

Bob Kinhead, Project Rendering Artist

With Introduction by Rick Luebbbers

Design concepts today are routinely presented in life-like images that offer rotatable 3-D views, fly throughs, and technically accurate details. Back in the '80s, it wasn't that way at all. Computer-assisted drafting was just coming into use. Most engineering drawings were still being prepared by hand. That limited what could be used as visuals for presentations to clients and the public. We often used hand-colored plans, profiles, elevations, and sections to show the alternatives we were considering. Public boards would sit and nod and make multi-million-dollar decisions without fully understanding what they were seeing.

Against all odds, we won a design contract for a major railroad grade separation project in South San Francisco. It involved high-speed passenger rail lines, the 101 Freeway, and a major arterial street, all within a very confined area. We developed and evaluated a series of alternatives using our engineering drawings. After several public presentations, the city selected a complex overcrossing project. At that point, we asked Bob to come visit the site and prepare some renderings to better depict the project. He took a few photographs and locked himself in a room with our engineering drawings. Within a couple of days, he emerged with several amazing pen-on-mylar renderings of the project, including an aerial view that he had to create in his head. We printed enlarged versions that Bob colored by hand. The now-gorgeous drawings were hanging on the wall of the council chambers when the city board walked in for the next meeting. They each stopped and gazed at the drawings and, to a person, said, "So, that's what it looks like!"

That response told us everything we needed to know. We included Bob's work in many more projects with great results. The key to Bob's renderings is that he always got the engineering details right. Then he made the project blend into its setting with an artist's flair. Marvelous products by a renaissance gentleman.

Bob's "story" ...



I'm a forester by education; but in 1960 became unhappy in my work, so I took some drawings I'd done to Clair Hill's office. Clair hired me as a computer/draftsman, mainly, I think, because he had a soft spot in his heart for disillusioned foresters, since he had been one himself!

I began drawing pictures on the side, of pump stations and minor projects for some of the engineers. As the company grew with the CH2M merger, so did the demand for pictorials; and soon they were paying me for it.

We hired Charlie Gamble, a very talented and trained artist; and the two of us were soon doing the graphics, renderings, displays, cartooning, etc. for not only the Redding Office, but Emeryville and Sacramento. Our work was all done by hand, felt pens, pen and inks, and watercolors. Computers didn't really take over the graphics work until the '90s.

I've had no formal training, except for during a slow period in the late 1960s. I took a leave of absence and took some courses at the Cornish School in Seattle.

There has been some interesting or funny feedback on some of the work. On the renderings, the only one I can remember that got a laugh was of a sewer project in a village in northern Alaska. The village was badly in need of one. The accepted method of waste disposal up to that point was to throw the contents of the chamber pots out the front door of the tar paper shacks, onto the ice in their front yards and streets first thing in the morning. This was OK during the long winter season when everything stayed frozen; but during the few months of thaw, the stench was overpowering.

Rather than trying to bury pipe up there, we designed a system where all the laterals and mains were on supports aboveground. Two of our engineers went up to make the presentation to the Eskimos in charge, sitting on benches, with my picture up front. When we unveiled it, the natives burst out in roars of laughter! Our guys couldn't figure out what was so funny and still couldn't by the time they got home. I think we got the job all right.

