

Edmund Orson Wattis

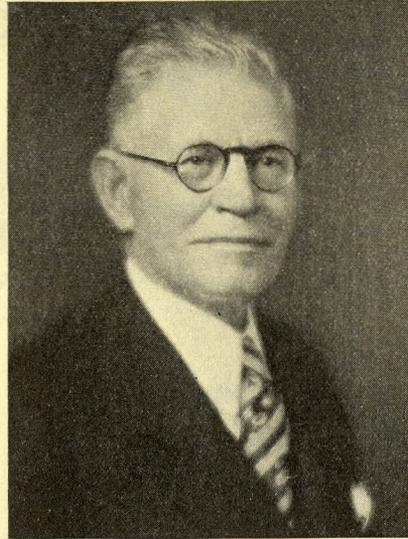
EDMUND ORSON WATTIS, 78, third president of the Six Companies, Incorporated, contractors on the Boulder Dam, died unexpectedly at his home in Ogden, Utah, February 3rd, of heart disease.

At the time of his death Mr. Wattis was also chairman of the board of directors of the Utah Construction Company, which had been developed by his brothers, Warren L. and William H., and himself, into one of the most extensive contracting companies in the west. Since its formation in 1901, the company has built hundreds of miles of railroads and many large engineering projects, among the latter being the Hetch Hetchy Dam for the San Francisco Water Supply System, the American Falls Dam in Idaho, the Gibson Dam in Montana, and the Guernsey Dam in Wyoming. In point of work done, the Utah Construction Company probably heads the list of outstanding western contractors. In 1926 it had completed \$130,000,000 of contracts and had \$17,000,000 of work under construction.

Mr. Wattis inspired the formation of Six Companies, Inc., an amalgamation of six western companies into a single unit, which bid on and secured the \$49,000,000 contract to build Boulder Dam. The concern is now two years ahead of its contract.

Recently Mr. Wattis spent a great deal of his time in San Francisco where he directed the Utah Construction Company office. Besides participating in the building of Boulder Dam, the firm is at present also working on a link of the Oakland Bay bridge.

Born in Uintah, near Ogden, on March 6, 1855, the son of pioneers, E. O. Wattis rose to be a leader in the construction industry in the U. S., having begun



his career as a 12-year-old ox-team driver on Union Pacific Construction 66 years ago. Self-educated and self-inspired, he is extolled as a typical western American who contributed through his own efforts to the transformation of the west from a wilderness to civilization. Mr. Wattis will be greatly missed by members of the excavating industry, as well as by his many personal friends.

In telling of his first job, driving a yoke of oxen on a piece of construction work for the Union Pacific Railroad, Mr. Wattis described his elation at earning \$15.00 a month, and later \$2.50 a day. His next venture in the "trucking business" hauling whiskey with mules, from Utah to Idaho, was less successful, as it did not net any profit. For several years after that his occupation was farming.

In 1881, E. O. Wattis and his brother Will undertook their first piece of construction work on the Oregon Short Line in Idaho, after which Mr. Wattis worked with their teams for Corey Brothers. In 1883, seeing the possibilities of construction work in the west, they borrowed money and traded

land for equipment and teams, and went to Canada to work for Corey Brothers on the Canadian Pacific railway.

While on this job, the Wattis brothers encountered their first construction difficulties, which were caused by heavy snows and disease which killed most of their horses. Instead of being discouraged, however, they planned to try it again on a larger scale, and with the Corey brothers formed the firm of Corey Brothers and Company. After successfully completing several big contracts, the company took a contract on the Pacific coast for over 100 miles of railroad. They had completed the first 20 miles, which were to be finished before they were to receive any payment, and were working on the second 20 miles, when the country was thrown, during Grover Cleveland's administration, into the worst financial panic it had ever known. The bank, in which the trust fund to pay their account had been deposited, failed, and the company went broke.

The Wattis brothers followed these various set-backs, with outstanding success on many a famous project and made themselves known through their vision and determination as men whose lives were inseparably linked with the progress of the west.

Funeral services were conducted for E. O. Wattis by the Knights Templar at Ogden, on February 6th. He was a 32nd degree Mason, a Shriner affiliated with the Islam Temple of San Francisco. Survivors are his wife, Mrs. Martha Ann Bybee Wattis; two sons, Leland Ray Wattis, Salt Lake, and Paul L. Wattis, Ogden; and five daughters, Mrs. W. H. Harris, Mrs. William Rice Kimball, and Mrs. E. R. Dumke, all of Ogden; and Mrs. Emil J. Hanks and Miss Ruth Wattis of Beverly Hills, California.