

The

SHEEP CREEK WATER COMPANY

1913 Thru' 2003



By John R. Lovett

PHELAN CHRONICLES

SHEEP CREEK WATER COMPANY:

The Sheep Creek Water Company actually was in operation prior to the State of California's State Water Commission development. The Company had filed its notices of appropriation dated October 12, 1912 and January 9, 1913, in Book "H" of Water Records, at Pages 357, 358 and 368 of the Records of the County Recorder of San Bernardino County, California. They note that the Company had prosecuted their water rights with due diligence, and hereby fixes the amount filed upon as has been collected for useful and beneficial purpose as of December 21, 1921. The amount of surface water collected was not to exceed 18 cubic feet per second of the waters of Sheep Creek.

This indicates that Alfred Johnson did do all of his homework before he filed on the surface waters of Sheep Creek and did file all necessary records at the County of San Bernardino before beginning the water diversion on the Sheep Creek channel. This allowed the Sheep Creek Water Company to divert the water that came each spring as the snow began to melt. But the one thing they did not have was a controlled flow of water year around. A drought was coming on our land and the Sheep Creek Water Company had to find additional water.

Before the Johnsons' began the snow melt ditches in Sheep Creek, they were required to find and purchase prior surface water rights by those individuals they could find and advertise for those whom they could not locate. I am going to list the names and dates that they filed for surface water rights.

The original filing date was January 6, 1906 by Alexis Lemonton of Little Rock, California; March 14, 1906 by H. C. Heath of Swarthout Valley; Alexis Lemonton filed on March 14, 1907 and A. C. Nielson and Al McCrea filed on February 18, 1908; C.O. Waters on October 23, 1908 and also on March 23, 1909; Fred L. Paul on March 29, 1911; and in 1912 on October 12, it was Arthur Roux who filed four times from 1912 till 1913.

The Sheep Creek Water Company Board of Directors filed on surface water rights on December 5, 1913. Alexis Lemonton filed January 14, 1914. Alexis Lemonton filed on March 23, 1914. Edmon Walsh and A.O. Dollson filed on November 17, 1914. On April 3, 1917 the Sheep Creek Water Company purchased the remainder of Lemonton and Roux's filings.

The Sheep Creek Water Company was formed in 1913 on the fifth day of December. The first Board of Directors was:

Mr. Alfred E. Johnson, Victorville, CA
Mr. Alexis Lemonton, Little Rock, CA
Mr. Arthur Roux, Victorville, CA
Mr. Henry A. Johnson, El Monte, CA
Mr. Frank L. Johnson, San Gabriel, CA
Mr. William P. Johnson, Victorville, CA

Each member of the Board had one share of the Sheep Creek Water Company stock so the corporation began with \$60.00.

At that time, the available water came from the snow water runoff in the spring time. Mr. Alfred Johnson and his attorney had contacted the persons who had filed with the County of San Bernardino for water rights in the Sheep Creek area. None had done any onsite excavation and for little sums of money, they turned their application over to him.

In the meantime, Mr. Johnson had achieved a lease on forty acres of Bureau of Land Management property in Horse Canyon to build a reservoir for water storage. At the same time, work was started on the Sheep Creek channel where the creek narrows between two bluffs just north of the large tank of the Sheep Creek Water Company. The channel work was to create chevron ditches across the creek to collect the snow melt water and transport it to the reservoir.

This, of course, required a water ditch along the east bank of Sheep Creek and a severe cut through the saddle now known as the Coor-Pender Pass, so that the water could travel on into Horse Canyon and the reservoir. All this work was done in the first five months of 1914. Then a water ditch was constructed north from the reservoir to where it could be turned into the first orchard of Henry Johnson. The Johnson ranches had water and in one form or the other, it has come down from the mountains ever since.

An open water ditch, though easy to build, was not as permanent as a pipeline. The Johnson family procured pipe forms, cement and lime from Victorville and sands from Wild Horse Canyon and they began to build a small mountain of concrete pipe to convert the open ditch from the reservoir to a closed pipeline. This allowed the water to come faster and with the pipeline in place, they could service all of the orchards and Alfred Johnson's alfalfa fields at the north ranch.

It also gave a better route for the water line so that they could serve water at a higher elevation. As the McAllister family moved in, this gave water to them also. The Sheep Creek Water Company was beginning to attract customers.

