A Century of Service

Willms Siphon. View showing old flume in place with walkway built along top. 1925 photo.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

The Founding of OID

1850-1909

◀ Oakdale Fireman's Masquerade Ball Parade, c. 1911. Courtesy of the Bank of Stockton.

Frank Kelley and Neil Tulloch scrape gravel from the canal at Six-Mile Bar after the 1907 flood. ▶

Oakdale's City Hall was overflowing with a noisy crowd on that warm summer day in 1909. They had come to make their voice heard once and for all: They wanted their own irrigation district like their Modesto and Turlock neighbors to the west. So loud was the Oakdale voice that the Stanislaus Board of Supervisors met on September 13 and ordered an election for October 23. The opposition cried that only the farmers would benefit and their taxes would rise.

Supporters held their breath on that warm Saturday in October. How would the voters swing? Did they see the prosperity that a young Modesto assemblyman had envisioned when he carried the Irrigation Act of 1887? Modesto and Turlock had been quick to form districts and the success that came to these organizations and their growers/farmers was remarkable.

But the roots of the Oakdale Irrigation are deeper than the Wright Act. The story of OID begins in 1853 during the Gold Rush in California. Near Knight's Ferry, a center of extensive placer gold mining along the Stanislaus River, miners needed water for their works. Necessity being the mother of invention, these early miners built a small diversion dam off the Stanislaus River and dug the "Knight's Ferry Ditch" on the right bank to their works.

Knight's Ferry was named for William Knight who was gunned down in the streets of the town bearing his name in November 1849. Knight settled at what he called Knight's Landing and started a trading post and ferry. Dent, Vantine & Company took over the ferry. John and Lewis Dent were often visited by their brother-in-law Ulysess S. Grant, who would later command the Union army in the Civil War and become the 18th President. It is reported that the famous Knight's Ferry Covered Bridge was built from plans made by Grant.

Some time in the late 1850s, one David Locke built a flour mill at Knight's Ferry using the river to power his water wheel. In 1862, a flood destroyed the mill. David Tulloch, who immigrated to California during the early 1850s and settled at Knight's Ferry, and who would become a major influence in the region for the next two decades, rebuilt the mill and had a stone dam constructed in 1866. Tulloch and his son, Charles, prospered and became influential and wealthy.

The drought of 1870-71 convinced even the most diehard skeptics that irrigation was the only way agriculture would succeed in the great Central Valley. Growers and ranchers in Stanislaus County convinced young C.C. Wright to sponsor a bill in the California Legislature that would create today's irrigation districts with the power to organize, issue bonds, and tax properties for the construction, maintenance and operation of irrigation works.

Charles Tulloch took charge of the family business in 1884 and formed the San Joaquin Land and Water Company in 1888. The company bought the miners' canal and their water rights shortly thereafter. With the younger Tulloch at the helm, the company extended the canal and began the first water sales to farmers near Oakdale and Valley Home.

By the late 1890s, the mining operations had panned out and the flour mill had become unprofitable due to competition. Charles Tulloch decided to construct a hydroelectric power plant adjacent to the flour mill. The remnants of the mill and power plant can still be seen today. Tulloch's efforts paid off and he expanded his works in 1902. He built a new dam above Six-Mile Bar. It became known as the Tulloch Dam. The cement used to build the dam is said to have been shipped from Holland.

The Modesto and Turlock Districts were not instant successes. It wasn't until the 1890s that they came into their own. It was about this time that a company called the Oakdale Irrigation Company began work on an 11-mile canal near Knight's Ferry. Apparently the work was never completed and the company was forced to turn to the Stanislaus Power & Water Company, which was headed by Charles Tulloch in 1905.

The success of the Modesto and Turlock Districts, along with the taste of irrigation Tulloch had given the area farmers, caused local Oakdale residents to clamor for their own district.

The vote on October 23 spoke volumes. The turnout was huge. 376 voters cast their ballots, with 93 percent in favor of forming the district. The irrigation district proponents were stunned. Only 27 votes were counted against the measure.

On Tuesday, November 2, 1909 the first board of directors of the Oakdale Irrigation District met at City Hall. W.A. Patterson was elected its first president and M.P. Kearney as secretary of the five-member board. The district had been born from the vision of a few and the hopes of many. What the future held for these hardy pioneers no one knew. There would be dams to build and even bankruptcy to endure.

▲ The dam at Six-Mile Bar on Stanislaus River. c. 1900.

▲ Bill McGinnis Thrasher. 1890 photo.

◀ Charles Tulloch, the visionary and entrepreneur who expanded the early miners' canal and brought water to Oakdale. Undated photo.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

Building the Oakdale Irrigation District

1910-1927

Forming the Oakdale Irrigation District in 1909 turned out to be the easy part. The real challenge lay ahead. Shortly after the board's first meeting in November 1909, the directors turned their attention to providing a system to deliver water to the thirsty farms in Oakdale. Someone suggested that OID and its new neighboring district, the South San Joaquin Irrigation District (SSJID), buy Charles Tulloch's irrigation works on the Stanislaus River near Knight's Ferry. Tulloch, an early pioneer of the region, had built a dam near Knight's Ferry and dug a ditch to deliver water to the outskirts of the city.

In July 1910, OID and SSJID purchased Tulloch's system for $650,000, agreeing to share the water equally. Thus began a partnership that has spanned nearly 100 years and a venture that changed the region forever. Without this partnership, Eastern Stanislaus County might not be as prosperous as it is today. Perhaps those men at the helm saw what future prosperity their efforts might bring, but in 1910, they were barely in the water business and a better delivery system and storage was needed.

In 1912, the districts began building Goodwin Dam, north of Knight's Ferry, where their two main canals would start. The dam was constructed as a double arch concrete structure some 80 feet in height and one and one-half miles downstream from the old miners' works.

The first, North Canal, was a joint diversion point with SSJID. It ran some three and one-half miles with 1,260 cfs (cubic feet per second) capacity leading down along the right bank of the river canyon to the joint diversion gates where the two districts split the water. OID took its water from here into its North Main Canal which ran some 15 miles in length to serve the District's north side farmers and ranchers.

The second, South Canal, was an OID project. It could handle 250 cfs of flow initially and ran down the left side of the canyon some 22 miles to serve the south side of OID's District.

▲ Digging and enlarging the irrigation canals for the construction of the Oakdale Irrigation District in 1910.

◀ Construction work on the canal near Knight's Ferry. 1910.

The Ed Rodden home on the southwest corner of West RR (Yosemite) and D Street. Jimmy Rodden in the foreground. c. 1918. Rodden Lake was named for the family.

Melones Dam site looking upstream.

Construction of Melones Dam June 3, 1926.

Goodwin was finished in 1913 to much fanfare. A large contingent of county and state officials dedicated the impressive dam on April 13, 1913. The ceremony was reported in the local Oakdale newspaper which commented: "Though attended by thousands of people from all parts of California, there was no mishap or accident worthy of note. The crowd was well-behaved."

