Water, resource that was the foundation of the Valley, found not inexhaustible

By RANDLE G. LUNT

Like gold, water is where one finds it. Unlike gold, water wher found is expected to be inexhaust ible, perpetual, and pure.

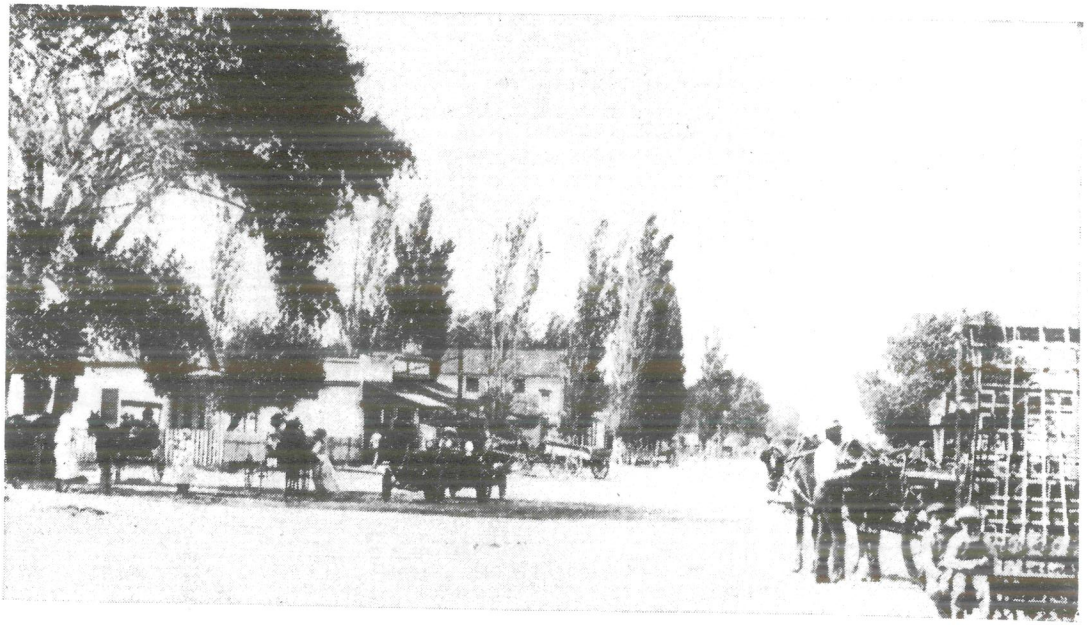
When gold was discovered i California, water was found i seemingly endless quantities with the greatest purity. Even in our desert area of Antelope Valley, water was abundant and pure for a land-locked water impounded in old alluvium formed from centuries of erosion of the Tehachapi, the Sierra Pelona and the San Gabriel Mountains.

Humanity has colonized and survived only in the vicinity of fresh water sources. Like gold, the water in Antelope Valley is mined. More wealth will have been taken from Antelope Valley from mining water than has been removed by placer-gold mining in California.

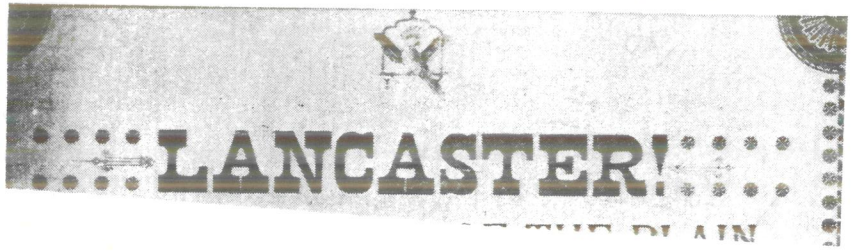
The remaining concentrations of gold found in the ancient Miocene gravels is too low to profit from its removal. In contrast, the water deposited in the Pleistocene alluvium of Antelope Valley has been mined for three quarters of a century at annual rates as high as 700,000,000 tons.

As late as 1930, the ground water surface which slopes towards Lancaster caused artesian wells to flow. Large streams of water flowing from wells without pumping was a stimulant to a booming agricultural economy which has flourished for three quarters of a century.

Being centrally situated in a large valley whose agricultural economy was supported by abundant water, Lancaster became the principal trading center for the cattle and farming activities in Antelope Valley.



LANCASTER IN 1912, BLOSSOMING OUT AS VALLEY'S TRADING CENTER
Agriculture area with abundant water supported growth of the town



In 1950, the census placed the urban population of Lancaster at 3,594; the 1960 census indicates a population of 26,012 for about the same area. The population of Antelope Valley in the same period grew from 23,000 to 70,000. In 1990, the population may be 350,000 or more.

It is estimated that more than 15,000,000 tons of alfalfa have been produced and exported from Antelope Valley which required 12,000,000,000 tons of water to produce.

Much of the water from the early artesian wells was wasted by evaporation. The artesian well [illegible] and some have disappeared. Water levels of the ocean are slowly rising, and significant climate changes have taken place in the last century sufficient to warrant modifying the computations used in forecasting the "normal average" for the next 50 years.

For more than 50 years of stream gauging experience, a downward trend is noted in the runoff of storm waters entering the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Basins.

We have experienced a long dry period, the last two years of which are the driest on record. The future is always unpredict-