

## Dedicating the Aqueduct Cascade: Los Angeles Celebrates the Arrival of Owens River Water

By Abraham Hoffman

On Wednesday, November 5, 1913, a crowd of people estimated at between 30,000-40,000 arrived at the northern end of the San Fernando Valley to celebrate the opening of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. They came by automobiles, train, horse-drawn carriages, and on horseback. Many of them brought their own personal drinking cups to have a taste of Owens River water at the end of its long trip from the Owens Valley in the Eastern Sierra.

The city welcomed all visitors to the historic event. Local banks distributed free programs describing the day's activities, beginning at 9:30 a.m. when an "official party" of dignitaries left downtown Los Angeles for the Cascade, the aqueduct terminus where the water would tumble down a hillside

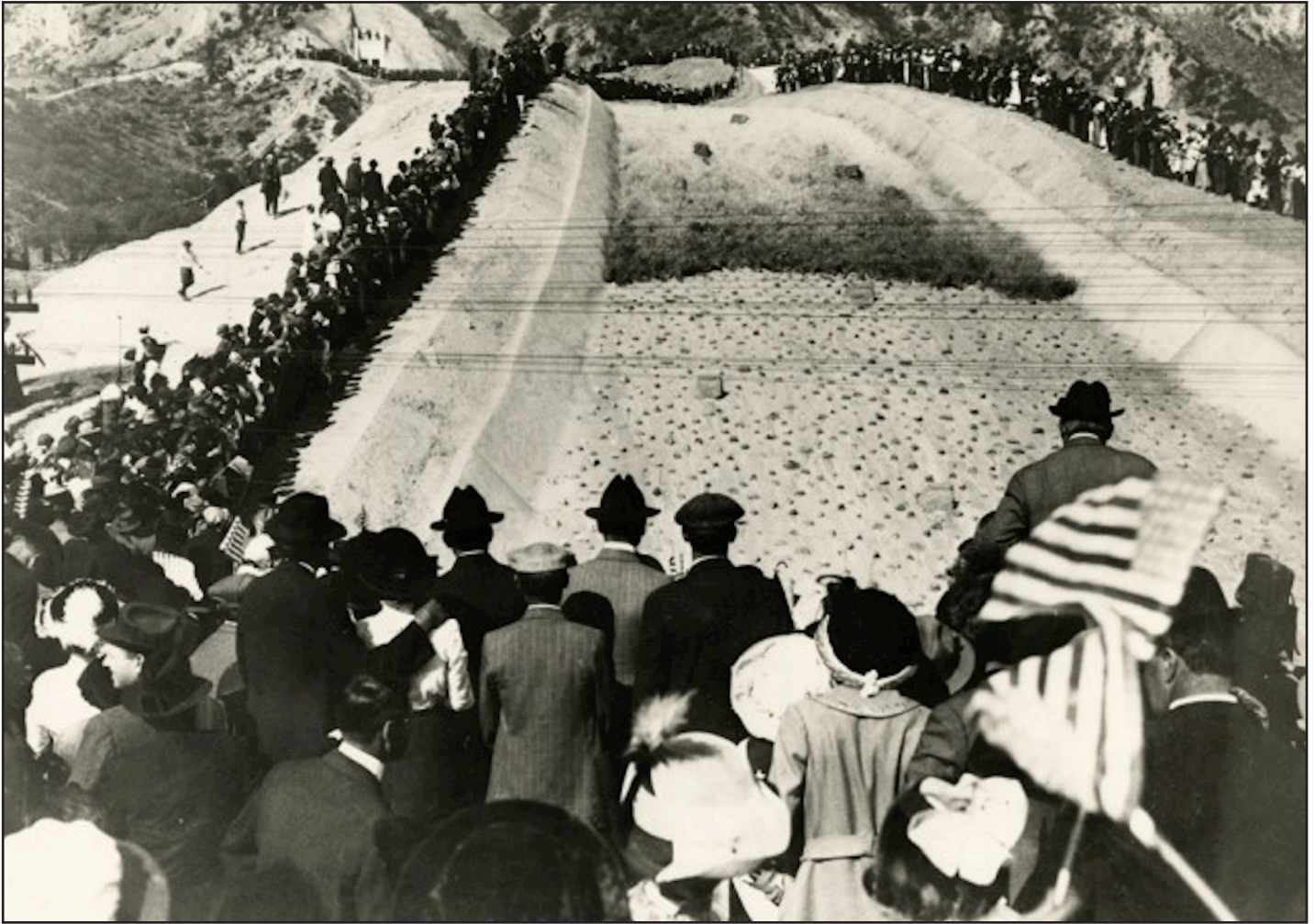
channel. Free public comfort stations were available as needed; in fact, anyone charging fees was to be reported to the police.

