
Anyone who has spent time in Los Angeles knows the name Doheny, even if they do not know the person behind the name. Doheny Drive and the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California are just two of the landmarks indicating the power and influence of the Doheny family. Margaret Leslie Davis has written a lively and even-handed account of Edward L. Doheny's life, taking us from his roots as a horse-trading teenager in the Southwest to the end of his life as a Los Angeles-based millionaire tainted by scandal.

Davis' book is divided into three parts, each of which encompasses significant eras in Doheny's life. The first part tells the story of Doheny's quixotic economic fortunes as a silver prospector, miner, and eventually as an oil-field developer in Mexico. These first chapters are a good indication of Davis' clear intention to provide a level of personal detail about Doheny that makes it hard to dismiss the man as simply a ruthless "robber baron." Doheny, according to Davis, was certainly a loyal friend to his business partner Charles Canfield, with whom he pursued various projects before settling into the oil business. He was also a hard-working, indefatigable frontier character, apparently expecting no more from his partners and workers than he expected of himself.

In his private life Doheny was a largely absent husband and father, as we learn from the letters Davis quotes written by Doheny's second wife, Estelle, and his son, Ned. Left behind in the rather grim family mansion at 8 Chester Place, Los Angeles, Estelle Doheny conscientiously raised Ned (the surviving child from Doheny's first marriage), decorated the house, and developed the grounds according to her husband's wishes. Doheny meanwhile remained in Mexico for weeks on end in his search for oil.

Davis's first section also indicates the extent to which Doheny meddled in Mexico's domestic and international affairs, developing a close and mutually beneficial relationship between himself and Mexican leader Porfirio Diaz, and insisting on military assistance from Woodrow Wilson's government when the Mexican revolution threatened the oil fields and storage facilities of Doheny's Mexican Petroleum Company. Of course, such a tale of commercial enterprise mixed with U.S. military intervention can be told many times over for different countries in Central and South America up through the twentieth century. The audacity of such activities still shocks, however, especially when told in such detail.

Davis's second and third sections focus on the development of the Teapot Dome scandal, with which Doheny became associated in the 1920s. Davis details Doheny's fateful friendship with Interior Secretary Albert Fall, the man at the center of the scandal over oil drilling on federal lands and accusations of illegal payoffs. Doheny's involvement with the scandal, culminating in his trials for fraud and conspiracy in 1926 and for bribery in 1930, cast a long shadow over his later years. The scandal, the court appearances, the threat of imprisonment, and the fear of financial ruin took a heavy toll on the once indomitable Doheny. In addition, the murder of his only son Ned in 1929 broke the by-then elderly tycoon and dashed his hopes for a dynasty dominant in Los Angeles and at the national level.

For readers interested in Doheny's role as a key player in the development of early twentieth century Los Angeles, Dark Side of Fortune may disappoint. There is very little information in the book about the L.A. context.
in which the Doheny family established themselves socially and economically. Cross-referencing Davis' book with other scholarship on the place and period might prove useful, however.

Reading *Dark Side of Fortune*, with its focus on the Teapot Dome scandal and its various ramifications, one cannot help but notice the activities of the current newly-appointed Secretary of the Interior. Like Albert Fall she favors drilling for oil on federal lands and chooses to ignore the protests of environmentalists and conservationists. The struggle between private enterprise, conservation, Western lands, government officials and high-stakes politics -- so deftly discussed in Davis's book -- repeatedly unfolds before our eyes.

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