with sculpture, a "fence" made from T.V. tubes, two trailers in which Mrs. Prisbrey lived, and 16 ornamental structures, 15 of which were made not for human shelter but to house Mrs. Prisbrey's various collections and archives. Among these collected items are lipstick cases, pine cones, horse shoes, shells, gourdes, toothbrushes, books, shot glasses, golf tees, dolls--over 600, and 17,000 pencils. The Shell House was not originally built for a collection, but instead as the living space for a son dying of cancer. Once he passed away, Mrs. Prisbrey filled the room with sea shells. It is the walls of these 16 structures that are made from thousands of whole bottles placed horizontally in mortar that give the district its title. The common stylistic theme at Bottle Village is that all of the contributing resources, except for the two trailers and the cactus in the cactus garden, are made from salvaged objects placed in mortar. As a work of art, the district is an assemblage of hundreds of thousands of mass consumer throwaway objects from the late 1950's and early 1960's, most of which were salvaged by Mrs. Prisbrey through her daily treks to the local dump for years.

Until the Northridge earthquake of 1994, the contributing resources at Bottle Village were in fair to very good condition, archivally untampered with except for rare cases of vandalism and theft, plus the effects of natural elements such as chipped paint, some rotting wood and minor cement cracks. The earthquake caused various degrees of damage from severe to minor; as the pictures will indicate, some of the structures came down yet others survived intact. Of the seventeen structures Prisbrey made, eight currently qualify as contributing resources, indicated on the site diagram. Nine out of the eleven objects qualify as contributing, as will be indicated on the site diagram as well. Despite the earthquake damage, Prisbrey's item in mortar method of assemblage technique is still ever present, as are many of her various collections, the mosaic floor of every structure, all of the shrines, gardens, follies, walkways and various other creations; the qualities that lend Bottle Village its famous and distinct artistic

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integrity are still evident.

Bottle Village is located on Lot 130, measuring 14,758 square feet, within the Kadota Fig District area of Simi Valley at 4595 Cochran Street. First subdivided into one-acre lots in the late 1920's, the neighborhood has undergone continuous evolution resulting in past mixed zoning use of high and low density housing, industrial and rural elements existing side by side. Lot 130 extends north-south, with the front entrance to Bottle Village facing south onto Cochran Street, one of three major thoroughfares in Simi Valley. South of Cochran Street was walnut groves in Prisbrey's day and is now medium high density single story homes built circa 1984. On the north side of Cochran adjacent west to Bottle Village was a turkey farm until the mid-1980's when a high population density senior apartment complex was built at this location. Adjacent east up to Fig Avenue on what was fig orchards is now low density single family homes built circa 1984. The north end of Bottle Village abuts the backside of one of a number of low density individually built modest single family homes built circa 1958. In regards to the relationship in a space matrix of contributing resources within the district, please refer to the enclosed site map.

All 16 structures are one room, one story each. All 16 structures have in common wall sections made of bottles placed horizontally in mortar supported by a framework construction of 2x4 and 4x4 wood beams, and interior floors made of thousands found objects placed in cement, ranging from guns, sunglasses, broken jewelry, and marbles to broken tile, signs and headlights, to name a few. Most of the structures feature planters made of car headlamps on either side of the entrance and had ceilings covered with various found fabrics sewn in a technique invented by Mrs. Prisbrey. Prisbrey exhibits constructional organization in that in each structure, the bottles which comprise the wall segments either protrude outward or inward, yet never both ways in one structure. Many of the structures exhibit a uniformity of bottle size, color, or both. In structures such as the Round House, Mrs. Prisbrey built the lower wall sections of



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larger bottles, and the higher sections of like-colored smaller bottles, thus adding a degree of visual gravity. Prisbrey installed electricity in most of the structures. All of the structures are large enough for human entry and most had a theme or title based on possessions and collections in each. Mrs. Prisbrey did all of the work herself, except for extremely minimal assistance she had with physically challenging tasks such as roofing. The juxtaposition and colors of disassociated objects mixed with the sunlight flooding through the bottle walls, particularly at dusk, creates an otherworldly surreal feeling when standing within a given structure. The physical achievement inherent in these structures, as the creation of one elderly lady with limited help, is compulsively immense. The following is a list of the 16 structures beginning at the southern most point of the property, closest to the entrance, and moving northward. The numeral heading refers to the visual diagram. Distinguishing characteristics of each structure will be mentioned.

- 1.1 "Sun Room": Also known as the "Chapel" for the two gold colored stained glass windows, now gone, which were placed between structural supports on the north side and south sides. West facing wall made of bottles in mortar. Other three sides left open, hence the structure's name. 80 square feet. The framework and the mosaic floor still remain.
- 1.2 Enclosure of first trailer: A wood frame structure that covered the trailer and an area in front of it which was an enclosed patio. Within this framework were wall sections of bottles of different shapes and colors, many painted inside. 360 square feet. The framework plus some lower bottle in mortar sections still remain.
- 1.3 The "Shot House": Prisbrey's first bottle house, originally to store her pencil collection--many of the clear bottles were painted inside with primary colors. Later housed her collection of shot glasses. 140 square feet. As a result of the Northridge earthquake, this is currently not a contributing resource.
- 1.4 The "Bottle House": Adjacent to the north wall of the shot house, this being the

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only wall possessing two-sided construction; made solely of amber beer bottles placed in horizontal rows. 80 square feet. Not a contributing resource as a result of Northridge earthquake damage.

- 1.5 Bottle Wall - 30 feet long, 4 feet high running north-south: Featured multi-colored bottles, the clear bottles painted inside. Many of the other bottles had pictures of loved ones inserted inside, flush with the bottle base to be seen by the viewer. Three steps at either end of the wall. The steps still remain, as do some lower sections of the wall.
- 1.6 The "Little Hut": A round structure made of bottles which once featured a roof of palm leaves. Within it, Prisbrey installed a round table and two-gallon Sparkletts-type water jugs turned upside down for seats. Walls made of 3,000 pint sized beer bottles. 78 square feet. The table mentioned above still exists, as do the mosaic fragments embedded in it. The structure suffered complete collapse in the Northridge earthquake.
- 1.7 The "Rumpus Room": A rectangular structure with bottle walls made of 18,000 green and clear bottles; interior ceiling features hanging cloth sewn by Mrs. Prisbrey and over 200 painted gourds hanging from this. Meant as an activity room for her grandchildren. 240 square feet. This structure suffered minimal damage in the Northridge earthquake and is in good condition.
- 1.8 The "Meditation Room": Adjacent east to the rumpus room; made of various beer bottles, jugs, and beverage containers. Slightly elevated with a low roof line. Mrs. Prisbrey took visitors into this room to sing and play the piano for them; the piano is still there. Many of the bottles had pictures of family members inserted flush with the bottles' base. 150 square feet. Much of the bottle walls composing this structure fell down during the Northridge earthquake.
- 1.9 The "Hidden Storage": Adjacent north wall of the Rumpus Room. Featured a 10' high west wall made of gallon size beverage and bleach bottles. 75 square feet. The lower three feet of this structure still remains; as a result of the Northridge

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earthquake, this structure is currently not a contributing resource.

