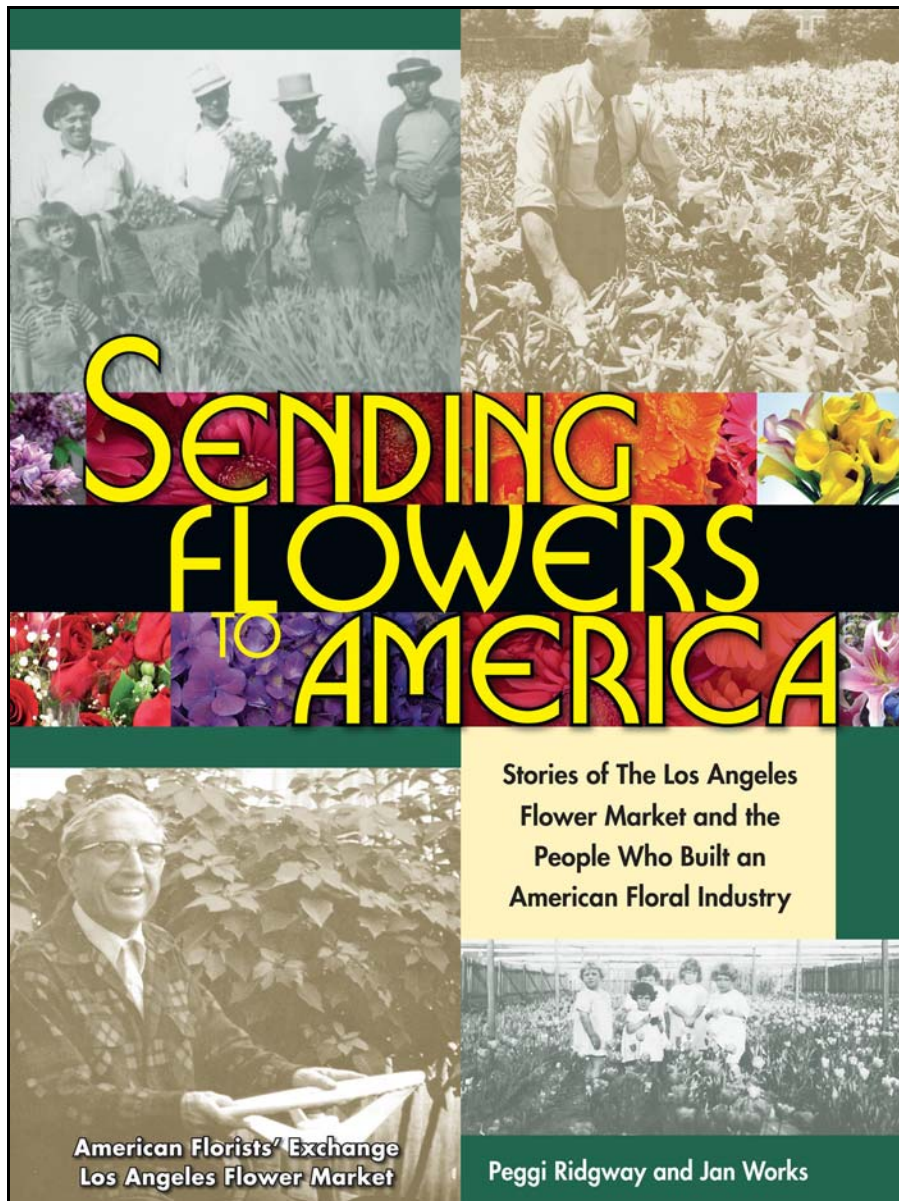


The *Sending Flowers to America* book published in 2008 by the American Florists' Exchange, project manager Peggi Ridgway

The research, writing, design and production of a major historical reference commissioned by the American Florists' Exchange dba Los Angeles Flower Market were performed and supervised by Peggi Ridgway. The coffee table keepsake book, called ***Sending Flowers to America***, was published in 2008 after eighteen months' research. Ms. Ridgway sub-contracted writing of individual family stories, which appeared in a section at the back of the book, to business writer Jan Works; and the design and layout to Theresa Fajardo; and cover design to Michael Wheary. The hardbound, indexed book with dustjacket contains 288 full-color pages and is the first comprehensive history of the Southern California (specifically Los Angeles area) floral industry and can be purchased at [FlowerMarketHistory.com](http://FlowerMarketHistory.com). A few sample pages are included here.



