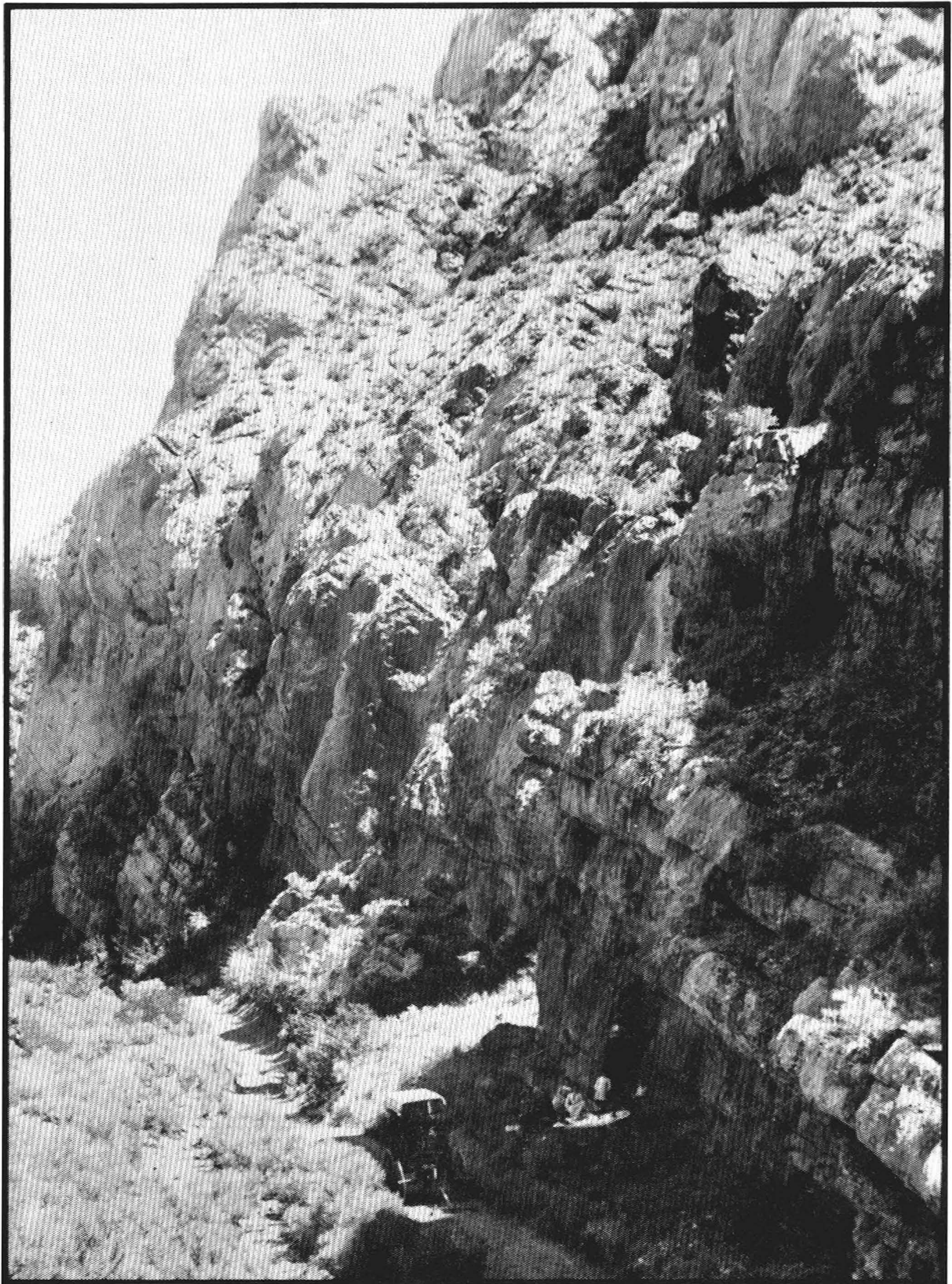


Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



SPRING 1991

NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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FRONT COVER: Picnic Party, Cathedral Canyon on the west slope of the White Pine range, north of Green Springs, c.1870. (Nevada Historical Society)		

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

The Battle for the Great Basin National Park, 1957-1967

Gary E. Elliot

IN NEVADA, A STATE TRADITIONALLY controlled by mining and stock-raising interests, the proposal for the Great Basin National Park proved to be the intersection where issues of commercialism and the environment clashed. Ever since Virginia surrendered ownership of its western land to the national government in 1781, the question has remained, whose land is it?¹ Debate over issues of ownership, distribution, and development have raged unabated for two centuries. Initially the American West was seen as a storehouse of natural resources to be exploited by land speculators, railroads, and extractive industries. Mining and, later, agriculture and stock raising were the dominant western industries by the close of the nineteenth century. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the old "rip, rape, and run" view of the landscape retreated as concern for conservation and the efficient management of natural resources came to the fore. This kind of conservation and its philosophy were in turn strongly challenged in the post World War II era as the environmental movement stressed the quality of the planet's life experience over scientific management and harvesting of wilderness resources.

By the 1950s, national parks were big business spurred on by Mission 66, a plan by park director Conrad Wirth that brought millions in tourist dollars into local economies by advertising the recreational advantages and scenic beauty of the national parks. States reaped enormous financial benefits from gasoline taxes, motel and restaurant business, concession sales, and sales of other consumer goods. Meanwhile, the federal government absorbed the cost of park road maintenance, payrolls, and upkeep.

Gary E. Elliott received his Ph.D in history from Northern Arizona University. He specializes in the twentieth-century American West. This paper was presented at the Nevada History Conference in May 1989 in Reno, Nevada.

The author wishes to thank Candace Kant of the Community College of Southern Nevada History Department for many helpful suggestions for improving this article. He also extends special thanks to Michael Green, doctoral student in history at Columbia University, for taking time to read and comment on this essay.

Parks alone accounted for \$2 billion in business sales, of which \$150 million found its way into local economies.²

The desire to cash in on a growing national park system, coupled with a preservationist impulse to save part of Nevada's natural heritage, was the key reason why Nevada Senators Alan Bible and Howard Cannon supported the Great Basin National Park plan.³

The move to establish a park in the Great Basin began in 1957 as the Great Basin Range National Park Association sought to preserve the natural wonders of Wheeler Peak, Lehman Caves and the bristlecone pine.⁴ The following year, Bible asked the Department of the Interior to investigate the possibility of establishing a park along the Snake Range in eastern Nevada. Alarmed, the state's mining and grazing interests marshalled forces to oppose the park plan, which they perceived as a threat to their traditional dominance of land use in White Pine County. Making money was the mining industry's only concern. Little, if any, thought was given to the environment.⁵

Nevada and White Pine County shared the twin legacy of economic voracity and environmental neglect. Beginning in the 1870s, White Pine County, like most of the mining West, suffered a depression that engendered increased reliance on stock raising, particularly in the Duck and Steptoe valleys. However, by the first decade of the twentieth century, extraction of low-grade copper became profitable and the county experienced an economic resurgence powered by mining and livestock raising.⁶

White Pine County ultimately became the largest producer of mineral wealth in the history of Nevada. But by the 1950s, reduced government stockpiles, foreign competition, and reciprocal trade policies combined to depress mining throughout the county.⁷ Of White Pine's thirty-seven mining districts, only four were affected by the Great Basin National Park plan, and those four did not include the Robinson District, in whose copper production 95 percent of the county's mineral wealth was concentrated. The districts in question included the Mount Washington District on the western slope of the Snake Range which produced one thousand tons of tungsten between 1952 and 1955, and which held large beryllium deposits discovered in 1959, none yet sold. The Osceola District, where gold and tungsten were extracted, accounted for about a million dollars in sales between 1902 and 1959. Records for the Shoshone District are incomplete, but production sales were less than two million dollars by the 1950s. Finally, the tungsten district, containing the famed Wheeler Peak, was inactive during most of its history, producing only \$363,000, mostly from lead production.⁸

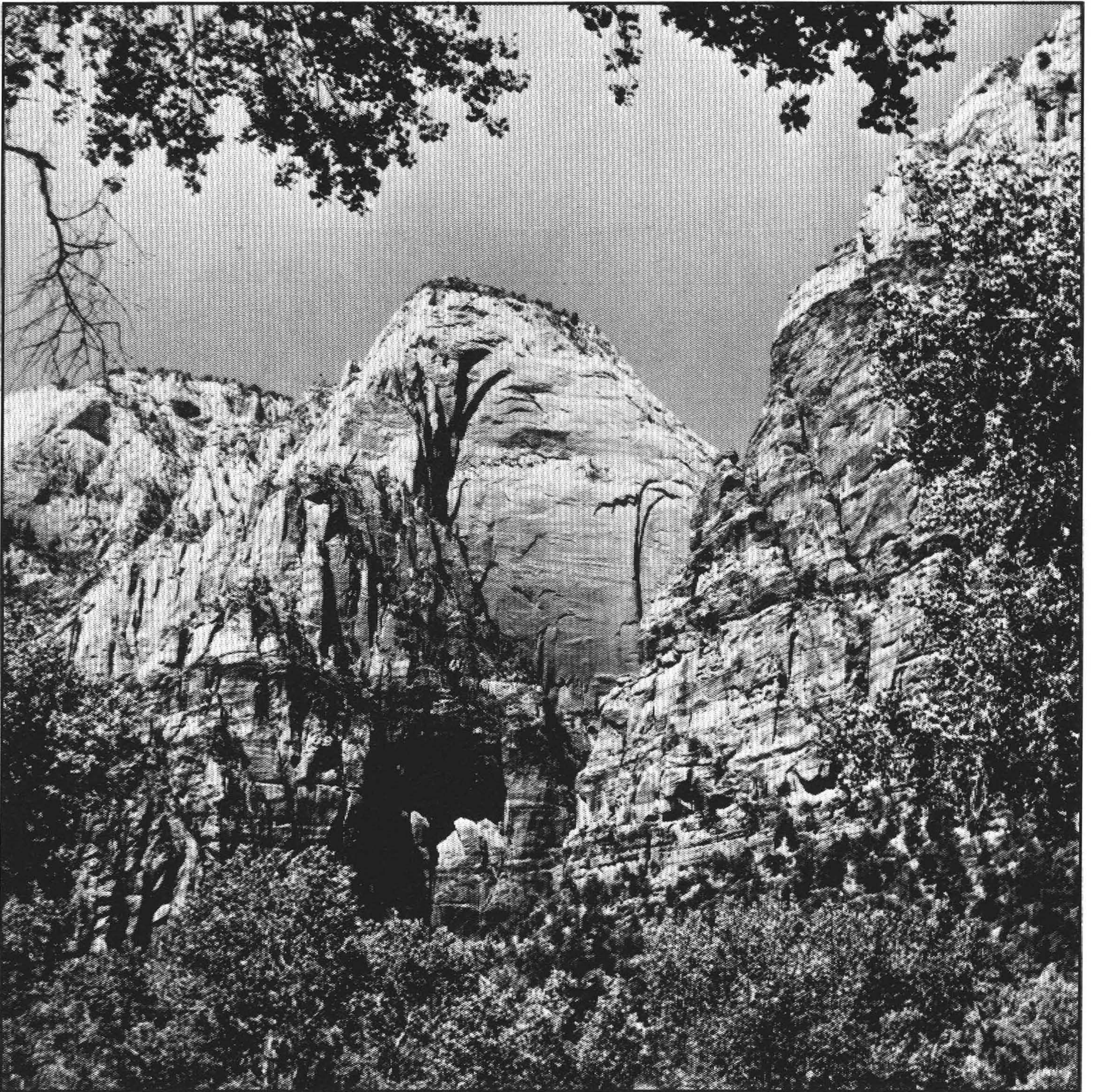
Clearly, mining production in eastern White Pine County, near the proposed park, was insignificant. Nevertheless, the industry took the firm position that any change in land use policy would inhibit future mineral

production. Still, mining opposition paled in comparison with that of the ranchers, who followed the time-honored Nevada pattern of opposing any regulation of the public domain that was in conflict with their industry's welfare. Their power had historically been exercised in a negative way—that is, they acted to prevent enactment of legislation they opposed rather than to influence passage of laws they favored. The battle over land use policy in eastern Nevada proved to be no exception.⁹

The western livestock industry is the single most destructive force on the public lands. Moreover, stock raisers have benefited from a welfare system that is rivaled only by the subsidization of water for agribusiness. Some critics have labeled the system “cowboy welfare” and its recipients “welfare parasites.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, the industry argued that its members deserved priority use of the range because of their vested rights, extending back to the nineteenth century. In the 1950s, stock producers still viewed themselves as “innocent victims” of unfair regulation and braced for the assault on the public domain by recreation enthusiasts who wanted national parks. Based on the custodial record of land management, the ranchers' arguments cannot be supported, particularly in Nevada, which has a long record of range deterioration through overgrazing.¹¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the open range suffered from the overgrazing of sheep and cattle. Species of grasses were entirely eliminated, and this in turn caused erosion, destruction of watersheds, silting of reservoirs, killing of stream fish, and a host of other problems. Regulation was badly needed. Because grazing was among the commercial uses of the forest, the United States Forest Service was the first to act.¹² Regulations were enacted and fees charged for use of the national forest. Then, in 1924, the Forest Service announced an increase in fees and ignited a fire storm of protest in the West. The irrepressible Oregon senator, Robert N. Stanfield, added fuel to the controversy by holding hearings to oppose any increase in fees, arguing that ranchers had vested rights in the land and merited special privileges because they had pioneered settlement of the West.¹³

No sooner had the uproar over Senator Stanfield's hearings subsided than the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act which created the Grazing Service, was passed; it regulated grazing outside the national forest on what had been the open range. Grazing districts were established, with fees based on the cost of administration rather than the price of forage, and 50 percent of the fee income was returned to the states. In addition, advisory boards were authorized in each district to make recommendations to the head of the grazing district, whose appointment was based on field experience rather than college training. Here was the theory of home rule, through decentralization and industry participation, that was to stand as a model for future government regulation. But the first fee increase proposed



Mt. Wheeler, White Pine County, Nevada, is the focal point in the Great Basin National Park. (*C.D. Gallagher Collection, Nevada Historical Society*)

under the act propelled Nevada stockmen into court to oppose the hike despite the overwhelming evidence of its need. After initial victories in local courts, the ranchers finally lost when the United States Supreme Court in 1941 upheld the government's right to increase grazing fees. Thereafter, Senator Patrick McCarran of Nevada came to the aid of his grazing constituents and launched a bitter attack on the Grazing Service.¹⁴

Senator McCarran's hearings took place intermittently from 1941 to 1946, with grandstand tours through the West, including fourteen days in Nevada that featured three different appearances in Ely. At issue were the fees the Grazing Service charged ranchers to use the public domain.