- 1.10 The "Card House": Also called the "Cabana". Composed of jars, jugs, and bottles. Structure is centered around a table with a base of multicolored bottles and a table surface that once had antique postcards glued into it. 85 square feet. The earthquake leveled this structure, although the mosaic floor inside still remains.
- 1.11 The "Doll House": Front entry way, composed of blue milk of magnesia bottles placed in white cement, resembles the two rounded curves of a heart. The rest of the structure is made of bottles of a variety of shapes and sizes. Featured a bay window to the right of the door. Interior featured a closet made of 8-foot fluorescent tubes placed vertically side by side, 2 feet into the ground, in the form of a rectangle. This structure housed Prisbrey's doll collection, which at one point numbered over 600. 185 square feet. Because of Northridge earthquake damage, this structure is not a contributing resource.
- 1.12 "Cleopatre's Bedroom": A horizontally long structure made solely of amber colored bottles. Two separate ground levels in the interior differentiated by steps made of painted Maniechevitz bottles and jewelry. Four telephone poles covered with gold spray painted Venetian blind make up the major structural support. Featured furniture and items that Mrs. Prisbrey saw as "exotic", hence the name. 260 square feet. Although some wall portions came loose during the Northridge earthquake, 90% of the structure is intact; Cleopatre's Bedroom is a contributing structure.
- 1.13 The "Viewing Room": Also known as the "Old Room". A low-lying horizontal structure, west wall of amber beer bottles, east wall comprised of assorted glass containers and bottles of various colors that emit a rainbow glow during dawn. Adjacent to Cleopatre's Bedroom. Most distinguishing features are the two long horizontal windows, built into the west wall, that face the center of the Village. Prisbrey displayed many of her favorite ornamental bottles in these windows along with items she felt looked "old". 75 square feet. 15% of east wall's upper section fell during the earthquake, yet this structure overall is in good condition and is considered a

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contributing resource.

- 1.14 The "Round House": Considered Prisbrey's prime structure. Made of 13,000 amber colored bottles except for a rhythmic geometric pattern of blue Milk of Magnesia bottles over the facsimile fireplace. Large Clorox bottles at the bottom, smaller beer bottles toward the top. 24' in diameter, 3' deeper into the ground than any other structure as a result of digging done entirely by Prisbrey. Only structure in which Mrs. Prisbrey used a level; interior features a drainage control system based on the slope of the floor that actually works. Vertical shaft in the interior center of the structure covered with crushed clear glass mixed in pink cement known as the "Glitter Pole". Originally housed "All things round". Structure is in very good condition. 415 square feet.
- 1.15 The "Third Pencil House": Geometrically asymmetrical in form; the final pencil storage house made by Prisbrey. May have been her last structure because of the awkward spatial proximity to the Round House. Amber colored bottles except for east wall which was a variety of colored bottles. 215 square feet. Aside from the door of this structure which has decayed, earthquake damage was minimal and this structure is a contributing resource.
- 1.16 The "Shell House": According to Prisbrey this structure was built in two days for a son dying of cancer. Upon his death became a room for her shell collection. Only structure which had running water. Adjacent to north wall of the Third Pencil House. Front of structure at one time covered with over 300 pinecones. Bottles in wall of many colors and types ranging from medicine bottles to soda bottles to jelly jars. 90 square feet. This structure is in good condition and is a contributing resource.
- 1.17 The "School House": Another asymmetrical structure. Amber beer bottles comprise the walls. Interior contained one-hundred-year-old desks and many books, now in storage. Adjacent to north wall of the Shell House. 208 square feet. The rear wall of this structure fell down in the Northridge earthquake. The majority and integrity of the structure is still present and therefore the School House is a contributing resource.

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Although Prisbrey did not date specific structures, she did publish a book in 1960 which discusses all of the structures except for the Third Pencil House. She mentions in this book about how "Four years ago" she began building. Therefore, it is ascertained that 15 of the 16 structures were made between 1956 and 1960.

Along with these structures, there exist a variety of contributing resources categorized as objects--these being the various shrines, wishing wells, walkways, gardens, and assorted other follies all made by Mrs. Prisbrey. As she did with the structures, Prisbrey uses an unorthodox mix of salvaged items as construction material placed in cement. Because these various objects she made are smaller in size, smaller bottles, such as blue Milk of Magnesia bottles, are often used in construction, as opposed to the larger beer type bottles used in the structures. Prisbrey was always very fond of the bright cobalt blue color of these bottles. Like in the planters attached to many of the structures, Prisbrey uses car headlights prominently with many of these objects; she felt they looked very pretty with the sun shining on them. All totalled there are 11 "objects" at Bottle Village and 9 are still contributing. Starting with the southmost resource closest to the front entrance and moving northward, the list of these resources is as follows:

- 2.1 The "Dolls Head Shrine": Circular base of car headlights placed in mortar out of which arise 3' sticks that have toy doll heads placed on each of their tops.
- 2.2 The Pyramid: 4' diameter, 3½' high tiered structure. Each tier has a row of headlights placed in mortar around each tier circumference. Tiers decrease in circumference as they elevate. Originally had a clock on top of the highest tier.
- 2.3 Small Wishing Well: 3' high, 1' diameter. Made of blue Milk of Magnesia bottles protruding inward with bases flush to the mortar. Originally placed fish inside it.
- 2.4 The Pond: A small (1' circumference) circular sculpture about 3' high made of various whiskey bottles placed in mortar. Within this is a faucet, no longer operating, that supplied water for this "pond".

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- 2.5 Fountain: Object made of various colored Bromo bottles, Milk of Magnesia bottles and car headlights. Rear of object is higher than front for the sake of water, powered by a motor, that would cascade down a diagonal slope covered with fluorescent lights laid horizontally on the cement, into an oblong, biomorphic shaped pool about 3' deep and 4' wide.
- 2.6 The Basket: A small circular creation, about 5' in diameter made of multicolored bottles with two cement arches at 90 degree angles to one another placed on top of the bottle construction. Piece resembled an Easter basket with two handles. Although the handles have come down, the circular 4' high base, rimmed with glass telephone transformers, still remains.
- 2.7 "Shrine to All Faiths": Located adjacent north wall of the Bottle House. Features a 2½' high base of 600 blue Milk of Magnesia bottles, on which 3 arch-shaped cabinets housed various figures and symbols to honor the world's major religions. The base is in good condition, although the arch-shaped cabinets, which are dry rotted, need restoration.
- 2.8 "Leaning Tower of Bottle Village": Base made of a beer keg on which were placed small metal poles in one linear, vertical fashion. Covered with smaller, delicate objects such as jewelry, necklaces, and "Lego" type toy blocks. Slightly crooked form that Prisbrey identified with the Leaning Tower of Pisa.
- 2.9 Large Wishing Well: Multi-tiered circular structure with undulating circumferences of car headlights, Magnesia bottles, and other found objects. At top Prisbrey placed two vertical beams topped by a wooden apex which came down in the earthquake.
- 2.10 Heart-Shaped Shrine: Car headlights placed in cement that is in a heart-shaped form. 2½' high. Originally made for a daughter dying of cancer. Contained roses which supposedly died the same day as her daughter. Replaced rosebuds with poles that have Milk of Magnesia bottles placed on them.
- 2.11 "Horseshoe Shrine": Roughly 8' in diameter. Car headlights placed in cement in the form of a horseshoe. Prisbrey left open space on the top of this object for

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planting small plants and cactus.

