

*Mc-  
Barrett*

LOUIS J. WILDE

SUITE 1220 PACIFIC MUTUAL BUILDING  
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

*History*

Jan. 19th, 1922.

Col. Ed Fletcher,  
Eighth Street,  
San Diego, Calif.  
My dear Colonel: -

I want to tell you in plain English, right here, just why San Diego is out three quarters of a million dollars on the Barrett Dam, one single item marked up against the tax payers among many others which happened and which I fought against during my term in office as Mayor.

The Barrett Dam was proposed and planned and various engineers asked for reports and to submit proposals and tentative figures. Mr. Savage was engaged as consulting engineer - drew plans specifications for the present dam - and no other engineer had a look in, neither O'Shaughnessy on the one side or your friend, the multiple arch man, on the other. The estimates furnished by Mr. Savage for a completed dam under his own specifications, were accepted and adopted and the estimate which was made liberally for its completion according to those plans, was in the neighborhood of \$865,000. if I remember correctly. A bond campaign was inaugurated and everybody in town dropped their grievances and went to the bat. This was supposed to complete in full Savage's plans. Bonds were carried and issued and I signed them. I urged that bids be accepted from outside responsible contractors and that the lowest bidder with suitable bond be given the contract under the direction of our engineer, Mr. Savage, and that bonds be sold immediately as I already anticipated a falling bond market. Nothing much was done but delayed until things looked dangerous. About this time we had a second election and I was re-elected Mayor after a memorable fight not forgotten.

The new Council and Mayor took up the water question harmoniously. I proposed that we see the bankers and Mr. Spreckles - get together and do something quick and then. We needed water and there was no time to lose in disposing of securities.

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Mr. Spreckles, who at this time was completing his railroad, had invited the Council and the new Mayor for a trip over that part of the road completed. We accepted. Accompanying us were several prominent citizens - including Frank Belcher, President of the First Nat'l Bank. When we arrived at the end of the line and after luncheon, I said to the crowd and to the Council, to Mr. Spreckles and to Mr. Belcher: "We have with us today the City Government, Mr. Belcher, who represents the banks, and Mr. Spreckles whose heart is in permanent action for real accomplishments and doing things worth while for a greater San Diego. Boys! Let us all get together today and do something - start our administration with acts and not talk! Let us complete the Barrett Dam and finance it here today!" Mr. Spreckles at once seconded the motion - then Virgil Bruschi and then Belcher and in a few minutes it was unanimous and we called a meeting. I, as Mayor, called a Special Meeting and we agreed there and then to complete the Barrett Dam according to the specifications and plans of Mr. Savage. Mr. Spreckles and Mr. Belcher were to take up with the clearing house the manner and means to underwrite the bonds. The details were discussed pro and con and it was agreed tentatively the banks should charge not to exceed 6% interest and would underwrite and take the bonds and complete the work in full without any further worry or controversy on the part of the city fathers, that any amount over and above 6% interest, plus actual cost, and within the bond issue saved would belong to the city and at no time and no place was anything thought of or contemplated or spoken of that referred to an excess amount of bonds at that time. The \$865,000. was considered an outside price for completion of all work called for by Mr. Savage for a turn key job.

We returned very jubilant and at our next Council meeting, which was only a day or so afterward, revived the issue and confirmed it. It was published in the papers and we were heroes of the hour. Mr. Fred Stearns and Mr. L. A. Wright were appointed as attorneys representing the clearing house and Mr. Spreckles. The City Attorney's office was to represent the City. The only question at issue was to find a legal way that the construction work and the damsite would remain or be held in escrow during the construction period and that the banks hold jurisdiction over the work until the dam was finally completed so all monies advanced by them would be secured from technicalities and to conform with State and National Bank Act.

At this point some newspaper opposition injected the thought that the banks were probably making too much money or Mr. Spreckles had an ax to grind. At any rate, it started argument and I believe Mr. Heilbron at the next Council meeting made a motion that the council reconsider its action and see if some bond houses or some other method could not be employed to do the

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work and take the bonds on a 5% interest basis, as he said 6% was too much and the banks should do financing without profit. Mr. Heilbron's motion was seconded by one of the other Councilmen. Now the question was open for discussion. I immediately set forth the dangers of changing and delays and showed the folly of such action - that the banks, more vitally interested in the city's growth than any Councilman, should be criticised and charged with holding up the city. My own banking experience and knowledge of financial conditions outside of our city placed me in a position to know and to anticipate a rapid falling bond market, a higher wage scale and material advance coming. This would operate in whipsaw fashion against our early action and I pleaded we go on with the contract and hold the bankers and Mr. Spreckles to their acceptance of our proposition and guarantee to finish the work as proposed, but I pleaded in vain and was told the City, under the operating department, could build the dam itself and save money - that they could sell the bonds as they needed funds and save money *again*. Could do the work earlier, save time and collect the early rains, etc. etc. At any rate, I was voted down and this gave the bankers and Mr. Spreckles the finest excuse in the world to say "We give it up! There is nothing in it for us and we were only trying to assist the Mayor, the Council and the City of San Diego in doing something immediately and completing the work for the good of every citizen and the credit of the city - already in a bad way."