Despite clear evidence to the contrary, McCarran insisted that the rates should be lowered. He browbeat and intimidated every witness from the Grazing Service in what has been described as a "merciless attack." Rarely has an agency been subjected to abuse on the scale inflicted by McCarran's committee.¹⁵ The result was a budget reduction for the Grazing Service, which restricted its ability to supervise grazing on the public lands. Stockmen did as they pleased, and the land suffered.

When McCarran's committee recommended state and private ownership of public lands, the National Wool Growers Association joined the fray. This group opposed the creation of national monuments by executive order, favored repeal of the antiquities act that authorized withdrawal of lands for parks and recreation, and supported open grazing in the national parks. Still, the association paused long enough in its condemnation of federal land policy to recommend a high protective tariff to restrict foreign competition.¹⁶ In 1952, the national Republican party platform committee echoed those sentiments by endorsing a plank advocating the right of stockmen to appeal through the courts when confronted with adverse administrative rulings on range policy.

While the mining and stock industries could count on established political interests to support the status quo, they lacked the momentum and force of the new ideas found in the arguments of recreationists. More important, the new constituencies that developed parallel with suburban growth were influencing the positions taken by politicians and agency employees. The examples of Alan Bible and Howard Cannon are two classic cases wherein Nevada's traditional economic interests had to be balanced against the desires of urbanites for expanded recreational activity.

In addition to maintaining continued support for mining and defense, Democrats Bible and Cannon supported the livestock industry with equal vigor. They denounced the import of sheep and beef from New Zealand and implored the tariff commission to aid Nevada ranchers.¹⁷ But their support for the state's customary economic base did not extend to preventing the economic expansion and diversification that the infusion of federal dollars brought to depressed areas of Nevada. By the mid 1950s, White Pine County badly needed to expand its economic base to revitalize an area stricken by its slumping mineral industry.

To bolster the region's sagging economy, Bible introduced Senate Bill 2664, which established a 147,000-acre national park on the Snake Range. Walter S. Baring, the state's three-term Democratic congressman, followed suit in the House with H.R. 9156, identical in wording to Bible's Senate bill.¹⁸ On the surface, the Nevada delegation appeared united and the state well along the path to its first national park.

However, the unanimity of the delegation was badly shaken by the hearings on Senator Bible's bill in Ely, the scene of McCarran's earlier tirade

against range control. Beginning December 5, 1959, the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands held a three-day forum to solicit opinions on establishing the Great Basin National Park. Predictably, the American Mining Congress objected to the park, citing evidence that the Snake Range was rich in potentially extractable minerals. The industry's key witness, W. Howard Gray, made clear that the mining industry resisted not only the Great Basin National Park, but all parks, because the park service forbade mining exploration.¹⁹ Representatives of Kennecott Copper Corporation echoed Gray's sentiments.

Ranchers claimed the park threatened their present use of the range. Their chief objection was that Forest Service grazing permits would lack full force and effect if the land were administered by the National Park Service. For example, local rancher George N. Swallow testified, "We also feel that a national park in this area will adversely affect our stock watering and agricultural use of water. We will be prohibited from cutting timber for use in our operation."²⁰ Besides the issue of economic hardship, Swallow stressed the dislocation to be suffered by "innocent victims" of government regulation. The hearings hit a high note for the bizarre and ridiculous when Swallow invoked the plight of hunters and trappers in the Wheeler Peak region who would be unable to earn a living. Under questioning by Senator Cannon, Swallow admitted that he "probably" knew of two people in the area whose living depended on trapping.²¹ Still, his testimony appealed to the established principle that national parks should be carved only from areas considered economically worthless.²²

Testimony at the Ely hearings revealed the philosophy of land use that park opponents embraced. They consistently argued that the public domain should be open to multiple use, specifically mining, grazing, and timber harvesting. Single-use concepts, such as establishment of national parks, "locked up" the land by excluding agricultural and industrial activity. When Congress passed legislation in June 1960 to include outdoor recreation within the definition of *multiple use*, park opponents ignored this monumental change in land-use philosophy and practice; they continued to define *multiple use* in commercial terms, while denying the claims of recreation advocates. They neither accepted nor understood the full meaning of the 1960 act as a significant victory for conservation.²³

Throughout 1960, Bible worked to draft new legislation that would accommodate, in the presence of the park, as many economic interests in White Pine County as possible. The result was S. 1760, co-sponsored by Senator Cannon, which contained an important provision in section 7 allowing grazing on park lands for a period of twenty-five years. As one in a long line of Nevada's Silver Senators, Bible also revised the park boundaries to exclude 24,000 acres from the northeastern boundary to al-

low for beryllium exploration. Moreover, section 6 protected existing mining operations within the national park.²⁴ Included in the Bible proposal were the principal bristlecone pine groves, the Lehman Caves, and the glacier at Wheeler Peak, as well as the surrounding scenic attractions. In addition, the National Park Service was prepared to spend \$4 million in operating costs.²⁵

The Bible plan provided strong support for Nevada's mining and livestock industries while injecting large doses of federal money into the eastern Nevada economy. But in late 1961, Regional Forester Floyd Iverson reported that the Humboldt National Forest along the Snake Range had been overused and told Senator Bible that grazing there would have to be curtailed for many years to restore the ground cover.²⁶ The implications were enormous, and the Forest Service's timing could not have been better calculated to revive the fear and suspicion of the livestock producers. From their perspective, reduced grazing in the national forest, the hated park plan, and foreign competition all conspired to inflict economic hardship on eastern Nevada's ranchers. In early 1962, the Department of the Interior exploded a bombshell by recommending a new increase in grazing fees. Even though Bible and Cannon moved swiftly to repair the damage, securing a postponement of the fee increase, the cumulative effect solidified the resolve of park opponents and was probably the key factor in Congressman Baring's dramatic change in position on the park plan.²⁷

At the height of the grazing-fee controversy, Senate bill 1760 passed and was sent to the House, where Bible and Cannon expected quick action because Baring was a member of the House Subcommittee on Public Lands. But in late June, the congressman met with members of the Ely livestock and mining industry, and he agreed to introduce legislation that would protect their interests. When he returned to Washington, he received the draft bill by special delivery from Ely and introduced it at a committee hearing on S. 1760.

The existence of the draft bill took Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall by complete surprise. Equally shocking, Baring had failed to read the legislation before presenting it to the committee.²⁸ The new bill, H.R. 7283, proposed to reduce the size of the park from 123,000 acres to 53,000 acres, with mining and grazing to be allowed indefinitely. Hunting and fishing would be permitted under the supervision of the Nevada Fish and Game Commission. Incredibly, Baring had not informed Bible or Cannon of his change in position, and both senators were shocked and angry. In the face of these new developments, the House understandably refused to act on Bible's bill, and the matter of the Great Basin National Park was left unresolved.

For two years neither side would give ground. Then, in March 1964, the

Department of the Interior officially endorsed the Bible plan, pointing out that the Baring proposal failed to provide the features required in a national park. Specifically, the National Park Service believed that the Baring bill, in limiting the size of the park, did not ensure sufficient protection for the surrounding scenic attractions.²⁹ The department's support for Senator Bible's bill was not surprising, because he had become a leader in forwarding national park legislation and, as chairman of the Senate Interior Subcommittee on Public Lands, was directly responsible for the hearings on the major park bills. This was in stark contrast to Baring's lack of experience, reflected in his proposal, which endangered not only the over-all park but other legislation important to Nevada.

Baring constantly antagonized Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, upon whom Bible and Cannon relied to authorize military expenditures and vital water projects in Nevada. Baring voted against the Johnson administration's civil rights bill, mass transportation measures, urban renewal plans, food stamp program, and medicare, while denouncing eastern liberals as "egg-headed atheists" and suggesting that "beatniks, pacifists, and draft-dodgers be sent to Moscow."³⁰ While on a campaign swing through Las Vegas in 1964, President Johnson praised the state's Democratic leaders but did not mention Baring. Senator Cannon did not mention Baring's name either in his Reno address the following day, but he did praise other party officials. The rift between Baring and President Johnson nearly doomed the important southern Nevada water project,³¹ which further strained working relationships with Bible, Cannon, and other leading Democrats in Nevada.

In early 1965, Bible tried to gain acceptance of the park plan by introducing S. 499; Baring countered with H.R. 6122. Both bills were identical to the 1962 proposals, and the issue was once again joined. However, this time Bible placed the burden of holding hearings and passing legislation on Baring. Bible reasoned that the Senate had already looked at the matter, held two separate hearings, and passed a bill; now it was Baring's turn to move forward if he was sincere about the Great Basin National Park. It soon became clear that Baring and his small group of supporters wanted to defeat any plan for a park, employing delay and inaction while appearing to support a park concept that would encompass mining and grazing.³²

Petitions from the White Pine Chamber of Commerce and Mines, supporting any park plan flooded Bible's office in July 1965.³³ He responded by outlining his position to the Ely National Park Committee, and suggested that public pressure might induce Baring to pass a "park bill, any bill, outlining any proposal." Then and only then could the Senate and House work together to iron out the differences between the Baring and Bible proposals.³⁴ This was an extraordinary public admission that Bible

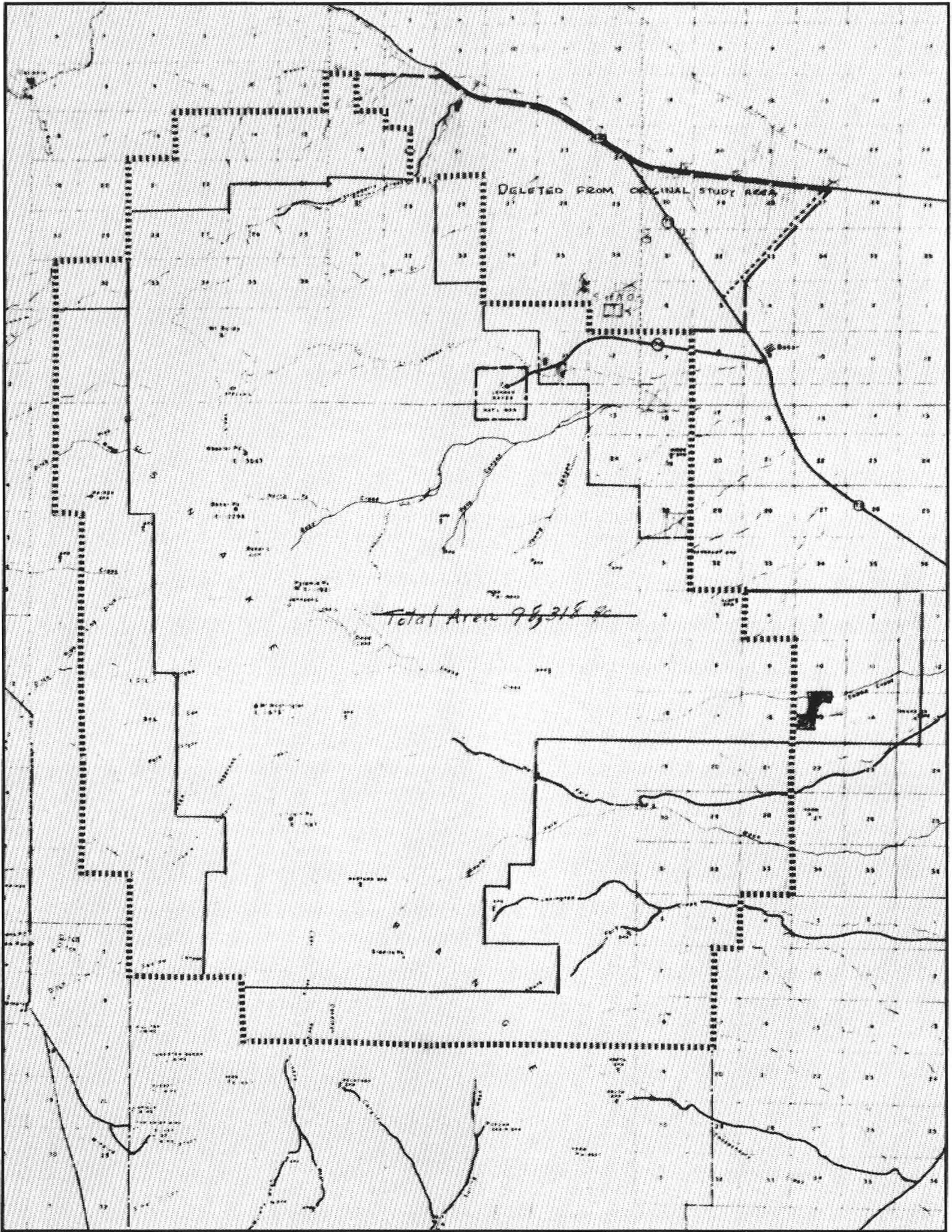
could not work with Baring and would rather work through a conference committee to create the Great Basin National Park.