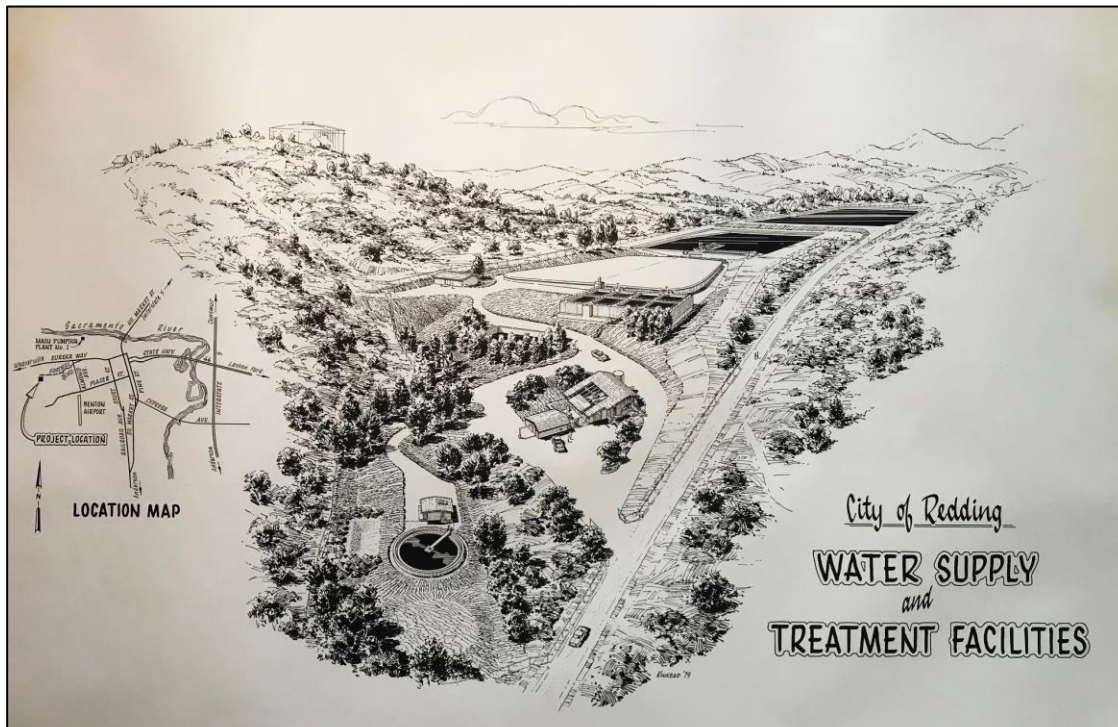
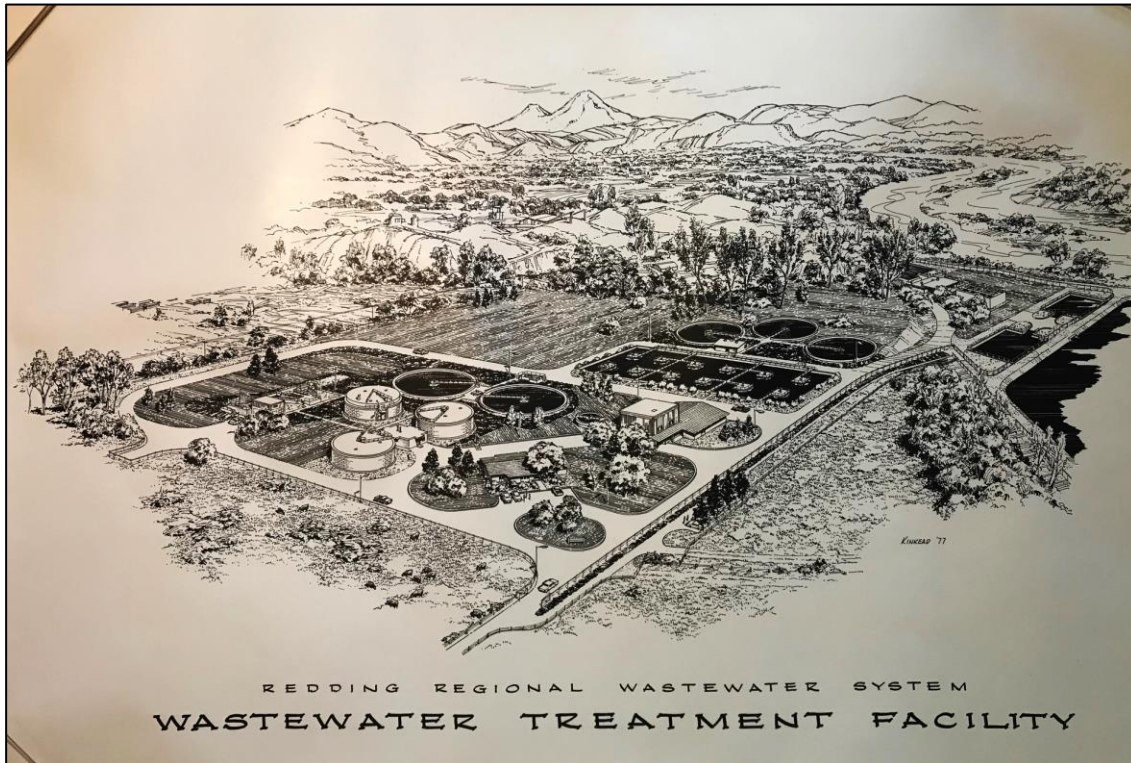
The caricatures were fun, but now and then I would get into trouble. If I exaggerated certain prominent features, like buck teeth or a big mouth, "My ears aren't THAT big!", the subject would take offense. It didn't happen often, though. Our engineers were great people and didn't suffer from a lot of vanity! I even had Jack Twitchell, who had had polio, lurching knock-kneed through a barnyard, stepping on cow pies; and he loved it.

Bob



Following is a sampling of Bob's project renderings and cartoons celebrating project wins.