Now, my dear ~~dam~~ site: these facts are history that cannot be eradicated. They were published. The banks will tell you as much and so will Mr. Spreckles. They were mighty glad to get out of their promises and responsibilities and place them back upon the City Government. I shall not attempt to tell you what has followed these last several years' of loss, overhead, drags and delays - the loss of waters that might have been impounded by an early completion of the work. Then came the time when all of the \$865,000. bonds were exhausted and the dam only partly completed. Then another big bond issue of \$500,000. proposed and carried - the expense attending same, now all spent and gone, dam not completed and as shown by latest estimate, it will take in the neighborhood of \$300,000 more bonds we haven't got. Even then we are not sure of the finish. This has been done under city management, absolutely dead against the petition and appeal of the Mayor at that time and I am only making this statement in justice to one single item where at least \$750,000. has been lost to the taxpayers by an error of judgment and that is putting it modestly and mildly for I do not wish to convey the impression that any member of the Council or any person on ~~the~~ side did not do what he thought was the best thing to do under the circumstances and believe all tried to think their way was great stuff. But you had a Mayor who knew what he was doing and as in a hundred other cases, never had a look in. Mr. Virgil Bruschi was really the only member at that time who backed me on the water question. I believe Engineer Savage would

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*immediate*  
have completed the dam with ~~the~~ available funds to organize and purchase in the early days of the Barrett Dam; therefore this is no criticism whatever to, for or against anyone - merely an explanation and one of the examples - costly and glaring - of municipal construction.

My dear Colonel - you could have completed two dams in half the time and had twice as much water if turned loose on your own hook and have been paid a salary of \$50,000. a year for doing the work and then we would have been money ahead and so could this have been done under the direction of the clearing house where economic brains and not political ones employed; or any one of the Councilmen, single handed, could have done much better but collectively there were too many cooks holding correspondence school recipes and I dare the city of San Diego to compile the actual cost, compounding the interest loss and the impounding of water loss to date over the original bond issue. You will find close to a million dollars has been lost by honest, innocent, bad management.

While I think of it - let me call your attention to the old town bridge - about the only bridge in the county to withstand the floods and recent rains and where the pressure and weight are the greatest. Look at your hurried construction of concrete bridge work throught the county - it has went! And that new proposed old town bridge which would have cost \$150,000. at least if built by contract and \$250,000. if built by Government, would also have went but the old, deep driven piles of the old town bridge withstood all danger and is there to speak for itself. I do not need to repeat the history of the old town bridge.

I also call your attention to the city's piers - the Capp's pier, and also refer you to Rufus Choate on my struggle to build a new pier and warehouse which was incorporated in the bond issue but afterwards cut out and reduced to such an extent that what was done was nothing and lost effort.

These are but a few glaring facts just remembered during my term in office. Differences of opinion, of course, but I was dead right and if you will show one single ruling - and only one - during the four years I was in the office of Mayor, where wrong in my advice or ruling - will promise you never to return to San Diego again and you know that would be great news and very pleasing to those who have opposed and fought me all the years I tried to do my best for the Beech-nut-City.

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Now, Old Man, I am writing to you and not for publication or favors or any old thing. Do not care about politics or any political honors for they are empty compensation for direct, clean cut service. There is nothing in doing right but a bid for abuse and slander but it is highly proper I tell you - interested in San Diego so largely - the facts concerning just one item - the Barrett Dam - that you may know the truth is all balled up and when the dam is completed a lot of people will be out there with bells on who made a mess of it and used it for political advancement - all of which they are not entitled to - no matter how honest their intentions were. They simply fell down. It was too big and the taxpayers of San Diego paid the price.

Yours very truly

LJW\*B

*I am not looking for a square deal now because I don't need it and if I did would not get it in San Diego. But as history has shown who's paying the water should know the museum of San Diego concerning Barrett Dam.*

2—EdFletcher.

mortgage can remain or be taken up at any time. My equity therefore, on a basis of \$450,000.00, would be \$240,000.00. These are substantially the particulars of the property.

In regard to what you refer to regarding other agents, will state that I can not control the anxiety or ingenuity of the various real estate firms in this town. Nobody has the price any lower than yourself, and no one can buy it for less than yourself, no matter what overtures come to you. I expect to deal direct with your customer and to pay you the regular commission. You are not obligated to divide with anybody, and I shall not recognize anybody on your customer except yourself. People you refer to simply have the property for sale the same as yourself and on the same basis. It is only human nature, I presume, for them to try and make a sale or help make one, and get in on the commission; you do that yourself. Now do not be quarrelling over the spoils and worrying about the commission and other agents, but try to effect a sale if your parties are satisfied with the terms.

You may drop in and get any particulars you want in regard to prices, and I will guarantee you the lowest possible terms and prices, and expect to pay you your commission. I do not prefer to sell both pieces of property, but will if necessary. If my price is not satisfactory, it is up to you to say the best your people will do, and if we can give and take a little and get together, alright, if not, we will forget it and no harm done. If I do not sell shortly I expect to raise the price instead of lowering. There is nothing else available on Broadway so desirable, and never will be a time again when you can get in as now. I would not think of making a sale but I have a building project in mind, and would like to begin to complete by Worlds Fair time. If I can not effect something satisfactory shortly, will take the property off the market, and not bother for two or three years, when I will get a very much larger price.

Hoping these particulars in this letter will be satisfactory, and we will get to a yes or no proposition soon.

Sincerely yours,

LJW:RL

[from box 78 "stuff"]

**Ed Fletcher Papers**

**1870-1955**

**MSS.81**

**Box: 34 Folder: 11**

**General Correspondence - Wilde, Louis J.**



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