



The Mary DeDecker Symposium

Mary DeDecker was born in Oklahoma in 1909 and moved to southern California in 1917. There she attended Van Nuys High School in the San Fernando Valley. Her father had started her interest in plants at the age of five; however, it was during her tenth-grade biology class that her lifetime enthusiasm for botany really began.

The Depression cut short her college career; she married Paul DeDecker in 1929, and they moved to Independence in 1935. It was there that Mary DeDecker began her career as a leading expert on the California flora east of the Sierra Nevada. As a leading expert on the local flora, she was asked by the Bureau of Land Management, Cal Trans, and the Forest Service for her scientific opinions and became the regional botanist laureate. In 1983 she began the important chapter on botany for the *Natural History Guide of the White-Inyo Range* (University of California Press, in press) and is continuing her work on the flora of the Owens Valley.

Mary has written for the *Inyo Register* and wrote the *Flora of the Northern Mojave*, the plant section for the *Deepest Valley* (by Genny Schumacker Smith), the *Eichbaum Toll Road*, and another book on *Mines of the Eastern Sierra*. She has held a variety of societal or civic offices. She has been recognized in the Bancroft Library oral history volume on *California Women in Botany* and has had the genus *Dedeckera* named after her. In addition, she has been a principal advocate for the preservation of the Eureka Dunes and the Last Chance Range, as well as a water-rights champion for the Owens Valley.

Because of all of her accomplishments, it was fitting to dedicate this Symposium on botany and public policy to her and to co-sponsor the Symposium with the California Native Plant Society--Mary helped organize the local Bristlecone Chapter of that society and was its second president.

Sir Thomas Blount wrote in his book on natural history in 1693: "Every flower of the field, every fiber of a plant, every particle of an insect, carries with it the impress of its Maker, and can-if duly considered--read us lectures of ethics and divinity." Mary DeDecker has considered those flowers, recorded the lectures provided in the field and plant, and commented on the ethics of the preservation that Nature has wrought. These are the reasons for honoring this gentle woman of the Valley.

C.A. Hall, May 1987

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