By August both the Bible and Baring positions and strategies were clear. Baring stressed that his park bill had been written by advocates of multiple use—ranchers, miners, and sportsmen—and reflected the will of land users in White Pine County. He refused to acknowledge that hikers, campers, or nature lovers had legitimate interests in land-use policy. Furthermore, the congressman declared he would call for hearings in the House only if Bible pledged his unqualified support in writing and proposed a similar bill in the Senate.³⁵ In short, there was no room for a Great Basin National Park except on Baring's terms, or, more accurately, on the conditions specified by Ely ranchers and miners. Baring demanded that his Senate colleague ignore the 1960 multiple-use act and turn a deaf ear to the needs of recreation. Bible could do neither and maintain credibility with his Senate colleagues on national issues affecting park and recreations legislation.

Bible rejected Baring's terms, but the White Pine Chamber of Commerce and Mines quickly accepted Baring's proposal and pleaded with the congressman to pass whatever park bill he could obtain in the House. They asked Secretary Udall to support the Baring bill, hoping to pressure the congressman to move ahead as quickly as possible.³⁶ Bolstered by the support of Ely business, Baring gave Nevada newspapers his correspondence on the issue along with that of Chamber of Commerce and Mines.

Bible and his press secretary, Dwight Dyer, were furious. The senator had not been asked by Baring to respond publicly to the congressman's proposal, and the news accounts made it appear that Bible, not Baring had caused the long delay. A few days after the story appeared in the Nevada papers, Baring wrote to Bible that the senator's written guarantee of support was unnecessary, but added that Wayne Aspinall, chairman of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, would probably want some assurances before scheduling hearings.³⁷ Bible and Cannon refused to be intimidated by the congressman's effort to shift responsibility, first to the Senate and then to the chairman of the House committee. On September 1 they issued a joint statement in which they refused to commit to the Baring plan because it failed to meet national park standards and faced a certain veto by President Johnson.³⁸

For almost six years, Baring maintained two positions. First, he contended that his bill was a true multiple-use plan even though it excluded recreation from consideration, despite the clear intent of Congress to the contrary. Second, he charged that the delay in enacting a Great Basin National Park bill was the fault of others, principally Senators Bible and Cannon, Secretary Udall, and Chairman Aspinall.



Map of the original plan of the Great Basin National Park by Senator Bible, 1959. (*Alan Bible Papers, University of Nevada, Reno*)

In early 1966, Baring made clear in a letter to the White Pine Chamber of Commerce and Mines that he would support park legislation only if it

received the unqualified endorsement of Ely mining and cattle interests. In still another effort to deflect responsibility, he asked Secretary Udall to meet with his mining and cattle people to work out a compromise. The secretary refused and remained steadfast behind the Bible bill. Pressure on Baring continued to mount as President Johnson endorsed Bible's plan on February 26, 1966.³⁹ Shortly afterward, Baring tried again to shift blame from himself to others. He charged in the press that Udall had turned down his invitation to negotiate, as had Nevada's two senators, and it was now their duty to carry forward with a Great Basin Park plan.⁴⁰

This was the last straw for Bible. On March 27, 1966, he wrote a stern letter to Baring requesting a meeting of the Nevada delegation to discuss the future of the Great Basin National Park. He told him to be prepared to accept full responsibility for the demise of the park plan. Then he released the letter to the press, which appeared on the front page of the *Ely Daily Times* the next day. In a subsequent editorial, the paper blasted Baring, saying,

Baring has opposed creation of a park since its inception. He blocked the Senate bill of 1962 and then put together what he has attempted to call a compromise bill. Bible has listened long enough to Baring's endless line of excuses. . . Now [Baring] must meet with Senator Bible who has proven he knows how to pass Nevada legislation in Washington.⁴¹

On the day after the editorial appeared, Baring informed Bible that a compromise bill should be drafted that "would not be opposed by the cattlemen, Fish and Wildlife, mining interests, labor interests, and others." ⁴²

To draft such a piece of legislation was clearly impossible, because of the positions taken by the grazing and mining interests in the Ely area. However, during the delay from the first hearings in 1959 to the stalemate in 1966 there was ample time to assess the importance of the park to economic conditions in White Pine County. Exploitation of the controversial beryllium discoveries that were the main focus of the 1959 hearings had failed to materialize. No significant mining activity had occurred in the area of the proposed park. One hundred head of cattle and nine hundred sheep were grazing in the area and could continue to do so under Bible's bill, which recognized existing water rights as well. But the annual hunting and removal of several hundred deer would not be allowed, and, in all likelihood, one ranch that was running forty head of cattle would be put out of business.⁴³ With some sarcasm, Bible accurately summed up the situation: "As support of the Great Basin National Park developed, the region abruptly took a new value, almost overnight it was valuable mineral property. There is no commercial mining then or now, but the area is touted as an area of great potential." ⁴⁴

Finally, on April 19, 1966, the long-awaited meeting between the

Nevada delegation and Secretary of the Interior Udall was held in Senator Bible's office. Congressman Baring appeared to be uninformed. Initially, he blamed defeat of the 1962 park plan on Congressman John Saylor, Republican of Pennsylvania, whom he charged with refusal to vote for park legislation that contained mining and grazing permits. This was startling information to everyone present and of questionable validity, since Congressman Saylor had recently supported park legislation with mining and grazing provisions. Baring then produced a letter from a woman who had written to him opposing the park on nonspecific ground. The letter was relevant to none of the topics under discussion. Baring then recounted his travels in a four-wheel-drive vehicle to the area; he said he saw some mining activity there but supplied no specific facts about mining productivity. Later Bible and Cannon revealed that the area Baring had visited was outside the proposed boundaries of the park. Undaunted, Baring again told Udall that his park bill had been written by various groups. "I have to report to these groups," he said, adding, "I would be deserting my interests and commitments if I took a stand at this minute. I have to speak to them." ⁴⁵

Baring did not waver from his position: A few cattlemen, miners, and hunters would decide the park's fate. At the end of the meeting, he asked Udall to meet again with "his people" to work out a compromise. The secretary declined, while Bible and Cannon were dismayed by the congressman's reluctance to take a stand on the issue. Secretary Udall publicly rejected the Baring plan in October, which killed any chance to create a Great Basin National Park.

Nevada's mining and grazing interests had won. They successfully defended their right to use and exploit two-tenths of one percent of the state's land base, an area that contained little mineral potential and whose main utilitarian application was to supplement the food supply and income of a few ranchers who owned about two thousand head of cattle and sheep. The preservation of the region's scenic beauty—indeed, of the state's most awe-inspiring and attractive features—was thwarted by the same economic interests that had long dominated western land-use policy.

Traditionally, the key to securing national park legislation was proof that the area under consideration was economically worthless. Senator Bible was well aware of this burden and firmly believed that the Wheeler Peak region was as nearly devoid of potential for economic development as any place in the United States. By the 1950s, western mining was a dying industry, but Bible rallied to its aid with numerous proposals to restrict imports and to develop regional production for defense and domestic consumption.⁴⁶ When mining and grazing interests opposed the wilderness proposal of Senator Hubert Humphrey and Congressman Saylor, it was Senator Bible who wrote the key amendment to the Anderson plan to



Hiking in the Great Basin, White Pine County, c. 1920. (C.D. Gallagher Collection, Nevada Historical Society)

include mining exploration and development, along with grazing rights, which enabled the 1964 Wilderness Act to become law. And he included similar provisions in the Great Basin National Park plan.

The unabashed greed of a few mine owners and stock raisers and the duplicity of their congressional spokesman defeated the Great Basin National Park plan and in the process further depressed the economic conditions in White Pine County. Bible and Cannon correctly predicted the economic impact of a national park on the entire region. In its absence, the county's economy and the condition of the land continued to deteriorate. In 1974 the Bureau of Land Management made a study of Nevada rangelands; it showed a continuing process of degradation resulting from over grazing livestock.⁴⁷ In 1978, the Kennecott Copper Mines closed, shattering what was left of prosperity and forcing a devastating decline in population. By 1983, power-plant projects were being proposed for White Pine County to relieve the distress caused by a failed economy.⁴⁸

Little in Nevada had changed by the 1980s. The stranglehold of mining and livestock interests on land-use policy was reinforced by the Sagebrush

Rebellion and President Ronald Reagan's cash-register approach to the environment. In 1985 Nevada was the only state that had failed to pass a wilderness bill as provided for in the national Wilderness Act of 1964. In 1986, more than a decade after Baring's death and Bible's retirement, Nevada finally secured the Great Basin National Park. It consists of 72,000 acres with guaranteed mining and grazing rights. While the park contains many of the attractive features contained in prior proposals, its final form reveals scant evidence that Nevada's two dominant land-use industries have changed their attitudes or have experienced any weakening of their abilities to influence members of Congress.

NOTES

¹ Paul W. Gates and Robert W. Swenson, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, D.C.: Zenger Publishing Co., Inc., 1968), 3, 12, 30. For a detailed account of a farmland policy see John Opie, *The Law of the Land: Two Hundred Years of American Farmland Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

² John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 549, 628.

³ Interview with Alan Bible, 2 February 1988. Interview with Howard Cannon, 25 October 1988.

⁴ Ise, *Our National Park Policy*, 531.

⁵ Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town, 1879-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14, 119. Duane A. Smith, *Mining America: The Industry and the Environment, 1800-1980* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 25.

⁶ Russell R. Elliott, *Nevada's Twentieth-Century Mining Boom: Tonopah, Goldfield, Ely* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1966), 174, 186, 268.

⁷ Smith, *Mining America*, 47. Also see Gary E. Elliott, "A Legacy of Support: Senator Alan Bible and the Nevada Mining Industry," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 31 (Fall 1988): 183-197.

⁸ Nevada, *Bureau of Mines and Geology*. Bulletin #85. Geology and mineral resources of White Pine County, Nevada, Part II, Mineral Resources by Roscoe M. Smith. (Mackay School of Mines, University of Nevada, Reno, 1976), 36, 38, 50, 60, 76, 79.

⁹ Phillip O. Foss, *Politics and Grass: The Administration of Grazing on the Public Domain* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960). This is a valuable and detailed account of the political strategy employed by western livestock interests and their supporters in Congress.

¹⁰ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 46, 61, 82, 157. Limerick disputes the western claim of exploitation of the West by eastern interests and the federal government. The concept of the West as a colonial economy is vigorously challenged, while Gates makes the important point that the West received enormous benefits from the national government through mineral laws, timber removal rights, power sites, reclamation development, and grazing fees.

¹¹ Foss, *Politics and Grass*, 77.

¹² Samuel P. Hayes, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 49.

¹³ William D. Rowley, *U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands: A History* (College Station: Texas A. M. University Press, 1985), 124, 132.

¹⁴ Foss, *Politics and Grass*, 120, 173-176, 202. In 1933 the cost to administer the grazing lands was \$11,700,000 and receipts from grazing fees were \$1,600,000. Fees charged for range use by states and holders of private lands are from 300 to 1,875 percent higher than government rates. Subsidized stock raising was a fact of life. See Gates and Swenson, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 632.

¹⁵ Gates and Swenson, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 618-622.

¹⁶ Gates and Swenson, *Public Land Law Development*, 626-629.

¹⁷ Elliott, "A Legacy of Support," 183-197. Alan Bible to Edgar Brossard, Chairman of the U.S. Tariff Commission, 31 March 1958. Also statement from the office of Senator Bible, 24 March 1960. Alan Bible Papers (hereafter cited as AB Papers), Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Library, Box 124.

¹⁸ U.S., Congress, Senate, *A Bill to Establish the Great Basin National Park in Nevada*, S. 2664, 86th Congress, 1st Session, 1959. U.S., Congress, House, *A Bill to Establish the Great Basin National Park in Nevada*, H.R. 9156, 86th Congress, 1st Session, 1959.

¹⁹ U.S., Congress Senate, *Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee on S. 2664*, 8th Congress, 1st Session, 1959, 220-221.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 228, 230.

²² Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Second edition, Revised, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 48.

²³ Gates and Swenson, *History of Public Land Law Development*, 631

²⁴ U.S., Congress, Senate, *Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee on S. 1760*, 87th Congress, 1st Session, 1961.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

²⁶ Rowley, *U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands*, 233.

²⁷ Statement from the office of Senator Bible "Washington Round-up," January 1962. AB Papers, Box 258.

²⁸ *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 10 April 1964, 9. Also see transcript of meeting among Bible, Cannon, Baring, and Secretary Udall on 19 April 1966, 22. Contained in AB Papers, Box 258.