The reservoir construction began on April the 24th of 1915. The primary work was horse and scraper and a team of mules from the health Ranch in Wrightwood. The horse and mule teams did the

primary work on the reservoir dam causeway by excavating a trench some twelve feet wide at the bottom and the length of the dam. This was backfilled with red clay and compacted thoroughly to create a water-tight barrier the full length of the dam.

As soon as they could, a Yuba crawler tractor was brought up from the Johnson ranch and with the horse teams, started the main dam embankment to complete the reservoir. The site was done by the end of November of 1916 and water was turned in to the reservoir on the 8th of November to begin filling the initial water pond.

The crew that took on this project was Mr. Roux, Mr. Barnett, Mr. Nilsen, Mr. Spurlock, Henry Johnson and a Mr. Pughs. There were four horse teams and four mules and the Yuba tractor, and the related Fresno scrapers to haul dirt fill in.

So the chevron trenches to collect the snow melt, the large ditch to carry the water down Sheep Creek and over the Coor-Pender Pass into Horse Canyon, where the reservoir was now filling, was the first big step. The next step was to transport the water north and east to Henry Johnson's orchard, then north to Frank Johnson's orchard, then on north to Alfred Johnson's orchard and alfalfa field.

Henry Johnson and the crew of Bill Barnett, John Hale, Melvin Nilsen, Bill O'Dell, C. Rodrigues and a Mr. Sacto and Henry Johnson's horse team were laying concrete pipe from the reservoir north east to Henry Johnson's ranch. Earl Ransome came on later on this crew that started this long run of pipe to the northern orchards of the Johnsons. This work began on April 13, 1918.

On May 3, 1917, Henry Johnson's time book indicated work on "shaft number 2." The location was east of the future alignment of the tunnel and about in line with the south work shaft that would be installed on the tunnel. Frank Johnson, Bill Barnett, Mr. Lamb and Henry Johnson, with a team of horses, started to bore a well shaft at this location. There is not very much information on this well shaft, but I will include the time sheets that speak of it.

The snow melt water was turned into the water ditch on March 25, 1918 and into the contour ditch and on to the reservoir on March 30, 1918. The water ditch that came through the Coor-Pender Pass and down Horse Canyon was called the "contour ditch" in Henry's time book. The pipeline being assembled during this summer to Henry's ranch was finished by August 3, 1918. They began to work on Henry's water reservoir for the orchard and were finished in about a month.

In 1919, Henry noted the building of a stone house in the vicinity of the future tunnel alignment. This was in the fall of 1919. This was used to house the miners and other men who were to work on

the tunnel. The Johnsons had apparently made a decision to begin the water tunnel in the near future. Henry's time books indicate work on the tunnel portal began on November 8, 1919. On January 21, 1920, they had finished the portal excavation and had a hundred feet of tunnel completed on this date.

I want to make a point or two about this crew of men who began this work. They were not experienced mining people, they were farmers and orchard people. Granted I am sure that Henry and his father did have experience with tunnel water production, but it was on the other side of the mountains under different conditions. They were determined men of much experience and I am sure they thought it as possible. I doubt that they had any inkling that water was four thousand feet away and three hundred and forty feet deep in the gravel of Sheep Creek.

The tunnel excavation proceeded; March 1, 1920 they were at 150 feet. Henry noted that Bruno Schultz joined the tunnel crew on November 6, 1920. Dean Swick came on the crew July 6, 1922. On May 18, 1924, John Lovett came to work on the tunnel crew.

John Lovett was a new homesteader who had just moved into Wild Horse Canyon. He was a miner of copper, gold and silver with good background in working in alluvial fan which was what they were tunneling in Sheep Creek. He was experienced with dynamite and grades underground. He was the lead miner the crew badly needed.

November 8, 1924 recorded the first one thousand feet of tunnel in place. The crew on that date was Henry Johnson, Charles Durham, Earl Ransome, John Lovett and F. E. Hayes. April 7, 1925 saw Clarence Buck on the tunnel crew.

Crew on the reservoir job was Henry Johnson, John Lovett, Bill Barnett, Frank Schankle, Tom Woods, Pat Higgins, Fred Joplin, Gary Bacon and Don Huffman and the job started on September 12, 1925. They finished the enlarging of the reservoir on November 14, 1925. On February 13, 1926, the tunnel crew was Henry Johnson, John Lovett, I. M. McAllister, Robert O'Neal and Carl Marshall.

The tunnel crew on June 15, 1926 was Henry Johnson, John Lovett, I.M. McAllister, M. M. Horine, Don Hoffman, Lewis Gottwalt and Duke Hingsen from Salt Lake City.

