

Owens Valley

and the

Los Angeles Aqueduct

Fame of the Los Angeles aqueduct has spread round the world. When it was completed in 1913, it was heralded as one of the boldest projects in the annals of engineering. Mountain ranges had been pierced, forbidding deserts spanned, to bring water over a distance of 250 miles and make possible the amazing growth of this City.

With its intake in Owens Valley, the aqueduct's source of water supply is the Owens River, which in turn is fed by the melting snows of the High Sierras towering above the Valley floor.

Los Angeles citizens and those in charge of the operation of the aqueduct have always had the kindest feelings toward the residents of Owens Valley. Every effort has been made by aqueduct officials to deal fairly and generously with them.

Then suddenly there arose in Owens Valley charges against the aqueduct and its management. City agents, it was alleged, were devastating Owens Valley, were "beating down" land values and bringing financial ruin in that region.

Is there foundation for these accusations?

The manner in which Los Angeles has dealt with Owens Valley is clearly and concisely stated in this pamphlet. The reader may judge for himself.

Issued January, 1925, by the
Department of Public Service
City of Los Angeles

Where the Aqueduct Begins

OWENS VALLEY is situated in the central eastern section of California, its most southerly point being about 200 miles north of Los Angeles. With the Sierra Nevada Mountains on the west and the White and Inyo Mountains on the east, it is approximately 100 miles in length and varies in width, roughly, from 5 to 15 miles.

Owens Valley has a total population of about 8,000, including the residents of its four principal towns, Lone Pine, Independence, Big Pine and Bishop.

Down through Owens Valley flows the Owens River, fed by the melting snows in the High Sierras and finally, unless diverted, emptying into Owens Lake, where prior to the construction of the aqueduct, the water was lost to all agricultural and domestic use.

Originally devoted, in its earliest settlement days, to mining activities, Owens Valley's three principal sources of revenue today are the mountain tourist trade, agriculture and business growing out of the operation of the aqueduct.

Although the Valley comprises several hundred square miles of territory, only a fraction of the land is used, or ever was used, for agricultural purposes. The greater part of the land is not adaptable to farming either because of the nature of the soil or because it cannot be economically irrigated.

Ranchers Have Ample Water

THE charge has been made that the City in securing water to supply its aqueduct has "dried up" Owens Valley ranches. This charge is absolutely false.

Where the City has purchased water bearing land adjoining privately owned land, the rancher, without a single exception, has continued to divert his full share of water.

As a matter of fact, it would be a physical impossibility for the City to take water belonging to a privately owned ranch irrigated from Owens River. All the privately owned irrigated land in Owens Valley watered from Owens River is ABOVE the point on the river where water is diverted into the aqueduct. Thus the ranchers have the opportunity to take their share of water before any water is delivered to the aqueduct intake.

Owens Valley ranchers have not only used all the water to which they have a right, but have also unlawfully appropriated large quantities of water belonging to the City. Seeking to safeguard the aqueduct water supply for the people of Los Angeles, the Public Service Department in 1923 and

1924 purchased tracts of water bearing land along Owens River at a total cost of almost \$4,000,000. Little if any water belonging to these purchased lands has reached the aqueduct, because the ranchers have diverted all the water to their lands, the City's water as well as their own.

Unlawful diversion by ranchers of City-owned water has greatly increased their supply of irrigation water.

Thus the purchase of water lands by the City has actually been made to increase the Owens Valley ranchers' irrigation supply, rather than in any way diminish that supply. The proof of this is revealed by the fact that Owens Valley ranchers, irrigating from Owens River, obtained practically a normal water supply throughout 1924, despite the record breaking drought general throughout the West.

Water Supply for 2,000,000

UTTERLY disregarding truth in a deliberate attempt to injure Los Angeles, Owens Valley spokesmen have spread the false report that Los Angeles was "strangled" by a "water famine" last summer. This is being done to make it appear that the City should purchase all the remaining water lands in the Valley and thus secure additional water.

Residents of this city know that Los Angeles did not suffer even a curtailment of use of domestic water last summer. In fact, Los Angeles was one of the few cities of the entire country that passed through the general drought period without any sort of a domestic water shortage.

The City's water bureau records disclose that during 1924 Los Angeles people consumed each day an average of 121,500,000 gallons of water, as compared with an average daily consumption of 109,000,000 gallons

during 1923. This reveals that instead of having less water, Los Angeles people were using 12,500,000 gallons MORE each day than during the previous year.

