

IN THIS ISSUE

- [Special Feature](#)
  - [Book Review](#)
  - [Gifts & Donations](#)
  - [In the Spotlight](#)
  - [Finding Aids on the Web](#)
  - [Free Publications](#)
- 

**ARCHIVES, INSTITUTIONS, AND WATER IN CALIFORNIA**

*by William Blomquist*

The story of water resource development in the state of California, especially the engineering feats at the heart of that development, have been told and retold in many splendid accounts. Much of that research came from the collections of the Water Resources Center Archives.

The story of the design, evolution, and performance of the institutional arrangements that have governed, guided, promoted, and regulated water resource development in California is a less often told tale. The precious resource of the Golden State has been developed, controlled, used, and protected not only by dams and reservoirs, aqueducts and pipelines, but also by laws, water user associations, water districts, and a complex network of inter-organizational relationships that encompass the state's smallest communities, largest agencies, and the full range between.

This story is told by legal scholars, economists, political scientists, and historians. As a political scientist, I have spent many pleasant hours in the pursuit of the origins and alteration of the forms of governance Californians have used since statehood to decide disputes, organize collective undertakings, raise and sustain financing, and above all, establish policies for the use and protection of surface and groundwater resources. The engineering accomplishments have been prodigious, nearly legendary. The quieter accomplishments of coming to terms with the questions of who would get what, when, and how...and more importantly,

who would decide...have been no less prodigious.

Anyone with a knowledge of water management in the West understands that institutional arrangements - laws, policies, and organizations - can be instruments of predation and rapacious self-aggrandizement. But institutional design and development can also be an exercise in problem solving - gathering information, finding ways to represent the affected interests, creating forums for communication and group decisions, sharing the costs and distributing the benefits of conserving stream flows, and capturing and controlling flood waters. That has happened in California, too.

Perhaps no bit of conventional wisdom about California water has been stated more lately than this - the days of the monumental engineering approach to solving water problems have passed. If that is so, then the present and future challenge of allocating and protecting water resources will depend increasingly on institutional solutions - organizing collective decisions governing uses and reuses of water, preserving its quality, and recognizing the wider array of values people place upon it. To do this well, decision makers will need a well-developed body of knowledge about the productive as well as the predatory uses of institutional arrangements in the past.

Understanding the evolution of an institution that people devised in order to solve problems requires some archival research. When the origins of an institution stretch back before the lifetimes or beyond the reach of memory of those who are still with us, we have to recover the stories from documentary evidence. What can we learn about what the interested citizens of a particular community knew, or were thinking as they contemplated whether to form a protective association or a special district, or tax themselves to support a financial enterprise, or arrive at a limitation of the rights to use a common resource? Where can we find out?

Those questions have led me to the Water Resources Center Archives on more than one occasion. Everything is not there, of course, but many precious bits of evidence are. There one may find a crucial piece of the trail...a memo, a report, the summary of a study performed long ago, the minutes or proceedings of a meeting, something that provides a glimpse of what was being considered, argued about, and planned. For those of us searching for clues to the origins and development of the institutions that allocate and protect California's water, those are wondrous finds. Without the Archives and similar collections, the effort to develop our understanding of that other crucial element of the California water story - the institutional element - would be hindered, perhaps beyond recovery, and to the state's lasting detriment.

For those of us engaged in the study of the institutions that have been developed for the management of water resources in the Golden State, the Archives is a treasure.

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

*by Carlos Velez-Ibanez*

Donahue, John M. and Barbara Rose Johnston, eds. *Water, Culture, & Power: Local Struggles in a Global Context*. Island Press, 1998. 396 p.

The editors of *Water, Culture, and Power* present a series of disparate case studies that examine the complex and often contentious relationships between differing cultural and political interests vying for our most precious resource - water. Contributors analyze the struggle for access to water and the meaning of water resources in a variety of national and cultural contexts.

