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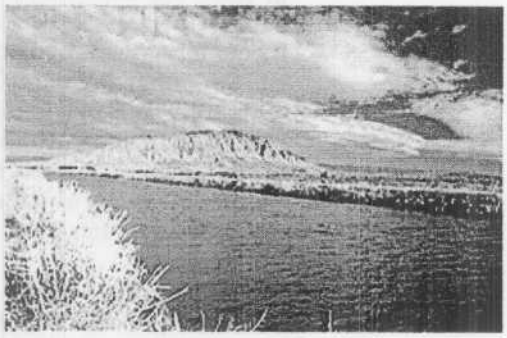
How We Started

Introduction



The Imperial Irrigation District (IID) was formed in 1911 to acquire properties of the bankrupt California Development Company and its Mexican subsidiary. By 1922, the IID had acquired 13 mutual water companies, which had developed and operated distribution canals in the Imperial Valley. By the mid-1920s the IID was delivering water to nearly 500,000 acres. Since 1942, water has been diverted at Imperial Dam on the Colorado River through the All-American Canal, all of which the IID operates and maintains

Today, the IID serves irrigation water and electric power to farmers and residents in the lower southeastern portion of California's desert. The harnessing of water and power that turned this desert into fertile irrigated farmland is truly a tribute to Imperial Valley pioneers. The IID is proud of its past accomplishments and faces the ever-challenging future with a firm commitment to providing customers with the best possible service at the lowest possible rates.

Water History

Juan Bautista de Anza, a captain in the Spanish army, found only desert when he led an expedition across the area in the 18th century. De Anza encountered a wasteland so forbidding that upon reaching San Gabriel Mission he declared that he had made "la jornada de los muertos" (the journey of the dead). Father Hermengildo Francisco Garces, who searched in vain for water in the desert and who later aided De Anza in his journeys, preceded De Anza. Travelers who followed De Anza soon encountered the same scorching barrier, yet as early as 1850 a few men of vision realized that the area could be made productive with an assured water supply.

William P. Blake was one of the first pioneers to recognize the Imperial Valley's potential. A geologist with a railroad survey party, Blake had passed through the desert in 1853 and noticed the ancient shoreline at the foot of the mountains, which proved at one time there had been an island amidst a sea where now there was desert. Barometric readings taken by Blake proved that the desert lay below sea level and could be irrigated by a gravity flow canal diverting from the Colorado River.

Another individual interested in the development of the desert was Dr. Oliver M. Wozencraft, who crossed through the area during the gold rush of 1849. In 1861 Wozencraft hired an engineer to survey the area and recommend a location for a canal. Wozencraft succeeded in having legislation introduced into Congress authorizing development of the Imperial Valley. The civil war delayed further progress on this plan for many years, and Wozencraft died without seeing his dream become a reality.

In 1901, the California Development Company began diverting water into a canal that started in the United States and ran most of its length through Mexico before recrossing the International Boundary into the Imperial Valley. Combined problems of silt, requiring a temporary diversion into Mexico, and unusual winter floods on the Gila River tributary to the Colorado River, resulted in the entire flow of Colorado River water entering Imperial Valley from 1905 to 1907. This flood greatly enlarged the New River and Alamo River and created the Salton Sea.

Power History

When the Imperial Irrigation District entered the power business, electric energy was accessible only at a very high rate to Imperial Valley residents who lived in urban areas.

W.F. Holt, an early developer, conceived the district's first hydroelectric drop. Holt's idea for a 40-foot drop on the Alamo River led to the creation of the Holton Power Company in 1903. Holt's company provided electric energy to the entire Imperial Valley until 1916 when he sold his company to the Nevada-California Electric Company. Nev-Cal, as it was known, was a powerful company for many years, supplying energy to the Imperial Valley by what it termed "the longest transmission line in the world." Unfortunately, each time a thunderstorm knocked out the line, the valley was without power for days. In addition to the undependable service, rates were extremely high.

Nevertheless, power was important to the pioneers. In the book, The First Thirty years, author Otis B. Tout recalls, "Mr. House (Taylor G. House, El Centro) believes in modern appliances. He has an electric refrigerator big enough to take care of a butchered calf and says he will never again pay fifty cents a pound for steaks that he sells the butcher for five cents a pound. Mrs. House enjoys an electric stove, electric power in her kitchen, and does her laundry and ironing by electricity."

IID entered the electric power business in 1936 in conjunction with the construction of the All-American Canal. The IID anticipated that hydroelectric power generated from five falling water drops on the All-American would enable them to set power rates considerably lower than the competition at that time.

Coachella Valley

Prior to 1920, Coachella Valley residents recognized the need for a supplemental water supply from the Colorado River. This water was not only necessary for the 10,000-12,000 acres being irrigated from a limited underground supply of water, but also to permit irrigation of approximately 100,000 acres of fertile, undeveloped desert lands. Because of this need for supplemental water, Coachella Valley

worked with Imperial Valley on the All-American Canal legislation.

Congress authorized construction of the All-American Canal to Coachella Valley. However, in negotiating repayment contracts with the United States, it was necessary that both the water and power rights of the Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Water District be determined. According to the terms of a 1934 agreement between Imperial and Coachella, the Imperial Irrigation District was given first rights to water delivered through the All-American Canal and a 99 year lease on any power rights Coachella had on the canal.

As rental for power rights, IID agreed to pay Coachella Valley Water District a percentage of the net proceeds from its power system. Coachella, in turn agreed to make available to Imperial—whenever the latter was ready to serve power in Coachella Valley—signed three-year contracts representing 80 percent of the power business in the northern valley. This latter provision became an important factor in bringing about an agreement with the private power company for the sale of its properties.

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