



EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HERITAGE



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear friends,

Exciting news!!! We have a new Docent Coordinator. His name is Andrew Alegria. He is a young family man with an interest in the city of El Cajon and its history. Welcome, Andrew!

I'm choosing good news first. Our friends at Friends of East County Arts have again granted us \$500 for transportation of 3rd graders to tour the Knox House. We are so grateful for their continued help.

Other good news is that we gained some new members as a result of our membership and 50/50 Opportunity Drawing. We also raised \$350 and gifted drawing winner, Becky Taylor, with \$350.

Some news-not so positive-comes from our grant writer. Las Patronas has not funded our request for bus transportation monies. Requests for funds have been more numerous than usual, so they had to turn us down. They did point out that we could apply again in the spring, which is for smaller grant amounts, and we have decided to do that. We were also turned down by the Masserini Trust, but still cling to hope of a grant from the Parker Foundation which will help to fund our digitization project.

I am delighted to begin a new year serving ECHS with our elected board members. Linda Garity has assumed even more responsibility in continuing on as our office manager, as well as taking on the Vice President's role.

Fondly,

Carla Nowak, President

Renew your dues! If you have not yet renewed your membership for the coming year, please do so. The categories are: Individual \$15, Family \$25, Organization \$45., Business \$45 and Life \$500.

Please make checks payable to ECHS and send to:

P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973.

Telephone Messages: 619-444-3800.

Upgrade your membership! Please consider upgrading your membership to become a Life Member (\$500). As Life Member, you pledge your lifetime support for the El Cajon Historical Society and its continued livelihood.

If you have already renewed your dues or became a Life Member, please accept our sincerest appreciation for your continued support!

WATER LAW

By Jack Dickens

Simply stated, in the early 1800's, Water Law was that if someone was to take water from one watershed to another, that person had to own the whole watershed that was giving up the water. And back in the mid-1800's to early 1900's this was happening because there was a great need for water as land developers in Southern California were building in an arid semi-desert area. From above what is now Los Angeles down past the border into Mexico, the area was hot and dry and known for its fleas. Las Pulgas off ramp from Hwy 5 at Camp Pendleton is "the fleas" in Spanish. The Southern California climate has changed over time to be substantially more humid with the introduction of so much water, allowing the geography to become lush and green.

In the late 1800's, John D. Spreckels, of the sugar dynasty, saw a potential for land development in Coronado and San Diego. He purchased the island of Coronado from Babcock and Story, which included their newly constructed Hotel Del Coronado (built in 1888). At that time, North Island was a separate island.

He continued his investment in land with the purchase of the whole Otay River and Cottonwood Creek watersheds. The Otay River water initially was for his new development of Coronado. It was backed up by reservoirs at Otay (1897), Barrett (1890's), and Morena (1912). Later, water was sent north to Alonzo Horton's new development of San Diego from Spreckels' Otay Reservoir. By 1905, the northern terminus for this part of his water project was the elevated knoll at Chollas Heights, and for the reservoir that he built near what is now San Diego's College Grove. The Otay Reservoir is at a higher elevation than Chollas Heights and the water moved by gravity. From Chollas Heights at that elevation he could provide sufficient water under pressure for fire hydrants in Horton's Gaslamp District way down by the bay.

John D. Spreckels was on the San Diego City Council, and in 1905, through council action, he sold his water system to the city. That is how the City of San Diego came to own Otay and Barrett and Morena reservoirs. Spreckels' purchase of the hilltop at Chollas Heights included not just the area for the reservoir, but also sufficient acreage that in later years became the City of San Diego's Chollas Operations Yard and the nearby landfill. Chollas is the name for a cactus.

Another land developer active at that time was Ed Fletcher. To be able to develop his land he purchased a system that brought water down from Lake Cuyamaca via a redwood flume. The lake borders the San Diego River, and therefore was not a watershed issue. The water system that he purchased included a flume that was 33 miles long, built entirely of redwood. It started at the diversion dam on Boulder Creek just above what is now the El Capitan reservoir. It ended at the small pond at Anthony's Restaurant in La Mesa. When observed from the air, many streets on the north and east side of Mount Helix and south of Hwy 8, such as Shadow Road, follow what appears to be a land contour. These streets are the result of the construction of the flume. There was a giant trestle that curved over what is now Jamacha Blvd., that took the water from one side of the El Cajon valley to the other. The water in the flume fell 3 feet every mile.