The book is divided into three sections. The first explores various cultural meanings of water and water resources and the impact of water resource development on local indigenous peoples. Whiteley and Masayeva describe the Hopi challenge to the use of underground water by the Peabody Coal Company; the Lummi in Washington State (Greaves) stop the overt expropriation of water resources by an expanding non-Indian urban city; the Cree of Quebec (Ettenger) cite their lost historical uses of natural resources to a hydroelectric project; and local populations in Honduras (Loker) are overwhelmed by a costly dam project that neither benefits them nor produces the electricity projected. Derman's work about the creation of water policy in Zimbabwe is better suited for inclusion in one of the other sections.

The second scrutinizes the political process of funding and building water resource projects and how projected gains to local and regional populations often fail to meet expectations. The authors examine local and supralocal institutions that not only determine water policy but also carry out projects, sometimes in contradiction to the stated goals. The work by Sheridan on the Central Arizona Water Project is filled with tragic irony. The project, building a 335 mile long canal for agricultural use, was in reality a 3.6 billion dollar project to support unrestricted growth in a fragile desert environment. Rogers' study on the 2 billion dollar Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway project, linking rivers in Tennessee and

Kentucky with another in Mississippi and Alabama, demonstrates that proposed economic benefits for the region were never realized. Only 1/3 of the 51 counties alongside the rivers benefited from employment opportunities. Donahue's description, of contentious interests in San Antonio seeking to create an above-ground aquifer in a region largely devoid of underground resources, carefully documents the Byzantine nature of the politics of water. Nickum and Greenstadt, in their work on polluted Lake Biwa in Japan, provide the reader with a perfect example of the power and limitations of an engaged bureaucracy confronting culturally constituted definitions of water and property rights. Hanchett, et al, describe the impact of water related events on women in Bangladesh. It should be a primer for donor agencies seeking to rectify the manner in which flooding selects for differential suffering. First, the poor suffer more than the wealthy and within the same class structure, women are more vulnerable than men. Second, when aid was available for flood victims, women did not benefit. Third, when the destitute women borrowed to survive, they were eventually forced to sell their possessions to repay their debt and were again destitute.

The last section focuses on water scarcity resulting from conflicts between the cultural meanings of water and the use of power. Riley, et al, found an inverse correlation between the socioeconomic status of a region and its water quality. In this study a number of water samples were taken from the oldest part of the city of Oaxaca, which includes some of its wealthiest neighborhoods. The study found that the water in this part of the city was some of the most polluted in the region. The study cautions analysts not to fall prey to the idea that there is a necessary relationship between water quality and class. Stonich, et al, (Honduras) document the rise of tourism on the Bay Islands and how it stimulated a population shift that endangered a fragile ecological zone. Development led to a large influx of tourists along with migrant workers from the mainland whose presence threatened the island's fresh water supply and marine water resources. Johnston's work (Virgin Islands) details the decline in the availability of fresh water from one of St. Thomas's primary aquifers as a result of uncontrolled tourism, large scale demographic increases and refinery pollution. The author relates the tragic story of islanders who, when they could no longer rely upon the quality of freshwater from the aquifer, bought water from private companies. The irony is that the major source of "clean water" trucked into the region was the contaminated aquifer. The problem was partially resolved with a series of lawsuits against the main polluter, Esso.

Hassoun (Israel/Palestine) says that it is useless to utilize the often articulated notion that the conflict over water between Arabs and Jews is due to an inherently violent nature or an ancient, intractable situation. According to Hassoun, Israelis and Palestinians share deeply held

religious ideas about the sanctity of the land and its resources. However, they differ greatly in their understanding of ownership and use of land and access to water. Islamic Palestinians believe that ownership of land is conveyed to those who use it. Open communal land is classified as undeveloped, part of a religious trust. The Israeli government views undeveloped lands as places to be occupied by settlers. To Israeli Jews, land is mythically promised and not transferable to non-Jews. This complicates any transfer of land to Palestinians for purchase or settlement. When it comes to water, Israelis have unlimited access to water. Palestinians, whether citizens of Israel or residents of the occupied territories, have more than 2,000 restrictive laws limiting their access to land and water. 1.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank are allotted 25 percent of the aquifer that underlies the region while 100,000 Israelis in the West Bank have virtually unlimited access. State sponsored inequity ensures the conflict over land and water will continue.