Dustjacket/Cover

## American Florists' Exchange, Ltd.

The American Florists' Exchange got its start around 1917 to 1919 as an informally organized group of about 30 people who went on to incorporate the group in January 1921. The flower growers and florists who made up the Exchange had been doing business with each other informally in the small downtown floral and produce markets. They were inspired by the success of the Japanese Americans, whose Southern California Flower Market had been operational and incorporated since 1914. They were also motivated by the growing demand for fresh cut flowers and the ability to produce outstanding floral products in the most ideal growing climate in America. Based on a loan from his bank, Gebhard PrechtI controlled more than 50 percent of the stock. When it came time to fulfill obligations on other bank notes, he did some pretty smooth talking to convince those unsure of the AFE's future to buy shares at \$50 each.

The first flower market operated by the American Florists' Exchange occupied space at Fourth and Winston streets in downtown Los Angeles. The AFE moved to its present 754 Wall Street location in 1923.

The AFE's Articles of Incorporation were signed in early January 1921 and the corporation was begun with \$50,000 capitalization. Some 900 shares of common stock and 80 shares of preferred stock (of a total 1,000 available shares), were valued and sold at \$50 each. The official name was "The American Florists' Exchange of Los Angeles." An amendment in 1931 changed the name to "American Florists' Exchange, Ltd." In January 1983, the name was again amended, this time to "American Florists' Exchange DBA Los Angeles Flower Market."

Capital stock of \$50,000, of which \$45,000 was common and \$5,000 preferred, was difficult to sell at the time. The AFE's Los Angeles Flower Market was a fledgling enterprise having been tossed together by a group of European immigrants and citizens relocated from other states, who were still learning how to work with each other and with the varied topographies and inland and seaside climates of Southern California.

Individuals and companies who expressed their confidence in the future of the AFE by purchasing one share of stock each in the first year of business included Albert Goldenson of Los Angeles (who served as the first AFE secretary), Peter A. Priamos of Hermosa Beach, the Polder Brothers, by John Polder, of Montebello, George J. Hall of Los Angeles, H.N. Gage Company of Montebello, Peter N. Priamos of Torrance, Frank M. Warner of Inglewood, John Bodger & Sons Company of Los Angeles, Roy F. Wilcox and Company of Montebello, G. Roller of Los Angeles, Lowes Flower Shop of Long Beach, C.E. Schucan of Long Beach, C.W. Halton of Los Angeles, O.E. Burns of Calumet, Illinois, Robert Newcomb of Long Beach, C.J. Groen of Montebello and the E.C. Amling Company. Preferred stock was issued to the new board of directors. Based on a loan from his bank, Gebhard PrechtI controlled more than 50 percent of the stock. When it came time to fulfill obligations on other bank notes, he did some pretty smooth talking to convince those unsure of the AFE's future to buy shares at \$50 each.

The first officers of the five-member board of directors of the American Florists' Exchange, Ltd. were Tom H. Wright, a Los Angeles florist (president), John C. Bodger, Montebello flower seed producer, Roy F. Wilcox, a leader in the decorative plant industry, Albert Goldenson, a Los Angeles florist, and H.N. Gage, a Montebello flower grower.

Gebhard PrechtI, a Montebello grower, and secretary J.S. Whyte witnessed the signing of the Articles of Incorporation.