Refreshments were for sale: sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks, and ice cream were available at ten cents each. Vendors sold little vials containing Owens River water. Souvenir pennants cost a quarter and could be purchased at the Cascade site, on street corners, and at Exposition Park, where another celebration was to be held on Thursday. This was the official opening of the park and the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art.

Activities at the Aqueduct Cascade began at 11 a.m. with an hour-long band concert, followed by a



A crowd estimated at up to 40,000 people turned out for the celebration on November 5, 1913. Courtesy WaterandPower.org



Closeup of the water coming down the Cascade, November 5, 1913. Courtesy DailyBruin.com

salute to Chief Engineer William Mulholland and the other distinguished guests who were expected to arrive at noon. The 50-piece Catalina Military Band played "America." Then came the speeches, interspersed with musical performances. Congressman William D. Stephens, who would be elected next year as the state's lieutenant governor and then become governor when Hiram Johnson was elected U.S. senator in 1916, gave a speech. Ellen Beach Yaw sang a song of her own composition, "Hail the Water":

Lift your voice in gratitude,  
A river now is here  
Whose glorious waters flowing free,  
A paradise will rear.  
Here within this land of love,  
May peace forever reign,  
For God has brought us waters pure,  
That Eden we regain.

Ms. Yaw had to deal with gusty winds that blew her hat's ostrich feathers into her face while she sang, but her clear soprano voice carried the message to the spectators.

Arthur Kinney, president of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, spoke for 15 minutes. The Catalina Military Band played another tune. Former California Governor George C. Pardee compared the city's accomplishment to the aqueduct system of the ancient Romans, claiming that what Los Angeles had done "ranks higher than the bloody accomplishment of all the Caesars; sets high among the great men of the world whose genius had made it possible; and records among the great people of the earth the Californians who commanded that it should be built." The band then played the state's anthem, "I Love You California."

At 1:10 p.m. William Mulholland presented the aqueduct to the City of Los Angeles. Contrary to



historians who have written that Mulholland simply said "There it is—take it," words he actually spoke after the opening of the aqueduct gates, he gave a heartfelt speech describing why the aqueduct needed to be built, thanking former Mayor Fred Eaton for his foresight in calling for construction of the aqueduct. Mulholland concluded his speech, "This rude platform is an altar, and on it we are consecrating this water supply and dedicating this aqueduct to you and your children and your children's children—for all time." He paused briefly and then said, "That's all."

Mulholland then signaled the engineers at the aqueduct gates, halfway up the hill, with an unfurling of the American flag. The engineers turned the wheels, the gates opened, and at first the water trickled out slowly. The water grew in volume, became a torrent, and rushed down the steps of the Cascade. Guns were fired, aerial bombs set off, and hundreds of people raced to the Cascade to be among the first to dip their drinking cups into Owens River water. Mulholland was supposed to make some additional comments, but with all the cheering and crowding around the edge of the Cascade, the

best he could say was to shout at Los Angeles Mayor Henry H. Rose, "There it is—take it."

The rest of the celebration was anticlimactic. Mayor Rose accepted the aqueduct on behalf of the City of Los Angeles; the Board of Public Works transferred the administration of the aqueduct to the Public Service Commission (later to evolve into the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power); and the band closed the event with the Star Spangled Banner." The water flowed from the Cascade down to the San Fernando Reservoir and from there it would go into a distribution system to the city that would be completed in April 1915. A late luncheon was held for 200 distinguished guests (by invitation only to separate them from the hoi polloi). Fred Buroff, an aqueduct booster who had married the widow of Benjamin Porter, who with his brother George had been a pioneer San Fernando Valley developer, hosted the affair at his home.