The reporter made a very prophetic observation: "The people on Inspiration Point, watching the waters of the Stanislaus flow over the double crescent of Goodwin Dam, were looking into the future and drawing mental pictures of the mighty transformation which will take place when those waters shall be diverted for their ultimate purpose of making parched soil of the plains bring forth abundant harvests."

Senator David W. Mott of Ventura, chair of the California Senate's Committee on Irrigation, represented the governor and presided over the opening of the gates. He turned to a Miss Helen Wurster and a young man named William Gray, both of whom had been chosen to do the official honors. Said the local press: "The gates were raised and the water started on its mission of making the land fruitful while Miss Wurster and Master Gray strewed upon its surface golden poppies, emblematic of wealth, and the people cheered."

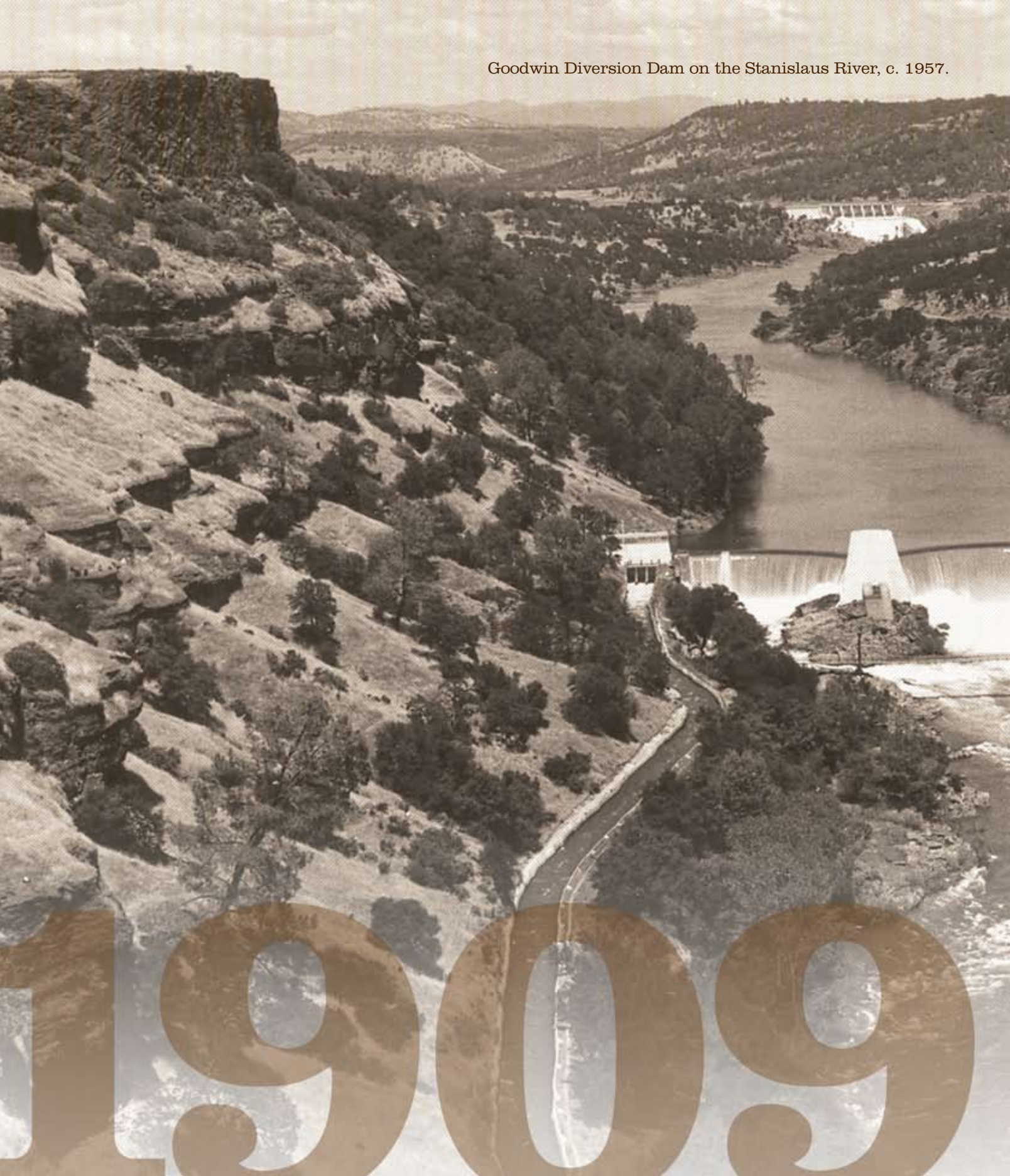
The christening of Goodwin was a milestone in OID's history, but by 1916, it was clear that more storage was necessary. OID constructed Rodden Lake to meet this need while SSJID built Woodward Reservoir. Eventually, OID would build 350 miles of canals and laterals that covered the district.

Farmers in the region were dependent on diversions from the natural flow of the river, which after July was not sufficient to meet their needs. To solve this problem, OID and SSJID agreed in 1921 to begin the Melones project, a dam 20 miles upstream from Knight's Ferry. Construction began in 1925 and the dam was completed in December 1927.