The Mosaic Walk, the Four Playing Card Suites Walkway, and the Cactus Garden are the three components of the designation "Contributing Site". All three of these contributors are in very good condition:

- 3.1 Mosaic Walk: One of the trademark creations at Bottle Village. Extends from first wishing well and first trailer northwards to the south side of the Rumpus Room, where it becomes a pathway 2½' wide until the north side of Cleopatre's Bedroom, where it becomes wider again, only to resume as a pathway from the south side of the Round House moving northward where it ends at the front entrance to the Shell House. Between the southern end of the Rumpus Room and the north end of the Viewing Room, the walk is paralleled by a row of 36 TV picture tubes on which Prisbrey placed various items. The Mosaic Walk features thousands and thousands of throwaway objects placed in mortar in close range to one another. Extreme juxtaposition. Strange relationship of disassociated objects placed next to each other such as a cigarette lighter next to a gun next to a recipe for French salad dressing. Very colorful as a result of many broken tiles and crockery bits used. Most objects in the walk were placed there whole.
- 3.2 Four Playing Card Suites Walkway: Heart, spade, diamond and club forms made of cement imbedded with various found objects in the same fashion as the Mosaic Walk.
- 3.3 Cactus Garden: Measures roughly 12'x12'. Features stepped walkways and planters of vertical rows of wine bottles protruding upwards. Many found objects such as jewelry, other bottles, and statues placed directly into the dirt alongside a multitude of various succulents; Prisbrey claimed to have had 150 various cactus. A small bird bath imbedded with car headlights is located on the southeast end of the garden. Prisbrey once stated that she related to the cactus family because they are "independent, prickly, and ask nothing of anybody."

The two contributing buildings at Bottle Village are the two trailers which served as living quarters for Mrs. Prisbrey. The first (4.1) was the trailer in which

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her and her husband originally moved onto the property. She stated that she hid the wheels of this trailer so they would "stay put." Indeed, the wheels are gone; a base of bottles runs the circumference underneath the trailer's bottom. It is not known what brand of trailer this is, only that it is wooden, built around the 1950's with a rounded, streamlined design. The earthquake caused some damage to this trailer, along with nature bringing some decay to the body, therefore is currently not a contributing resource. The second trailer (4.2) is "Spartan Brand," circa 1960, made of aluminum. This trailer served as her second living space and is in very good condition.

The only resources which are neither contributing nor non-contributing are the 30 Eucalyptus trees that line the property's east side. These trees probably served as a windblock long before Prisbrey moved here, when the area was all fig farms, and are estimated to be 80 to 100 years old.

All of the resources have now been addressed. Please see the enclosed visual diagram which lays out the spacial context and relationship of the various resources.



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integrity are still evident.

Bottle Village is located on Lot 130, measuring 14,758 square feet, within the Kadota Fig District area of Simi Valley at 4595 Cochran Street. First subdivided into one-acre lots in the late 1920's, the neighborhood has undergone continuous evolution resulting in past mixed zoning use of high and low density housing, industrial and rural elements existing side by side. Lot 130 extends north-south, with the front entrance to Bottle Village facing south onto Cochran Street, one of three major thoroughfares in Simi Valley. South of Cochran Street was walnut groves in Prisbrey's day and is now medium high density single story homes built circa 1984. On the north side of Cochran adjacent west to Bottle Village was a turkey farm until the mid-1980's when a high population density senior apartment complex was built at this location. Adjacent east up to Fig Avenue on what was fig orchards is now low density single family homes built circa 1984. The north end of Bottle Village abuts the backside of one of a number of low density individually built modest single family homes built circa 1958. In regards to the relationship in a space matrix of contributing resources within the district, please refer to the enclosed site map.

All 16 structures are one room, one story each. All 16 structures have in common wall sections made of bottles placed horizontally in mortar supported by a framework construction of 2x4 and 4x4 wood beams, and interior floors made of thousands found objects placed in cement, ranging from guns, sunglasses, broken jewelry, and marbles to broken tile, signs and headlights, to name a few. Most of the structures feature planters made of car headlamps on either side of the entrance and had ceilings covered with various found fabrics sewn in a technique invented by Mrs. Prisbrey. Prisbrey exhibits constructional organization in that in each structure, the bottles which comprise the wall segments either protrude outward or inward, yet never both ways in one structure. Many of the structures exhibit a uniformity of bottle size, color, or both. In structures such as the Round House, Mrs. Prisbrey built the lower wall sections of

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larger bottles, and the higher sections of like-colored smaller bottles, thus adding a degree of visual gravity. Prisbrey installed electricity in most of the structures. All of the structures are large enough for human entry and most had a theme or title based on possessions and collections in each. Mrs. Prisbrey did all of the work herself, except for extremely minimal assistance she had with physically challenging tasks such as roofing. The juxtaposition and colors of disassociated objects mixed with the sunlight flooding through the bottle walls, particularly at dusk, creates an otherworldly surreal feeling when standing within a given structure. The physical achievement inherent in these structures, as the creation of one elderly lady with limited help, is compulsively immense. The following is a list of the 16 structures beginning at the southern most point of the property, closest to the entrance, and moving northward. The numeral heading refers to the visual diagram. Distinguishing characteristics of each structure will be mentioned.

- 1.1 "Sun Room": Also known as the "Chapel" for the two gold colored stained glass windows, now gone, which were placed between structural supports on the north side and south sides. West facing wall made of bottles in mortar. Other three sides left open, hence the structure's name. 80 square feet. The framework and the mosaic floor still remain.
- 1.2 Enclosure of first trailer: A wood frame structure that covered the trailer and an area in front of it which was an enclosed patio. Within this framework were wall sections of bottles of different shapes and colors, many painted inside. 360 square feet. The framework plus some lower bottle in mortar sections still remain.
- 1.3 The "Shot House": Prisbrey's first bottle house, originally to store her pencil collection--many of the clear bottles were painted inside with primary colors. Later housed her collection of shot glasses. 140 square feet. As a result of the Northridge earthquake, this is currently not a contributing resource.
- 1.4 The "Bottle House": Adjacent to the north wall of the shot house, this being the

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only wall possessing two-sided construction; made solely of amber beer bottles placed in horizontal rows. 80 square feet. Not a contributing resource as a result of Northridge earthquake damage.

