

[From S.D. Flume
History
etc.]

San Diego, Calif.
January 13, 1919

Col. Ed Fletcher,
San Diego, Calif.

Dear Fletcher:

Mr. Lou B. Mathews called at my office today and asked me if I could give you any data on the early history of the San Diego Flume Company.

While I have never been connected either in an official or clerical capacity with the Flume Co. I was quite close in touch with the first promoters of the enterprise.

The bringing of water from the San Diego River was conceived by W. E. Robinson in conjunction with E. S. Van Dyke. The scheme was hatched late in 1883. W. E. Robinson was the moving spirit: Van Dyke looked after the legal part, such as filing on streams and appropriating water according to California laws, and securing rights of way. Neither of these men had any money to begin with, but Robinson borrowed a certain amount (\$5000.) of money from his mother-in-law, Mrs. Harrison, who had just previous to that date secured \$10,000 life insurance money from the death of her husband in Northern California. With this money Robinson began the preliminary work and Van Dyke filed claims on the San Diego River and its tributaries. Local engineers were first employed to run levels over the rights of way that Van Dyke had secured, but it was soon manifest that more competent engineers were necessary to successfully carry on the work,

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and Robinson secured the services of a Mr. Marlett, who brought with him a Mr. Straight, engineer. Robinson's small amount of money soon gave out. This was supplemented by money secured from ranches along the proposed line for water rights that the Company sold for from \$500 to \$800 per miner's inch of water, and this gave cash or notes to the amount of several hundred thousands of dollars. This assisted in the grading of the right of way and increased the confidence in the scheme, for it was only a scheme to that point.

The first men in the Company were Geo. D. Copeland, San Diego, and Allen Hawley from Lincoln, Nebr., W. H. Terry, from Chicago, Bryant Howard and several other San Diego men of means and enterprise.

About this time the Company made arrangements with Moore & Company, a big lumber concern in the Northern part of the State, to furnish redwood lumber for the Flume, in part cash payment but mostly in the stock and bonds of the Company. They furnished the most beautiful redwood lumber that has ever been shipped into this part of the State—absolutely free of knots. Progress was constantly made on the line. A big 1/2 mile tunnel on the east side of El Cajon Valley retarded the work, but in time the Flume was finished to the eastern end of the Valley. More money was demanded for the further extension of the line. So a scheme was conceived by Robinson and the Company to take about 1,000 acres of land and plat it into small tracts and name it La Mesa Colony, and sell the one hundred lots for \$1,000.

each. This would give them an additional \$100,000. San Diego people were anxious to get the water for domestic use and these lots sold by "lot" to be drawn for without any delay to the citizens of San Diego.

Robinson was an optimist and never lost heart in the final completion of the enterprise. After Moore & Co. began delivering the lumber there was no trouble to sell water rights to the farmers.

I shall never forget a remark Robinson made to me in the very early stages of the promotion. I said, "Robinson, how do you expect to raise enough money to build the flume?" He said, "Smith, if I can get the first fifty thousand and invested the flume is a sure go, for those people and others who take up the load will follow that fifty thousand until it is finished." And that proved to be the history of the undertaking. Many lost all they put in, others lost part but some one kept following up the \$50,000 until completion. A. E. Babcock was an active director at one time.

Large blocks of stock and bonds passed into the hands of English investors, and in time they had to take over the management. They sent here as their manager, Mr. Howell, an engineer. (I think his initials are J. M.) He took an active interest and did some development work, for at that time, about 1894-5, we were having a series of dry years. Howell organized the Consolidated Water Company, who put in pumping plants in the Monte Valley on the San

Diego River to supplement the shortage of water, for the water from the Cuyamaca Dam in the mountains was soon exhausted during the dry years. Howell also built the La Mesa Dam.

No net revenue coming from the use of the water, the Company decided to make a change in management and M. C. Healion arrived as representative of the Company, and the English Bondholders, The Consolidated Water Company never figured much after Howells' time. Bryant Howard, was president, 1889, L.F. Doolittle, Secy., J. W. Befton was president of the Company 1892, and L. F. Doolittle, Secretary. About that time no body wanted to be President of the Company. F. W. Stewart was put in to fill the breach. Then Howell came, and after him Healion, then Fletcher and the Cuyamaca Water Company.

Yours truly,

(Signed) Joseph H. Smith

Ed Fletcher Papers

1870-1955

MSS.81

Box: 72 Folder: 18

**Writings and Interviews - Water History - "Oldtimers"
interviews and letters re history (see also R. Choate
and T. Van Dyke correspondence) - Smith, Joseph H.**



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