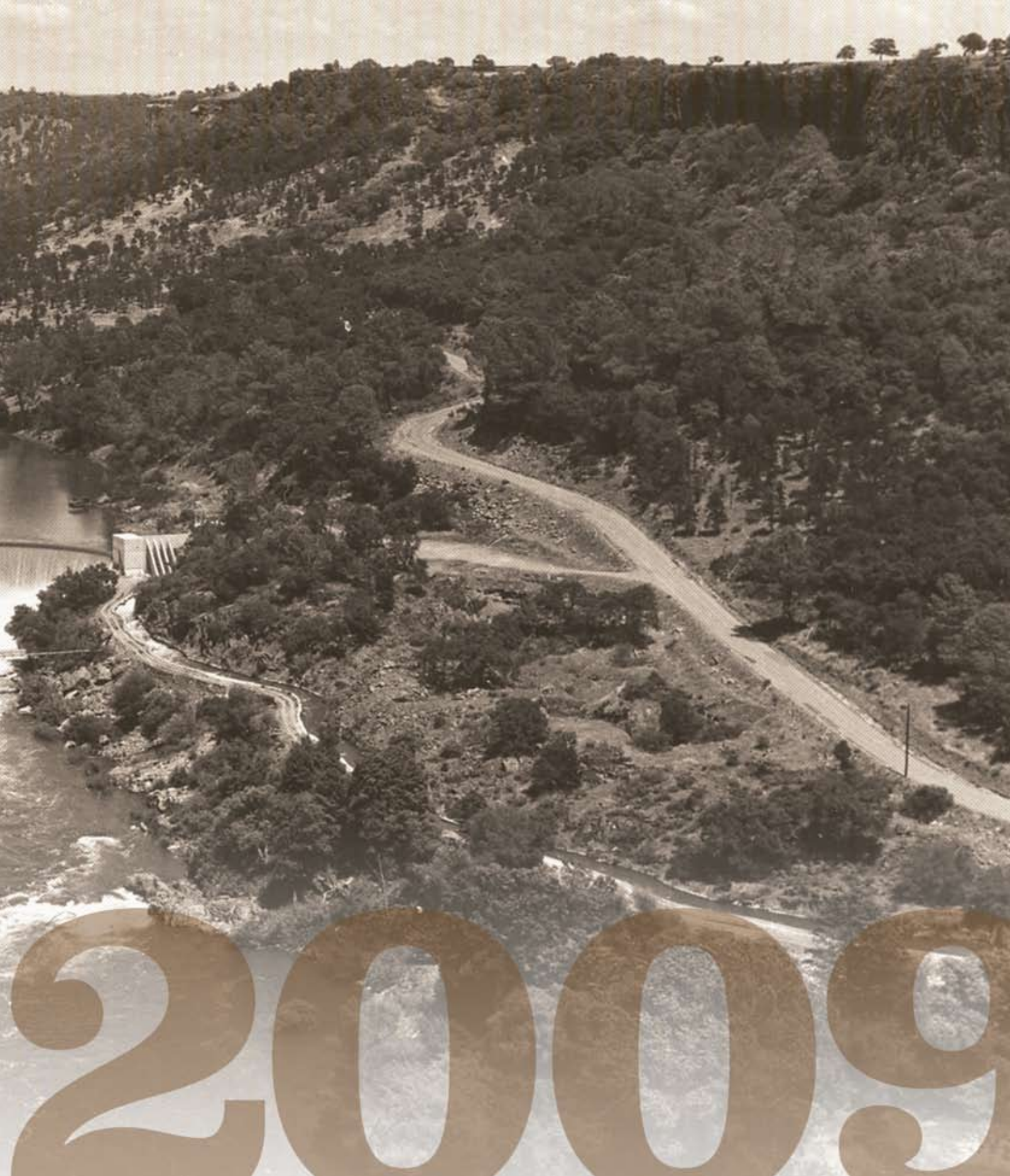
To finance the construction of the dam, as one observer remembered: "The two Districts agreed to construct a pressure power tunnel leading from the dam some 3,800 feet along the left side of the river down to a power plant site where 25,000 kw of electric energy could be developed. For the privilege of using the water through this power plant [PG&E] agreed to pay the Districts $130,000 each year over a 40-year period." This covered principal and interest on construction bonds to finance the dam. As a result, no district or public monies were used. The dedication ceremony, like Goodwin's some 14 years earlier, brought out the local and state dignitaries.

As the 1920's ended, OID seemed to enjoy much success. In 20 years it had built its delivery system, created major storage facilities, constructed two dams and set the stage for prosperity for the whole region.

But hard times were on the way.



Goodwin Diversion Dam on the Stanislaus River, c. 1957.



2009

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1909-2009

1909 (November)
Wm. A. Patterson
Ed Rodden
J. B. Stearns
Robert L. Thompson
Dr. E. Schneller

1911 (December)
Wm. A. Patterson
J. B. Stearns
R. L. Thompson
F. L. Freelove
Ed Rodden

1912 (August)
Wm. A. Patterson
J. B. Stearns
R. L. Thompson
F. L. Freelove
A. L. Gilbert

1913 (March)
J. B. Stearns
F. L. Freelove
J. M. Murtha
R. L. Thompson

1915 (March)
F. L. Freelove
C. M. Wilson
H. S. Crowe
R. L. Thompson
J. M. Murtha

1917 (March)
J. H. Eakin
C. W. Richards
R. W. Hobart
H. S. Crowe
C. M. Wilson

1918 (February)
C. M. Wilson
Wm. Clawson
C. W. Richards
H. S. Crowe
R. W. Hobart

1919 (March)
H. J. Bauhman
Wm. Clawson
H. S. Crowe
C. W. Richards
R. W. Hobart

1919 (June)
Wm. Clawson
H. S. Crowe
C. W. Richards
R. W. Hobart
Fred N. Merrihew

1919 (July)
Wm. Clawson
H. S. Crowe
C. W. Richards
Fred N. Merrihew
H. B. McMath

1921
H. S. Crowe
H. B. McMath
Fred Merrihew
Frank M. Reed
E. N. Moulton

1922 (September)
H. S. Crowe
F. N. Merrihew
Geo L. Magneson
E. N. Moulton
H. B. McMath

1927 (June)
H. S. Crowe
F. N. Merrihew
E. N. Moulton
H. B. McMath
Glen Harter

1931 (March)
S. K. Kaufman
E. N. Moulton
H. B. McMath
Glen Harter
T. S. Pendergrass

1931 (May)
S. K. Kaufman
H. B. McMath
E. N. Moulton
T. S. Pendergrass
Joseph C. Wilson

1931 (October)
H. B. McMath
S. K. Kaufman
E. N. Moulton
H. H. McKinney
T. S. Pendergrass

1932 (January)
H. B. McMath
S. K. Kaufman
H. H. McKinney
T. S. Pendergrass
C. W. Richards

1932 (July)
H. B. McMath
S. K. Kaufman
Fred N. Merrihew
C. W. Richards
H. H. McKinney

1933 (March)
H. B. McMath
S. K. Kaufman
Fred N. Merrihew
W. T. Kerr
H. H. McKinney

1937 (March)
H. M. McMath
S. K. Kaufman
Fred N. Merrihew
H. H. McKinney
David Tulloch

1937 (November)
H. B. McMath
S. K. Kaufman
Fred N. Merrihew
H. H. McKinney
A. N. Quayle

1938 (May)
A. N. Quayle
H. B. McMath
Fred N. Merrihew
V. A. Farren
S. K. Kaufman

1938 (December)
A. N. Quayle
H. B. McMath
Fred N. Merrihew
S. K. Kaufman

1940 (February)
F. N. Merrihew
P. L. Davis
H. B. McMath
A. N. Quayle
S. K. Kaufman

1941 (March)
Fred N. Merrihew
W. W. Edwards
P. L. Davis
A. N. Quayle
S. K. Kaufman

1943 (February)
Fred N. Merrihew
W. W. Edwards
P. L. Davis
S. K. Kaufman
Ernest Preston

