

Tahoe water almost diverted to SF

By Nilda Rego, San Jose Mercury News

Alexis Waldemar Von Schmidt was an ambitious man with big ideas. Perhaps his biggest was to provide 200 million gallons of water daily to San Francisco from Lake Tahoe.

Von Schmidt came to the United States as a child. He claimed to have been trained as an engineer and surveyor in prestigious schools, but no record confirming that has been found. At 29 he caught Gold Rush fever and sailed to California. He discovered he could make more money providing services to the burgeoning population of the state than by digging for gold.

As a deputy United States surveyor, he roamed the state, documenting land grants issued by the Mexican government.

In 1860 he went to work for the Spring Valley Water Works as chief engineer. The company provided water to San Francisco and charged a lot for it, making an enormous profit.

Von Schmidt realized he, too, could make a lot of money from water. In 1865 he and five investors organized the Lake Tahoe and San Francisco Water Works. He acquired control of land at Lake Tahoe's outlet at Tahoe City for \$3 an acre and the right to appropriate 500 cubic feet per second from Lake Tahoe.

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