The American Florists' Exchange presidents and the years they took office have been:

Tom H. Wright, 1921; H.N. Gage, 1921; Gebhard PrechtI, 1922; L.W. Hills, 1922; C.J. Groen, 1946; Paul Ecke Sr., 1957; Paul Ecke Jr., 1991; John Williams, 2002.

*This information was gleaned from American Florists' Exchange documents, the transcript of a 1981 interview with Frank Kuwahara, general manager of the Southern California Flower Market, and conversations with individuals closely associated with the American Florists' Exchange through the years.*



The *Sending Flowers to America* book published in 2008 by the American Florists' Exchange, project manager Peggi Ridgway

## *Events of Local and Worldwide Impact*

The world celebrated the arrival of the third millennium and the twenty-first century on New Year's Eve of 1999. Elaborate, spectacular fireworks displays were viewed by millions through pre-arranged television staging. On New Year's Day, the Tournament of Roses held its one hundred eleventh Rose Parade. The B-2 "Spirit" (aka Stealth Bomber) arrived from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri to fly over the parade in celebration of the millennium. In the oldest and most prestigious of college football games, the Rose Bowl, Wisconsin beat Stanford, 17-9.

The year 2001 started off innocently but ended with the country facing the threat of war on far away shores. On September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda terrorists commandeered four jet planes and flew them into the two World Trade

Center towers in lower Manhattan, a part of the Pentagon building and a field in rural Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 people lost their lives that day.

The Society of American Florists shifted into high gear, along with many other organizations and floral associations and thousands of American citizens. SAF reported that florists generously offered ribbons, carnations, bows and balloons, giving them away or selling them to give the proceeds to victims and relief efforts.

SAF coordinated efforts between the American Institute of Floral Designers, Teleflora, FTD and other industry groups. In one volunteer effort alone, florists sent buffet arrangements to the Spirit of New York, a harbor cruise ship serving 12,000 meals daily to Ground Zero rescue workers. Flowers were sent to family crisis centers and bouquets to the site where both the towers had collapsed to the ground. Florists volunteered to make arrangements for memorial and funeral services around the country.

Over the next few years, America would be engaged in a war in Afghanistan and Iraq intended to keep such events as the 2001 terrorist attacks and threats from ever happening again.



One of Ms. Ridgway's many photos included in the book with her writing.



## Early Los Angeles Flower Markets

Going into the twentieth century, farmers hauled fruits, vegetables and flowers straight from their fields to a large produce market in Los Angeles. Paul Ecke Sr., who took his father's poinsettia growing operation to heights Albert Ecke could hardly have dreamed possible, recalled in later years that he accompanied his father every week to the big vegetable and flower market at San Pedro and Ninth Streets. Between 1902 and 1918, he recalled, they hitched up the horses, loaded the buckboard and left for market at 2 o'clock in the morning.

Traveling from Eagle Rock, and later on from their Hollywood fields, Ecke remembered, "We would get to the vegetable and flower market at 4:00 in the morning. It took us two hours to come down by horse and wagon, and then about an hour-and-a-half to drive home after the market." [4]

Paul Ecke also remembered his fascination with the hustle and bustle of the market, its fruits, vegetables and flowers in colorful array, and the florists who bought Ecke products regularly. [5]