1943 (March)
P. L. Davis
W. W. Edward
J. H. Smart
A. H. Murray
Ernest Preston

1944 (June)
P. L. Davis
W. W. Edwards
A. H. Murray
Ernest Preston

1944 (July)
P. L. Davis
W. W. Edwards
A. H. Murray
Ernest Preston
Leroy Smith

1945 (March)
Ernest Preston
A. H. Murray
Leroy Smith
G. W. Cassel
Enoch Ward

1946 (March)
Leroy Smith
A. H. Murray
G. W. Cassell
Enoch Ward
Joe Barnhill

1947 (March)
Joe Barnhill
G. W. Cassel
Edwin Koster
Leroy Smith
Enoch Ward

1949 (March)
Leroy Smith
G. W. Cassell
Edwin Koster
Enoch Ward
Paul Hunt

1951 (March)
Edwin Koster
G. W. Cassell
B. V. Hanson
Enoch Ward
Paul Hunt

1951 (April)
Edwin Koster
C. W. Cassell
B. V. Hanson
Paul A. Hunt
Robert B. Washburn

1952 (July)
Edwin Koster
Charles W. Priddy
B. V. Hanson
Robert W. Washburn
Paul A. Hunt

1954 (July)
Edwin Koster
B. V. Hanson
Robert W. Washburn
Paul A. Hunt

1954 (August)
Edwin Koster
B. V. Hanson
Robert W. Washburn
Paul A. Hunt
Victor O. Wedegaertner

1957 (July)
Victor 0. Wedegaertner
B. V. Hanson
Robert B. Washburn
Paul A. Hunt
N. E. Collins

1964 (January)
Victor 0. Wedegaertner
B. V. Hanson
Robert B. Washburn
Paul A. Hunt
Mervin Amerine

1965 (March)
Victor 0. Wedegaertner
B. V. Hanson
Emory Miller
Paul A. Hunt
Mervin Amerine

1969 (May)
Victor 0. Wedegaertner
B. V. Hanson
Emory Miller
Joe Gambini
Mervin Amerine

1970 (April)
Richard Lutz
Victor 0. Wedegaertner
Emory Miller
Joe Gambini
Mervin Amerine

1971 (May)
Barry M. Jett
F. Richard Lutz
Victor 0. Wedegaertner
Emory Miller
Joe Gambini

1979 (December)
Doug E. Kuhlman
Charles T. Stevens
F. Richard Lutz
Domingo Toste
Tom Van Ruiten

1982 (February)
Domingo Toste
Charles R. Harvey
Doug E. Kuhlman
F. Richard Lutz
Tom Van Ruiten

1985 (November)
Charles R. Harvey
Doug E. Kuhlman
F. Richard Lutz
Tom Van Ruiten
Robert Van Lier

1986 (January)
Doug E. Kuhlman
F. Richard Lutz
Tom Van Ruiten
Robert Van Lier
Steven Webb

1991 (December)
F. Richard Lutz
Tom Van Ruiten
Robert Van Lier
Steven Webb
Milton Very

1993 (December)
F. Richard Lutz
Robert Van Lier
Steven Webb
Milton Very
Tony Taro

1995 (December)
Steven Webb
Robert Van Lier
Henry Burtschi
Dale Price
Tony Taro

1998 (January)
Steven Webb
Henry Burtschi
Dale Price
Tony Taro
Grover Francis

2001 (December)
Steven Webb
Tony Taro
Jack Alpers
Louis Brichetto
Frank Clark

July 2006 – Present
Steven Webb
Tony Taro
Jack Alpers
Frank Clark
Al Bairos, Jr.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

The Growth Years

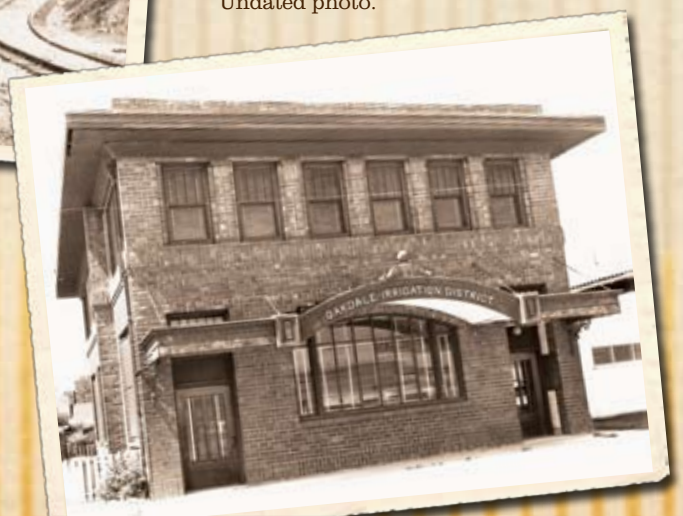
1928-1955

The completion of the Melones Dam in late 1926 seemed to solve many of the water storage problems that faced the Oakdale Irrigation District and its sister district, the South San Joaquin Irrigation District. But the planting of Ladino clover changed that. The first planting in OID lands began in February 1928 on a ranch just north of the Stanislaus River. Ideal for fattening cattle, Ladino clover plantings quickly spread throughout the district. By the late 1930s, one source estimated that nearly 60 percent of all of OID irrigated acres were rolling in clover. The problem was that the crop needed water – lots of water – which forced the district to consider additional storage. A proposed dam project was summarily turned down by the U.S. Secretary of Interior Harold L. Ickes.

OID Chief Engineer Russell Hartley, whose service to the District would span nearly six decades, turned to digging deep wells. "We put in some 25 deep well pumps," Hartley recalls in his memoir of the District. "It was costly but did enable us to keep clover along with added private pumps." Over 100 private wells were also sunk. As more and more wells were dug, the groundwater table began to decline. Meanwhile, the demand for water escalated. Hartley continued to press for more dams and storage reservoirs. But the 1930s was the decade of the Great Depression and there was little support or money to develop the projects. Worse, water districts all over the state were experiencing hard times financially and OID was no exception.

By the mid-1930s, the District's profile had changed dramatically from its modest beginnings in 1909. Now there were 73,300 total acres in the District that included 40 miles of canals, 315 miles of laterals and pipelines and a customer list of 2,693 about half of which were farm properties and the other half city and town properties. The District had a population of about 7,000 with approximately 2,200 of them Oakdale residents. The problem was no one had any money.

◀ Old Melones Railroad photo with unknown man standing next to tracks. Undated photo.



OID offices. Built in 1913 on property donated by A.L. Gilbert. The building was home to the District until the current offices on F Street were constructed. ▶

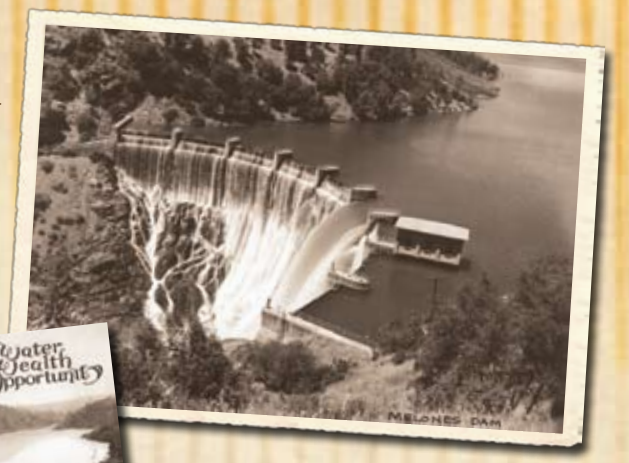
▲ City of Oakdale letterhead promoting Ladino clover which was first planted in Oakdale in 1928. It became an important crop in the District.

