

## F. LESLIE RANSOME (1868-1935)

*J. David Rogers*



F. Leslie Ransome was born in Greenwich, England in December 1868 and his family emigrated to San Francisco two years later. He grew up in Oakland and attended the University of California, graduating in geology in 1893. He continued his studies working in Marin County under Andrew Lawson, receiving his Ph.D. in 1896. That same year, he was hired by the U.S. Geological Survey as one of their first four civil service professionals (the others being W.C. Mendenhall, G.O. Smith, and A.C. Spencer).

Ransome's career at the USGS focused on economic and applied geology, assessing the continent's richest ore bodies and mining districts in a series of comprehensive reports, bulletins, and folios. He was one of the founding fathers of the journal *economic geology* in 1905, writing the memorable article "The present standing of Applied Geology," which appeared in the inaugural issue. The following year he authored a seminal article titled "The directions and movement and the nomenclature of faults,"

followed by an invited article in *National Geographic* about the causes of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. A noted spokesperson for the geology profession, he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1916.

In the fall of 1922 he left the USGS to accept a professorship in economic geology at the University of Arizona, where he became dean of the graduate school and hired, among others, William Morris Davis, to teach geomorphology. During this time he also began consulting for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on the Boulder Canyon Project, then being designed. After refusing to sign a petition against the university president who hired him, he left Arizona to accept a half-time position as professor of Economic Geology in the new geology program at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, beginning in the fall of 1927.

In March 1928 the St. Francis Dam failed near Los Angeles, killing 450 people and causing much alarm. Professor Ransome was one of two geologists appointed to the prestigious board of inquiry named by the governor of California. His writings and public testimony about the need for engineering geologic input garnered national attention. In 1929 he was one of the luminaries invited to speak at both the AIME and ASCE symposiums on high dams, which had much influence on the emergence of engineering geology as its own specialty. That same year the Bureau of Reclamation asked him to make a detailed assessment of the Hoover Dam site in Black Canyon. Ransome remained busily engaged as an oft-sought engineering geology consultant for the balance of his life, working mainly with the Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles on their Colorado River Aqueduct and its system of distribution across southern California. He died in Pasadena on October 6, 1935 at age 67, 6 days after the dedication of Hoover Dam by President Roosevelt.