At 7:30 p.m. a dinner for the distinguished guests was held at the Hotel Alexandria in downtown Los Angeles. There was more oratory and presentation of medals, silver cups, and scrolls. Mulholland had the last word, and then hurried home to his wife



Mulholland addresses the crowd at the Cascade, November 5, 1913. Courtesy WaterandPower.org

Lillie's bedside, where she was seriously ill and had missed the day's celebration.

For the rest of the week Los Angeles citizens continued to celebrate the completion of the aqueduct. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, "William Mulholland, the master of the aqueduct, the peer of the practical results of the world's best engineers: every man, woman, and child acknowledges a debt impossible to pay." The *Los Angeles Evening News* paid similar compliments. "Los Angeles sent forth her engineers; their instructions were to find water, plenty of water, the best of water, and complete their plans for bringing it any distance that might be necessary to serve in abundance the needs of this city for generations . . . Today Los Angeles is no longer the trace of a shadow on the destiny of this wonderful city—all due to our Chief William Mulholland." News of the completion of the aqueduct traveled as far east as Massachusetts, the *Boston Globe* stating that it was "one of the monumental engineering achievements of all ages, and of all lands."

The construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct did not escape controversy, and there was plenty of it. Although its supporters compared the project with another major effort being built at the same time—the Panama Canal—there were many critics who denounced it as corrupt, a theft of water rights that properly belonged to the residents of Owens Valley, and a land grab by some of those same distinguished guests who were honored at the celebration.

Among the distinguished guests at the Hotel Alexandria banquet was Joseph B. Lippincott, Mulholland's assistant chief engineer on the construction project. Prior to taking on that task, however, Lippincott held the position of supervising engineer for California in the U.S. Reclamation Service. When Congress approved the creation of the Reclamation Service as an agency of the Department of the Interior in 1902, the new agency began conducting preliminary surveys of likely places for federal irrigation and reclamation projects. The Owens Valley was one of those places where the Reclamation Service conducted a survey.

A long-time resident of Los Angeles, Lippincott enjoyed the friendship of Mulholland, Eaton, and other prominent business and political leaders, and he operated his own engineering firm, claiming he had the time to fulfill both his government duties as well as his private business. Eaton had expressed



**William Mulholland in the field. Courtesy WaterandPower.org**

an interest in connecting Los Angeles to the Owens River by way of an aqueduct that would stretch some 235 miles from the valley to the city, an idea first seen as visionary rather than practical. Eaton convinced Mulholland that a gravity-flow aqueduct was feasible, and that without the water the city could not continue its rapid growth, as the Los Angeles River at best could serve a population of 250,000, and people would continue to come to make Los Angeles their home in a region of sunshine and mild winters. In November 1904 city officials met with Reclamation Service leaders who agreed to yield to the city's interest in the Owens River, provided the aqueduct be a wholly municipal enterprise.

No one bothered to inform Owens Valley residents that there would not be a reclamation project in their valley. City leaders, aware that any publicity about purchasing water rights would jack up the prices, decided to do so secretly. Eaton made several trips to the Owens Valley in the spring of 1905, giving residents the impression that he was purchasing water rights for the federal reclamation project. Owens Valley farmers and ranchers knew that Eaton and Lippincott, who had been seen together, were associates, even friends, and Eaton did not bother to correct the misimpression. By the time Owens Valley residents caught on to the ruse, the water rights were secured. On July 29, 1905, the *Los Angeles Times* broke the secret with a headline proclaiming, "TITANIC PROJECT TO GIVE CITY A RIVER."

Owens Valley settlers expressed outrage at





**J.B. Lippincott, Fred Eaton, and William Mulholland, 1906. Courtesy WaterandPower.org.**

the betrayal. Valley newspapers renamed the Reclamation Service engineer as "Judas B. Lippincott." Stafford W. Austin, the General Land Office registrar at Independence, the county seat of Inyo County, publicly accused Lippincott of conflict of interest and fraud. The Reclamation Service's chief engineer, Frederick H. Newell, and Secretary of the Interior Ethan A. Hitchcock, found the accusations serious enough to warrant an investigation into Lippincott's conduct. Although the investigation cleared Lippincott of acting illegally, it was apparent to many government officials that he had acted unethically. Lippincott resigned from the Reclamation Service effective July 31, 1906, and almost immediately accepted Mulholland's offer to be assistant chief engineer on the aqueduct construction project at a hefty increase in salary over his government job. The *Inyo Register* sarcastically noted that Lippincott deserved the salary increase, inasmuch as he had done so much for the city in betraying the valley.

