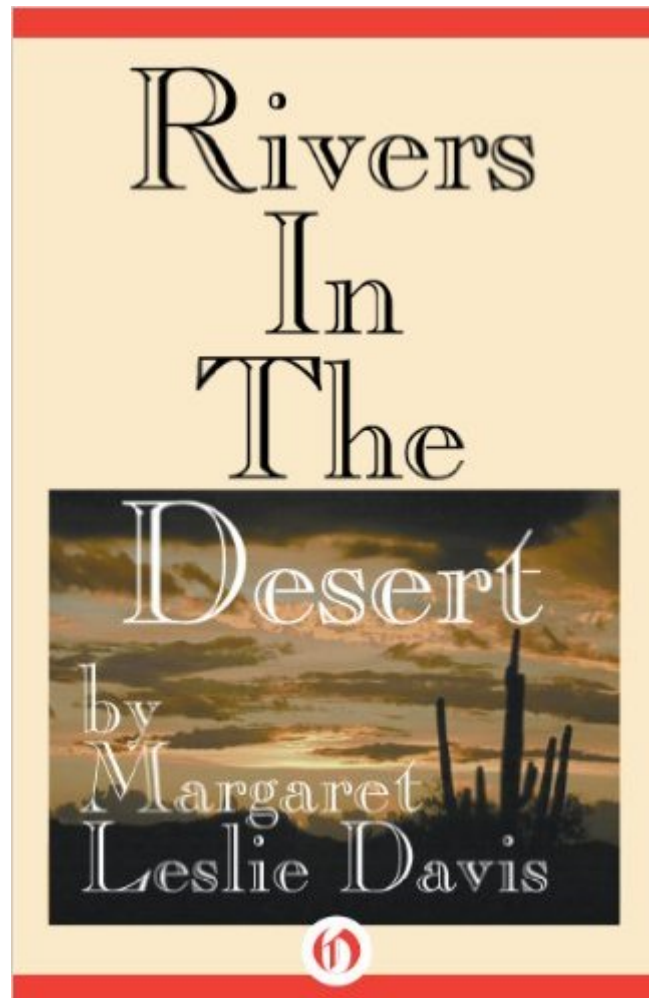


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Rivers In The Desert



Synopsis

Rivers in the Desert is the quintessential American story. It follows the remarkable career of William Mulholland, the visionary who engineered the rise of Los Angeles as the greatest American city west of the Mississippi. He sought to transform the sparse and barren desert into an inhabitable environment by designing the longest aqueduct in the Western Hemisphere, bringing water from the mountains to support a large city. Davis chronicles Mulholland's dramatic ascension to wealth and fame, followed by his tragic downfall after the sudden collapse of the dam he had constructed to safeguard the water supply. The disaster, which killed at least five hundred people, caused his repudiation by allies, friends, and a previously adoring community. Epic in scope, *Rivers in the Desert* chronicles the history of Los Angeles and examines the tragic fate of the man who rescued it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Readers of this book should be aware that Davis' scholarship is seriously lacking. In particular, her account of the testimony of William Mulholland in the Los Angeles County Coroner's investigation of April, 1928 in connection with the St. Francis Dam disaster, is essentially a fabrication. Even a casual reader would have to be suspicious of the type of detail Davis includes that is unavailable in a court transcript, and cannot be fully trusted in newspaper accounts. More troubling is her penchant for taking the few accurate quotes she offers entirely out of their original context. I have compared Davis' dramatic account of this event with the actual court reporter's transcript and found numerous

egregious misquotes, quotes taken out of order and context, and entire passages that appear to have been woven out of whole cloth. Davis has Mulholland providing verbatim answers to questions he was not asked. The purpose appears to be to cause Mulholland to appear shiftless, defensive, self-pitying, and possibly incompetent. It is difficult to turn a page in this book without finding similar errors of fact. On page 148, for instance, Davis suggests that Mulholland selected San Francisquito Canyon as the site of the main Los Angeles storage reservoir because it was "located next to Powerhouse Number One... making it cheaper for the reservoir to generate hydroelectric power." In fact, the St. Francis Reservoir never generated any hydroelectric power whatsoever, and it was never designed with this purpose in mind. The powerhouses (in fact there were two) were entirely separate facilities and functionally unrelated to the dam and reservoir. They were co-located only due to their proximity to the Owens Valley Aqueduct.

Rivers in the Desert Margaret Leslie Davis is a graduate of Georgetown University and the School of Professional Writing at the University of Southern California. She is a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, a legal publication.. This 1993 book has 18 chapters in its 303 pages. William Mulholland was the engineer who built the Los Angeles aqueduct that brought water from 235 miles away. This made Los Angeles the largest city in area in the world; without water this could not have happened. The funeral of Mulholland in July 1935 was observed by many (Prologue). He played key roles in the construction of the Colorado River Aqueduct, the Panama Canal, and Hoover Dam (Epilogue). In September 1904 Mulholland and Fred Eaton rode to Owens Valley. Mulholland's idea was for municipal ownership of water and power (Chapter 1). [Half the price in Frisco.] Eaton also bought land for himself. The result was insufficient water for both Owens Valley and Los Angeles (Chapter 2). Owens Valley farmers sold their water rights to what they thought was a Federal project (Chapter 3). News about a land-buying syndicate caused a controversy. Los Angeles municipalized its water supply in 1902. This water project required roads and power plants for electricity (Chapter 4). The Panic of 1907 created unemployed workers for the job. A bonus system increased productivity. Workers paid into a fund for medical care. Transporting fresh food in 100F heat was a problem (Chapter 5). A financial problem reduced work. The tunnel was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. Mulholland began to suffer health problems (Chapter 6). The most difficult job was the installation of massive inverted siphons. The water was turned on in November 1913 (Chapter 7). There was a celebration.

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