

## **Factoids.....**

For centuries, the Colorado River, alternating between the gulf and the basin, made the Salton Sink a great fresh-water lake, depositing in the process 150,000,000 tons or more of silt every year. Artesian borings at Holtville in 1913 showed sedimentary deposits in that part of the Imperial Valley are more than 1,000 feet in depth.

### The Widney Sea

In 1873 a proposal was made to turn the Colorado River deliberately into the Salton Basin and re-create Lake Cahuilla. Dr. Joseph Pomeroy Widney wrote an article in the January issue of the Overland Monthly, presenting a plan for creating a great fresh water lake. If the basin were filled again, he reasoned, the evaporation would be comparable to that of the Bay of Bengal, which had been computed at 16 feet annually. It would be enough, he thought, "to supply 12 inches of rain to the 86,400 square miles". In suggesting how and where the river might be diverted to form a new Lake Cahuilla, Widney added considerably to the evidence that the river was, without help from man, approaching a condition where it might soon turn itself back into the basin. The Public Lands Committee consultant, Richard Stretch, reported that the weather change issue needed further study, but he felt it was "evidently wiser policy to retain the land than to destroy it by submersion." Stretch's report, dated February 8 1874, struck Congress as good thinking. So far as Congress was concerned, that was the last formal action on the Widney Sea proposal

### Lost Ships of the Desert

Tales of a Spanish galleon lost in the sands of the Colorado Desert keep recurring. One of the most persistent made the pages of the Los Angeles Star in 1870. It seems that hundreds of years ago, when the waters of the Gulf of California came up into the desert, a pirate ship sailed up the Gulf. It was caught in some cross currents and went aground on a sand bar. The crew died, and the ship was left stranded there with almost a million doubloons and pieces of eight in her hulk.

Historical novelist, Antonio de Fierro Blanco, in his book 'The Journey of the Flame', tells of a party that left Mazatlan in 1615 on a pearl hunting and trading expedition into the northern end of the Vermilion Sea - the Gulf of California. After they passed Point San Felipe, homeward bound, they began to look for the Straits of Anian that would carry them from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Instead they found a narrow entrance leading to an inland sea (presumably the area now occupied by the Salton Sea). While they were exploring the shores of this body of water, a great cloudburst occurred in the adjacent mountains, sending quantities of debris into the sea. This landslide choked the narrow inlet through which they had come. They spent weeks trying to find another outlet, until the water began to recede, and their ship was finally grounded. They were obliged to leave it in the desert with its vast treasure of pearls aboard.

Subsequently, a boy named Manquerna, from Sinaloa, said that in 1774 he was taken by Captain Juan Bautista de Anza as a mule-driver on the exploring trip from Sonora to the California coast. When they started crossing the desert westward from the Colorado River, he was sent out to the north of the course traveled by the main body of

explorers, to seek a different route. While he was traveling at night to avoid the heat, he stumbled upon an ancient ship, and in its hold was so many pearls that they were beyond imagination. He took what he could carry, deserted de Anza, and finally reached the Mission of San Luis Rey. Later, he spent many years trying to find the ship again.

George Chaffey forms Imperial Land Company, 1902. Names the basin 'Imperial Valley' to attract settlers.

#### The Bureau of Soils Report

In the early part of 1902, the Bureau of Soils of the US Agricultural Department published the results of a survey of the irrigable lands in the Colorado Desert. They reported that the lands were so impregnated with alkali that very few things could be successfully grown on them.

This report was widely quoted and commented upon and was a real deterrent to further colonization. If it had been issued two or three years earlier, it might have been fatal to the whole irrigation project. Fortunately, though, the crops raised by a few farmers who had already been cultivating this "alkali impregnated" land proved conclusively that the report of the analysis of the soil made by the Government experts was unduly pessimistic, if not wholly erroneous.

June 1905. Civil Engineer, C.E. Grunsky, of the U.S. Reclamation Service, described the situation as 'not serious, but sufficiently alarming as to require some attention.'

Before the construction of Hoover Dam, a single day's supply of water for the Imperial Valley contained silt enough to make a levee twenty feet high, twenty feet wide and one mile long. (Imperial Valley Press, July 25, 1916).

June 1906 flood. Breach is 10 miles wide and there is a 23(28) foot waterfall on the New River near Calexico. 75,000 cubic feet of water per second going into the basin. Salton Sea rising seven inches per day. Amount of sediment eroded equal to four times the amount dug from the Panama Canal.

In 1906, Otho Moore and Dean Redfield, hopped a local freight and rode to Salton, from where they could see the big red buildings and smoke stacks of the New Liverpool Salt Company sticking out of the rising water. In 1908, Otho remembers that the train tracks were inundated and that swift waters were flowing over the tracks. When he looked out to where the buildings and smoke stacks had been, there was nothing to see but the rising waters of the future Salton Sea.

1907 Totals - 13,000 acres lost to erosion; damage to rail lines over \$870,000; 12,000 acres of crops lost; cost of flood control/repairs by S.P. Railroad estimated at \$3 million.

Captain Davis builds 'Hell's Kitchen', 1908. Builds boat-landing, café, and dancehall. He is said to have released sea lions into that sea that were reported to have crawled out at night to steal local farmers pigs.

Lord Mosley's Ostrich Farm in Brawley, 1915. 2,200 birds. Plumes valued at \$350 per pound.

Henry J. Kaiser proposed idea of digging a canal from the Gulf of California to the Salton Sea to facilitate shipping steel from Fontana steel mill, 1932.