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The Teapot Dome Scandal - III

Lead: In 1922 Interior Secretary Albert Fall leased to his friends oil-rich land in California and Wyoming. He was on the take.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Government experts suspected that oil was being drained from government land into private wells on the edge of national oil reserves in the west. To protect these reserves, oil was being pumped out

under contract and resold to the government for above ground storage. In trouble financially, Interior Secretary Albert B. Fall in the spring of 1922 arranged private leases in exchange for cash, bond, and interest-free loans of \$400,000 in cash or bonds.

Rumors of the deal had floated through Washington for months but an investigation led by Democratic Senator Thomas Walsh of Montana came up dry in the face of stonewalling by the Harding Administration. The President could not believe his old friend, former fellow Senator, and poker-playing buddy Albert Fall was dishonest. Walsh continued his plodding but it seemed a hopeless exercise until strange things began happening to the members of the Committee. Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin's office was ransacked. Walsh suspected his phone was being tapped and mail opened.

The first significant break in the investigation was the discovery that shortly after he issued the private leases Fall's ranch in New Mexico had doubled in size and suddenly acquired a new hydro-electric dam. Fall, unhappy with his declining influence with the President, resigned and went to work with Harry F. Sinclair. Thereafter, slowly, fitfully the story came out.

Harding died in August, 1923, just before his friend Albert Fall went before the Walsh Committee. At the early hearings, both Fall and Sinclair denied any wrong-doing, with the latter declaring flatly Fall had received no financial benefit or profit from the grant of the leases. This, of course was a lie. In the end, Fall and Sinclair received jail sentences and the Harding Administration the reputation as one of the most scandal-plagued in American history.

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Resources

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