Bondholders for the original construction of Melones were clamoring for their payments. The District proposed a payment restructuring plan that was accepted by nearly all but a few bondholders. But holdouts took their case to the Stanislaus County District Attorney, R. R. Fowler. Fowler investigated the matter and declined to pursue the case for the disgruntled bondholders, saying, "Everyone knows that under the present conditions many of the irrigation districts are on the very brink of ruin and bankruptcy, and with that their collapse would follow the ruin of everybody within their boundaries."

Still, by the late summer of 1934, OID was forced into a "plan of re-adjustment" and filed for protection under Chapter IX of the U.S. Bankruptcy Act. The plan was approved and bondholders received about "50 cents on the dollar," as Engineer Hartley recalls. "During that period the finances of the district were so tight that the office force, including myself, took a 10 percent cut in wages to help out," he mused.

As the district weathered the financial storm of the 1930s, water storage continued to be an issue. In late 1938, the Board of Directors ordered Hartley to make additional studies for possible reservoir sites on the Stanislaus River on the western slopes of the High Sierras. World War II put any serious effort on hold and it wasn't until 1948 that Hartley, working with his staff and the staff of SSJID, determined that three dams should be built. Donnells and Beardsley would be located on the Middle Fork of the river and Tulloch upstream from the diversion dam at Goodwin. The project was dubbed "Tri-Dam" and became a cooperative effort similar to Melones for both OID and SSJID, with payment for their construction to come from the hydroelectric powerhouses at the dams and sales of the power under a 50-year contract to PG&E that expired in 2004 when the two districts took ownership of the dams.

Melones Dam. ▶



◀ Early OID Promotional Brochure.

After several more years of surveys, studies and design work, the projects were put to the voters of both districts who had to pass a bond measure to fund the construction. In 1952, the voters overwhelmingly passed the measure and the project went to bid. The high cost of the contractors' bids stunned the boards and they were rejected. It wasn't until 1955 that favorable financial conditions allowed the Tri-Dam Project to move forward. The original estimated cost of $40 million had mushroomed to $52 million.

◀ OID blacksmith shop 1958.

Riverbank sewer line. ▶
Flood 1955. Photo taken December 24, 1955.

GENERAL MANAGER/SECRETARY 1909-2009

1909
M. P. Kearney

1932
T. S. Pendergrass

1935
H. M. Tennant

1937
M. W. Corrigan

1938
C. W. Quinley

1967
Keith F. Chrisman

1974
Robert L. Isaac

1980
Charles T. Stevens

1981
Ed Schnabel

1983
Eugene O. Bergeron

1983
William F. Hurst

1984
Eugene O. Bergeron

1993
Barrett Kehl

1996
Richard Barzan

1997
Wayne Marcus

2001
Buck Scheffel

2002 – Present
Steve Knell

Remembering Our Leaders

From its inception, OID has been blessed with outstanding leadership. Visionaries and pioneers such as William A. Patterson, the District's first board president and H.S. Crowe, a driving force for Melones on the OID board. Board members play a key role in setting the policy and direction for the District. Their invaluable service cannot be understated.

OID has also been dependent upon its general managers or "secretaries," as they were called in the early days. M.P. Kearney served for nearly a quarter of a century in that role. Clarence W. Quinley was considered to be the energy behind the Tri-Dam Project. General managers are the industry captains that keep the District focused and running smoothly.

From the staff came men like Russell Hartley whose 57 years of service is unparalleled in the annals of the District. And there are countless others who could be named. No district functions well without dedicated staff members who put their lives into their jobs and make it better for us all.

Thank you to all who have served the Oakdale Irrigation District.

OID and SSJID Board Members at Melones construction site. ▶

▲ 1965 Board of Directors (left to right): Paul Hunt, Vic Wedegaertner, Emory Miller, Budd Hanson, Chairman, C.W. Quinley, Secretary, M.W. Amerine

Acknowledgements

This booklet, *A Century of Service*, would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of individuals. Our sincere thanks to the Oakdale History Museum and its staff for allowing us to scan and use the photographs for our 100th Anniversary celebration. Unless otherwise indicated, photographs are from the Tom Haidlen Collection. Our thanks to the Bank of Stockton for allowing us to use a number of other photographs. Thanks to Tom Laidlaw who provided much of the original research for the text and rounded up all the photos. Thanks to Steve Knell and Lori Fitzwater-Presley who helped guide the project. And, to the board of directors who commissioned the project and made it possible.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

Tri-Dam Powers OID

1955-1984

The last bucket on Donnells Dam, May 15, 1957.

Artist rendering of new OID headquarters built in 1965.

Ground was broken for Tri-Dam on June 17, 1955 and nearly two years later to the day, the dams were dedicated in a VIP ceremony at the Beardsley Powerhouse site. OID president Edwin Koster and SSJID President John E. Vrieling took the podium along with Harvey Banks, the director of the State's Division of Water Resources and PG&E President N. R. Sutherland.

PG&E's role had been important in the building of the Tri-Dam Project. The company was on the hook to buy power generated by the project for 50 years. Payments from the utility would pay the bonders back. At the same time, PG&E had spent millions of dollars constructing power transmission facilities to convey the electric power to the San Joaquin Valley.

The three dams, along with an improvement project to Goodwin, brought a total of 230,400 acre feet of gross water storage to the region at the time. Donnells, the uppermost facility on the Middle Fork of the river was an arch dam built 290 feet high with a capacity of 64,500 acre feet. Beardsley, 12 miles down the river from Donnells, was the largest of the three dams. The earth-filled dam stood 280 feet above the stream bed and stored 97,500 acre feet. Tulloch, a concrete gravity dam named for pioneer Charles Tulloch, was 45 miles downriver from Beardsley, stood 165 feet above the stream, and stored 68,400 acre feet of water.

There was plenty of credit to go around for the success of Tri-Dam. Both districts could share in the limelight, but many pointed to the tireless work of Clarence W. Quinley, OID's Secretary, who also held the position of the executive secretary of Tri-Dam.

Another significant project had been completed for the public good without new taxes and without raising the water rates of any District customer. It was built by people with vision and determination who saw what the power of water could do for the economic vitality of the region.

The first five decades of OID's history were fraught with the challenges of building a system and meeting the needs of its agricultural economy. Farms and ranches were small and the OID water delivery system was designed to meet their needs. District engineer Ronald Keeler, who served OID for 43 years, remembered, "When I first came here [in 1946] the district was short of water. We didn't have the water to develop [additional] land. We had water rights of 300,000 acre-feet and couldn't deliver that."