²⁹ U.S., Department of Interior, National Park Service, *News Release, Great Basin National Park*, March 27, 1964.

³⁰ *Nevada State Journal*, 2 August 1964. *Ely Daily Times*, 10 November 1964.

³¹ *Nevada State Journal*, 15 October 1964. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 10 April 1964. For a detailed account of the problems surrounding Baring and the Southern Nevada Water Project, see Gary E. Elliott, "Senator Alan Bible and the Southern Nevada Water Project, 1954-1971," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 32 (Fall 1989): 181-197.

³² U.S., Congress, Senate, *A Bill to Establish the Great Basin National Park in Nevada*, S. 499, 89th Congress, 1st Session, 1965. Also see U.S., Congress, House, *A Bill to Establish the Great Basin National Park in Nevada*, H.R. 6122, 89th Congress, 1st Session, 1965. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 9 May 1965.

³³ *Ely Daily Times*, 7 July 1965. *Las Vegas Sun*, 9 July 1965.

³⁴ Alan Bible to M. Burrell Bybee, Chairman, National Park Committee, White Pine Chamber of Commerce and Mines, 28 July 1965. AB Papers, Box 258. I am indebted to Eric N. Moody of the Nevada Historical Society for taking time to review the Baring Papers and for providing a guide to their location and use. Reference to the Great Basin National Park is contained in Boxes 7, 11, 14, 19, 25, 26. Many of the file folders contain only a copy of the proposed legislation with no accompanying documents or correspondence. By way of comparison, the Bible Papers appear to be more complete in that the correspondence between and among the parties is substantial. Still, there is a great deal of duplication. Also see the vertical file for correspondence of the Great Basin Range National Park Association, Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Library. In addition, the Richard C. Sill Papers maintained in the Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Library, contain many of the position papers of the Sierra Club. The vertical file and the Sill Papers contain substantial information that corroborates the positions of Walter Baring and Alan Bible expressed in this article. Both the Sierra Club and the Great Basin Range National Park Association supported the park along the lines of the various Bible bills and the Department of the Interior.

³⁵ Walter S. Baring to M. Burrell Bybee, 6 August 1965. AB Papers, Box 258.

³⁶ J.R. Deveraux to Walter S. Baring, 10 August 1965. M. Burrell Bybee to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, 13 August 1965. AB Papers, box 258.

³⁷ Walter S. Baring to Alan Bible, 13 August 1965. AB Papers, Box 258. *Elko Free Press*, 18 August 1965. *Battle Mountain News*, 12 August 1965. *Tonopah Times*, 13 August 1965. *Carson Nevada Appeal*, 11 August 1965.

³⁸ Joint statement from the offices of Senators Alan Bible and Howard Cannon, 1 September 1965, AB Papers, Box 258.

³⁹ Walter S. Baring to Nate E. Bayless, President, White Pine Chamber of Commerce and Mines, 6, January 1966. Stewart Udall to Walter S. Baring, 5 February 1966. Statement from the office of Senator Alan Bible, 26 February 1966, AB Papers, Box 258.

⁴⁰ *Nevada State Journal*, 1 March 1966.

⁴¹ Alan Bible to Walter S. Baring, 27 March 1966, AB Papers, Box 258. *Ely Daily Times*, 28 March 1966, 1; 29 March 1966, 4.

⁴² Walter S. Baring to Alan Bible, 30 March 1966. AB Papers, Box 258.

⁴³ Department of Interior, National Park Services to Alan Bible, 1 April 1966. AB Papers, Box 258.

⁴⁴ Statement from the office of Senator Bible "Washington Round-up," April 1966. AB Papers, Box 99.

⁴⁵ Transcript of meeting between Alan Bible, Howard Cannon, Walter S. Baring, and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, 5, 6, 9, 15, 16, 18, 22, 25, 31, 33. AB Papers. Box 258.

⁴⁶ Michael Malone, "The Collapse of Western Metal Mining: An Historical Epitaph." *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (August 1986): 455-464. Also Elliott, "Legacy of Support," 183-97.

⁴⁷ U.S., Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Effects of Livestock Grazing on Wildlife, Watershed, Recreation and Other Resource Values in Nevada*, February 1975, 21, 22, 38, 46, 49, 50-53, 55, 61. For report on the continued deterioration of rangeland and riparian areas, see U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Rangeland Management: More Emphasis Needed on Declining and Overstocked Grazing Allotments and Public Rangelands: Some Riparian Areas Restored but Widespread Improvement Will Be Slow* (Washington, D.C.: Government Accounting Office, 1988).

⁴⁸ Steve Oulman, "Copper, Cows, Crown Jewels" (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, 1987). U.S., Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *White Pine Power Project: Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Summary*, October 1983, 3, 7, 10. For example, between 1971 and 1980, employment in White Pine County mining industry dropped from 1,090 to 340 persons, and over-all employment dropped from 3,660 in 1971 to 3,280 in 1980. Moreover, adjusted per-capita personal income in 1959 was \$3,109 as compared to \$3,078 in 1970. Governor's Office of Planning Coordination, *Nevada Statistical Abstract* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1981), 53, 55, 63, 147.

FROM LABORER TO ENTREPRENEUR

The Italian-American in Southern Nevada, 1905-1947

Alan Balboni

ITALIAN-AMERICANS HAVE PLAYED an impressive role in the economic development of southern Nevada, especially in light of their relatively small number.¹ The Italians who were settlers in and around Las Vegas adapted to its social and cultural system, some even moving into an upper-middle-class life style within the first generation, while their compatriots in the eastern United States often had to wait until the second or third generation to acquire that status.² Immigrants with an innovative spirit found more opportunities to advance to leadership positions in the Las Vegas townsite, founded in 1905, than did their cousins who lived in the established East Coast and Midwest.

The first Italians in the Las Vegas area, like their Greek, Mexican, and Japanese counterparts, came primarily to work on the railroad or in the mines.³ The 1910 Manuscript Census, not surprisingly, is imperfect in several respects. Nonetheless, one can be confident that men and women of Italian background constituted less than 0.015 percent of the Clark County population in 1910. At the same time, at least 0.035 percent of Nevada's total population was of Italian ancestry.⁴ The Manuscript Census reports Italian laborers living in construction cars along the railroad with laborers of Japanese and Mexican backgrounds. One Italian family of four lived nearby in an area primarily inhabited by Mexican families. The census also contains a reference to Rosa C. Marchetti, age twenty-five, married the nine years she had been in the United States, who was a housekeeper in a hotel. No Italians appear to have lived in the mainly Mormon precincts of Overton, Bunkerville, and Saint Thomas, but there were at least six Italian males among the miners in the Goodsprings and Potosi precincts. With one exception, they immigrated between 1901 and 1905 and were between twenty-six and thirty-eight years of age. Vincent

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Matteuci, his family, and unmarried Italian laborers lived in the Arden precinct, near the gypsum mill.⁵ While Matteuci and at least one of his sons worked in the mill, the family raised fruits and vegetables, some of which they sold in Las Vegas.⁶ In the Nelson and Searchlight precincts, also mining areas, there were at least two individuals of Italian background, one of whom, Victor Troici, was born in New York and held the position of barkeep in a Searchlight saloon.⁷

In any community, tempers may flare, personalities clash, and violence result, but when such incidents occurred among the Italians, the *Las Vegas Age*, the area's only newspaper until 1909, assigned the blame to the volatile nature of these foreigners. Perhaps because virtually all the Italians in these early years were laborers or miners and thus of lower socioeconomic levels, they were easily relegated to the status of ethnic stereotype. In August 1905 an article entitled "Race War" described an altercation among railroad workers:

Three Italians and fifteen Greeks, proteges of the Salt Lake railroad, recently opened hostilities about fifteen miles south of this place. The Italians were worsted in the conflict and to wreck [sic] vengeance had three sons of Greece arrested and brought before the bar of justice.

The case was tried before the justice of the peace last Friday. Judge Brennan was engaged as legal sponsor for the Greeks and Dan V. Noland appeared for the banana sellers, and it is only fair to state that between them they conducted a highly entertaining trial. Justice Ralph, not to be outdone, found both the prosecution and defense guilty of assault and battery, and fined each individual warrior the sum of \$10.00. The judge evidently desires to discourage foreign hostilities on American soil.⁸

A month later another story complained that Italian, Greek, and Austrian railroad laborers, who lived in tents near the Armour Icing Plant, created a terrible nuisance with noisy carousals each evening.⁹ A condescending attitude was present even a decade later as the *Las Vegas Age* reported that "Deputy Sheriff Joe Keats arrested an Italian at Moapa on a charge of attempted murder sworn out by the man's partner. One Italian tried to carve another, but the party assailed, although somewhat injured, got a gun, and put his assailant to the bad." ¹⁰ Even those who had left the ranks of miners and laborers were subject to reinforcement of the volatile Italian stereotype. For example, in 1917 Peter Lorenzo, Tony Andrino's partner in the Miners' Bar at Goodsprings, was fatally stabbed by Peter Piantoni following what the *Las Vegas Age* described as "a drinking bout in which a number of Italians were celebrating the New Year's holiday." ¹¹

In contrast, *Las Vegas Age* correspondents accorded a good deal of respect to Italians who achieved financial success. Foremost among early en-



P.O. Silvagni is shown receiving his deed for the lot on North 2nd Street which he purchased at an auction in the spring of 1948. (*Charles Alpine Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library*)

trepreneurs of Italian ancestry was Domenic Pecetto, who came to Las Vegas in 1905 and had the foresight to open a liquor store in a building he constructed on First Street between Clark and Lewis streets.¹² The liquor business is generally a profitable one, especially when there is a nearby clientele of hardworking and thirsty railroad workers. Since Mr. Pecetto built a twenty-five-room hotel six years later, one may presume that his liquor business proved a good method for amassing the capital necessary for other commercial undertakings.¹³ His investments, which in addition to

the liquor store and hotel included a bar and twenty rental cabins, were reported in southern Nevada's leading newspaper in extremely positive terms, often with reference to Pecetto's contribution to the city's potential as a major commercial center.¹⁴

Another early settler who achieved success was Manuel Champo. Born in Italy, he immigrated in 1903 to Mercur, Utah, to work as a miner, married an Italian woman in Mercur, went back to Italy, and then returned to Mercur before coming to Las Vegas. He stayed only briefly and then moved to Sparks to work in the railroad yard. Several months later, he and his family returned to Las Vegas, where he became a bartender in the Union Hotel, owned by Domenic and Josie Pecetto. His wife was also employed by the Union Hotel, and cooked for thirty or more boarders, most of whom were railroad workers. After several years of tending bar, Champo bought a small ranch at Cow Springs, south of the present Green Valley. Like Matteuci, he raised fruits and vegetables and peddled them in the early mornings in Las Vegas. City residents bought grapes, melons, garlic, asparagus, peppers, and onions from this enterprising businessman, and he was soon able to buy property in Las Vegas.¹⁵

A major flood in the summer of 1921 completely destroyed Champo's fields at Cow Springs, and he never reopened the ranch commercially. Rather, he modified the nature of his contribution to the well-being of Las Vegas residents and visitors by purchasing the Green Lantern Bar on North First Street, close to Block Sixteen, the red-light district. Even though this was during the Prohibition Era, the Green Lantern quite likely dispensed more than fruit juice and soft drinks. In any event, Manuel Champo was successful and subsequently leased the Green Lantern to new operators, who renamed it the Log Cabin. This investment, as well as other properties, continued to produce revenue for several decades.¹⁶

Joe Graglia was another early resident who, responding to the needs of Las Vegas residents and visitors for food, drink, and entertainment, was accorded a position of respect in the community. Certainly, being the brother-in-law of Domenic Pecetto facilitated his rise to prominence in Las Vegas. The 1912 Prosperity Edition of the *Las Vegas Age* identified Graglia as a proprietor, along with Domenic Pecetto, of the Union Hotel and Bar;¹⁷ the two were lavishly praised for their contribution to the community's advancement, with particular attention given to the fact that they had established "a family liquor store, where a large stock of bottled goods, domestic and imported wines and liquors was kept for family trade." ¹⁸

These positive attitudes toward early entrepreneurs of Italian background are particularly noteworthy against the larger background of hostility during and after World War I to immigrants, and especially to those from southern and eastern Europe. Persons of Italian background

were among those apprehended in the raids that United States Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer conducted against subversives, and Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were only the best known of the numerous Italians and Italian-Americans subjected to injustices.¹⁹ The Ku Klux Klan considered Italian-Americans to be among those it deemed unworthy of citizenship, and Italian-Americans who were children in the 1920s can recall cross burnings directed against their families.²⁰

In contrast to events in other parts of the country, when enterprising members of the Las Vegas Italian community were accused of violating the law, they were treated with respect by the press and also by the juries. Charges against Joe Graglia for violation of gambling laws were dropped in 1916, and a year later a jury acquitted Domenic Pecetto of charges that he had received stolen goods from railroad employees.²¹ Neither Graglia nor Pecetto fit the image of poor, confused immigrants, unable to defend themselves in court. Indeed, Pecetto retained a Los Angeles lawyer in addition to attorney Thomas Ham.²² Vincent Matteuci's first and only conflict with the law came, as it did for many southern Nevadans, during Prohibition. As he owned and operated a Las Vegas saloon, it should not be surprising that he continued to satisfy the thirst of his clients without regard to the Volstead Act. He was found guilty and given a mild sentence, but during the trial Matteuci demonstrated both a knowledge of court procedure and, by laying aside his fine command of English from time to time and lapsing into Italian, a well-tuned sense of humor. Sympathetic court watchers regarded his trial as quite an entertaining production.²³

Another major figure among those of Italian name who made early contributions to Clark County's development was D.G. Lorenzi.²⁴ He operated several businesses, sometimes simultaneously, during the two decades he lived in the Las Vegas area. His most lasting contribution resulted from his 1914 discovery of underground water just north of Las Vegas.²⁵ Trained as a stonemason, he tapped this source to create two artificial lakes, and under his management they became major recreation areas during the 1920s and 1930s. Native Las Vegans recall the popularity of Twin Lakes, especially since summers were then endured without air conditioners.²⁶ Lorenzi's other business endeavors included a confectionery shop opened soon after he arrived in Las Vegas in 1913, a grocery store established in 1919, a coal-and-wood yard commenced in 1927, and a gold mine acquired the same year.²⁷ He was the first Las Vegan of Italian surname to seek a Clark County Commission seat, and received 154 of 1,333 votes cast in the 1920 election.²⁸

Al Corradetti was more successful in his quest for public office. He came to Las Vegas in 1916 to work in the Troy Steam Laundry and Cleaning Works. A newspaper report describes him as "an experienced man in this line of business and thoroughly acquainted with the most

modern methods in use in the larger city establishments. " ²⁹ Successful in this and other business ventures, Al Corradetti was always praised by the press. He became a citizen of the United States in 1923, was called to jury duty the next year, entered local politics soon thereafter, and was appointed a city commissioner to fill a vacancy in 1938.³⁰ Corradetti was re-elected several times, serving on the City Commission through the end of the next decade. Unlike most other successful Italian-Americans, Corradetti was not directly involved with the liquor, food, or hotel business.

