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# PATIENCE

DESERT CHRIST PARK IS A ROCK-  
OF ONE ARTIST'S PERSI

**O**n a hillside overlooking Yucca Valley, there's a crop of out-sized statuary that seems to rise out of nowhere from the desert landscape. While the years and vandals have not been kind to the statues at Desert Christ Park, the cement figures stand as a monument to the persistence of their creator.

Sculptor Frank Antone Martin's artistic vision was larger than life, and he was determined to share that vision with others. One of his better-known efforts is a 10-foot-tall concrete-and-steel

figure of Jesus that weighs 6,300 pounds. Martin, who worked by day as an aircraft plaster pattern maker in Inglewood, fashioned the sculpture in the late 1940s with the intent of giving it to the National Park Service. His dream was to place the statue on the rim of the Grand Canyon.

The federal government vetoed the idea, however, citing the rule about division of church and state: By law no permanent religious statue or artifact can be erected in a national park or monument. Martin may have had his Grand Canyon dream dashed, but the plight of his homeless

# OF JOB

SOLID REMINDER  
STENCE

Jesus made the national news. According to Morongo Basin historian Joan Wilson, the media began referring to the statue as "the Christ that wasn't wanted."

Martin considered placing the statue at a church but he wanted a site where it could be viewed by the general public. Then he was contacted by the Rev. Eddie Garver who had put in a claim for 10 acres of land for his new church and parsonage on a hilltop in Yucca Valley. Garver told Martin that, not only would his artwork be

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# STATUES

Continued from Page 1  
 placed in a park-like setting, it would be visible to anyone passing through the town.

So in March, 1951, other motorists gawked as Garver and his friend Ralph Kingston transported the statue by truck from Inglewood to the high desert. The men had managed to load the sculpture using a borrowed crane, block and tackle and dock-side loading rollers obtained by a friend with connections at Balboa Bay. As they were driving up the Morongo Grade, the truck, which weighed slightly more than the statue, threatened to lose power. Garver and Kingston contemplated putting the rig in reverse and backing it up the grade, but the vehicle made it to the top.

The next chore was to hoist the statue slowly up the 50-foot hillside to the knoll, where a foundation had been laid. Garver was aided by a dozen Yucca Valley citizens, and the mission was accomplished with the statue suffering only a broken finger. The elated Martin explained to Time and Life magazine photographers who had followed the statue's move that he could easily replace the broken digit.

Pleased with the statue's new home, Martin moved another of his biblical sculptures, "Jesus Blessing the Children," to the site. Having found a place where his artwork was appreciated, he relocated to Yucca Valley in 1953 and, at age 66, began work on his Peace Garden.

The town's first subdividers donated an adjacent five acres to the project, which was later renamed Desert Christ Park.

Wilson says Martin was a driven artist, who often got so involved with his work that he forgot to eat. Working until his death in 1961, Martin completed 40 artworks, one of the most ambitious being a carved facade of the Last Supper three-stories high and 30 feet wide.

The Yucca Valley Park and Recreation District assumed responsibility for the park after Martin's death, adding picnic tables, restrooms and night lighting. Today the facility is maintained by the Hi Desert Nature Museum Assn. Located off Highway 62.

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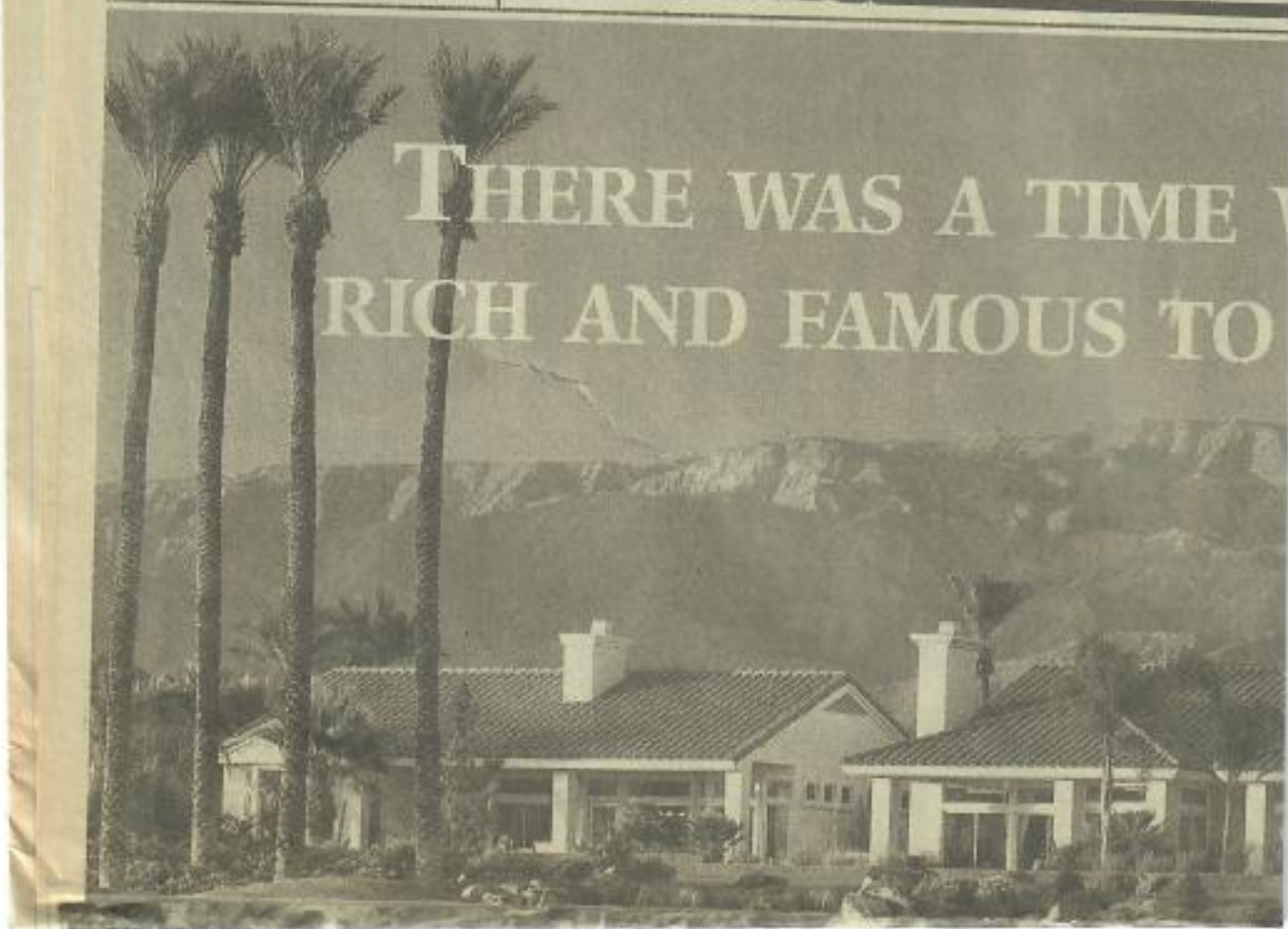
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