Mulholland's engineering staff estimated the total cost of the project at \$24,485,700, and it is certainly commendable that it was completed under budget. Construction began in September 1907. Los Angeles voters overwhelmingly approved the bond issue to finance the aqueduct. It took six years to complete the construction of the aqueduct's 233 miles, including channels, canals, three reservoirs, 12 miles of siphons (technically, pressure pipe sections), and 164 tunnels. President Theodore Roosevelt gave the project his blessing by withdrawing from settlement the public lands over which the aqueduct was to be built.

It did not help the city's image that two land syndicates, with some of the most prominent businessmen in Los Angeles as members, profited from the purchase of land in the San Fernando Valley, the first syndicate getting insider information provided by Moses H. Sherman, a syndicate member who happened to be on the city's Board of Water Commissioners. The second syndicate, the Suburban Homes

Company, held free barbecues to bring potential buyers out to the San Fernando Valley. Mulholland knew what was going on but could do little about it; the terminus of the aqueduct was from an engineering standpoint best located at the northern end of the San Fernando Valley, from where a distribution system would send the water to the city. The syndicates were an open secret to Los Angeles residents, but since their interests in securing a reliable water supply coincided with the syndicates' land purchases, there were few critics in the city complaining about the arrangement. However, an Aqueduct Investigation Board was convened in 1912 to look into various accusations about the project, but found little fire in the smoke.

The legacy of the land syndicates can be found in place names in the San Fernando Valley. Sherman Oaks and Sherman Way for Moses Sherman; Chandler Boulevard for Los Angeles *Times* editor Harry Chandler; Otis Street for Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the *Times*; Whitsett Avenue for William P. Whitsett, developer of Van Nuys. The community of Marian was named for Otis's daughter who had married Harry Chandler; the name was later changed to Reseda. Owensmouth, a name that stretched geography because it was some 15 miles west of the Cascade, later became Canoga Park. William Mulholland did not personally profit from any of these real estate developments, though he bought property in what is now Chatsworth.

Despite all the honors and silver loving cups bestowed on Mulholland, his moment of triumph was bittersweet. Mulholland was asked if, as the hero of the moment, he would consider running for mayor of Los Angeles. Mulholland rejected the idea. He said that he would rather give birth to a porcupine backwards than be mayor of Los Angeles. His years away from home while supervising the building of the aqueduct bore a personal cost. His wife Lillie, suffering from cancer, could not attend the Cascade ceremony. She died on April 28, 1915, at only 47 years old.

The 1900 census had counted a population of 100,000 people living in the City of Los Angeles. Just five years later, the estimated population had doubled. By 1910 the census had counted 319,000, and the 1920 census brought the population up to 576,000. In 1930 Los Angeles had over a million residents. Mulholland had believed Owens River water would meet the growing city's needs for decades to come, but by the 1920s, only a decade after the

completion of the aqueduct, demand was heading beyond supply. Mulholland looked to the Colorado River for both water and electrical power, and the creation of the Metropolitan Water District in 1928 resulted in construction of Parker Dam and the Colorado River Aqueduct, bringing water and power not only to the City of Los Angeles but also to many other southern California municipalities.

Mulholland also initiated new land and water purchases in the Owens Valley in the 1920s to meet the demands of the city's increased population. The aqueduct took the river's water near Big Pine, south of the more developed areas in the Owens Valley. When the city began buying land and water rights in the northern part of the valley, businessmen in Bishop, the valley's biggest town, saw their customers selling out to the city. Mark and Wilfred Watterson, owners of a chain of banks in Inyo County towns, led a strong protest against Los Angeles water policies. Some Owens Valley residents resorted to violence. Between 1924 and 1927 the aqueduct was dynamited at least a dozen times. Local authorities proved apathetic about tracking down the culprits; Mulholland hired guards and armed them with submachine guns.

