

✖ [Environmental scholarship has lost a real giant:](#)

Norris Cecil Hundley Jr., a former resident of Pacific Palisades, passed away peacefully on April 28. He was 77. Born to Norris and Helen Hundley on October 26, 1935 in Houston, Texas, Norris is survived by six younger siblings... Norris graduated from Whittier College in 1958. After receiving his Ph.D. in history from UCLA, he taught at the University of Houston for a year before returning to UCLA in 1964. He was a professor of American history at UCLA from 1964 to 1994, and was a renowned scholar of water rights in the west. Professor Hundley was editor of the *Pacific Historical Review* for almost 30 years (1968-1997), and instrumental in shaping the field of the American West as well as the Pacific Rim through his introduction of new scholars and fields to this leading journal.

“Instrumental” doesn’t really describe it. Hundley practically invented the professional history of water in the American West. I first encountered his work with [The Great Thirst](#) (1988, rev. 2001), a monumental survey of California water history, and really sort of Hundley’s *summa*. One of his other books, [Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West](#) (1975, rev. 2009), remains the best account of the creation of the Compact, and necessary reading for water policy analysts, lawyers, and really anyone with an interest in the tangled and fraught politics of the Colorado River. One point that emerges out of this latter book is that the Supreme Court just botched it when, in [Arizona v. California, 373 U.S. 546 \(1963\)](#), it restricted California’s rights to 4.4 million cubic feet, a decision we are still living with. (Interestingly, we still lack a good history of the Supreme Court case itself, a situation I hope to remedy in a couple of years.). This doesn’t begin to describe his output: more than 100 books and essays. I feel guilty that I had not heard earlier of his death.

✖ One thing that set Hundley apart is that he understood law in a deeper way than most historians without legal training. ([Historians rightfully complain about the converse](#), i.e. lawyers not understanding history). *The Great Thirst* treats many key decisions differently than lawyers would, but he gets the doctrine right, which is more than can be said for lots of lawyers as well.

I corresponded briefly with him several years ago about groundwater rights in California, and a few years after that, I got an e-mail out of the blue from him pointing me to some recent newspaper articles concerning the issue. He took care with interact with younger

scholars. I wanted to pick his brain more extensively, but then he fell ill and moved to Montecito, where he died, surrounded by his family.

Rest in peace.