In their conclusion the editors rely on Eric Wolf's analysis of kinship, tributary and market modes of social organizations to delineate the power relations between groups who are often in opposition. The Hopis represent the communal group contesting the market organization, Peabody Coal that undermined the available water supply used by the Hopis for ritual purposes. However, Wolf's categories seem to fail when applied to the Navajo who generally support the continued use of underground water but are also employed by Peabody and participate in dispersed lineages throughout Navajo Country. The Lummi are able to protect the natural environment by applying tributary political pressure on the state to constrain water use by the City of Bellingham. On the other hand, the retrospective Cree case, in which memory is relied upon for what was, may be closer to the communal versus tributary mode of power relations but selective memory of an idyllic state may be problematic. The Honduran example of a large dam replacing local population levels for the promises of development does not seem an appropriate example of communal versus tributary mode of social organization. In conclusion, despite the shortcomings of the Wolfian rubric, the editors have done a commendable job of rendering the case studies. The book is a valuable addition to the nexus between power, culture and the use or misuse of natural resources, and would be very useful in the following disciplines - political science, anthropology, economic development and environmental science.

*Carlos Velez-Ibanez is Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences and Professor of Anthropology at the University of California Riverside.*

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## **GIFTS & DONATIONS**

The Archives wishes to acknowledge Daniel O. Holmes for his donation of Sierra Nevada and Mono Basin materials.

### ***GIFTS***

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- Iris Priestaf and Douglas Greenberg

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### **IN THE SPOTLIGHT - JOHN LETEY, JR.**

*by Kathy Dieden*

*John Letey, Jr. is Acting Director of the Centers for Water and Wildland Resources.*

Following the retirement of Don Erman as Director of the Centers for Water and Wildland Resources in the Fall of 1998, John Letey was appointed Acting Director of the Centers. John's career with the University of California began at UCLA and for nearly 37 years he has been associated with the University of California at Riverside. He is a member of the faculty at Riverside and is a Distinguished Professor of Soil Physics. His research in water and water related topics covers a broad

spectrum with emphasis on water and agricultural issues.

In 1993 the Centers, which operated as four distinct research units, were in the process of being reorganized under one administrative umbrella, the Centers for Water and Wildland Resources. Henry Vaux, Associate Vice President, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, appointed Don Erman Director of the new combined Centers; and, John Letey was appointed Associate Director. Erman's expertise is in the fields of water and forested land while Letey's is in agriculture related research. So they divided the responsibilities accordingly.

Since his appointment in 1998 as Acting Director for the Centers, Letey's administrative duties have increased. He also continues to serve as Coordinator of the UC Salinity Drainage Program and as the State Water Quality Coordinator under the aegis of the USDA Federal Water Quality Initiative. Letey believes that one of the greatest benefits to be derived from the consolidation of the different units is the increased breadth and scope of the Centers' research. It covers a very broad spectrum of the water related issues important to California, he said. When asked what he most enjoyed about his administrative positions, Letey replied, "I have enjoyed the opportunity to interact with decision-makers federal, state and agricultural interests. I have been able to make use of my research to help solve problems."

The Water Resources Center and the Wildlands Resources Center, two of the units combined into the Centers in 1993, are presently undergoing programmatic reviews by Ad Hoc Committees. The review process is typically done about every five years for multi-campus research units. When asked about his vision for the Centers, Letey replied, "it would be presumptuous to issue a statement before the programmatic reviews are complete."