- 1.5 Bottle Wall - 30 feet long, 4 feet high running north-south: Featured multi-colored bottles, the clear bottles painted inside. Many of the other bottles had pictures of loved ones inserted inside, flush with the bottle base to be seen by the viewer. Three steps at either end of the wall. The steps still remain, as do some lower sections of the wall.
- 1.6 The "Little Hut": A round structure made of bottles which once featured a roof of palm leaves. Within it, Prisbrey installed a round table and two-gallon Sparkletts-type water jugs turned upside down for seats. Walls made of 3,000 pint sized beer bottles. 78 square feet. The table mentioned above still exists, as do the mosaic fragments embedded in it. The structure suffered complete collapse in the Northridge earthquake.
- 1.7 The "Rumpus Room": A rectangular structure with bottle walls made of 18,000 green and clear bottles; interior ceiling features hanging cloth sewn by Mrs. Prisbrey and over 200 painted gourds hanging from this. Meant as an activity room for her grandchildren. 240 square feet. This structure suffered minimal damage in the Northridge earthquake and is in good condition.
- 1.8 The "Meditation Room": Adjacent east to the rumpus room; made of various beer bottles, jugs, and beverage containers. Slightly elevated with a low roof line. Mrs. Prisbrey took visitors into this room to sing and play the piano for them; the piano is still there. Many of the bottles had pictures of family members inserted flush with the bottles' base. 150 square feet. Much of the bottle walls composing this structure fell down during the Northridge earthquake.
- 1.9 The "Hidden Storage": Adjacent north wall of the Rumpus Room. Featured a 10' high west wall made of gallon size beverage and bleach bottles. 75 square feet. The lower three feet of this structure still remains; as a result of the Northridge

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earthquake, this structure is currently not a contributing resource.

- 1.10 The "Card House": Also called the "Cabana". Composed of jars, jugs, and bottles. Structure is centered around a table with a base of multicolored bottles and a table surface that once had antique postcards glued into it. 85 square feet. The earthquake leveled this structure, although the mosaic floor inside still remains.
- 1.11 The "Doll House": Front entry way, composed of blue milk of magnesia bottles placed in white cement, resembles the two rounded curves of a heart. The rest of the structure is made of bottles of a variety of shapes and sizes. Featured a bay window to the right of the door. Interior featured a closet made of 8-foot fluorescent tubes placed vertically side by side, 2 feet into the ground, in the form of a rectangle. This structure housed Prisbrey's doll collection, which at one point numbered over 600. 185 square feet. Because of Northridge earthquake damage, this structure is not a contributing resource.
- 1.12 "Cleopatre's Bedroom": A horizontally long structure made solely of amber colored bottles. Two separate ground levels in the interior differentiated by steps made of painted Maniechevitz bottles and jewelry. Four telephone poles covered with gold spray painted Venetian blind make up the major structural support. Featured furniture and items that Mrs. Prisbrey saw as "exotic", hence the name. 260 square feet. Although some wall portions came loose during the Northridge earthquake, 90% of the structure is intact; Cleopatre's Bedroom is a contributing structure.
- 1.13 The "Viewing Room": Also known as the "Old Room". A low-lying horizontal structure, west wall of amber beer bottles, east wall comprised of assorted glass containers and bottles of various colors that emit a rainbow glow during dawn. Adjacent to Cleopatre's Bedroom. Most distinguishing features are the two long horizontal windows, built into the west wall, that face the center of the Village. Prisbrey displayed many of her favorite ornamental bottles in these windows along with items she felt looked "old". 75 square feet. 15% of east wall's upper section fell during the earthquake, yet this structure overall is in good condition and is considered a

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contributing resource.

- 1.14 The "Round House": Considered Prisbrey's prime structure. Made of 13,000 amber colored bottles except for a rhythmic geometric pattern of blue Milk of Magnesia bottles over the facsimile fireplace. Large Clorox bottles at the bottom, smaller beer bottles toward the top. 24' in diameter, 3' deeper into the ground than any other structure as a result of digging done entirely by Prisbrey. Only structure in which Mrs. Prisbrey used a level; interior features a drainage control system based on the slope of the floor that actually works. Vertical shaft in the interior center of the structure covered with crushed clear glass mixed in pink cement known as the "Glitter Pole". Originally housed "All things round". Structure is in very good condition. 415 square feet.

- 1.15 The "Third Pencil House": Geometrically asymmetrical in form; the final pencil storage house made by Prisbrey. May have been her last structure because of the awkward spatial proximity to the Round House. Amber colored bottles except for east wall which was a variety of colored bottles. 215 square feet. Aside from the door of this structure which has decayed, earthquake damage was minimal and this structure is a contributing resource.

- 1.16 The "Shell House": According to Prisbrey this structure was built in two days for a son dying of cancer. Upon his death became a room for her shell collection. Only structure which had running water. Adjacent to north wall of the Third Pencil House. Front of structure at one time covered with over 300 pinecones. Bottles in wall of many colors and types ranging from medicine bottles to soda bottles to jelly jars. 90 square feet. This structure is in good condition and is a contributing resource.

- 1.17 The "School House": Another asymmetrical structure. Amber beer bottles comprise the walls. Interior contained one-hundred-year-old desks and many books, now in storage. Adjacent to north wall of the Shell House. 208 square feet. The rear wall of this structure fell down in the Northridge earthquake. The majority and integrity of the structure is still present and therefore the School House is a contributing resource.

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Although Prisbrey did not date specific structures, she did publish a book in 1960 which discusses all of the structures except for the Third Pencil House. She mentions in this book about how "Four years ago" she began building. Therefore, it is ascertained that 15 of the 16 structures were made between 1956 and 1960.