The aqueduct has capacity to supply water for 2,000,000 population. Water lands and water rights in Owens Valley amply sufficient to fill the aqueduct to capacity have already been bought and paid for by the City of Los Angeles. This is not merely the statement of an opinion. It is a statement of fact, based upon careful, authoritative studies and measurements made by the most eminent water engineers in the country.

Early Attempts to Settle

FOR more than 10 years officials of the Los Angeles water bureau have endeavored to work out a permanent water policy in Owens Valley that would be acceptable and beneficial to the land owners.

In 1914 City officials opened negotiations with a view to establishing such policy. The ranchers asked for time to make certain stream flow measurements along Owens River. These operations continued until 1921.

In 1921 the City submitted another proposed agreement based on data collected by the City and the Valley. Under this plan the City offered to construct a 100-foot dam in Owens River gorge, thus creating a storage reservoir above Owens Valley. Construction of this project would have benefited the ranchers far more than the City since the City already possessed adequate reservoir capacity along the aqueduct below the ranchers' lands.

A majority of the ranchers favored this plan. Others insisted that the City build a dam 150 feet high, which theoretically would store more water than the lower structure. The City could not agree to this demand since engineering studies had revealed that above the 100-foot line the reservoir walls behind the dam were so

porous that water stored higher than 100 feet would be lost through leakage.

When the City started preliminary work on a 100-foot dam to store water, largely for the benefit of the ranchers, the landowners demanding the 150-foot dam instituted injunction proceedings in court and all work on the storage project was halted.

All negotiations looking to a general settlement of water rights have been seriously hampered by local controversies among the ranchers. These disputes have, in the main, sprung out of conflicting water claims among the ranchers themselves. On the one side are the ranchers with old established water rights and plenty of water available from the natural stream flow of the river; on the other, the farmers with secondary or uncertain water rights. These disputes have occasioned much friction and trouble in the Valley. And, as a result, the people of the Valley have never been, and are not now, a unit in their desires as to what should be done by the City or by their own irrigation districts.

Los Angeles Aids and Promotes Interests of Owens Valley

THE charge has been made that the Los Angeles aqueduct has proved a blight on Owens Valley, that through the City's policy of acquiring lands and water rights, land values have been depreciated, that market for the land has been destroyed, that ranchers in the Valley are denied loans by the banks, and that the City when making purchases of land in connection with the aqueduct has "beat down" the owners' legitimate prices, all to the injury of the Valley. The charges upon investigation are proved absolutely groundless.

Since inception of the aqueduct, Owens Valley has progressed as never before, the population has increased, and land values have grown. Here are indisputable facts:

ASSESSED VALUATIONS INCREASE FOUR FOLD

In 1905, just before the City began construction of the aqueduct, the total assessed valuation of Inyo County, as shown by the assessor's rolls, was \$2,487,000. Owens Valley constitutes practically the only developed area in the County. By June 30, 1915, two years after completion of the aqueduct, the assessed valuations had grown to \$7,628,000, and by June 30, 1924, had jumped to \$11,031,755. Assessed valuations have multiplied by four since the aqueduct entered the Valley.

MARKET VALUE OF LAND MUCH HIGHER

That land values have increased, and that the City has paid generously for land purchased also are facts revealed by the Inyo County records, as the following list of transfers, selected at random, shows:

In 1904 E. H. Blake sold a 370 acre tract to James J. Crawford for \$10,000. In 1905 Crawford sold this land to Fred Eaton for \$12,000 and in 1920 Fred Eaton sold the same land to H. W. Otis for \$60,000, who sold the same land in 1924 to the City of Los Angeles for \$108,974.

In 1918 the Owens Valley Improvement Company sold two lots to Jess Fleharty for \$6,000. In 1922 Jess Fleharty sold these two lots to Thomas and George M. Hay for \$7,000. In 1924 G. W. Dow bought the same two lots from Thomas and George M. Hay for \$9,286.

In 1915 E. L. Petitfils sold 230 acres to E. F. Ahrens for \$12,500. In 1922 Ahrens sold this land to W. F. Ahrens and W. Townsend for \$23,000, who in 1923 sold it back to E. F. Ahrens for \$17,000. (This is the only instance in the list of decreasing selling prices.) But Ahrens sold the same land in 1923 to the City of Los Angeles for \$55,000.

In 1908 Lester Callaway sold two lots to Estella Callaway for \$10,160 and this property was sold in 1915 to Paul Zucco for \$16,000.

In 1919 LeGrande D. Wooliscroft sold two lots in the Owens Valley Improvement Company's subdivision of the Robinson ranch to Walter L. Phillips for \$16,150 and these were again sold in 1921 to Jacob Wilson and Charles E. Klund for \$26,000.