The tunnel crew on November 30, 1926 was Henry Johnson, John Lovett, M. M. Horine, C. K. Marshall and I. M. McAllister. On July 30, 1927, the crew was John Lovett, M. M. Horine, F. G. Feriss and R. M. Whitmere.

The tunnel would be finished in 1928. However, there were a few twists and turns that my father, John Lovett, would talk about in stories he told of the tunnel construction. The 14" concrete pipe

that was laid along the floor of the tunnel was to give the crew new timbers and batting to move ahead in the tunnel. It did sharply reduce the material cost. My dad's man complaint was that Henry and his father, Alfred, were both short, so they cut the timbers to fit them. Old tall John had to duck under everything. But the pipe allowed the crew to backfill a large portion of the tunnel back on the 14" pipe.

The tunnel was completed on August 5, 1928.

The crew at that date was John Lovett, M. M. Horine, Duke Hingsen, F. G. Ferriss and Henry Johnson. The water came out of the head wall of the tunnel at the tunnel floor. My father estimated the flow at about 55 miners inches. As the years go by, I have seen measurements as high as 1,000 gallons per minute and as low as 250 gallons per minute.

I must remind you that three thousand feet of the tunnel was a 14" concrete pipe for the water to go through. The 1,000 gallon per minute was about all it could handle and during wet years, the water was 3 ft. to 4 ft. deep at the entrance of the pipe. In later years, I found a small fault about 150 ft. north of the head wall and water would leach into cracks at that point. Much of the flow was about 350 gallons per minute which would amount to 504,000 gallons per day. This would amount to about 15,120,000 gallons per month out of the 14" concrete pipe at the portal on the north end of the tunnel.

The bottom line was that Alfred and Henry and a bunch of farmers with one good miner had developed a good source of water for the Sheep Creek Water Company. The water was in the ditch, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and they needed more storage if they could manage it. But it was there! After eight years and two months, it was really there.

The next day had the tunnel crew out in the open preparing a ditch from the north portal towards the snow melt ditch so the water would flow to the reservoir. From August 6, 1928 to October 15, 1928, the crew of Henry Johnson, John Lovett, M. M. Horine, F. G. Ferriss and John Hale were the crew that did extra ditch work from the tunnel portal to the reservoir.

I have talked about all the men who worked on the tunnel, but not a word about the women who worked in the stone house and feed the miners and the top crew with good meals during the summer months. One was my mother, Mrs. Doris Lovett. She always talked about Duke Hingsen who was going to Brigham Young University in Salt Lake, Utah. Duke was dead of pneumonia by November of 1928.

SHEEP CREEK MUTUAL WATER COMPANY

An Order of Temporary Injunction was filed in the Superior Court, State of California, County of Riverside on August 18, 1926. Said Injunction was filed by the Pacific Southwest Trust and Savings Bank, who was the lender to the Wrightwood Corporation.

The Temporary Injunction Order filed by the lawyers of the Pacific Southwest Trust and Savings Bank had tried to stop the tunneling work on this date. The Superior Court Judge G.R. Freeman decided on a continuance of work by the tunneling crew until the tunnel reached a point some 38+00 feet from the original portal. In his mind this would allow the Sheep Creek Water Company to continue their search for water up to that station.

The station of 38+00 feet was the south shaft of the tunnel and was in the process of being lowered as time permitted. The miner in charge of the tunnel had argued with all his ability to stop the south shaft excavation. It was his opinion that the engineer was lowering the shaft in the wrong place. When the 38+00 foot station was finally reached in the late summer of 1928, they had developed some 50 miners inches of water in the tunnel. The tunnel was not under the shaft. The shaft was to the west of the tunnel at the station 38+00 feet.

The final agreement of the two corporations came on the 24th day of September 1931. The agreement of stipulations was for judgment and the judgment was recorded on that date. The Pacific Southwest Trust and Savings Bank was enjoined from any water well drilling within one mile of the Station 38+00 of the tunnel placed by the Sheep Creek Water Company.