Along with these structures, there exist a variety of contributing resources categorized as objects--these being the various shrines, wishing wells, walkways, gardens, and assorted other follies all made by Mrs. Prisbrey. As she did with the structures, Prisbrey uses an unorthodox mix of salvaged items as construction material placed in cement. Because these various objects she made are smaller in size, smaller bottles, such as blue Milk of Magnesia bottles, are often used in construction, as opposed to the larger beer type bottles used in the structures. Prisbrey was always very fond of the bright cobalt blue color of these bottles. Like in the planters attached to many of the structures, Prisbrey uses car headlights prominently with many of these objects; she felt they looked very pretty with the sun shining on them. All totalled there are 11 "objects" at Bottle Village and 9 are still contributing. Starting with the southmost resource closest to the front entrance and moving northward, the list of these resources is as follows:

- 2.1 The "Dolls Head Shrine": Circular base of car headlights placed in mortar out of which arise 3' sticks that have toy doll heads placed on each of their tops.
- 2.2 The Pyramid: 4' diameter, 3½' high tiered structure. Each tier has a row of headlights placed in mortar around each tier circumference. Tiers decrease in circumference as they elevate. Originally had a clock on top of the highest tier.
- 2.3 Small Wishing Well: 3' high, 1' diameter. Made of blue Milk of Magnesia bottles protruding inward with bases flush to the mortar. Originally placed fish inside it.
- 2.4 The Pond: A small (1' circumference) circular sculpture about 3' high made of various whiskey bottles placed in mortar. Within this is a faucet, no longer operating, that supplied water for this "pond".

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- 2.5 Fountain: Object made of various colored Bromo bottles, Milk of Magnesia bottles and car headlights. Rear of object is higher than front for the sake of water, powered by a motor, that would cascade down a diagonal slope covered with fluorescent lights laid horizontally on the cement, into an oblong, biomorphic shaped pool about 3' deep and 4' wide.
- 2.6 The Basket: A small circular creation, about 5' in diameter made of multicolored bottles with two cement arches at 90 degree angles to one another placed on top of the bottle construction. Piece resembled an Easter basket with two handles. Although the handles have come down, the circular 4' high base, rimmed with glass telephone transformers, still remains.
- 2.7 "Shrine to All Faiths": Located adjacent north wall of the Bottle House. Features a 2½' high base of 600 blue Milk of Magnesia bottles, on which 3 arch-shaped cabinets housed various figures and symbols to honor the world's major religions. The base is in good condition, although the arch-shaped cabinets, which are dry rotted, need restoration.
- 2.8 "Leaning Tower of Bottle Village": Base made of a beer keg on which were placed small metal poles in one linear, vertical fashion. Covered with smaller, delicate objects such as jewelry, necklaces, and "Lego" type toy blocks. Slightly crooked form that Prisbrey identified with the Leaning Tower of Pisa.
- 2.9 Large Wishing Well: Multi-tiered circular structure with undulating circumferences of car headlights, Magnesia bottles, and other found objects. At top Prisbrey placed two vertical beams topped by a wooden apex which came down in the earthquake.
- 2.10 Heart-Shaped Shrine: Car headlights placed in cement that is in a heart-shaped form. 2½' high. Originally made for a daughter dying of cancer. Contained roses which supposedly died the same day as her daughter. Replaced rosebuds with poles that have Milk of Magnesia bottles placed on them.
- 2.11 "Horseshoe Shrine": Roughly 8' in diameter. Car headlights placed in cement in the form of a horseshoe. Prisbrey left open space on the top of this object for



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planting small plants and cactus.

The Mosaic Walk, the Four Playing Card Suites Walkway, and the Cactus Garden are the three components of the designation "Contributing Site". All three of these contributors are in very good condition:

- 3.1 Mosaic Walk: One of the trademark creations at Bottle Village. Extends from first wishing well and first trailer northwards to the south side of the Rumpus Room, where it becomes a pathway 2½' wide until the north side of Cleopatre's Bedroom, where it becomes wider again, only to resume as a pathway from the south side of the Round House moving northward where it ends at the front entrance to the Shell House. Between the southern end of the Rumpus Room and the north end of the Viewing Room, the walk is paralleled by a row of 36 TV picture tubes on which Prisbrey placed various items. The Mosaic Walk features thousands and thousands of throwaway objects placed in mortar in close range to one another. Extreme juxtaposition. Strange relationship of disassociated objects placed next to each other such as a cigarette lighter next to a gun next to a recipe for French salad dressing. Very colorful as a result of many broken tiles and crockery bits used. Most objects in the walk were placed there whole.
- 3.2 Four Playing Card Suites Walkway: Heart, spade, diamond and club forms made of cement imbedded with various found objects in the same fashion as the Mosaic Walk.
- 3.3 Cactus Garden: Measures roughly 12'x12'. Features stepped walkways and planters of vertical rows of wine bottles protruding upwards. Many found objects such as jewelry, other bottles, and statues placed directly into the dirt alongside a multitude of various succulents; Prisbrey claimed to have had 150 various cactus. A small bird bath imbedded with car headlights is located on the southeast end of the garden. Prisbrey once stated that she related to the cactus family because they are "independent, prickly, and ask nothing of anybody."

The two contributing buildings at Bottle Village are the two trailers which served as living quarters for Mrs. Prisbrey. The first (4.1) was the trailer in which

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her and her husband originally moved onto the property. She stated that she hid the wheels of this trailer so they would "stay put." Indeed, the wheels are gone; a base of bottles runs the circumference underneath the trailer's bottom. It is not known what brand of trailer this is, only that it is wooden, built around the 1950's with a rounded, streamlined design. The earthquake caused some damage to this trailer, along with nature bringing some decay to the body, therefore is currently not a contributing resource. The second trailer (4.2) is "Spartan Brand," circa 1960, made of aluminum. This trailer served as her second living space and is in very good condition.

The only resources which are neither contributing nor non-contributing are the 30 Eucalyptus trees that line the property's east side. These trees probably served as a windblock long before Prisbrey moved here, when the area was all fig farms, and are estimated to be 80 to 100 years old.

All of the resources have now been addressed. Please see the enclosed visual diagram which lays out the spacial context and relationship of the various resources.

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### Preface: About Folk Art Environments and their History in California

Folk art environments occur when individuals with no formal artistic or architectural training creatively manipulate a physical area through the making of three-dimensional structures and objects, accumulation of found artifacts, or by manipulation of the land itself: gardens, landscape, creative grading of land elevation. Typically these environments reflect the idiosyncratic visions of singular creators working with obsessive consistency over a period of years. Intuition replaces blueprints or formal planning toward the rebuilding process. Although most of these individuals are "ordinary" people from mainstream society and may not see themselves as artists, art scholars designate their creations "Outsider Art," often citing the environments as examples of intrinsic creative genius. Because often money is at a minimum, the media used are frequently found and discarded objects which have no correlation to art, per-se. It is this circumstance that is responsible for much of the acclaim given these individuals because (1) there is a bold task involved in seeing creative potential in a hubcap or headlight opposed to paint and pastels, and (2) the folk art environmentalist meets this task, physically manifest in their massive creations, in which "junk" is transformed and redefined into something more.

California is home to at least fifty folk art environments, a number that is declining fast yet is still highest among all states. Seymour Rosen has stated that the main reasons for this plentitude are the consistency of climate plus the availability of open land in the 1950's, when most of these environments were built--a time also when the population was still moving westward. Like the emergence of Roadside Vernacular architecture in the 1920's and the Googie style coffee shops of the 1950's and 1960's, folk art environments reflect California's reputation as a place for eclecticism, diversity, alternative creativity and the free spirit.

