



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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## **(San Diego Water Management) Map of the Dam and Reservoir Site on the Sweetwater River, San Diego County, California belonging to San Diego Land & Town Co. March 1887 [Jamacha Rancho]**

**Stock#:** 97272  
**Map Maker:** Schuyler / Stretch  
**Date:** 1887  
**Place:** San Diego  
**Color:** Hand Colored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 80.5 x 34.5 inches  
**Price:** \$ 3,500.00



### **Description:**

#### ***San Diego's Sweetwater Dam***

A crucial map for the history of San Diego's water resources development, a manuscript survey for the Sweetwater Dam and reservoir site belonging to the San Diego Land & Town Co.

Dated March 1887 and made under the aegis of the San Diego Land & Town Co., this map stands as a foundational document in the early planning and management of water resources in the San Diego region. Executed in pen and ink on drafting linen, the map features hand-colored contour lines, facilitating an understanding of the topography and hydrology of the site. A detailed table specifying the area and capacity of the reservoir at various depths adds to the original utility of the map, which was made during the planning stages of the Sweetwater Dam. Jamacha Rancho is prominently noted on the map.

Water has perennially shaped the destinies of communities, more so in arid regions like Southern California. The latter part of the 19th century marked a transformative phase for San Diego, marked by railroad connections with the east and north, as well as important water development. Securing reliable water resources was paramount for the region's long-term sustainability. The map prefigures the construction of the Sweetwater Dam, which when completed in 1888, became the first modern dam in San Diego. The new infrastructure addressed not only immediate needs but laid the foundation for building new communities out of San Diego's vast swaths of undeveloped land. While the boom and bust cycle of local real estate speculation would continue for decades to come, San Diego would have the water when needed.

The table is notable, as it presents data on the reservoir's area and capacity at varying depths,



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demonstrating an early commitment to meticulous planning and resource management. This map stands as evidence of San Diego's early grasping the reins of its future, acutely aware that water management would be the linchpin in its hoped-for trajectory toward becoming an important American city.

This dam suffered a catastrophic failure in January and February of 1916 when a series of powerful rainstorms hit the area. The resultant floods led to a partial collapse of the dam, resulting in significant property damage downstream and the tragic loss of lives. The incident underscored the need for stringent safety measures and more rigorous engineering standards in dam construction to protect communities and resources.

#### **James Dix Schuyler: Canal Builder, Irrigation Specialist, and San Diego City Engineer**

Schuyler (1848-1912) was a prolific West Coast engineer whose diverse enterprises spanned many states, countries, and fields. While perhaps his most notable achievement was accompanying President-Elect William Howard Taft on a tour of the Panama Canal, and reporting on his findings for Congress, much of his life was dedicated to building early California infrastructure, including key surveying work in San Diego.

A native of Ithaca, New York, Schuyler started his engineering career in the Midwest in 1869, employed in the service of the Kansas Pacific Railway. From there, he moved to California to work on railroads, before being appointed Chief Assistant State Engineer in 1877. Following a brief stint in the Mexican railroad industry, Schuyler returned to California. One of his most important projects was the construction of the Sweetwater Dam in 1887-1888, the focus of the present manuscript map. It was about this time when he became City Engineer for San Diego. In the early 1900s, Schuyler pioneered the construction of dams through hydraulic fill, and it was in part because of this expertise that he was sent, with President-Elect Taft, to Panama to advise on the construction of a lock system. He recommended substantial modifications to the Gatun Dam, which were acted upon.

Schuyler died in 1912. His papers are preserved at UC Riverside.

#### **Rarity**

This map is unique, we can find no trace of any version of the map separately cataloged in OCLC or cited in RBH. It is very rare indeed to encounter a manuscript map which combines high quality draftsmanship and detail with central historical importance to Southern California water resources development. It would be difficult to imagine a 19th-century San Diego map of comparable importance - perhaps James



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Pascoe's Pueblo Lands of San Diego, or the earliest maps of the California Southern Railroad, such like would be on par with the present survey map of Sweetwater Dam and Reservoir.

**Detailed Condition:**

Pen and ink map on drafting linen, outline hand color. Old fold marks. Some foxing and tan offsetting stains. Slight curling and marginal chipping in lower right corner of sheet. Overall very good.