

Summary: Los Angeles

History of the City

The Spanish founded Los Angeles in 1781 as a farming community with fewer than 50 people. In its early days, Los Angeles was cut off from the rest of the country by deserts and mountains. It had no natural harbor. The Southern Pacific Railroad linked the city to the transcontinental railroad in 1872. Then in 1885, the Santa Fe Railway built a direct line from the east to Los Angeles. By 1920, southern California had as many people as northern California.

As Los Angeles grew, it needed a port to handle the added ship traffic. The best choice was San Pedro, 20 miles south. To make San Pedro large enough for ships, workers deepened the harbor and built a huge breakwater. A freight railroad then linked the port to Los Angeles. San Pedro became the city's official port. The port grew even more after the Panama Canal opened in 1914. The canal connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and allowed for faster shipping to California from Europe and the eastern coasts of North and South America.

Water for Los Angeles

Many newcomers to Los Angeles started farms. But the nearby Los Angeles River did not provide enough water. In the early 1900s, Los Angeles received even less rain than usual. The desert city was desperate for water.

William Mulholland, the head engineer of the city's water department, decided to get the water from the Owens River, about 200 miles northeast of the city. He convinced people of the Owens Valley to sell their water rights. Mulholland built a huge aqueduct that moved the water through a network of dams and reservoirs to the city. The water first reached Los Angeles in 1913.

But by the 1920s, ranchers and farmers from Owens Valley didn't have enough water to grow crops or raise animals. The area became a desert. In Los Angeles, the aqueduct provided hydroelectric power as well as water for farming and everyday use. However, because fresh water is limited, conservation is important.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

aqueduct *noun*, a pipe or channel that moves water across great distances

reservoir *noun*, a tank or lake for storing large amounts of water

hydroelectric power *noun*, electricity created by using the power of moving water

After You Read

REVIEW Why did Los Angeles's location make growth difficult in its early years? Draw a box around the sentences that explain why Los Angeles's early growth was slow.

REVIEW Why was Los Angeles desperate for water in the early 1900s? Highlight the sentences that explain why the city needed more water.