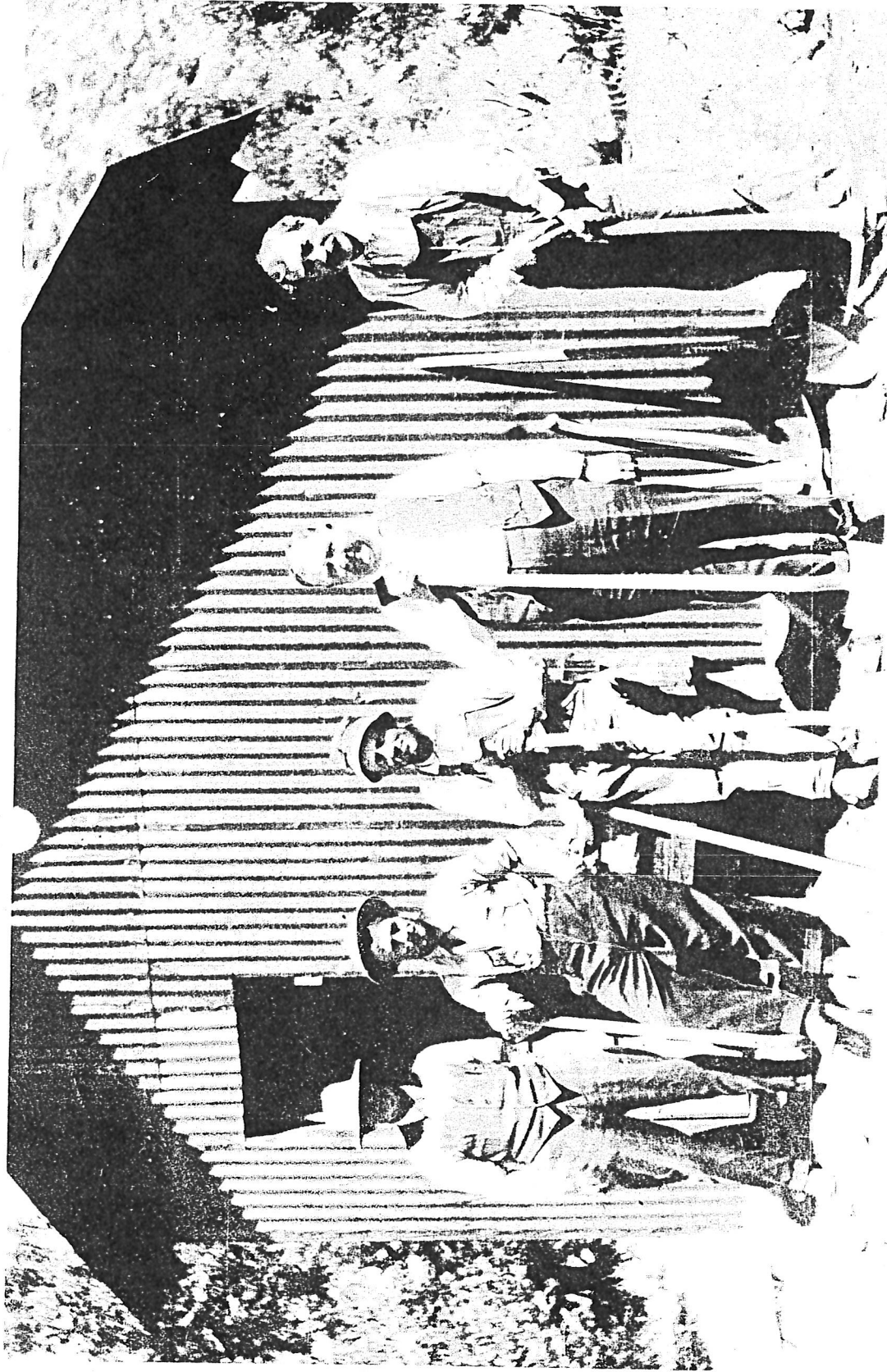
I am sure that the two corporations were not satisfied, but the judgment remains in place till this day. In 1993, the Mojave Water Agency got their judgment to become the Watermaster of the Mojave River and related valleys adjacent to the area. When the early maps surfaced of the Watermaster's areas, the Board of Directors of the Sheep Creek Water Company submitted a series of documents that detailed the use of State Water Rights for the water tunnel. The State had updated these rights through documents and letters since the 24th day of September of 1931. The Board of Directors submitted these papers to the Mojave Water Agency and were excused from participating in the Watermasters adjudication area. The Watermaster Executive Officer, Mr. Larry W. Rowe, was always asked what happened to his map in our area. His answer was "politics!"

The time books were stopped after the Sheep Creek and the contour ditches were rebuilt as the tunnel began to flow. And for several years, the water company has no written Board of Directors meetings or any correspondence on record. So we move forward to March 28, 1936 and the first record of a directors meeting.