### Summary

Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village is a City of Simi, County of Ventura, and State

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of California Cultural Landmark. Bottle Village has also been recognized as an official folk art environment by California SHPO. Under criterion C, Bottle Village, as a folk art environment, is considered art, architecture, and landscape architecture. This environment is a 1/3-acre creation of structures, sculptures, gardens, and walkways all made from various found objects, notably 16 house-like structures with walls made of bottles placed in mortar. Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey meets criterion B standards under art, architecture, and landscape architecture because she created Bottle Village. With no formal training in art or architecture, Prisbrey began Bottle Village construction at age 60, proceeding to create it by herself, mostly from materials gleaned through daily visits to the dump. To national history, Bottle Village is important because it is a significant folk art environment created by an American folk artist of high acclaim, Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey, and also because it is a rarity created out of actual mass consumer throwaway from everyday lives of Americans of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Bottle Village meets national register criterion G; although it was begun circa 1956, this environment has achieved serious acclaim by scholars, critics, curators and students as an important American folk art environment and as perhaps the prime folk art environment in art history created by a female self-taught artist.

History of Tressa Prisbrey and Bottle Village<sup>1</sup>

Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey (birth name Thresie Luella Shafer) was born January 19, 1896 in Easton, Minnesota. Her only formal education ended at age 13 when her family moved to a homestead outside Minot, North Dakota. At 15 years old she married 52-year-old Theodore Grinolds with whom she had seven children, six of which would die in her lifetime. She left Theodore in the late 1920's with some of the children and sustained as a waitress. During this time, she got involved in politics and began her pencil collection, which would become a main reason for beginning Bottle Village. During World War II, Prisbrey lived in Seattle doing assemblyline work for Boeing and in 1950 she moved to California and worked at a citrus packing plant. She would marry her

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second husband, Albert Prisbrey, in 1954.

The history of the property begins here when in 1955, the Prisbreys 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 stay put, and to have a place to exhibit her pencil collection. As is often the case with folk art environments, dates of various resources within the whole are not always documented by the artist. So is the case here. Circa 1956 to 1965 is used as the period of significance because all of the resources she made were finished by this time. Prisbrey's only date-oriented documentation of Bottle Village comes in the form of a booklet titled "Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village," written by Prisbrey in 1960 which documents that the bulk of work was done by 1960, including 15 out of 16 contributing structures (the third Pencil House was created a year or two later), and 5 of the other contributing resources, which are the small wishing well, the found object walkway, the Shrine to all Faiths, the cactus garden, and the thirty-foot long wall, the first object made by Prisbrey on the premises.

As Prisbrey kept building, Bottle Village evolved into a bona-fide tourist attraction. For .25 cents a visitor was treated, by Prisbrey herself, to a guided tour, complete with Prisbrey anecdotes, life stories, jokes, and at the end, piano playing and singing in the Meditation Room. In the midst of giving tours and getting older, she still managed to drive her Studebaker truck to the dump daily, scouring the garbage for various items which she would incorporate into her environment or collect on their own accord. As she found more interesting collectables, new houses were necessary to store them; in time Prisbrey built until she ran out of space, then focusing on decorative and ornamental aspects. Bottle Village grew to be very popular; many guestbooks exist with thousands of visitors' names and addresses from around the world. On a local level, residents of Simi Valley have long since incorporated Grandma Prisbrey into the pantheon of local mythology. Prisbrey saw Bottle Village as a hobby that she enjoyed very much, especially in the company of visitors, when she could share her creation and her life.

In 1972, Prisbrey sold the property and moved to Portland, Oregon to nurse a son

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dying of cancer. She returned in 1974 as a caretaker of Bottle Village. It was during this time that Bottle Village began to receive serious international recognition in the field of folk art study. This popularity, which is alive and growing today, is due in large part to the effort of SPACES, which also helped establish the Preserve Bottle Village Committee, a private non-profit organization that currently owns and maintains Bottle Village today. Due to poor health, Prisbrey left in 1982, moving to San Francisco to live with her daughter. Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey died October 5, 1988.

Statement of Historic Context

In the folk art field, Bottle Village has been called "monumental"<sup>2</sup> and "A testament to how far American women folk artists have come."<sup>3</sup> Scholars praise Prisbrey as one of the first women artists to work with plastic media. Unintentionally, she is an influential artist, her name mentioned in the company of Louis Bourgois and Miriam Schapiro because she was one of the first women artists to use a house motif in which a full scale structure, the Doll House, and its contents symbolically relate to a female theme: maternity.<sup>4</sup> The use of a real house as an installation space would become a popular motif among feminist artists in the 1970's. Yet Prisbrey's intention was not to make any statement on the female in society. Earlier in life she raised seven children and during the Bottle Village years she watched her grandchildren regularly, therefore maternal themes may have very easily been a natural, intuitive extension of circumstances. In 1981, Prisbrey's artistry would once again be recognized in the form of a \$5,000.00 NEA grant to build a 15'x6' bottle wall in the Simi Valley main library.

In his book "Architectural Follies in America," Gwyn Headley, the art world's foremost authority on the subject of architectural follies, calls Bottle Village "The most ambitious bottle house in the nation."<sup>5</sup> Prisbrey used what is properly called the "bottle in mortar" method of construction. She would begin with a 3 to 1 mix of sand to cement, proceeding to lay a course of concrete into which the bottles would be pressed. A second and third course would follow. The next day, three more courses would be laid.

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Prisbrey raised these walls using no framework.<sup>6</sup>

Needless to say, this method of construction is rare, yet it had been used before Prisbrey, particularly by frontier families moving westward during the turn of the century. Bottles were a readily available cheap resource which provided interior light in place of window panes.<sup>7</sup> There is no documentation that Prisbrey had any prior knowledge of these bottle houses. None of these previously made bottle houses has received the acclaim of her's; acclaim for the ambient, luminescent light present in the interiors, and for the unmatched scope and magnitude of her undertaking.

In relation to its surroundings, Bottle Village resides in an area which today is medium density, mostly strip malls and single family homes built in the 1950's and 1960's. These homes are distinct from one another in style, and Bottle Village complements this idea well. Visible from Cochran Street, Bottle Village garners much attention as a creative and unique curiosity, especially in relation to the condominium complex adjacent west property line. The architectural cohesiveness of Bottle Village is manifest in that all 16 structures were constructed by Mrs. Prisbrey using the bottle in mortar method, and are spacially unified around a north-south axis occupied by the found object walkway.

