

# Boulder City—Government Town Problem

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## BOULDER CITY—GOVERNMENT TOWN PROBLEM

**T**he Bureau of Reclamation, in the Department of the Interior, is identified with the great development of the West in the last half-century. In the state west of the 100th meridian it has built gigantic hydroelectric plants, and vast stretches of canal systems that have transformed millions of acres of barren desert into areas of incredible productivity.

As by-products of its large multipurpose projects, the Bureau has quietly given birth to a unique family of problem children, the government towns. Each of these towns poses problems of local particularity. This article is concerned primarily with Boulder City, Nevada, the eldest of the family, where a direct attack on parental problems is being made. Boulder City is neither the beginning nor the end of the government town problem of the Bureau. It is hopefully anticipated, however, that experiments under way there will provide techniques for general use.

That the Bureau of Reclamation has no monopoly on government town problems is indicated in recent reports about two Atomic Energy Commission towns, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Richland, Washington. There are distinctions in purpose, however, between the AEC towns and Boulder City. In Oak Ridge, for example, there was a deliberate intent to create a self-sufficient city hemmed in by a security wall. The Bureau of Reclamation sponsored Boulder City on a more casual and gradual basis. Its isolation was due to location rather than predetermination.

Practically all government towns, however, have one thing in common: they are the spring of a marriage of necessity. The federal government does not create towns for the purpose of engaging in municipal government. The towns are not an objective in

themselves; they are the incidents of a broader purpose to which the federal authority may add some touch with propriety. When this broader purpose has been served, the excuse for federal involvement in local government is removed.

### *The Building of Boulder City*

**B**oulder City has experienced three development phases. It began as a construction camp while Hoover Dam, power plant, and appurtenances were under construction. Because the dam site was in the middle of a desolate area of barren rock mountains and desert sand, the establishment of a construction camp was a genuine pioneer project. All materials had to be shipped in and utilities had to be provided by the developers. Since construction was in the canyon depths, the hellish heat prevailed around the clock, it seemed wise to locate the construction camp on a mountain plateau several miles away. Water was pumped up the steep mountain incline.

The estimated period of construction was several years and the layout of the construction camp was accomplished in line with objectives of orderliness, efficiency, and comfort. The Bureau engineers were aware that the camp was the forerunner of a permanent operating headquarters and provision for facilities was made on a long-term rather than a temporary basis. At the peak of construction, the camp population was about 6,000.

When major construction ended in 1937, Boulder City changed from a feverish construction camp to the quiet dignity of a permanent operating headquarters. The population was now made up of professional men, workers, skilled laborers, and essential service businessmen.

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