CITY PAYS MORE THAN ENGINEERS' ESTIMATES

W. R. McCarthy, engineer for the Owens Valley Irrigation District, and J. C. Clausen, consulting engineer, in a report to the district on March 20, 1923, fixed the value of 53,900 acres of land in the Irrigation District at \$5,536,400, or approximately

\$100 an acre. For 22,000 acres of this same land, the City in 1923 and the first six months of 1924 paid an average price of \$145 an acre, or \$45 an acre above the value fixed by the district's own engineers. That certainly was no case of "beating down" the owners or destruction of values.

GROWTH AND BUILDING ACTIVITY AT BISHOP

Since the construction of the Los Angeles aqueduct, Bishop, the largest town in Owens Valley, has prospered and grown. During the last two years there has been greater activity in building than ever before in the town's history. In 1924 a solid block of new store buildings was erected by Watterson Brothers, Inc., at a cost of approximately \$75,000. The Kitty Lee Inn, an extremely attractive tourist and commercial hotel, involving the investment of approximately \$100,000, also was built last year, as well as a new American Legion Hall. Both these buildings were sponsored by the Bishop Chamber of Commerce, which aided in their financing.

RAILROAD AN AID TO THE VALLEY

When the City of Los Angeles was about to undertake construction of the aqueduct, the problem of transportation of materials and supplies over the long desert stretches north from Mojave faced the engineers. It was solved by an arrangement with the Southern Pacific company, whereby the company constructed a broad gauge line from Mojave to Lone Pine, a distance of about 120 miles, on condition that it would be given a certain amount of freight during construction of the aqueduct. That arrangement by the City resulted in giving Owens Valley a standard broad gauge railroad as an outlet to the markets of Los Angeles and all the southwest for the Valley products.

SECURES STATE AID FOR AUTO ROAD

A committee of the Los Angeles Board of Public Service Commissioners several months ago took up with the California State Highway Commission the matter of improvement and care of the automobile road from Mojave into Owens Valley. Several meetings were held with the highway commissioners, and Governor Richardson's committee of nine, who after visiting the valley recommended, and the highway commission has adopted, a plan to have the state take over upkeep of the road, and to spend a sum equal to \$400 a mile on its improvement. This will mean easier access to the Valley and will swell the already large volume of tourist travel.

CITY VOLUNTARILY PAYS COUNTY TAXES

The City of Los Angeles is the largest taxpayer in Inyo County. For the year ending June 30, 1924, the City taxes on land and other property in Owens Valley were approximately \$70,000, about one-fourth of the total taxes collected in the entire county. Yet the City need have paid no taxes whatever. When the purchase of lands in connection with the aqueduct was begun, the state constitution specifically exempted cities from payment of taxes on property owned in other counties. But City officials connected with the aqueduct initiated steps in the state legislature to have the constitution amended so as to compel payment of taxes on City lands the same as any land and property owner. Before the new law went into force the City voluntarily paid the taxes.

Impossible Demands

CLAIMING that the operation of the aqueduct has caused a "shrinkage" in land values, W. W. Watterson, president of the Owens Valley Irrigation District, has demanded that the City pay \$5,500,000 in "reparations" to the ranchers and business interests of the Valley.

Facts disclosed in other portions of this pamphlet prove conclusively that there has been no shrinkage in values of either ranch or town property, or loss of any kind, by the residents of the Valley by reason of any act or policy of the City of Los Angeles.

Furthermore, the Board of Public Service Commissioners cannot legally expend public funds intrusted to it for the payment of "reparations" claims. The Board, however, is willing and anxious to do everything within its power to help improve conditions in the Valley: (1) By assuring a full water supply for an area sufficient to support the towns, (2) By helping to bring about the highest possible development of that area, (3) By working to secure needed highway and other improvements, (4) By enlisting the aid of civic organizations in increasing tourist business in the Valley.

Coupled with Mr. Watterson's demand for "reparations" is another proposal. Either pay \$5,500,000 for "shrinkage" in values, he says, or buy the 25,800 acres owned by the ranchers in the irrigation district at a price of \$12,000,000. This price, he explains, will

include \$6,500,000 for purchase of the land and \$5,500,000 to compensate the land owners and business interests for "shrinkage" in values.

The City has no need whatever for the land Mr. Watterson wants to sell. Why should it expend \$12,000,000 of the taxpayers' money for land it does not need, especially when such a purchase would mean the destruction of a productive farming district?

