

# THE AQUEDUCT

By Elizabeth Carrasco – As told to Bernice Etcharren

At the time the aqueduct was being blown up, I was a young housewife living on what was then known as the Wilson Ranch. It was in the Alabama Hills, where it is all built up now. It was quite a nice house, which had been built by a woman who was writing a book. There were some apple trees 10 or 15 feet from the windows.

One night I was home alone with the children. I heard men's voices and looked out the window, and there were 4 men with barley sacks over their backs. It frightened me, of course, but I didn't say anything, and I prayed the children wouldn't hear them and wake up. They didn't any more than get out of sight, headed off toward where the Whitney's now live, when my husband came as fast as his old model T Ford would travel. He said, "Did you see any men go by here?" When I said "yes", he asked, "How many?" He asked if the children saw them, and I said "no". He said, "If anyone questions you, you didn't see anything, not anything!" "They are on their way to blow up the aqueduct, there where Diaz Creek comes in, and I don't want you to know anything about it, period."



Damaged aqueduct.  
(Photo courtesy of Rich McCutchan)

I was so scared. I didn't know who they were and never did find out. If he knew he never told me. Someone must have found out, and was there and intercepted them, because the aqueduct was not blown, not at that place. I think the one before that was the last blasting they ever did. I know there were several men involved in the blasting of the aqueduct, and to my knowledge one man went to jail. I worked with his wife, and he seemed to feel it was worth it to go to prison and serve his term, rather

than to tell who else was involved in it. He felt that the aqueduct had it coming, and at that time feeling was pretty high. Most anyone would have blasted the aqueduct, if they could have managed it. I think many would today, because they certainly have raped this valley. They got the water by default. Sure, they came along and paid a man for his land, then choked off the man next to him, so he had to sell.

Before they came, the whole valley was full of orchards, lots of wild feed, and lots of all kinds of grain. I have heard stories, in fact, I heard one the other day, that this was a very arid valley when they came here. That is a joke. My dad came here in 1864. He was just a small boy, and they came in over the mountains from Utah. He said when they came over the mountain, it looked like they were coming into Paradise. Everything was green, and the horses and cattle were up to their bellies in feed.

I can remember the orchards in Manzanar, myself. They packed a lot of fruit and sent it out from the Manzanar Packing House from all those big orchards at Georges Creek and Manzanar. Many people worked there, and they shipped lots of apples, and pears, and some peaches. A spur of the railroad also came in there.



Kearsarge railroading siding on the old Carson & Colorado Railroad  
(Photo courtesy of Ray DeLea)

Years ago, before I ever lived here, there were ranches all along the mountains, on the east side of the railroad track. There are still signs of the old canals they used for irrigation of their alfalfa. They had a Pilgrim-like village over there when my husband was young. There were ranches all along, from Lone Pine to where we lived at Kearsage, as it was known then, all along the river. There is now nothing left at Kearsage, but the location is still known as Kearsage. Then up above that was Bend City.

The Owens River was a very treacherous river. There was lots of quicksand and if you didn't know where you were crossing, you were liable not to get across. That still was true not too many years ago.

My son was out at the Ranch one summer, and my grandson, Jug, took a run across the river to catch a calf. My son screamed at him not to go in there, but it was too late, and they had to pull him out.

They harvested lots of hay in this valley, even after I grew up. Everyone had horses, and they had to have hay, corn and barley. Just out of Independence, on Oak Creek, there was a mill and people took their corn and wheat there and had it ground into cornmeal and flour.

I think the bank in Lone Pine closed about 1924. I am pretty sure about that because my baby was born about that time. Had the men who owned the bank had a chance they could have made every dime good. The two men went to prison. The Water & Power was behind it all. My father lost what money he had and so did my father-in-law. Both said that people who criticized the Wattersons were very poor people because many times in the winter, had it not been for the Watterson bank, many families would have starved to death in this valley.