



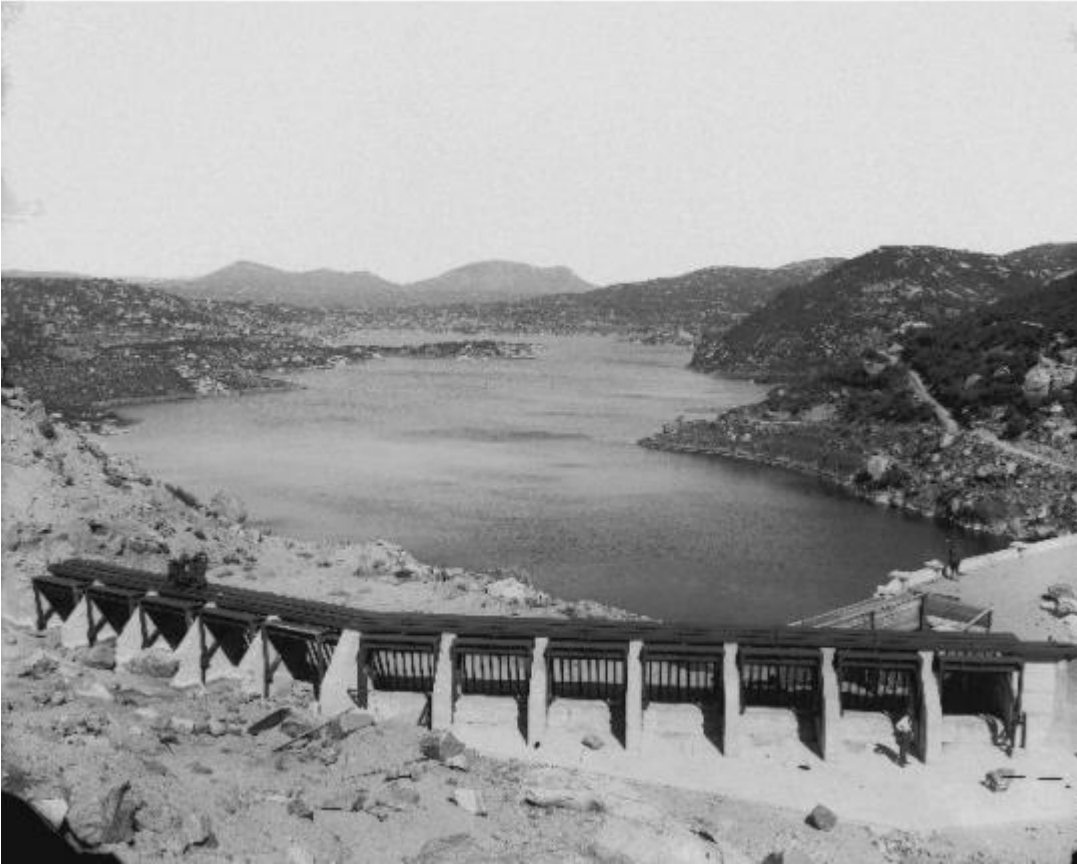
They called Charles Hatfield a commander of nature, the greatest rainmaker of modern times. For more than 30 years he practiced his art and won a name for himself by filling lakes, saving crops, and breaking droughts, from the Yukon to Guatemala. He offered to clear London of its fog and to water the Sahara. But the scene of his most spectacular achievement was [San Diego](#), California.

Hatfield approached the city council in December 1915 with simple offer. For a fee \$10,000, he would fill the vast city reservoir at Morena Dam; if no rain fell, he would aspect no pay. The council's amused reaction: if he did fill the reservoir, they would pay him, with pleasure.



It seemed a safe bet. The reservoir could hold a staggering 15 billion gallons and had never been more than one-third full since it was built. Besides, as one member of the council pointed out, if Hatfield did succeed, he would supply them with 10 billion gallons of water at a cost of one tent of a cent per 1,000 gallons, if he failed, the attempt would have cost them nothing.

Drawing the Clouds



On January 1, 1916, Hatfield arrived at Morena Dam, some 60 miles east of San Diego, and set to work. First he erected a wooden tower about 20 feet high. On top of it he placed large galvanizing trays containing his special moisture attracting mixture. Then, through a process of [chemical](#) evaporation – the details of which he kept a closely guarded secret – he began “coaxing, wheedling, and courting” nature.

By January 5 there was already rain at the reservoir. By January 10 heavy, almost continuous rain fell throughout the county. Then the downpour began in earnest – and continued for 10 days.



To the inhabitants of San Diego, it seemed the rains would never end. As torrents of water rushed through the streets, [business](#) stopped and all normal life was suspended. Highways were closed and rail connection flooded. The [telephone](#) and telegraph were cut off. Rivers overflowed their banks, [washing](#) away houses and barns.



There was a brief respite. For a few days the sun shone weakly through the clouds, and repair work began. But on January 26 the [storm](#) returned. At Morena Dam rain fell heavily and steadily all day. By midnight the level of the lake was rising at the rate of two feet per hour. It finally stopped just five inches from the top of the Dam, and disaster on a massive scale was averted.

Wall of Water



Other districts were less fortunate. The nearby Lower Otay Dam disintegrated, releasing a wall of water 40 feet high. The water plowed 12 miles to the sea, demolishing everything before it.



Altogether, an estimated 50 lives were lost, more than 200 bridges were washed away, and miles of track were destroyed; [trains](#) were halted for 32 days. The floods left scars on the mountains and hills for years, and in some places the landscape was changed permanently.



There was no doubt in Hatfield's mind that he had lived up to his promise to fill the Morena Reservoir. But when he went to claim his money, the city council refused to pay.

Hatfield had proceeded on the basis of an oral agreement without a signed, legal contract. Now the council was maintaining that the deluge was an "act of God," unless Hatfield could provide evidence that he was the responsible. And, of course, Hatfield could never prove that it was he who had brought forth the rain.



Many people thought that Hatfield had been treated unfairly, although the episode did much to enhance his reputation as King of the Cloud Compellers. He filed a suit against the city, but did little to pursue it; it was finally dismissed in 1938 for lack of prosecution.



But the city of San Diego remembered Hatfield for years to come in 1948, when they hired a cloud seeder to make it rain, they took out substantial damage [insurance](#).