In August 1927 Owens Valley resistance collapsed when the Watterson brothers were arrested and charged with embezzling funds from their own banks. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison. Many Owens Valley residents lost their life savings when the banks closed. Ultimately the City of Los Angeles came to own 200,000 acres, mainly Owens Valley, plus another 60,000 acres in Mono County. Agriculture declined, and the economic base of the region shifted from farming to ranching (on land leased from the city) and tourism. But in 1913 no one at the aqueduct's dedication could see that within a decade there would be a "water war" over control of the Owens River.

During the 1930s the Department of Water and Power constructed the Mono Extension, diverting water from the creeks that flowed into Mono Lake and sending it down the pipeline to Los Angeles. No one at the time considered the environmental consequences of reducing the level of Mono Lake. From 1940 until 1979 the lake's level fell about a foot a year. A grassroots group, the Mono Lake Committee, and the National Audubon Society, sued the City of Los Angeles and won a major decision when the California Supreme Court ruled that the diversion violated the public trust. Eventually the



Mono Lake Committee prevailed and the diversion of the creeks was sharply reduced.

Increasing demand by the city for more water prompted the DWP to construct a second aqueduct during the 1960s. Without the publicity and fanfare that accompanied the building of the first aqueduct, the new one, dubbed the "Second Barrel," was completed in 1970. However, the Second Barrel was never used to full capacity as Inyo County launched lawsuits against the city. Times had changed, and a growing public environmental awareness demanded that alternative sources of water be found and that serious conservation practices take place. In recent years the DWP has introduced important conservation policies, including a mitigation project to reduce dust blowing from the dry Owens Lake, and limiting lawn watering in the city as well as curbing other wasteful practices. The city has compensated for the reduction in the supply of Owens River water by purchasing water from the Metropolitan Water District which obtains it from the Colorado River Aqueduct and the California State Water Project.



Jawbone "siphon." Also known as the "Second Barrel." Courtesy WaterandPower.org

When the aqueduct was dedicated on November 5, 1913, the thousands of people at the celebration found themselves in an area that was largely agricultural, with only a few small scattered communities. According to the Los Angeles City Charter, the city could not sell any excess water to other cities. If the residents of the San Fernando Valley communities wanted a share of the imported water, they would have to agree to annexation by the city. In 1915 most of the communities voted for annexation, including the new ones created by the syndicates, as did city voters. The City of San Fernando, which had access to water sources not connected to the Los Angeles River, kept its independence. The San Fernando Valley would remain an agricultural region until after World War II when the postwar housing boom brought hundreds of thousands of people to the new suburbs there. To paraphrase the hit song by Bing Crosby, they made the San Fernando Valley their home.

The Aqueduct Cascade is easily seen from I-5, about a mile or so north of the merger of I-5 and I-405. The Second Barrel's outlet is at the top of the hill; the original outlet is halfway down. Anyone looking at the photographs of the area that were taken in 1913 can see how suburban development has transformed the San Fernando Valley beyond the wildest dreams of the city boosters who brought water to Los Angeles from a remote region by means of a remarkable, if controversial, engineering project.

#### About the Author:

Abraham Hoffman was born in Los Angeles in 1938. He attended local public schools and then two years at Los Angeles City College. On receiving his A.A. degree he transferred to Los Angeles State College (later renamed California State University, Los Angeles) where he received his B.A. in Social Studies in 1960 and the M.A. degree in History in 1962. He enrolled at UCLA in 1965 and received his Ph.D. in History in 1970.

Dr. Hoffman taught for many years in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and since 1974 he has taught history courses in the Evening Division at Los Angeles Valley College.

Abe's new book, *From Dead Sea to Environmental Treasure: A History of Mono Lake* was released in April 2014 by the University of New Mexico Press.



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Members of the Platrix Chapter of E Clampus Vitus celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the opening of the Cascades with the placement of a historical marker on November 5, 2013. Pictured are Abe Hoffman, kneeling; Standing right to left: Glenn Thornhill, Tom Oldfield, Doug Boyd. Four Clampers on the left are not identified.