After Tri-Dam was completed in 1957, it became apparent that the distribution system needed to be expanded. "Tri-Dam increased our water 50 percent," Keeler recalled in a newspaper interview. "Then we

had to build up the canals where they could take a full supply of water. That took 10-12 years."

It was the post-World War II-era and the valley economy was booming with growth. The District began to expand its irrigated acres as more and more canals and laterals were built. By the 1960s, there were now over 40 miles of canals, 330 miles of laterals and 110 miles of drains with over 58,000 of the District's 72,000 acres being irrigated.

In 1965, the District moved its offices from the old 1913 facility to its present site on F Street which then housed the OID's maintenance yard and shops. The new facility was built at a cost of $138,000, a tidy sum for the 1960s.

The mid-60s saw another important change in District operations. Until then, OID used its system for flood control on the Stanislaus River. But in 1966, the U.S. government began construction of the New Melones Dam and reservoir and the Bureau took charge of flood control.

New Melones was first conceived in 1944, just 17 years after the first dam was built. Congress authorized its construction and in 1962 modified the authorization to include irrigation, power, wildlife, fishery enhancement and recreation as justification for the new dam. New Melones, built downstream from the old dam, stood some 625 feet high and became the fourth largest in California. It was completed in 1978 and the powerhouse was finished in 1979, the same year that OID and SSJID turned over control and management to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Old Melones? It was now covered by 350 feet of water.

In 1966, at the time the Bureau was beginning construction of the New Melones project, Russell Hartley, chief engineer of OID since 1921, decided it was time to retire. His full-time employment ended in December 1966 but the District could not let such a valuable asset get away. He was retained as a consulting engineering from 1967 until his passing on October 5, 1978.

The O'Byrne's Covered Ferry Bridge over the Stanislaus. The longtime landmark was built in 1862, and removed when Tulloch Dam was constructed in 1957.

Few people have played such an important role in the creation of OID as it stands today. The board of directors noted his service in a proclamation shortly after his death: "During his fifty-seven years he gave unselfishly of his time, energy and best thoughts to the advancement and progress of the District he served… All irrigation interests in the State of California have suffered irreparable loss." Hartley Lake was named in his honor.

In 1984, the Sand Bar Hydroelectric Powerhouse was completed, adding another 16,200 kilowatts of power to the Tri-Dam Project on the river.

It had taken decades to deliver Tri-Dam and fulfill the real mission of the District. Now there was plenty of water and storage to meet the needs of a thirsty District that was growing and powering regional agriculture.

But problems lay ahead.

OID Chief Engineer, R.E. Hartley, 1965.

A.C. Holbrook, Superintendent, 1965.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

OID Looks to the Future

1985-Present

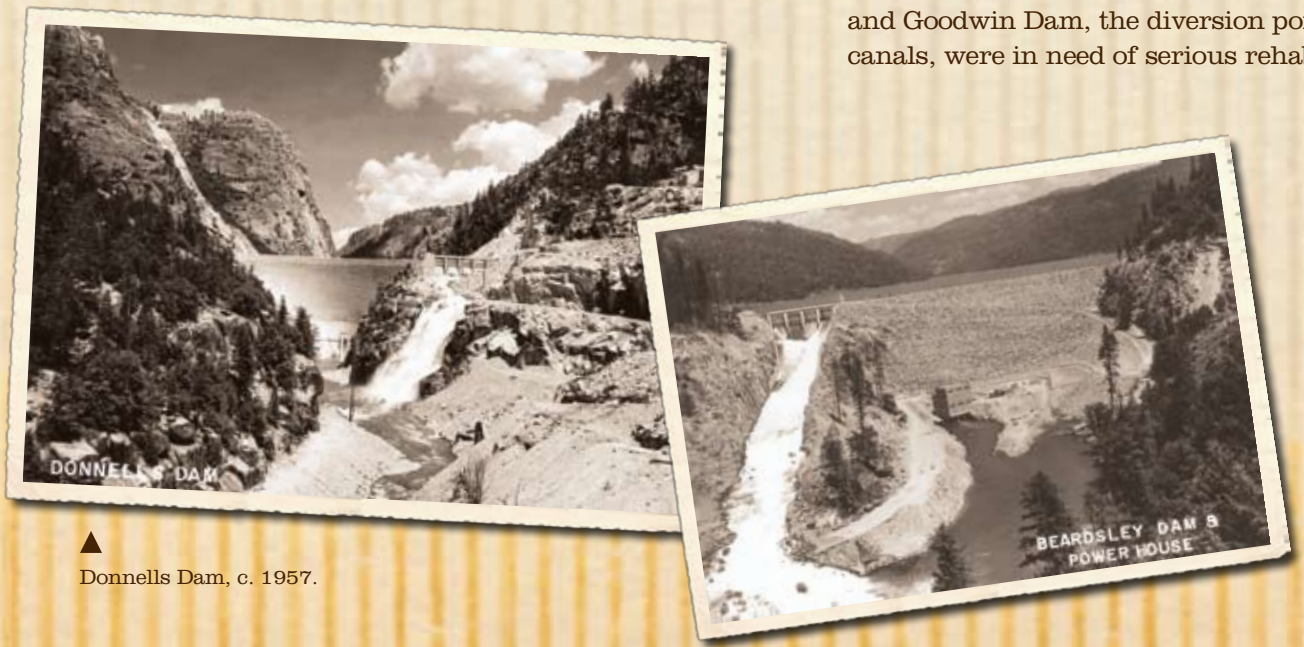
Since the mid-1980s, OID has continued to serve its constituencies–growers, ranchers and several hundred Oakdale residents. In 2005, the Tri-Dam bonds were paid off and OID's Federal Energy License to generate power was renewed with a favorable financial impact on the District.

However, the District began to see changes. Many OID customers turned to planting permanent crops such as orchards, which required less water but a greater level of service. As almonds replaced pasture, the influence of Ladino clover declined rapidly. The average parcel size inside OID began to shrink and weekend irrigators wanted more scheduling flexibility. Many District customers began to install drip irrigation to improve efficiency and save water. But drip requires filtration which meant the District had to adjust its maintenance programs to meet this need.

Outside influences also began to put pressure on OID. Environmental concerns and serious water quality issues became a key focus. There were air quality regulations and regional/local groundwater management issues to deal with. Water was leaving the District as tailwater (runoff of excess irrigation water from fields) that provided no benefit to the District or its customers. State laws were now requiring additional operational practices to ensure that OID's tailwater complied with discharge requirements. Aquatic herbicide applications had to meet regulatory standards. These and other water quality issues required District compliance.

At the same time, others in the state began to look at OID's water use practices. The District was using more water per irrigated acre than any neighboring district. There were demands that the District be more efficient.