Bob's Project Renderings

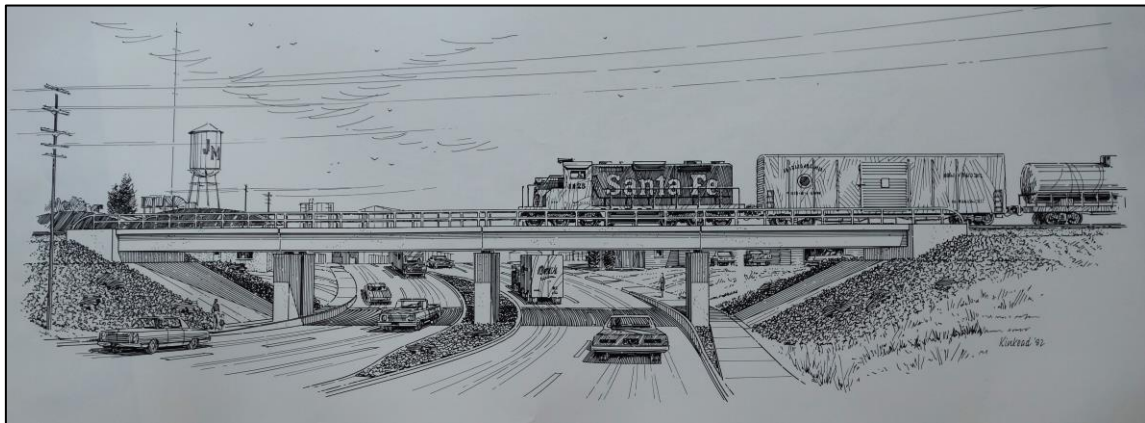
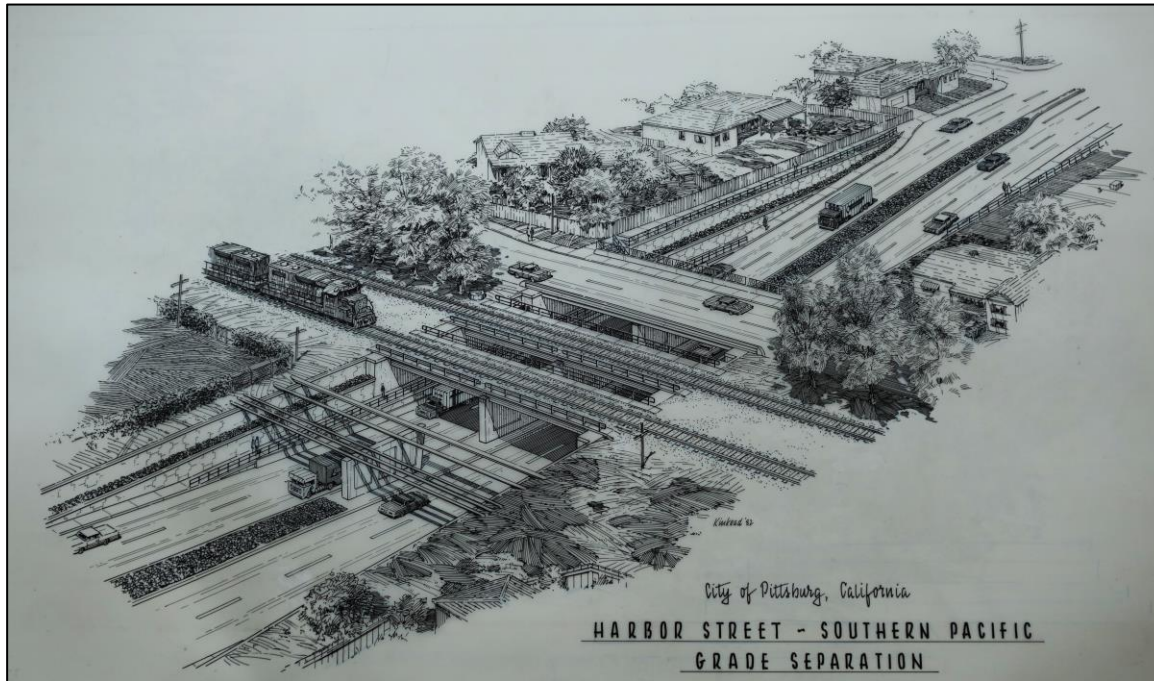


