

Dedication

In the span of recorded history, the story of the San Joaquin Valley and that portion of it served by the Modesto Irrigation District is quite brief. The impact of a region upon a nation, however, cannot be measured by time alone.

Settled by adventurous, innovative, courageous people who had the vision and determination to change a huge valley which was desert waste in the summer and whose flood-swollen rivers ran 10 miles wide in the spring, the San Joaquin Valley today is the nation's most productive agricultural region. This was the home of people such as Irwin S. Wright, who in 1868 invented jerk-line control of long pulling teams; of Benjamin Holt, inventor of the Caterpillar tractor who subsequently made possible the first army tanks; of George Stockton Berry, who, starting with a discarded portable steam engine, built the first mechanically-driven combine to harvest, thresh and sack wheat in a single operation, and of political and military leaders such as John C. Fremont, the first presidential nominee of the Republican Party, and famed General William Tecumseh Sherman.

It was in this region that the farm cooperative received its greatest stimulus, resulting in the development of the world's largest cooperatives such as the Milk Producers Association of California and Tri/Valley Growers, both of which were founded in Modesto.

More than a century ago, enterprising leaders of this caliber envisioned the rich potential of the region's agriculture; needed was a practical means of bringing water to the land throughout the summer months.

To achieve this goal, they created the nation's first successful irrigation districts, the Modesto Irrigation District and the Turlock Irrigation District, which were to set the pattern for all of California and much of the rest of the nation and the world.

This is the story of a pacesetter, the Modesto Irrigation District, and how the dreams of Stanislaus County's pioneers were achieved. On this, the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Modesto Irrigation District, the directors dedicate this book to those men who turned a vision into reality and insured that the land truly owns the water and the power.