Complicating the situation was the fact that OID's infrastructure was old. From 1984 to 2004, distribution system repairs were deferred. Canal banks were eroding. Pipelines were leaking. Tunnels between Knight's Ferry and Goodwin Dam, the diversion point for the main canals, were in need of serious rehabilitation.



▲ Donnells Dam, c. 1957.

◀ Beardsley Dam and Power House, c. 1957.

Cover, OID Water Resources Plan, Phase I Summary.

The complexity of the water issues, both locally and at the state level, required OID to rethink its practices and priorities so that it could fully protect the region's water supplies into the future.

OID's board of directors launched a strategic planning effort to provide overall direction to deal with the many issues. The board retained water resource experts to assist it. Major studies were made of OID's land use, changing crop patterns, infrastructure needs, water practices and other District operations. A host of public outreach efforts were employed including work sessions with the board.

OID's Water Resources Plan, completed in 2004, detailed how to repair, rebuild and modernize the old and outdated system. The plan's goals were and continue to be to: Provide long-term protection to OID's water rights; address federal, state and local challenges; rebuild/modernize an out-of-date system to meet the changing customer needs; develop affordable ways to finance improvements; and to involve the public in the process. After significant environmental review, major rehabilitation efforts got underway in 2007.

The Water Resources Plan, when fully completed over the next 20 years, will greatly enhance the District's operations and service. It will continue the District's 100-year commitment to the region: To protect and develop its water resources for the maximum benefit of the community it serves by providing excellence in irrigation and domestic water service.

Tulloch Dam and Powerhouse, c. 1957.

As OID looks to the future, the District understands its role as an economic engine for the region through both the water it delivers and the energy resources it develops with its partner, SSJID, through Tri-Dam. In recent years, OID has become more visible to the community so that its many stakeholders can have their voices heard and understand its role as an important regional asset.

The directors, management and staff of OID look to the future with confidence, optimism, and a sense of service to the region and the people who live here.

Since 2000, OID has been a part of the Vernalis Adaptive Management Program, a 12-year study to protect juvenile Chinook salmon migrating from the San Joaquin River through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Rehabilitation of the OID distribution system is underway.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

Russell Hartley Remembers OID

Russell Hartley was chief engineer of OID from 1921 to 1966 and a consulting engineer until his passing in 1978.

My First Year with OID

Prior to coming [to OID] on Nov. 21, 1921, I was with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on the Truckee-Carson project in Nevada, 60 miles east of Reno. My starting salary with the District was $175 per month. That first winter was very trying. We had just come from the desert and it was very wet and foggy. [I] was married, had two children and Mrs. H was pregnant.

The board consisted of Harry Crowe, chairman, Fred Merrihew, H. B. McMath, Ed N. Moulton and Frank Reed. They were a very capable and loyal board and very economy minded. They were patient with me.

The irrigation force was rather limited. We had two very capable foreman—M. M. Jones. The other was Al Crosby. We had two model T Ford flat rack trucks which the foreman used and four mules and two head of horses and a few scrapers. During my first year I walked every mile of ditch, about 300 miles altogether, just to find out conditions and where they were.

About 18,000 acres [were] being irrigated...[and] I succeeded Burton Smith, a very capable engineer, but he was lacking in patience and sympathy for the farmers' problems. He and the board dissolved [their] relationship. Mr. Smith had destroyed or burned every record in the engineer's office and I came to a bare desk and one 3' x 4' drafting table. I learned a lot of lessons as how not to carry on with the farmer.

Recollections of Tri-Dam

Until about 1930, the water from Oakdale's half share in Melones took care of irrigation needs fairly well, but about that time Ladino clover began to make its appearance, and for several years, some 2,000 or 3,000 acres [were] planted every year. With that the district was forced to look into more storage to develop water.

I went back to the old Beardsley project which we had surveyed in 1924. We tried to work up a federal aid project but the then [U.S. Secretary of Interior Harold L.] Ickes, turned thumbs down on the project so we had to go into deep well pumping.

We then [turned to] the development of Donnells and Tulloch [dams and reservoirs]. After a long period of surveys, studies, design work and negotiations, [we] advertised for bids…[but it wasn't] until 1955 when more favorable financing conditions prevailed and we were able to get contracts under which the [Tri-Dam] project would be constructed.

In 1924, W.H. Newell was exploring a railroad location for the Pickering Lumber Corp. In his preliminary surveys, he ran into a big basin at the Beardsley Flat. He recognized the potential of this site for a reservoir. He came to our office and begged me to take a look at it. On the strength of his enthusiasm I went up into the hills and hired a man who had cattle at Beardsley. He went with me on horseback down a trail. The moment I got down the hill I saw the possibilities of a dam site and a big basin.

The PG&E, or its predecessor, the Sierra and San Francisco Power Co., had supposedly gone over the various branches of the river and thought they had all the potential reservoir sites recorded. When we brought the matter of the Beardsley site to their attention, they swore up and down that no such site existed. It took a lot of persuasion to get their men there to see it. They said, "How in hell did we ever miss this?"

These are excerpts from
Brief History of Russell Hartley's Tenure with Oakdale Irrigation District,
written about 1966.

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

How Agriculture Has Changed in 100 Years

The pioneers who created OID in 1909 knew it would not be long before large acres of different crops would be planted once the diversion dam at Goodwin, tunnels, miles of canals, pipelines and laterals were built.

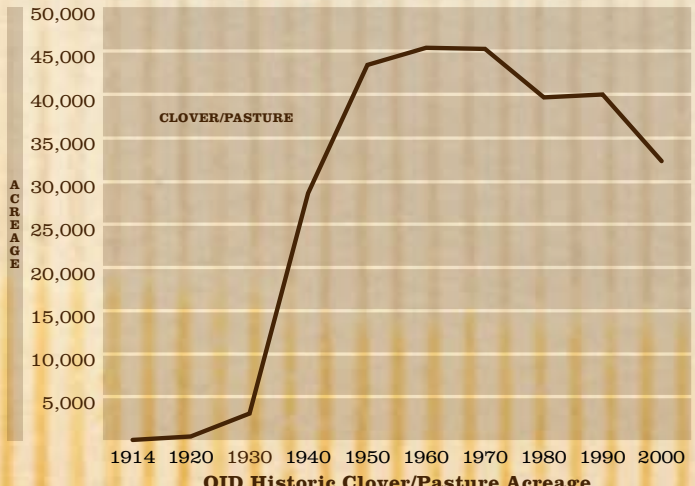
From modest beginnings in 1914, with just over 1,000 acres of trees, rice, corn and a few vines, the number of irrigated acres increased as the system grew. By 1920, there were nearly 7,000 acres of crops being grown.

With the introduction of Ladino clover in the late 1920s, the District was totally changed. In 1930, clover and pasture totaled some 3,000 acres. By the heyday in 1960, clover and pasture totaled over 45,000 acres. Today, the pattern is again shifting as more and more OID lands are converted to permanent crops such as orchards.