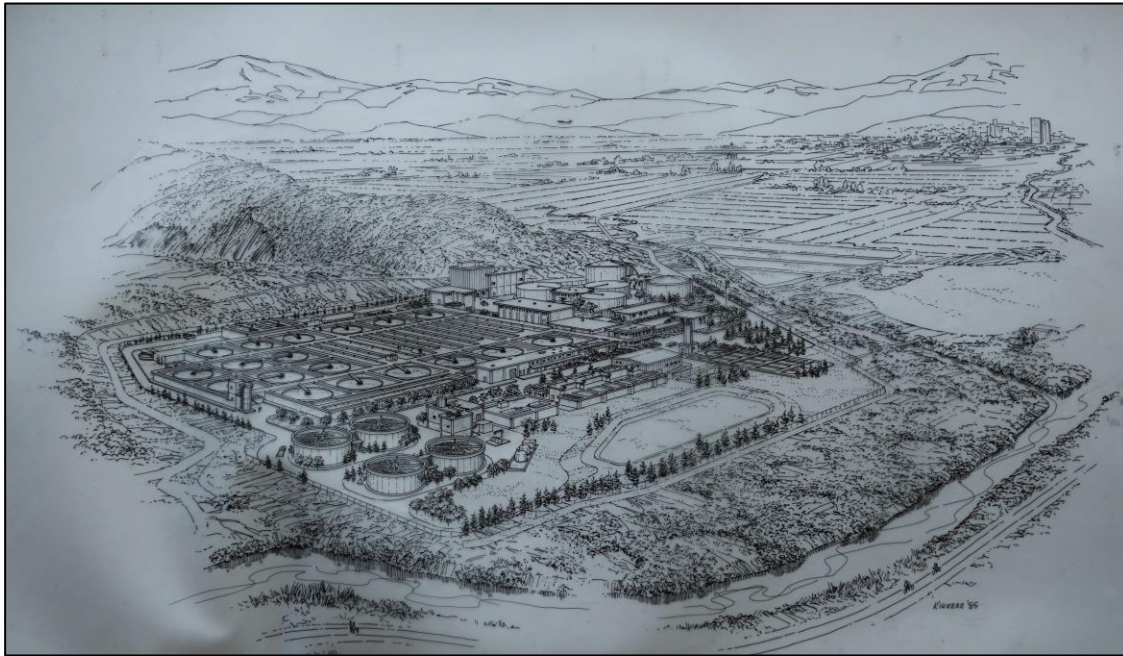


Russian River Bridge on Vichy Springs Road at Ukiah, Mendocino County, CA

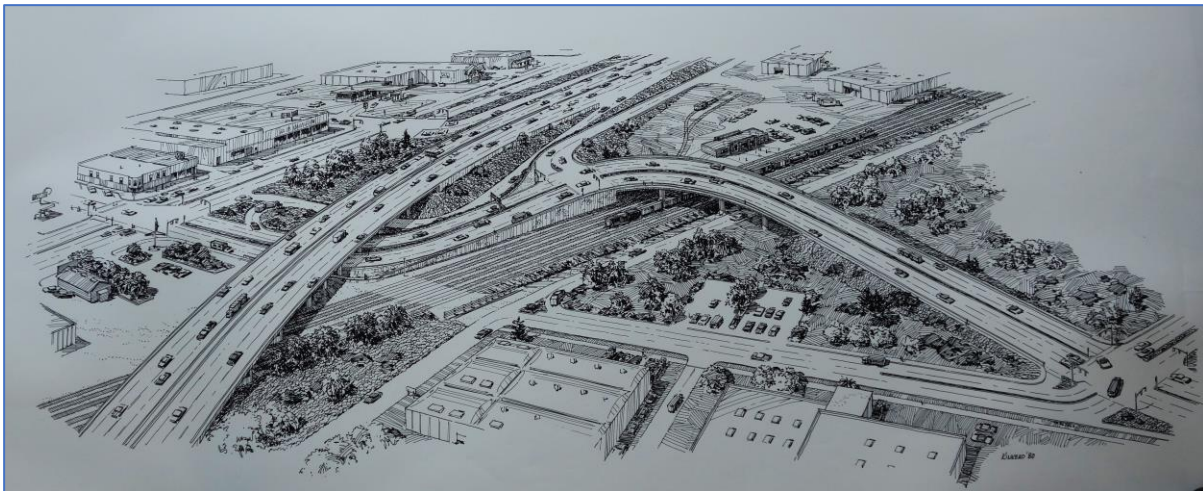


The Sacramento River steamer "Valleta"
Passing the Colusa Bridge enroute to the Grimes picnic, May 1908





Reno – Sparks Wastewater Treatment Facility



East Grand Avenue Overcrossing, City of South San Francisco



Sacramento River Bridge on Bend Ferry Road, Tehama County, CA

Bob also did cartoons and caricatures celebrating project events