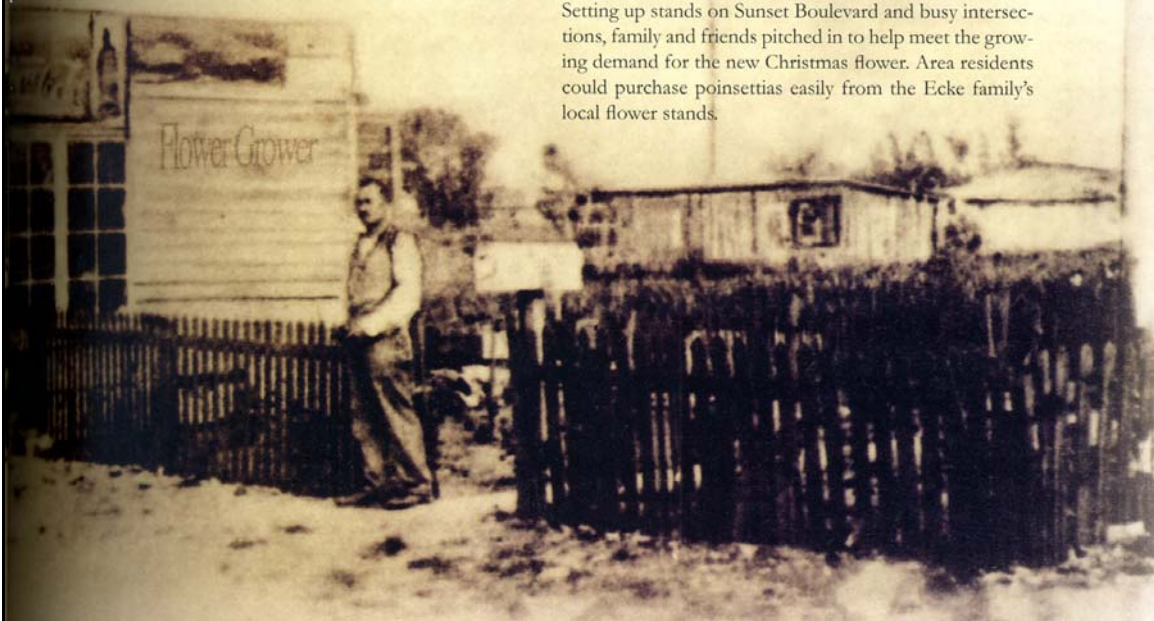
Japanese American flower growers of the area were among the early flower peddlers in downtown Los Angeles. In 1909, growers Heiichiro Higashi and Yukitaka Ohta operated a small wholesale market on Spring Street; and in 1910, more than 30 Japanese growers were selling their flowers along South Broadway, near Sixth Street. [6]

Several flower "markets" were held as one-day or weekend events, usually to benefit a charity organization, during the years leading up to the formation of the American Florists' Exchange. In fact, a *Los Angeles Times* writer suggested in a September 16, 1907 article titled "A Fruit and Flower Market," that the city should build a "large, airy, artistic retail fruit market, devoted entirely to the sale of fruit and flowers." The writer went so far as to suggest the market be constructed "largely of glass," emulating Covent Garden in London.

One of the early flower "market" events, titled simply, "The Flower Market" was described in the "Red Cross Affairs" column of the *Los Angeles Times* on April 19, 1918. The event was to be held on May 4, 1918, in Central Park (today's Pershing Square) to benefit "war relief" and it was organized by the Needlework Guild of America, which was affiliated with the Red Cross.

*May 4 is Flag Day and it is planned to have the parade that day march around the park and disband there, after which there will be an invasion of the market by the soldiers and sailors, each of whom will be presented with a boutonniere. — Los Angeles Times, "Flower Sale for War Work," April 28, 1918 [7]*

Flowers seemed to be everywhere in the early part of the last century. They were sold on street corners and in little stalls and doorways throughout the city, making it easy for shoppers and residents to enjoy their beauty and fragrance. The Greek farmers were easily recognized as they carried bundles of flowers on their shoulders, hawking their blooms throughout the business district. Today's famous poinsettias produced by the Ecke Ranch in Encinitas got their start in the early 1900s when Paul Ecke Sr. sold them streetside in Hollywood, straight from the field. Setting up stands on Sunset Boulevard and busy intersections, family and friends pitched in to help meet the growing demand for the new Christmas flower. Area residents could purchase poinsettias easily from the Ecke family's local flower stands.



Eight chapters cover chronological history with a focus on the floral industry.