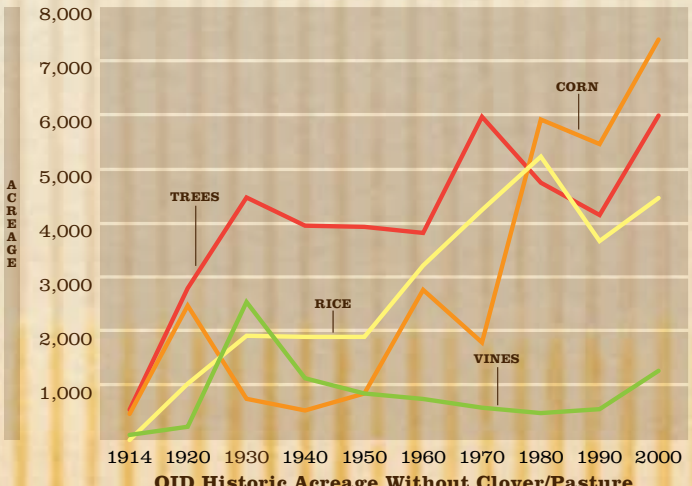
The annual subsiding river flows after July forced more change on the District. With Melones and Tri-Dam, OID developed water storage capacity, created hydroelectric power to pay for it and introduced new recreational opportunities in the Sierra foothills. The result has been abundant prosperity and a better quality of life for the region.

▲ Early farming tractor in Oakdale. The men here are unidentified. Undated photo.

Early promotional brochure for OID and Oakdale. ▶



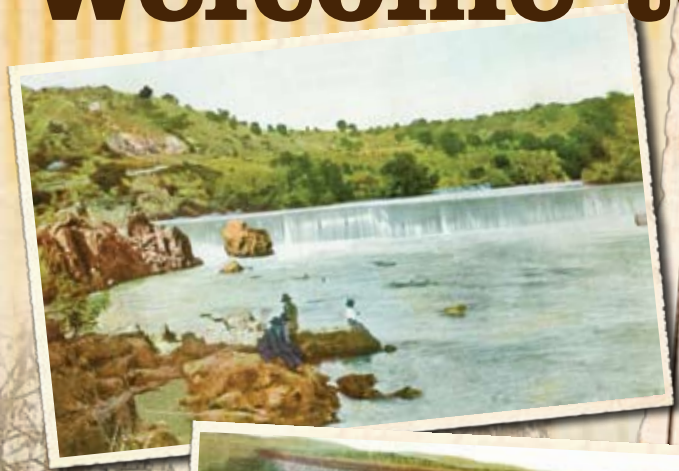
OID Historic Clover/Pasture Acreage



OID Historic Acreage Without Clover/Pasture

VISIONARIES & PIONEERS

Welcome to OID

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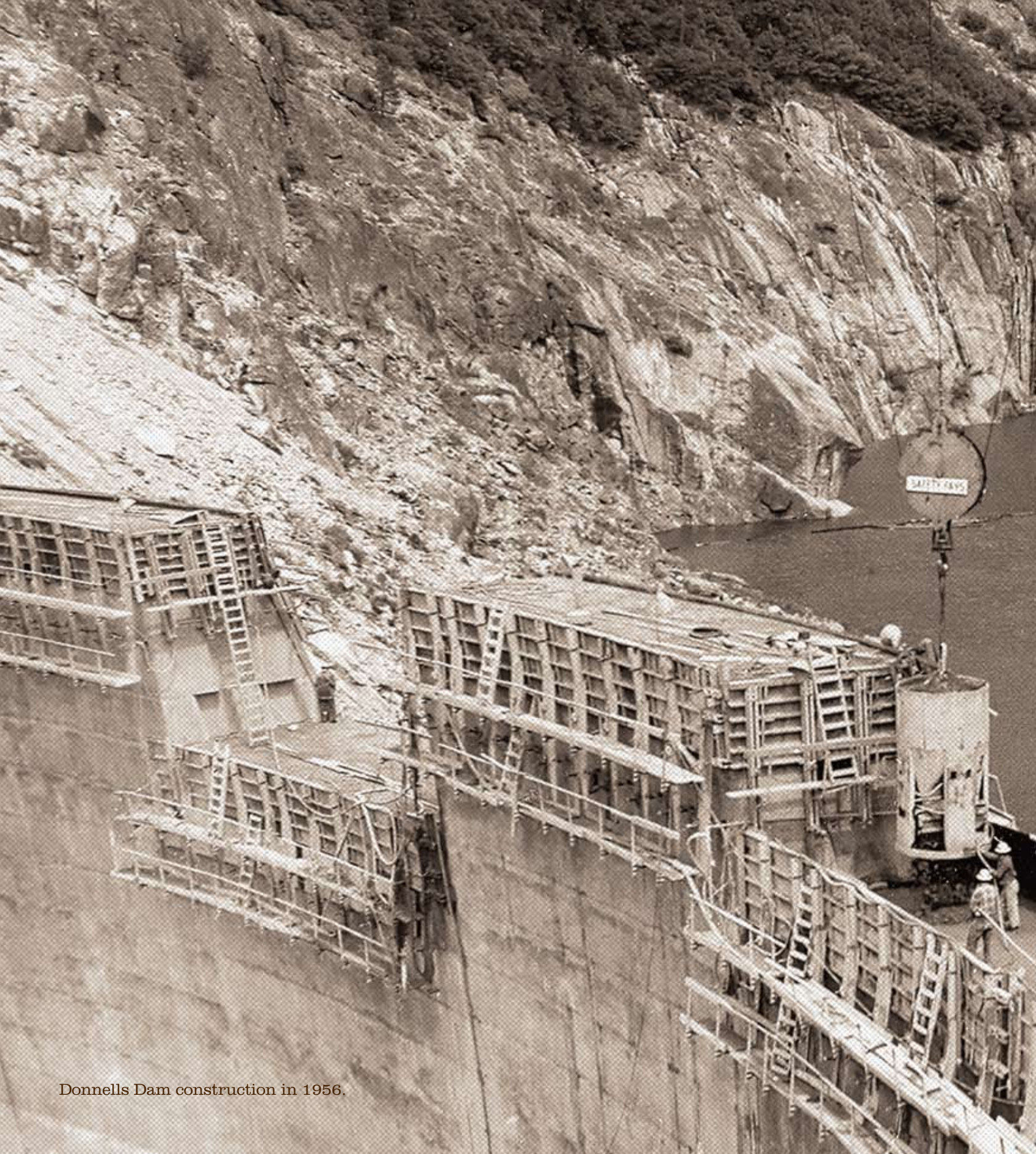
DIV. No. 1
KNIGHTS FERRY
OAKDALE
COLONY
WATERFORD
MAP OF THE
OAKDALE IRRIGATION DISTRICT.
AUGUST 1914.



Donnells Dam construction in 1956.

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