Construction of Boulder Dam began in 1931; it stimulated the Las Vegas economy and provided Italian-Americans, as well as other citizens, with expanded opportunities for jobs and investments. In addition, two 1931 changes in Nevada law opened other opportunities: The first lowered the residency period required for a divorce from three months to six weeks and the second returned legalized gambling to the state.³¹ While both changes initially affected Reno more than Las Vegas, 1931 marked a turning point in southern Nevada history.

The legal changes and the influx of several thousand construction workers brought to Las Vegas the new Italian-American entrepreneurs who would later replace Joe Graglia and Domenic Pecetto as leaders in the business community. Joe Graglia had built the National Hotel in 1923 and, with his wife Francesca and son John, he managed it until his death in 1934.³² Active in several fraternal and civic organizations, he was eulogized in a front-page obituary as " a man of fine character and the highest integrity. " ³³ At the time of his former partner's death, Domenic Pecetto was no longer in Las Vegas; he had leased the Union Hotel to his wife's brother, John Vinassa, and moved to California.³⁴

Most prominent among the new entrepreneurs were the Ronzone, Cornero, and Silvagni families. Rapidly declining silver prices brought Attilio Benjamin Ronzone and his wife to Las Vegas in 1929. Leaving their general store in Tonopah, they opened a clothing store in the hope that prosperity would flow from the construction of Boulder Dam. The new store quickly attracted a large clientele and later became the premier department store in southern Nevada.³⁵ Attilio Ronzone died in 1938, but his son Richard later played a major role not only in the management of the store, which was sold to the Dayton-Hudson (Diamond's) Corporation in 1969 and then to the Dillard's Corporation, but also in the over-all expansion of business in Las Vegas. He served first as president of the Chamber of Commerce, and later in a variety of elective offices including seats on the Clark County School Board, University of Nevada Board of Regents, Nevada Assembly, and Clark County Commission.³⁶

While the Ronzone family's entrepreneurship was of a conventional nature, the Cornero brothers, Frank, Louis, and Tony, engendered con-

troverly as they organized and operated their businesses. Having accumulated capital and expertise as bootleggers and gamblers in California, Frank and Louis saw the opportunities for profit in supplying liquor and prostitutes to the men working on Boulder Dam. When gambling was legalized in March 1931, they decided to focus their talents in this area.³⁷ The Cornero brothers employed a variety of local tradesmen to construct the first legal hotel/casino in Las Vegas, greatly boosting the local economy thereby. Local business and civic leaders expressed their appreciation in a special ten-page section of the *Las Vegas Age*. In promotional fashion, the casino was described as follows:

Potent in its charm, mysterious in its fascination, the Meadows, America's most luxurious casino, will open its doors tonight and formally embark upon a career which all liberal-minded persons in the West will watch closely.³⁸

Apparently the Meadows, located about a mile east of Fremont Street, was not profitable enough for the Cornero brothers. Two months after the opening, they sold the twenty-five room hotel to Alex Richmond, a southern California hotel owner and builder, but retained the casino and ballroom.³⁹ In February 1932 the Corneros leased the casino (for \$5,000 per year) to three associates, including Guido Marchetti, "better known to his many Las Vegas friends as 'one hand Hogan.'" ⁴⁰ While the Meadows was for several years the center of social activity in the Las Vegas community, and eventually became an exclusive house of prostitution, it never became a gambling mecca. A third brother, Tony, was not discouraged by his brothers' lack of success. As discussed below, he later attempted to invest in Las Vegas some of the very substantial profits from his high-seas gambling operation off the California coast.⁴¹

The contribution of the Silvagni family to Clark County's growth was more consistent than that of the Cornero brothers, but not as conventional as that of the Ronzones. Pietro Orlando Silvagni, known as "P.O.," came to Las Vegas in 1929. He had been a successful contractor in Carbon County, Utah, an area with a substantial Italian settlement. When the Depression caused a decline in Utah construction, Silvagni came to Las Vegas to obtain some of the initial construction contracts for Boulder Dam. Quickly recognizing the potential profit represented by the drinking, eating, and entertainment requirements of the thousands of construction workers soon to come to the Las Vegas area, he invested his capital, and that of many others, in a prime piece of real estate at the corner of Second and Fremont streets. There he built the Apache Hotel.⁴² The construction of the city's first hotel with elevators and air conditioning left Silvagni without liquid assets, so he leased the hotel to a group of Los Angeles and

Yuma investors headed by Robert and Matilda Russell.⁴³ The press enthusiastically greeted the grand opening of the Apache Hotel in March 1932, giving particular attention to its several shops, including a drugstore, barbershop, and ladies'-wear store.⁴⁴ Soon after receiving a gaming license, Silvagni opened the Pache Club Garden, which featured casual ballroom dancing. The Pache Club Garden, like the casino, bars, and restaurant of the hotel, attracted both southern Nevada natives and tourists, in particular the many women who wished to take advantage of Nevada's liberal residence rules for divorce.⁴⁵

In the Italian tradition, Mr. Silvagni, a strong-willed man, always maintained strong family ties. When his daughter Lena married Roberto Testolin, an Italian-American from Wyoming who began his career as a bootlegger during Prohibition and then bought the Cinnibar and Mission bars near the present location of the Golden Nugget Hotel, Silvagni brought him into the management of the Apache Hotel. He also encouraged his sister Philomena and her family to leave the depressed economy of New Jersey and relocate in Las Vegas. In 1940 Philomena Mirabelli, her husband Carmine, and several of their children arrived in Las Vegas from Newark. As Mirabellis had once resided in Carbon County, Utah, they adapted quickly to life in Las Vegas. Carmine ("Pop") Mirabelli worked as a tailor at Gates Cleaners in the center of Las Vegas, and one of his sons, Dante, became a custodian at the Apache Hotel. Two other sons, Phil, who came with the family in 1940, and Mike, who arrived in Las Vegas after World War II, later held elective office. Phil served as a city commissioner in the 1960s, and Mike, who moved to Washoe County after teaching in Las Vegas, was Nevada's state treasurer from 1963 through 1978.⁴⁶

The Italian-American population in southern Nevada substantially increased during the construction of the dam and through the end of World War II.⁴⁷ The Ronzones, Corneros, and Silvagnis were the most significant Italian-American contributors to southern Nevada's growth before World War II, but they were not the only ones. During the 1930s and 1940s, Italians opened and operated restaurants, taverns, liquor stores, butcher shops, grocery stores, barbershops, repair shops, and plumbing and heating companies. Others continued to work in a variety of occupations for the Union Pacific Railroad.⁴⁸

Two California families, the Barozzis of Los Angeles and the Peccoles of Stockton, sought business opportunities in Las Vegas in 1931. While they lacked the access to capital of Attilio Ronzone, the Corneros, and P.O. Silvagni, they established small businesses, bought inexpensive properties, and gradually gained substantial real estate. Anna and Angelo Barozzi had previously operated small businesses in several different states before coming to Las Vegas. They bought a small piece of property on the corner



Pair O' Dice Nite Club, owned by Joe Graglia and Frank Detra, was the first nightclub on the L.A. Highway. (*Horden-Graglia Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library*)

of North Second and Stewart streets and opened the Roma Cafe, the first of many Italian restaurants later established. In 1934 they purchased several nearby apartments when Joe Santini, the owner, died without heirs in this country. Having great faith in the potential of Las Vegas, the Barozzis immediately reinvested the profits from both the restaurant and the rental of the cabins. They bought additional property, particularly in the area where many black Las Vegans lived in the 1930s and 1940s, on the northwest side of Second and Stewart streets (where the Casino Boulevard freeway off-ramp is currently located), as well as in the areas where the California Hotel and Binion's Horseshoe Casino parking garage now stand. Their son, Aldo, in addition to assisting with the management of the Barozzi family properties, became a highly regarded public servant, serving almost thirty years in the Water Department in a variety of engineering positions, including acting general manager.⁴⁹

Peter Peccole was a friend of Angelo Barozzi, and soon after arriving in Las Vegas he bought property and opened a bar on South First Street. He,

too, invested in property, initially in less substantial buildings in the poorer sections of the city. He then reinvested in more valuable residential and commercial buildings. His sons, Robert and William, carried on the tradition of financial success, the former as a casino executive, and the latter first as owner of an insurance company and later as a prominent real estate developer. William also won a seat on the Las Vegas City Commission in the 1950s.⁵⁰

Andrew Petitti, an Italian-American friend of both the Barozzis and Peter Peccole, left the depressed economy of Carbon County, Utah, for Clark County in 1932. After working at several different jobs, including dealing at clubs in Las Vegas and along the road to Boulder Dam, he was hired by Peter Peccole to tend bar at the Exchange Club. Petitti, like many other Italian-Americans, wanted to establish his own business. He soon leased the Hofbrau Bar, located across the street from the Exchange Club, and eventually bought property at public auction in 1942 when the owner committed suicide.⁵¹ His son Jack achieved fame in Las Vegas in the late 1930s as an outstanding high school and college football player. After World War II Jack joined Dick Ronzone, Phil Mirabelli, and William Peccole as a successful Italian-American politician. He won a seat on the Clark County School Board in 1950, and later was elected to the North Las Vegas City council and the Clark County Commission.⁵²

By the time that the United States became involved in World War II, Italian-Americans were playing an impressive role in the economy, of southern Nevada, despite their meager numbers. John Vinassa managed the Union Hotel, John Graglia operated the National Hotel, P.O. Silvagni owned the area's finest hotel and meeting place, Anna and Angelo Barozzi and Pete Peccole were major property owners and Al Corradetti was a senior member of the City Commission, having served a term as police commissioner. In addition, John DeLuca who later played a major role in Las Vegas's growth, had left his executive position with Acme Brewery in Los Angeles and entered into partnership with J.T. Watters, a long-time liquor wholesaler. DeLuca recognized Las Vegas's potential for becoming a major entertainment center, near to southern California's mild climate as well as to the employment opportunities in defense industries. DeLuca soon bought J.T. Watter's share of the business and established DeLuca Importing Company in 1944. The next year he leased a fireproof building with 4,000 square feet of floor space located on a railroad spur track. He sponsored an open house and inspection of the facilities in October 1951.⁵³

Subsequently, DeLuca became a partner with Pat Clark, owner of Nevada Beverage Company, the other major liquor distributor in southern Nevada during World War II; in 1951, he purchased Clark's share and emerged as the dominant liquor wholesaler in the burgeoning Las Vegas market. He moved quickly to gain long-term franchise rights from such

major liquor producers as Seagrams, Cutty Sark and Hiram Walker. As the resort industry rapidly expanded following Bugsy Siegel's establishment of the Flamingo Hotel in 1947, DeLuca prospered. Like many of his wealthy Las Vegas contemporaries, John DeLuca became involved in philanthropic and civic undertakings, particularly so in the decade preceding his death in 1960. His contributions publicly were appreciated by Clark County's Jewish-American and Italian-American communities: B'nai B'rith awarded him the Man of the Year citation several times, and the first formal organization promoting Italian-American social relationships was named the John DeLuca Italian-American Club.⁵⁴

While Tony Cornero's high-seas gambling operations and many disputes with California legal authorities, especially Attorney-General Earl Warren, drew southern Nevada newspaper readers during the late 1930s, the City Commission disliked his efforts to become Silvagni's not-so-silent partner in 1944. Cornero planned to establish the S.S. *Rex* casino (named after the gambling barge that he anchored off the Santa Monica coast) in Silvagni's Apache Hotel; but when the commission met to consider Silvagni's application for a gaming license, Mayor E.W. Cragin charged that there had been "considerable conniving going on among commissioners." ⁵⁵ Perhaps to rebut the inference that money had changed hands, they voted 3 to 2 to deny a license to P.O. Silvagni. Al Corradetti explained his stand:

I would like to see Pio Silvagni clean house. It is our business to see that we know who is going to run this place for Silvagni. I don't want Bugsy Siegel and people of his stripe in here, and, until I know who is going to run Silvagni's place, I'll vote against the license.⁵⁶

Two weeks later Silvagni convinced Al Corradetti and two colleagues of his integrity, and he received his gambling license three days before Christmas.⁵⁷

There is irony in the continuing story of the city fathers' concern about Tony Cornero. Six months later Silvagni was again accused of cooperating with Cornero in the operation of the S.S. *Rex* casino.⁵⁸ Threatened with loss of license, Silvagni completely severed connections with him and leased the casino, renamed the Rex Club, to Dr. Marty Bernstein, a Los Angeles physician, in February 1946.⁵⁹ But three months later, a quarter-page advertisement in the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* announced that Moe Sedway was manager of the Rex Club.⁶⁰ Sedway was widely reputed to be Bugsy Siegel's advance man in Las Vegas.⁶¹

Rebuffed by Las Vegas, Tony Cornero bought a bigger ship, the S.S. *Lux*, and, in partnership with Wilbur Clark, continued high-seas gambling off the California coast.⁶² Returning to Las Vegas in the early 1950s, he

played a major role in the construction of the Stardust Hotel until his death in 1955.⁶³

The opening of the Flamingo Hotel in 1947 marked the beginning of a new era in Las Vegas history. While Thomas Hull, a prominent California hotel owner, and D.C. Griffith, a theatre magnate, had built elegant dude ranches on what was to become The Strip, Bugsy Siegel's luxurious resort transformed the Las Vegas image. No longer a desert oasis with gambling, it had become a glamorous land of adult entertainments.⁶⁴ Rapid expansion of the Las Vegas resort industry brought an influx of Italian-Americans and other ethnic groups from cities such as New York, Buffalo, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Steubenville, Kansas City, Chicago, New Orleans and Newport, Kentucky.⁶⁵ Their contributions to the economic development of Clark County would be no less substantial than those of earlier settlers, but of a different nature.

In summary, the early entrepreneurs of Italian ancestry—most notably Domenic Pecetto, Manuel Champo, Joe Graglia, Victor Matteuci, D.G. Lorenzi, and Al Corradetti—invested their energy and modest finances in Las Vegas, a dot in the Mojave desert distinguished only by natural springs and a railroad repair yard and rest stop. These pioneers and those who followed—particularly Attilio Ronzone, the Cornero brothers, Peter Peccole, Angelo and Anna Barozzi, P.O. Silvagni, John DeLuca—invested in this thinly populated area whose long-term potential was evaluated inaccurately by most of their contemporaries.

Why is it that these Italian-Americans, whose number was always small (less than one percent of the southern Nevada population from 1924 through 1947), played such significant roles in the growth of this area? While not discounting ability and diligence, it is true that a new desert city in an underpopulated state was conducive to the rapid economic and social advancement of immigrants in ways that the well-established cities of the East, with their many ethnic ghettos, were not. The frontier environment was by no means free of ethnic prejudice, of course, and hostility to Asian immigrants often erupted into mob violence. However, the boom-and-bust economy of many western states, and especially Nevada, precluded development of rigid social structures. While migrants to the West might well face bias, as did the Italian-Americans in southern Nevada through World War I, opportunities abounded for those with even modest capital or skills because both money and knowledge were in short supply. Success in business enterprises often led to leadership in civic life.

The rapid integration of the Italian-Americans into the Las Vegas community was facilitated by their sparse number. In contrast to many cities in the East, Las Vegas had no distinctively Italian neighborhood and, unlike other western cities such as Reno/Sparks, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where there are more Italian-Americans, it had no Italian-language



The interior of the Union Hotel with Joe Graglia as bartender. (*Horden-Graglia Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library*)

newspapers or radio programs, and no Italian cultural or social organizations.⁶⁶ Indeed, there were so few of Italian stock that the children of the pioneers most often married members of other ethnic groups. Their East Coast counterparts, on the other hand, usually married other Italian-Americans. While inner city Italian neighborhoods provided immigrants with a secure and familiar environment, too often they also isolated Italian immigrants, their children, and grandchildren from the customs and values of the larger society, reproducing the social system of a particular region of rural Italy. Italian-Americans of the Las Vegas area avoided this as well as the calls of Italian cultural organizations to reaffirm Italian values among second- and third-generation Italian-Americans.⁶⁷ They applied their energies and talents to economic and social advancement, rather than to preserving remnants of the past.

Southern Nevada offered Italian-American entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century unequalled opportunities for financial success and community leadership.⁶⁸ Their innate ability, unyielding drive for success, and strong tolerance for risk taking enabled them to adapt quickly to the new

desert society. Although few in number, they played a decisive role in southern Nevada's economic development.

NOTES

¹ Like others who have written about Italian-American in the western United States, I have included individuals who emigrated from Switzerland's Italian-speaking cantons. The same approach is taken by Albin J. Cofone, "Reno's Little Italy: Italian Entrepreneurship and Culture in Northern Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 26 (Summer 1983): 97-110 and "Themes in the Italian Settlement of Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 25 (Summer 1982): 116-132.

² Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: The Free Press, 1962) is probably the foremost of several sociological studies of Italian-American communities of the East Coast or Midwest showing the slow movement to complete assimilation and middle-class status. Richard D. Alba, *Italian American: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), also discusses this phenomenon.

³ Payroll and Labor Distribution files of San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad Company. Special Collections Department, Dickinson Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

⁴ *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 Abstract of the Census with a Supplement for Nevada* (Washington, D.C. 1913), 208-209, and 580-595.

⁵ 1910 Manuscript Census on microfilm at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Government Documents collection.

⁶ *Las Vegas Age*, 11 May 1907: 8.

⁷ 1910 Manuscript Census.

⁸ *Las Vegas Age*, 8 August 1905: 4.

⁹ *Las Vegas Age*, 23 September 1905: 4.

¹⁰ *Las Vegas Age*, 31 July 1915: 2.

¹¹ *Las Vegas Age*, 6 January 1917: 1.

¹² *Las Vegas Age*, 10 June 1905: 1.

¹³ *Las Vegas Age*, 1 April 1911: 1.

¹⁴ *Las Vegas Age*, 10 June 1905 and 1 April 1911. The *Las Vegas Age* was the only newspaper in southern Nevada until the establishment of the *Clark County Review* in 1909.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Patrick, "The Champos: An Italian Family Rose to Prosperity in 1920's Las Vegas," *The Nevadan*, 27 March 1982: 6-7.

¹⁶ Interview with Stella Iaconis (née Champo).

¹⁷ Pop Squires, publisher and editor of the *Las Vegas Age*, was a great booster of the city's potential for growth.

¹⁸ *Las Vegas Age*, 15 August 1912:2.

¹⁹ Stephen Thernstrom, *A History of the American People*, Volume Two (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, Inc., 1984), 554-560, is one of many sources of information on these subjects.

²⁰ Interviews with Richard Ronzone and Jack Petitti.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1916:1; 6 October 1917:2.

²² *Ibid.*, 29 September 1917:2.

²³ Roy Chesson, "The Man Who Settled the Dust with Wine," *The Nevadan* 8 (June 1967):26-27. See also *Las Vegas Age*, 30 December 1922:1.

²⁴ D.G. Lorenzi's daughter, Mrs. Louise Fountain, informed me that her father came from an area of France close to the Italian border and did not consider himself Italian, stressing rather the fact that his family members were cousins of the Grimaldis, Monaco's ruling family. Since Mr. Lorenzi was rather widely considered to be of Italian background, I have included him in this study.

- ²⁵ *Las Vegas Age*, 10 January 1914:3.
- ²⁶ Interviews with Richard Ronzone and Jack Petitti.
- ²⁷ *The Nevadan* 18 (June 1967):26-27. See also *Las Vegas Age*, 30 December 1922:1.
- ²⁸ *The Nevadan*, 6 November 1920:1.
- ²⁹ *Las Vegas Age*, 15 January 1916:1.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 21 April 1923:1.; 16 August 1924:1; 27 August 1931:6; and 22 July 1938:1.
- ³¹ Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 277-278.
- ³² *Las Vegas Age*, 21 February 1929:1.
- ³³ *Las Vegas Age*, 23 March 1934:1.
- ³⁴ *Las Vegas Age*, 19 January 1929:1 and 24 February 1944:5. Additional information on John Vinassa is available in *Las Vegas Age*, 5 April 5, 1932, 6 and 7 February 1939, 2.
- ³⁵ Interview with Richard Ronzone, 10 January 1989.
- ³⁶ *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 20 February 1951:1, and interview with Richard Ronzone.
- ³⁷ *Las Vegas Evening Review Journal and Boulder City Journal*, 10 February 1948:2.
- ³⁸ *Las Vegas Age*, 3 May 1931, ten-page section devoted to Meadows Casino.
- ³⁹ *Las Vegas Age*, 1 July 1931:1.
- ⁴⁰ *Las Vegas Age*, 28 February 1932:4.
- ⁴¹ *Las Vegas Evening Review Journal and Boulder City Journal*, 10 February 1948:2. Information on Tony Cornero's California activities are found in the *Las Vegas Evening Review Journal*, 22 July 1938, 4 and 8 September 1938:1.
- ⁴² Interviews with Phil Mirabelli and Olga Moe (née Silvagni). See also Papanikolas (ed.), *op. cit.*, 311 for information about the Italian community in Carbon County.
- ⁴³ Interview with Olga Moe.
- ⁴⁴ *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal*, 8 March 1932, 1 and 18 March 1932, 1.
- ⁴⁵ *Las Vegas Age*, 9 September 1933 and interviews with Olga Moe and Guido Testolin.
- ⁴⁶ Interviews with Phil Mirabelli, Olga Moe, and Guido Testolin.
- ⁴⁷ A comparison of published lists of Clark County voters in 1924 and in 1936 shows that the growth in the number of voters with Italian surnames, while substantial, did not appear to keep pace with the over-all population growth. By 1936 Italian-Americans appear to have comprised less than 0.01 percent of the Clark County population. The lists were published in the *Las Vegas Age* of 4 November 1924, 12-15 and 30 October 1936, 14 pages. All interviewees who lived in Clark County in the 1930s recall only a small number of Italian-Americans.
- ⁴⁸ Telephone directories for 1926, 1931-1936, and *Directory of Las Vegas and Vicinity*, 1943-44, Special Collections Department, Dickinson Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
- ⁴⁹ Interview with Mary Jean Barozzi and *Las Vegas Sun*, 30 January 1989, obituary of Aldo Barozzi.
- ⁵⁰ Interviews with Mary Barozzi, Philip Mirabelli, and Stella Iaconis. See also *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* and the *Boulder City Journal*, 22 February 1946, 12 and 20 March 1946, 8 for more specific information on Peter Peccole's real-estate holdings.
- ⁵¹ Interview with Jack Petitti.
- ⁵² County Political Directory for Nevada, Clark County, Nevada Historical Society, Reno Nevada.
- ⁵³ Interview with Linda Isola (née DeLuca). See also *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* and *Boulder City Journal*, 11 July 1944, 2 and 25 October 1945, 6, for more specific information on business transactions.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Linda Isola. Groups of Italian-Americans had met informally before the club was formed in the 1950s.
- ⁵⁵ *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* and the *Boulder City Journal* (hereafter cited as *RJ* and *BCJ*), 7 December 1944:1.
- ⁵⁶ *RJ* and *BCJ*, 8 December 1944:3.
- ⁵⁷ *RJ* and *BCJ*, 22 December 1944:3.

⁵⁸ *RJ* and *BCJ*, 30 June 1945:1.

⁵⁹ *RJ* and *BCJ*, 7 February 1946:1.

⁶⁰ *RJ* and *BCJ*, 2 May 1946:12.

⁶¹ Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle* (New York: Trident Press, 1963), 12-13.

⁶² *RJ* and *BCJ*, 5 August 1946:1.

⁶³ George Stamos, "The Great Resorts of Las Vegas: How They Began," *Las Vegas Sun Magazine*, 9 (September 1979): 6.

⁶⁴ Eugene P. Moehring, "Suburban Resorts and the Triumph of Las Vegas," *Halcyon* 10 (1988): 207-208, discusses the uniqueness of Bugsy Siegel's Flamingo Hotel.

⁶⁵ Interviews with the Reverend Caesar Caviglia, the Reverend Benjamin Franzinelli, and Guido Testolin.

⁶⁶ Interviews with Stella Iaconis, Olga Moe, Phil Mirabelli, and Guido Testolin.

⁶⁷ The confining nature of life in Italian neighborhoods is discussed thoroughly in Gans, *loc. cit.* and Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974) and Cofone, "Reno's Little Italy: Italian Entrepreneurship and Culture in Northern Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 26 (Summer 1983): 108-109.