Alfred Ezekiel Johnson Born Feb 3rd 1857

Passed Away Jan 13th 1940



ALFRED E. JOHNSON

HENRY A. JOHNSON

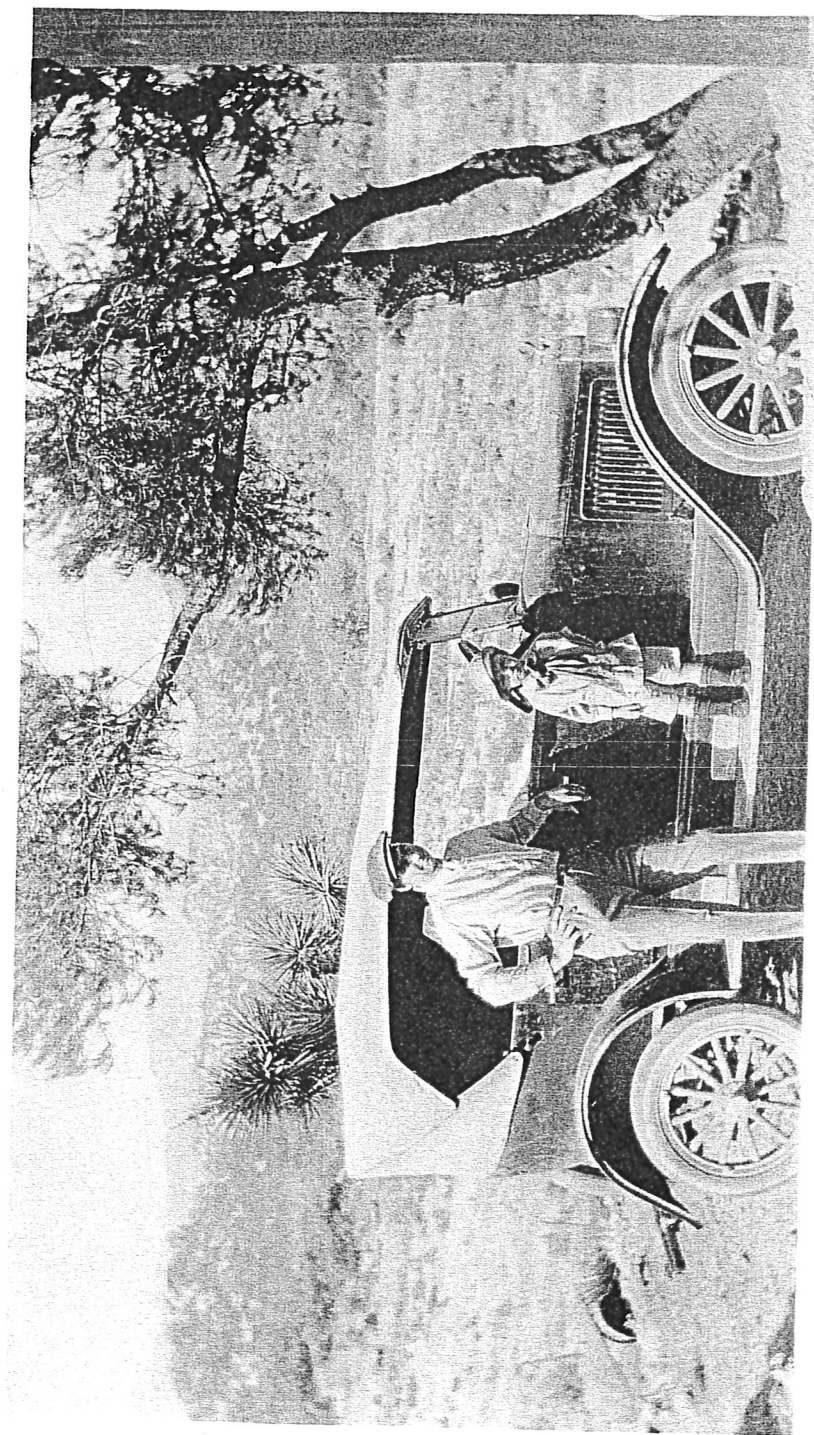
HERBERT COLBY

DAVE BARNETT

WILLIAM BARNETT

NOT PRESENT: ARTHUR ROUX & LEMON TAYNE

SHEEP CREEK WATER COMPANY 1913



JOHN L. LOVETT and son, JAMES

1924