Furthermore, the price demanded by Mr. Watterson and his associates is exorbitant and utterly unreasonable, even if the City needed the land. W. R. McCarthy, engineer for Mr. Watterson's irrigation district, in 1923 appraised this land at \$100 per acre. In his \$6,500,000 demand, Watterson is asking \$252 an acre, or \$152 an acre more than the value placed on the land by the district's own engineer.

In the face of this exorbitant price, Mr. Watterson still insists that the ranchers should be "compensated" for "shrinkage in values," to the tune of \$5,500,000.

City's Owens Valley Policy

DETERMINED to do all within its power to bring about an exactly defined and permanent water agreement in Owens Valley that will best serve the interests of that region and also assure Los Angeles of a full aqueduct supply, the Board of Public Service Commissioners on October 14, 1924, adopted a resolution setting forth its policy along this line.

The Commission's policy was based upon facts established by a disinterested and eminently able board of engineers, selected by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. This Board of engineers was composed of Louis C. Hill, J. B. Lippincott and A. L. Sonderegger.

In their report, filed August 14, 1924, these engineers pointed out that there is

The report further pointed out that there is not enough water available in Owens Valley and the Mono Basin, to the north, to make feasible or practicable the construction of a second aqueduct to Los Angeles, even though all agricultural development in Owens Valley be discontinued.

PLAN OUTLINED

The Commission's policy or plan, in brief, provides:

First. That the City of Los Angeles is ready to establish such water conservation and development facilities as will guarantee an ample and regulated irrigation supply for 30,000 acres, or more, of the best land in Owens Valley.

Second. That these 30,000 acres shall remain under private ownership of Valley residents, the City not to make any land purchases whatsoever within the zone or zones set aside to comprise this acreage.

Third. That the City would use its best efforts to bring about the establishment of a good automobile road from Los Angeles into and through Owens Valley. Such a road will open the beautiful mountain country of that region to all Southern California, thereby building up a profitable tourist trade for the Valley people.

Since it was unnecessary to secure the Valley's formal agreement to the good road feature of the Commission's plan, work on this project has rapidly progressed, and has already borne fruit. The California State Highway Commission has authorized the taking over of the road from Mojave to Independence, a distance of 130 miles, as a State Highway, and has voted to this year expend \$400 a mile in grading, leveling and maintaining the road in good condition.

ASSURES PROSPERITY FOR VALLEY

The Commission's plan provides for permanent development of the best farming, dairy and orchard land in Owens Valley. In providing an assured 100 per cent water supply, in place of the present uncertain and fluctuating stream flow, this plan opens the way for the intense and unfailing cultivation of every acre of this land. It insures a production exceeding anything known in the past history of the Valley.

In that part of Owens Valley naturally tributary to the town of Bishop there is now held in private ownership approximately 30,000 acres of irrigated land. Except for certain scattered purchases and exchanges necessary to round out the area into a solid block, this land will remain in private ownership, under the Commission's plan.

DEVELOPMENT VS. DESTRUCTION

Purchase by the City of Los Angeles of all irrigated land in Owens Valley could not be justified from the standpoint of the City or the Valley, or the general development of the state.

From the City standpoint, purchase of all such land would mean the expenditure of millions of dollars of public money for land not needed in connection with the aqueduct water supply, or for any other purpose.

From the Valley's standpoint, purchase by the City of all irrigated lands in the Valley, and withdrawal of this land from crop production, would result in the absolute destruction of Owens Valley as an agricultural district. It would leave the Valley towns standing isolated in the midst of a country reverted to desert, with no crop production to support existing commercial life and business.

Purchase by the City of all lands now held in private ownership in Owens Valley would in no way benefit the City, and would mean the utter destruction of one of the oldest agricultural sections in the state.

On the other hand, the Commission's proposed water policy is one that guarantees the continued development of Owens Valley. It establishes a full and dependable water supply for 30,000 acres in place of the present uncertain supply. And in assuring continued farming development, the Commission's plan guarantees prosperity to the towns and business interests of the Valley.

Facts About Owens Valley

Since the Los Angeles Aqueduct was Built---

- land values in Owens Valley have steadily risen.
- assessed valuations in Owens Valley have increased four-fold.
- the City of Los Angeles is the largest taxpayer in Inyo County, paying one-fourth of the total taxes collected there.
- during the past two years the value of building operations in Bishop, largest town in Owens Valley, far surpassed any two preceding years in the town's history.
- the State Highway Commission, urged by officials of Los Angeles, has consented to spend \$400 a mile on improvement of the road from Mojave into Owens Valley.
- directly through the efforts of the City of Los Angeles, a standard gauge railroad was built into Owens Valley, giving it an outlet to the markets of this City and the Southwest.