⁶⁸ Wilbur Shepperson, *Restless Strangers* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1970) 7, 110, discusses the relative success of Italian-Americans, and more specific discussion of the advancement of Italian-Americans to the middle and upper classes is found in Cofone, *loc. cit.*

SOUTHERN NEVADA AND THE LEGACY OF BASIC MAGNESIUM, INCORPORATED

William T. Dobbs

IN 1936 ANOTHER WORLD WAR seemed unthinkable. Americans still struggled with the hardships of the Depression; finding their bread was far more important to them than searching out trouble in far off Europe and Asia. The Olympics in Berlin that year did make a marvelous spectacle, and visiting American businessmen praised the orderliness, discipline, and loyalty of the German people. But world events of the five succeeding years, culminating for Americans in the shock of Pearl Harbor, were to shatter all such complacency. In the meantime, there was business at home to attend to. For the state of Nevada, 1936 marked the completion of Boulder Dam. In retrospect, the activities of an obscure businessman from Cleveland were also of extraordinary importance: Howard Eells, a maker of blast-furnace bricks, began that year to stake mining claims in northwest Nye County, Nevada. He had found extensive magnesite deposits, the raw material necessary to build furnace bricks. But magnesium metal is also made from magnesite, and Eells's Nye County find was one of the world's richest deposits. In the next few years, this source of mineral wealth proved both significant for America's wartime production and vital to Nevada's economy.¹

By the end of May 1940, with the stunning German victories in Europe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt found Congress receptive to his warning about "the grave danger to democratic institutions." Congress swiftly approved his request of funds for greatly expanded production of war materiel, including the manufacture of fifty thousand military aircraft per year, eighteen times more than the number then in service throughout the entire country. As time went on, both federal spending and the production of armaments and other strategic goods soared. Western America, with its vast undeveloped lands, natural resources, and proximity to the Pacific Ocean, received a tremendous infusion of the federal capital.

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Seemingly overnight, new populations, new factories, and new military installations sprang up in the West. As Gerald Nash points out, the resulting economic boom released latent productive forces that converted the area from backwardness into "the pace setting region of the nation." The dusty little town of Las Vegas, in sparsely populated Nevada, shared in this transformation. Wartime production of magnesium, a metal two-thirds the weight of aluminum, and important for aircraft production, was to play a pivotal role in developing this remote town into a renowned tourist resort.²

At the hands of German bombers, the British became well acquainted with the destructive power of modern aircraft. Magnesium incorporated into the structure of airplanes increased speed and maneuverability; incendiary bombs, flares, and tracer bullets of magnesium could be part of the airborne arsenal. It was, of course, important for the British to maintain their production of this strategic metal. One of their producers, Magnesium Elektron, Inc. (MEL), explored the possibility of building a plant in Canada, far from the range of the *Luftwaffe*. Through his Canadian affiliate, Eells learned about the plans of MEL, and set about persuading the company to build in America instead. By April of 1941, he had a partnership agreement. The new venture, called Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI), was to be located near Las Vegas, Nevada. Basic Refractories, Incorporated,³ Eells's firm, could provide a virtually endless supply of magnesite, while MEL furnished plant designs and production expertise. Eells managed BMI on behalf of the Defense Plant Corporation (DPC), which paid for the construction of buildings, equipment, housing, and utilities for this massive project, soon to be the most productive magnesium factory in the world.⁴

As Las Vegas entered the 1940s, it was nothing like the resort city we know today; only 8,500 people lived there. At first glance, this was an unlikely site for a federal project to build the world's largest magnesium factory—near a small desert town that seemed, besides a railroad depot, to offer little more than oppressive heat, abundant dust, and legalized gambling and prostitution. But near Las Vegas stood Boulder Dam, and it was Boulder Dam that made BMI possible. Although federal officials had conferred a great benefit upon Las Vegas by building the dam, they had little love for what Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes called an "ugly, rotten little town." Ickes forbade housing of dam workers in Las Vegas, and instead built the federal reservation of Boulder City. His department explained that rather than "a boisterous frontier town it is hoped that here simple homes, gardens with fruit and flowers, schools and playgrounds, will make [Boulder City] a wholesome American community." Despite the high moral aspirations, Boulder City could neither accommodate the influx of dam workers and their families nor match the recreational appeal of unsavory Las Vegas gambling. As a result, Las Vegas businesses for several

years enjoyed a prosperity brought by the dam workers, and when the dam was completed in 1936, these customers were sorely missed.⁵

Although completion of Boulder Dam eliminated the construction-worker clientele, it also provided a ready-made advertising theme. Las Vegas would henceforth proudly promote itself as “ the gateway to Boulder Dam. ” In 1938, Las Vegas attracted visits from 75 percent of those who came to see the dam; the next year, more than 85 percent of the 630,000 dam visitors made the trip. Las Vegas’s prewar businessmen, however, still failed to catch the real vision of their city’s future. In 1939, the city’s six gambling clubs were still clustered near the railroad station. There was no hotel-casino, and gamblers who wished to stay overnight had to seek lodging in ordinary hotels or automobile courts. Las Vegas did not yet realize that their town could be the main attraction, rather than a sidelight to the dam⁶

Wartime economic development eventually transformed Las Vegas into a true resort city. It was a sign of coming prosperity when, late in 1940, the federal government agreed to build the Las Vegas Gunnery School (later called Nellis Air Force Base), to be located six miles north of the city. By February of 1941 the facility already housed 2,000 men, and in the years to come thousands more recruits passed through its doors. During the war, soldiers on leave from their Mojave Desert stations, or those traveling by railroad to bases in California, also swelled the ranks of customers in the gambling clubs of Las Vegas. The Basic Magnesium plant, however, pumped more money into Las Vegas than anything else. McNeil Construction Company workers began clearing the BMI plant site, about fifteen miles from both Las Vegas and Boulder City, on September 15, 1941. At the end of December 2,700 men were laboring in the desert, and by the following March the figure had soared to 9,700. With paychecks said to total about \$1 million per week at the peak of employment, this new business clientele gave Las Vegas a tremendous economic shot in the arm.⁷

But BMI was destined not only to energize the Las Vegas economy: It also permanently altered the city’s racial character. In 1940, only 165 of the 664 blacks who lived in the state of Nevada resided in Las Vegas. By mid-June of 1942, however, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported that 2,000 black defence workers had streamed into the city “ in the past few weeks, ” with more expected soon. Wartime manpower shortages and difficult working conditions that caused a high rate of turnover prompted BMI’s management to make a special effort to recruit blacks. These immigrants came hoping for better living and working conditions, and in southern Nevada they found both increased economic opportunity and the racial discrimination characteristic of the era. The mass influx of blacks did more than simply provide employees for a large wartime manufactur-



Aerial view, south, demountable townsite, showing various stages of construction, 1942. (Howard Eells (BMI) Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)

ing plant: It also posed the question of how these new neighbors, white and black, intended to treat each other. The answer to that question has been an important part of Las Vegas history ever since. In the pages that follow we will therefore comment from time to time about the conditions faced by BMI's black employees.⁸

Before BMI could even contemplate recruiting employees, black or white, there were hard decisions to be made. Eell's decision to locate the plant in southern Nevada was eminently practical. Las Vegas, easily accessible by railroad and highway, could conveniently serve as a world wide entrepôt, yet was also safe from enemy bombers. The trip from the mineral processing center in Gabbs, Nevada, was only 300 miles, and Boulder Dam stood near Las Vegas, ready to furnish abundant water and power.

But where, exactly, in the vicinity of Las Vegas should BMI build its facilities? Waste disposal, prevailing winds, and topography all entered into this decision. Furnishing adequate housing for a large work force proved an even knottier problem. In late July of 1941, J.D. Platt, Eells's assistant, met federal officials in Las Vegas to survey possible housing and plant site locations. They decided that both Boulder City and Las Vegas were unsuitable, because neither could furnish the schools, sanitation and water required by the expected population increase. And perhaps most important, especially in view of the government's decision not to house dam workers in Las Vegas, federal officials warned Platt "that Las Vegas would be very undesirable as a homesite for an industrial population due to wide open conditions—booze, gambling, and brothels." Instead, Eells and the government decided to put the plant midway between Boulder City and Las Vegas, and build a one-thousand-home town (Basic Townsite) and a five-hundred unit apartment complex (Victory Village). They thereby created what ultimately became the city of Henderson.⁹

However much federal officials might disapprove of Las Vegas, BMI's workers could not fulfill their basic needs without it. By July of 1942, a scant ten months after bulldozers began clearing ground to build the plant, a project high of 13,000 men toiled in the desert, more than two and a half times the largest number that had been employed at one time on the Boulder Dam project. There was no sewer system (work on it having only begun that month), and men slept in tents, mock-up shanties, and under the stars. The BMI workers, even more than the dam workers before them, flocked to Las Vegas in search of housing, groceries, clothing, and recreation. It took so long to build adequate facilities at the new town that most workers initially chose to live in Las Vegas anyway, for all the federal government's disapproval.¹⁰

BMI workers—whether residents of Basic Townsite, Las Vegas, or roadside shanties—did their shopping in Las Vegas. The crowded roads, shops, saloons, trailer parks, and swelling population are evidence that much of BMI's payroll found its way into Las Vegas cash registers. By November of 1944, when BMI ceased magnesium production, the Las Vegas business community had profited immensely. For southern Nevada, however, the most significant effect of the project came in the postwar years. Las Vegas businessmen learned that gambling could be big business, and have promoted it ever since.¹¹

But before Las Vegas casinos could take in a penny from the project, Eells had to persuade the United States government to make a substantial capital investment in his brainchild. This he succeeded in doing: The DPC sank \$130 million into the project. These funds made BMI a reality. They brought power lines from Boulder Dam, delivering more electricity than the combined total consumed by the four western states of Arizona,

Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming. They paid for more construction steel than went into the Empire State Building. Upon completion, the BMI plant included hundred-foot-long rotary kilns, underground storage vaults, overhead cranes, railway sidings, and refrigerated cars. There were 80 two-ton crucibles, 83 three-story chlorinator furnaces, 700 kiln cars, 1,800 electrolytic magnesium and chlorine cells and much more equipment of all kinds and sizes. During the twenty-six months it operated, BMI's production line turned out 166,325,000 pounds of magnesium, more than the rest of the whole world had produced in 1939 and 1940. Basic Magnesium made thirty-nine percent of the nation's magnesium in 1943, even though it went into full production only that July. Eventually BMI and the other wartime factories made far more magnesium than America needed. Production cutbacks at BMI began in April of 1944, and in mid-November the government ordered a complete halt to the company's magnesium output.¹²

The workers from BMI had dramatically affected everyday life in Las Vegas, flooding its streets with new shoppers, new residents, and new hell-raisers. The project had brought Las Vegas national publicity,¹³ and, for the long run, taught the city's businessmen that casino gambling could bring them high profits. In 1944, however, the end of production seemed a heavy blow to the local economy. Fortunately, the plant's small chlorine and caustic units did remain open, and the industrial facilities that BMI abandoned offered the prospect of accommodating future industrial growth. Any such industry could also take advantage of the BMI-created town of Henderson, with its houses, apartments, and electrical and water installations.

We must also not overlook the significant influence BMI exercised on the lives of its employees. By considering the conditions faced by the workers, we can perhaps gain a better perspective on the meaning of the entire enterprise. Workers on the BMI project did experience trying circumstances, some unique to this job, others common to the booming western towns of the World War II era. In the following pages we will continue to deal with BMI's history, concentrating on the wartime period, and will also tell something about the living and working conditions encountered by those who earned their pay at the Basic Magnesium project.¹⁴

The BMI project produced magnesium, and it is appropriate here to outline the production processes involved. There were four main steps: Preparation, chlorination, electrolysis and refining.

1. *Preparation.* The Gabbs processing center in Nye County shipped raw magnesite to the BMI plant in southern Nevada. When it arrived, either by rail or truck, workers pumped the fine white dust into silos or underground storage compartments. The production line combined the mag-



Stacking busbars ready for fill, BMI Plant, May 7, 1942. (Kunkel Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)

nesite, with sodium chloride, potassium chloride, and coal and peat, and the mixture was then carried by conveyer belt through a series of mixing and paddling devices. Further heating, cooling, and processing produced magnesium briquettes, which were then broken up into smaller pellets.

2. *Chlorination.* Electrically powered cars carried thousand-pound loads of pellets from preparation to a chlorination building, where an overhead-crane man emptied them into special compartments with assistance of other workers, called “chargers.” Each chlorination building contained eight three-story chlorinator furnaces, which incidentally produced enormous quantities of chlorine gas every day.¹⁵ In the furnaces a combination of chlorine, heat, and magnesium pellets produced magnesium chloride. An employee called a “tapper” emptied this molten liquid into another huge electric car, which carried it to the electrolysis cells.

3. *Electrolysis*. Ten electrolysis buildings each housed eighty-eight cells, twenty-two cells in each series, eleven back to back. Each brick-lined steel cell contained positively charged anodes and negatively charged cathodes. Concrete hoods, equipped with pipes to carry off the chlorine gas, covered cathode compartments, while steel doors permitted access to anode compartments. The cells sent electrical current through busbars up to fourteen feet long, heating electrolytic fluid to a temperature of more than 700 degrees. Because of the wartime copper shortage, the United States government lent silver bars worth \$24 million to use as electricity-conducting busbars.

“ Cell tenders ” threw flux into the mixture to put out the small fires that frequently flared up on the surface, and they also carefully regulated mixture, fluid level, and pressure. Each cell produced 390 pounds of magnesium metal “ cheesecakes ” every day, not to mention large amounts of chlorine gas and waste.

4. *Refining*. In the refineries workers melted magnesium cheesecakes, and huge automated crucibles then poured the purified molten liquid into bar molds on conveyor belts. By the time the molds reached the end of the belts, the liquid had already hardened into metal, and the magnesium bars were sent down a chute to workers, often women, who wrapped and transported them to storage. Finished magnesium bars weighed about six pounds, and measured twenty-two inches long by three inches wide.