The initial intention of the company that built the flume and pond was to grow citrus trees in an area now known as Lemon Grove. Ed Fletcher had other ideas. He took the water from the pond into another flume along what is today Water Street and Amaya Drive to Murray Lake, a small reservoir on the north side of the San Diego River. Flume Road today lies between Blue Lake Drive and Dallas Street as those streets make a straight shot westward toward the lake. In some areas, the former flume road appears as an alley or an easement or community gardens between properties. Ed Fletcher purchased the entire valley that included Murray Lake. By 1917, Fletcher's concrete dam on the south end of that valley was completed and formed a reservoir that he named Lake Murray. When the reservoir filled it submerged the original earthen dam located

(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

in the north end. Fletcher's intention with this project was to develop areas such as today's Mission Hills.

The water from Lake Murray followed the San Diego River down to an area that is now Hotel Circle on Hwy 8, west of Hwy 163. From there it went straight up to the southern rim of the valley along a road that is now known as Bachman Place, which ends in the parking lot of the present-day UCSD Medical Center. Lake Murray is at a higher elevation than Mission Hills, and the water moved by gravity. The water continued on to a stand pipe near what is now India Street.

Fletcher's flume system through the El Cajon valley to Lake Murray eventually became the Helix Water District. Lake Murray was transferred to the San Diego Water Utilities Department in 1961.

Ed Fletcher was also active in North County. He saw possibilities for development in what is now Escondido-to grow avocados-and for this he needed water. With the assistance of his financial backers he purchased the whole San Dieguito River watershed so as to be able to take the water north. There was an existing ranch in the watershed that he purchased, Rancho San Dieguito, and he renamed this area Rancho Santa Fe in honor of the railroad that helped him financially in the purchase. Lake Hodges is on the San Dieguito River and is named after the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad vice-president W. T. Hodges.

This whole scenario of purchasing watersheds to move water elsewhere was playing out throughout Southern California. In the iconic movie "Chinatown" with Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, and Robert Houston, the City of Los Angeles is portrayed as secretly draining its reservoirs at night to give the impression to its citizens that there is a drought so that the bonds to build the Owens River Aqueduct would pass. An interesting fact about the movie is that it went from concept to film without a book being written first. The City of Los Angeles had secretly purchased the whole Owens River watershed, and now was the time to build the 233-mile aqueduct to take the water. The self-taught engineer for the project was William Mulholland. It is an understatement to say that the residents of Owens Valley were very upset when they found out that their valley and its water had been sold out from under them.

The planning and effort that went into the secret purchase of the Owens Valley didn't happen just overnight, and there wasn't a single player, such as John D. Spreckels or Ed Fletcher, behind the project. The water was destined for the San Fernando Valley. The land speculators who would benefit from this water, among others, were: William Mulholland, the project's engineer, Harrison Grey Otis, publisher of the Los Angeles Times, and railroad magnates E.H. Harriman, Henry Huntington, and Moses Sherman. President Theodore Roosevelt endorsed the project as an ideal example of his Progressive agenda. The bonds for the aqueduct passed in 1905. When the construction was completed in 1913 it was the largest water project in the world at that time.

Another land/water scheme that was happening about that same time was George Chaffey and the California Desert. The desert was past a row of low mountains to the east and south of Los Angeles above the border with Mexico. After purchasing the desert Chaffey renamed the area Imperial Valley and brought water there from the Colorado River. He constructed the Imperial Canal from near Yuma on the river to bring water by gravity to his valley. One of the ongoing problems with the canal was that it would silt up with soil being carried down the Colorado River. One year the buildup of silt was so great that the canal burst its banks and instead flowed into the nearby Salton Sink. The canal flowed unchecked for years creating California's largest lake – the Salton Sea.

Chaffey went on to develop another area near the border with Mexico south of San Diego. He named this area Imperial Beach to attract rich landowners from the Imperial Valley. His water source was the Otay River.

From: El Cajon Historical Society
P. O. Box 1973
El Cajon, CA 92022

To:

January Quarterly Meeting

Please join us for our meeting at
Denny's Restaurant
2691 Navajo Rd El Cajon, CA

Thursday, January 16 at 11:30am.

Cost \$15

Lunch choices are from the
Value Menu and Senior Menu,
breakfast and lunch only.

Turn in your reservation form early!

Looking forward to seeing you there!

January Meeting Reservation Form

Number Attending _____ @ \$15 Each

Name

Address

City, Zip

Phone

E-mail

Welcome New Members

- ✦ Olaf Wieghorst Museum Foundation
- ✦ Andrew & Molly Alegria

RESERVATION DEADLINE

January 10, 2020

Mail reservations/checks to:
ECHS, P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973

Reservations not kept become a donation.