As is often the case with folk art environment creators, money is at a minimum, forcing the artist to use unorthodox materials from unorthodox places. By turning to the dump for materials, Prisbrey, compared to other artists, now had the added formidable task of using media already preconceived as non-art objects, as garbage or junk. Much of Prisbrey's acclaim is directed toward her creative vision in resolving this dilemma. Not only did she make 16 structures out of bottles, she also created a walkway from television tubes, a fire screen of intravenous feeding tubes, planters and shrines from car headlights, a "Spring Garden" from various metal automobile springs, and a found object walkway that includes toy guns, license plates, electric shavers, sunglass frames, and much more. As Prisbrey herself said, "Anyone could do anything with a million dollars--look at Disney. But it takes more than money to make

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something out of nothing, and look at the fun I have doing it." Prisbrey receives further acclaim for the circumstances in which she created this environment. She began construction at age 60, and proceeded to build Bottle Village by herself. She had no plans and no formal training in construction, architecture or art.

To American history, Bottle Village is important because it is a significant folk art environment created by an American of high acclaim. Furthermore, Bottle Village is important to American history because it not only possesses attributes that could be studied to extract important information about American society, it is literally made of hundreds of thousands of them. Bottle Village has been called "An above ground archaeological dig of Simi Valley." Many local residents would visit the village and to their surprise, see an artifact which used to belong to them; few other landmarks tie into local history through being made of local garbage! Bottle Village is a virtual time capsule of both the commonplace and time and place; Prisbrey's media was primarily mass consumer throwaway and other objects from the 1950's and early 1960's. The feeling of time and place--late 50's/early 60's America, is present.

If Bottle Village is accepted on to the National Register of Historic Places, it will be only the ninth out of hundreds of folk art environments to be acknowledged, and it will be the first created by a female, thus giving proper credit to both Tressa Prisbey, an outstanding example of the artist as female, as elderly, as recycler, and Bottle Village, a noteworthy example of the bottle in mortar method of construction, highly distinct and noted in the folk art world.

Footnotes

[1] Many facts of Prisbrey's personal history stated in this section were taken from a fact sheet compiled by Helen Dennert, Preserve Bottle Village Committee.

[2] Esther McCoy, "Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village," Naives and Visionaries. Walker Art Center, 1974.



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[3] C. Kurt Dewhurst, Artists in Aprons: Folk Art By American Women. Museum of Folk Art, New York, 1979.

[4] Arlene Raven, At Home. City of Long Beach Department of Recreation and Human Services, 1983.

[5] Gwyn Headley, Architectural Follies in America. John Wiley and Sons, London, 1996.

[6] Information regarding Prisbrey's construction process originally found in Esther McCoy's article mentioned in [2].

[7] Information regarding the history of the Bottle in Mortar method of construction provided by Seymour Rosen. Interview, June 15, 1996.

[8] Seymour Rosen and Louis Jackson, "Folk Art Environments in California: An Overview," Cat and a Ball on a Waterfall. Oakland Museum Art Department, 1986.

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### Preface: About Folk Art Environments and their History in California

Folk art environments occur when individuals with no formal artistic or architectural training creatively manipulate a physical area through the making of three-dimensional structures and objects, accumulation of found artifacts, or by manipulation of the land itself: gardens, landscape, creative grading of land elevation. Typically these environments reflect the idiosyncratic visions of singular creators working with obsessive consistency over a period of years. Intuition replaces blueprints or formal planning toward the rebuilding process. Although most of these individuals are "ordinary" people from mainstream society and may not see themselves as artists, art scholars designate their creations "Outsider Art," often citing the environments as examples of intrinsic creative genius. Because often money is at a minimum, the media used are frequently found and discarded objects which have no correlation to art, per-se. It is this circumstance that is responsible for much of the acclaim given these individuals because (1) there is a bold task involved in seeing creative potential in a hubcap or headlight opposed to paint and pastels, and (2) the folk art environmentalist meets this task, physically manifest in their massive creations, in which "junk" is transformed and redefined into something more.

California is home to at least fifty folk art environments, a number that is declining fast yet is still highest among all states. Seymour Rosen has stated that the main reasons for this plentitude are the consistency of climate plus the availability of open land in the 1950's, when most of these environments were built--a time also when the population was still moving westward. Like the emergence of Roadside Vernacular architecture in the 1920's and the Googie style coffee shops of the 1950's and 1960's, folk art environments reflect California's reputation as a place for eclecticism, diversity, alternative creativity and the free spirit.

### Summary

Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village is a City of Simi, County of Ventura, and State

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of California Cultural Landmark. Bottle Village has also been recognized as an official folk art environment by California SHPO. Under criterion C, Bottle Village, as a folk art environment, is considered art, architecture, and landscape architecture. This environment is a 1/3-acre creation of structures, sculptures, gardens, and walkways all made from various found objects, notably 16 house-like structures with walls made of bottles placed in mortar. Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey meets criterion B standards under art, architecture, and landscape architecture because she created Bottle Village. With no formal training in art or architecture, Prisbrey began Bottle Village construction at age 60, proceeding to create it by herself, mostly from materials gleaned through daily visits to the dump. To national history, Bottle Village is important because it is a significant folk art environment created by an American folk artist of high acclaim, Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey, and also because it is a rarity created out of actual mass consumer throwaway from everyday lives of Americans of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Bottle Village meets national register criterion G; although it was begun circa 1956, this environment has achieved serious acclaim by scholars, critics, curators and students as an important American folk art environment and as perhaps the prime folk art environment in art history created by a female self-taught artist.

### History of Tressa Prisbrey and Bottle Village<sup>1</sup>

Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey (birth name Thresie Luella Shafer) was born January 19, 1896 in Easton, Minnesota. Her only formal education ended at age 13 when her family moved to a homestead outside Minot, North Dakota. At 15 years old she married 52-year-old Theodore Grinolds with whom she had seven children, six of which would die in her lifetime. She left Theodore in the late 1920's with some of the children and sustained as a waitress. During this time, she got involved in politics and began her pencil collection, which would become a main reason for beginning Bottle Village. During World War II, Prisbrey lived in Seattle doing assemblyline work for Boeing and in 1950 she moved to California and worked at a citrus packing plant. She would marry her

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second husband, Albert Prisbrey, in 1954.

The history of the property begins here when in 1955, the Prisbreys 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 stay put, and to have a place to exhibit her pencil collection. As is often the case with folk art environments, dates of various resources within the whole are not always documented by the artist. So is the case here. Circa 1956 to 1965 is used as the period of significance because all of the resources she made were finished by this time. Prisbrey's only date-oriented documentation of Bottle Village comes in the form of a booklet titled "Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village," written by Prisbrey in 1960 which documents that the bulk of work was done by 1960, including 15 out of 16 contributing structures (the third Pencil House was created a year or two later), and 5 of the other contributing resources, which are the small wishing well, the found object walkway, the Shrine to all Faiths, the cactus garden, and the thirty-foot long wall, the first object made by Prisbrey on the premises.

As Prisbrey kept building, Bottle Village evolved into a bona-fide tourist attraction. For .25 cents a visitor was treated, by Prisbrey herself, to a guided tour, complete with Prisbrey anecdotes, life stories, jokes, and at the end, piano playing and singing in the Meditation Room. In the midst of giving tours and getting older, she still managed to drive her Studebaker truck to the dump daily, scouring the garbage for various items which she would incorporate into her environment or collect on their own accord. As she found more interesting collectables, new houses were necessary to store them; in time Prisbrey built until she ran out of space, then focusing on decorative and ornamental aspects. Bottle Village grew to be very popular; many guestbooks exist with thousands of visitors' names and addresses from around the world. On a local level, residents of Simi Valley have long since incorporated Grandma Prisbrey into the pantheon of local mythology. Prisbrey saw Bottle Village as a hobby that she enjoyed very much, especially in the company of visitors, when she could share her creation and her life.

In 1972, Prisbrey sold the property and moved to Portland, Oregon to nurse a son

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dying of cancer. She returned in 1974 as a caretaker of Bottle Village. It was during this time that Bottle Village began to receive serious international recognition in the field of folk art study. This popularity, which is alive and growing today, is due in large part to the effort of SPACES, which also helped establish the Preserve Bottle Village Committee, a private non-profit organization that currently owns and maintains Bottle Village today. Due to poor health, Prisbrey left in 1982, moving to San Francisco to live with her daughter. Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey died October 5, 1988.

Statement of Historic Context

In the folk art field, Bottle Village has been called "monumental"<sup>2</sup> and "A testament to how far American women folk artists have come."<sup>3</sup> Scholars praise Prisbrey as one of the first women artists to work with plastic media. Unintentionally, she is an influential artist, her name mentioned in the company of Louis Bourgois and Miriam Schapiro because she was one of the first women artists to use a house motif in which a full scale structure, the Doll House, and its contents symbolically relate to a female theme: maternity.<sup>4</sup> The use of a real house as an installation space would become a popular motif among feminist artists in the 1970's. Yet Prisbrey's intention was not to make any statement on the female in society. Earlier in life she raised seven children and during the Bottle Village years she watched her grandchildren regularly, therefore maternal themes may have very easily been a natural, intuitive extension of circumstances. In 1981, Prisbrey's artistry would once again be recognized in the form of a \$5,000.00 NEA grant to build a 15'x6' bottle wall in the Simi Valley main library.

In his book "Architectural Follies in America," Gwyn Headley, the art world's foremost authority on the subject of architectural follies, calls Bottle Village "The most ambitious bottle house in the nation."<sup>5</sup> Prisbrey used what is properly called the "bottle in mortar" method of construction. She would begin with a 3 to 1 mix of sand to cement, proceeding to lay a course of concrete into which the bottles would be pressed. A second and third course would follow. The next day, three more courses would be laid.

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Prisbrey raised these walls using no framework.<sup>6</sup>

Needless to say, this method of construction is rare, yet it had been used before Prisbrey, particularly by frontier families moving westward during the turn of the century. Bottles were a readily available cheap resource which provided interior light in place of window panes.<sup>7</sup> There is no documentation that Prisbrey had any prior knowledge of these bottle houses. None of these previously made bottle houses has received the acclaim of her's; acclaim for the ambient, luminescent light present in the interiors, and for the unmatched scope and magnitude of her undertaking.

In relation to its surroundings, Bottle Village resides in an area which today is medium density, mostly strip malls and single family homes built in the 1950's and 1960's. These homes are distinct from one another in style, and Bottle Village compliments this idea well. Visible from Cochran Street, Bottle Village garners much attention as a creative and unique curiosity, especially in relation to the condominium complex adjacent west property line. The architectural cohesiveness of Bottle Village is manifest in that all 16 structures were constructed by Mrs. Prisbrey using the bottle in mortar method, and are spacially unified around a north-south axis occupied by the found object walkway.

As is often the case with folk art environment creators, money is at a minimum, forcing the artist to use unorthodox materials from unorthodox places. By turning to the dump for materials, Prisbrey, compared to other artists, now had the added formidable task of using media already preconceived as non-art objects, as garbage or junk. Much of Prisbrey's acclaim is directed toward her creative vision in resolving this dilemma. Not only did she make 16 structures out of bottles, she also created a walkway from television tubes, a fire screen of intravenous feeding tubes, planters and shrines from car headlights, a "Spring Garden" from various metal automobile springs, and a found object walkway that includes toy guns, license plates, electric shavers, sunglass frames, and much more. As Prisbrey herself said, "Anyone could do anything with a million dollars--look at Disney. But it takes more than money to make

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something out of nothing, and look at the fun I have doing it." Prisbrey receives further acclaim for the circumstances in which she created this environment. She began construction at age 60, and proceeded to build Bottle Village by herself. She had no plans and no formal training in construction, architecture or art.

To American history, Bottle Village is important because it is a significant folk art environment created by an American of high acclaim. Furthermore, Bottle Village is important to American history because it not only possesses attributes that could be studied to extract important information about American society, it is literally made of hundreds of thousands of them. Bottle Village has been called "An above ground archaeological dig of Simi Valley." Many local residents would visit the village and to their surprise, see an artifact which used to belong to them; few other landmarks tie into local history through being made of local garbage! Bottle Village is a virtual time capsule of both the commonplace and time and place; Prisbrey's media was primarily mass consumer throwaway and other objects from the 1950's and early 1960's. The feeling of time and place--late 50's/early 60's America, is present.

If Bottle Village is accepted on to the National Register of Historic Places, it will be only the ninth out of hundreds of folk art environments to be acknowledged, and it will be the first created by a female, thus giving proper credit to both Tressa Prisbey, an outstanding example of the artist as female, as elderly, as recycler, and Bottle Village, a noteworthy example of the bottle in mortar method of construction, highly distinct and noted in the folk art world.

Footnotes

[1] Many facts of Prisbrey's personal history stated in this section were taken from a fact sheet compiled by Helen Dennert, Preserve Bottle Village Committee.

[2] Esther McCoy, "Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village," Naives and Visionaries. Walker Art Center, 1974.

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- [3] C. Kurt Dewhurst, Artists in Aprons: Folk Art By American Women. Museum of Folk Art, New York, 1979.
- [4] Arlene Raven, At Home. City of Long Beach Department of Recreation and Human Services, 1983.
- [5] Gwyn Headley, Architectural Follies in America. John Wiley and Sons, London, 1996.
- [6] Information regarding Prisbrey's construction process originally found in Esther McCoy's article mentioned in [2].
- [7] Information regarding the history of the Bottle in Mortar method of construction provided by Seymour Rosen. Interview, June 15, 1996.
- [8] Seymour Rosen and Louis Jackson, "Folk Art Environments in California: An Overview," Cat and a Ball on a Waterfall. Oakland Museum Art Department, 1986.