Production entailed many processes besides those described, but only a few more can be mentioned here. The gas produced by the chlorinator furnaces went into recovery washtowers, where it encountered moisture and recondensed into hydrochloric acid and magnesium chloride. Both were used in the preparation plant. In another area of the plant, brick-lined steel cells, resembling those in electrolysis, produced chlorine and caustic soda, both with many industrial uses. The company could then cool the chlorine gas to minus 32 degrees, converting it to a liquid state ready for shipment to an industrial customer. Or the liquid could later be converted to gas in the chlorinator furnaces. Other stations at the BMI plant manufactured the flux that the electrolysis cell tenders sprinkled on the molten liquid, and even made the concrete that could be used in cell linings and hoods.¹⁶

The production processes generated abundant heat, an additional burden in torrid Las Vegas, where summer temperatures could soar as high as 115 degrees. The heat, combined with the ubiquitous chlorine gas, made breathing difficult. Curiously, BMI's introductory pamphlet for workers, which was also used for recruiting, glorified in the hardship, even boasting that the plant had been “ built by determined men, operated by determined men, a big harsh job in a harsh land with no place for lace panties.... This is a place where Japs and Germans will be defeated. ”¹⁷

Adversities that were not publicized included scarce housing, exorbitant rent, overcrowded stores and hospitals, and snarled transportation. But then these disadvantages were hardly the stuff of heroism and masculine tales of war.

The immigrants flocking to burgeoning defense industries all over the West commonly encountered discontinuities and shortages in housing, businesses, schools, and transportation. Southern Nevada was no exception. The Las Vegas housing market had been tight in 1940. While the beginning of the BMI project inspired civic pride, it also drove newcomers to extremes like sleeping in cardboard boxes. People simply could not find housing. As the *Review-Journal* boasted in November of 1941, only two months after the clearing began, "Something has happened in Las Vegas... the streets are full. People are sleeping in their cars. You can't get a hotel room for love or money. Boom town. Big money. The talk is on every corner." ¹⁸ Heavy demand drove all prices up, making business prosper, but it was obvious that it was the housing market that would be the most pressing long-term concern for the workers at BMI.

The Las Vegas landlords were quick to exploit their advantages, raising rents to three or four times their levels prior to the arrival of BMI. To deal with such problems, Clark County's Defense Council established a fair-rents committee, responsible for enforcing federally mandated rent control. This body, however, had an impossible task. Throughout 1942, hundreds of complaints about high rents streamed into the committee's office, but Las Vegas landlords blithely ignored official pleas for voluntary rollbacks. One exasperated federal official complained that "Las Vegas landlords are among the worst we have had to deal with. They seem to want nothing else but to gouge the defense workers." ¹⁹ One worker complained bitterly, "We'll never leave the state with a dollar we've earned. It all goes just to live." ²⁰ Where renters paid an average of \$26 per month before the war, boomtown Las Vegas struggled to find one-room shacks with community outhouses for \$60 to \$90 per month.²¹

The experience of electrician Buck Baker, who moved to Las Vegas from California in July of 1942, is perhaps typical. He initially found shelter in a tent, then gratefully rented the back room of a Las Vegas resident's house for \$60 a month. It had neither a cooler nor a toilet, but did boast a solar water heater: one fifty gallon drum poised on the roof. Recovery-unit foreman George Jones came to Nevada with his wife in October of 1942, and like numberless others they also moved into a Las Vegas tent paying \$60 a month. Mrs. Jones understandably grew upset when the tent blew down in a windstorm, and with this motivation to inspire him, her husband managed to obtain a spot in one of the many crowded trailer parks in Las Vegas. Others were not as fortunate: One family of eight lived in a culvert, a most uncomfortable place, especially in cold or rainy weather.²²

Hundreds scrambled for places to live. With only about 3,000 workers on the job in January of 1942, Howard Eells complained bitterly about the "lousy settlements" that had sprung up alongside Boulder Highway. Calling these mock-up shanties "a disgrace," he offered to bulldoze them. He did not say where he thought these people should or could find shelter. Desperate for someplace to stay, men lived in abandoned cars, in cardboard boxes, and in the desert sleeping under mesquite bushes. "It looked like something straight out of the *The Grapes of Wrath*," says Buck Baker.²³

Black workers faced special challenges in housing and working conditions. They came to BMI from towns in the Deep South: Tallulah, Louisiana, and Fordyce, Arkansas, seem to have been two of the most prevalent points of origin. Workers told Billy Sanner, a cafeteria employee, how recruiters promised them positions, loaded their furniture into vans, and drove them in convoys to Westside, the black residential district. Once there men and women faced the formidable task of finding tolerable living quarters. Houses were scarce, and tents, shacks, and outdoor sleeping common. When the sun shone, thick layers of dust swirled through Westside's unpaved streets, but a rain found inhabitants mired in the mud. With no toilets, electricity, or running water, the new occupants walked blocks to haul water and coal for their stoves, while those who were enterprising filled buckets with ice and sold drinks of cold water in the streets. A resident who had the good fortune to be able to take a bath, enjoyed it in a galvanized "number two washtub" which sold like "hotcakes" from the store at Bonanza Overpass. When Woodrow Wilson and his wife finally moved from a tent to a house, two other couples shared not only its one room, but also the gaps in the roof that let in melting tar, rain and dust. The building lacked cooling and plumbing facilities. Nevertheless, those who could move into such cracker box houses considered themselves lucky indeed.²⁴

While Eells was complaining about the shanties along Boulder Highway, construction men were busy building new tents and barracks near the plant, accommodations for white workers only. Called Anderson Camp, by October of 1943 the new facility had grown to house more than 4,000 workers. Residents slept in tents or in barracks which provided the comfort of window-mounted evaporative coolers. Along with the camp, Anderson Supply Company of Las Vegas opened a cafeteria capable of serving twenty thousand meals a day. At its height, more than 200 employees worked on its food lines, staffed its butcher and bake shops, and made ice cream on the premises. According to Billy Sanner, patrons could get free scoops of ice cream with any piece of pie, a welcome refreshment amid desert heat and wartime sugar rationing.²⁵

With most employees commuting from Las Vegas, Boulder Highway

“ did not get crowded, it stayed crowded, ” says electrolysis-cell tender Dennis Shelton. Impatient drivers traveling home from work often neglected to keep to the proper side of the two-lane road, forcing workbound commuters off the pavement and onto the shoulder for half an hour at a time.²⁶ A survey in September of 1942 showed that almost 8,000 cars a day entered the plant, only twenty percent with good tires. In the fall of that year management expressed “ grave concern ” about worker morale in the face of the highway congestion and impending rationing of rubber, gasoline, and oil. One supervisor pointed out that the residents of Basic Townsite were “ virtually marooned ” because they lived too near the plant to qualify for rationing points for tires. This was a serious problem because the town lacked both recreational facilities and shops, and it would be months before they were built. With packed buses and the rubber shortage, hitchhikers were a common sight along the road.²⁷

In view of the massive migration to southern Nevada, it was essential that BMI and the businessmen of Las Vegas cooperate in building houses everywhere in the valley. But Eells's decision to build a permanent town next to the plant sparked controversy. Senator Berkeley Bunker, newly appointed to the seat of the late Key Pittman, became a champion for Las Vegas businessmen who complained that Eells would not allow any BMI housing to be built in their city. In December of 1941, Bunker's letter to President Samuel Husbands of the DPC was published in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. The letter claimed it was more logical to build housing in a city that already had facilities, than to spend the additional money for utilities, police patrols, and other services for a new town. Bunker charged that supporters of Basic Townsite simply entertained visions of personal profit. He also pointed out that private contractors were anxiously awaiting only the word to begin building new houses in both Boulder City and Las Vegas. Much to the displeasure of Eells, Husbands dispatched a representative to Las Vegas with power to authorize the building of 2,000 new houses in Las Vegas. At the same time, the DPC ordered BMI to abandon its plans for a permanent town, making new arrangements for temporary plant-site dwellings instead.²⁸ Although so-called demountable houses did eventually go up at Basic Townsite, they were as permanent as the numerous houses that were also built in Las Vegas.

In fact Bunker did not limit his complaints to housing: He accused the BMI management of both ineptitude and war profiteering. His charges prompted a Senate investigation and a visit to Las Vegas by the famous Truman Committee, headed by then Senator Harry S. Truman. The federal government eventually persuaded Anaconda Copper Company to purchase BMI's share of the enterprise. Anaconda took over the reins at BMI on October 27, 1942, with Eells professing satisfaction. “ I have felt for some time ” he observed, “ that the plant needed a large, well-financed

concern in charge—a concern that couldn't be kicked around as we have been in the recent past. ”²⁹

As indicated previously, the housing scarcity had long preceded Eells's departure. The first three months of 1942 saw 7,000 employees come to the southern Nevada industrial plant, raising its work force to almost 10,000, more than the entire pre-BMI population of Las Vegas. The first fifty-nine houses at Basic Townsite opened for rental in mid-April of 1942. By May, 245 residences were ready. This, however, was but a drop in the bucket, considering the 13,000 employees, not counting family members, who were working at BMI by July. Eventually the 1,000 Townsite houses sheltered 3,500 residents. By the spring of 1943, contractors were building hundreds of houses and apartments in Las Vegas, but demand always seem to outstrip supply, and the housing shortage continued unabated even after the war had ended. Those who wanted to rent at the Basic Townsite had to put their names on a waiting list. Frustration caused by the long wait under difficult living conditions prompted attempts to by-pass the list. Electrolysis foreman Charles Trueworthy grew weary after four or five months stay in Anderson's barracks apart from his family. To his dismay, the supervisor refused to give him preference for a house. Exasperated, Trueworthy arranged for a moving van to bring his furniture from Montana, and told management that if he did not have a house at Basic Townsite when his van arrived, he was going to Los Angeles. Somehow, a house was found for him. Brick inspector Roy Hughes, later chlorine foreman, got tired of living in a tent, and placed his name on the waiting list. He learned that men who had applied after him were already moving into houses, and his threat to quit received the same favorable results as Trueworthy's. Despite the list, it appears that supervisory personnel with valued skills, or those with contacts, could get houses first.³⁰

Las Vegas's growing population, up to 30,000 by mid-1942, strained both shops and municipal facilities. The city government, continually plagued by lack of funds, could not keep up with the need for school and hospital expansion. Local merchants tried to accommodate their customers by staying open later. Shoppers from Basic Townsite could either drive to Las Vegas, assuming they had sufficient tire and gas rationing points, or they could take a Pony Express bus. Lacking a proper fleet because of wartime shortages, the Pony Express Company, according to Billy Sanner, ingeniously pressed old automobile-hauling trucks into service, equipping them with wooden seats and side panels. Unfortunately, the packed buses often broke down, stranding sweltering passengers at the roadside for hours. Commuters could plan to spend many hours doing their shopping in Las Vegas.³¹

Basic Townsite's food market, like other Townsite businesses, was a private, profit-making operation, and finally opened in mid-February of



Workers at Basic Magnesium drilling 7/8" holes in busbars, July 8, 1942. (Kunkel Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library)

1943. Wives of BMI employees staffed the store, and food ration-point checkers made sure that purchasers qualified to buy their goods. The store sold paperback books and drugs as well as vegetables, but slot machines were forbidden by government order. Beer sales, however, were brisk. Basic Townsite, renamed Henderson on January 1, 1944,³² eventually acquired all the facilities needed by its residents: a beauty shop, barber shop, drug store, bowling alley, and churches. War-bond rallies were frequently held at the 10,000-square-foot Victory Theater, and local businessmen contributed free goods and services to every bond buyer. One such meeting in July 1944 boasted professional and amateur singers, and a free showing of Gary Cooper's latest film, *Pride of the Yankees*.³³

Some residents at Basic also enjoyed a flourishing social life. The *Las Vegas Review Journal* carried a special section devoted to BMI social news, with announcements relating to the Masons, Legionnaires, and Scouts. Its pages also publicized activities like bowling, softball, volleyball,

chess and checkers. Yet, it seems that most workers, despite management's aversion, found their favorite pastimes in drinking and gambling, and they packed the easily accessible taverns along Boulder Highway. The company blamed these bars for the high rate of worker absence, and wanted them closed. While that wish was never realized, BMI management did take strong countermeasures. In cooperation with the American Federation of Labor and the Las Vegas police, in April of 1943 they sent forth a "production patrol police" force. This patrol combed bars on weekends, counseled men against overindulgence, and shipped drunks to BMI's temporary jail. After sobering up, presumably suitably chastened, the men returned to their jobs. Despite these efforts, absentee rates stayed high, even after pressure from the military and BMI induced the Las Vegas City Commission to order that casinos and taverns be closed at midnight for the duration of the war.³⁴

Management constantly exhorted workers to patriotism, and wartime federal regulations made it difficult for defense workers to quit, but BMI's employees still left their jobs at a monthly rate of twenty percent of the entire work force. Electricians, says Buck Baker, commonly joked that there were three crews on the job—"one working, one going, and one coming." The company probably found it wiser to let disgruntled employees leave. Forcing discontented employees to stay on would merely have spread dissatisfaction among their co-workers. Employee flight can hardly be blamed on taverns and casinos, however. Larry McNeil, president of McNeil Construction Company, expressed surprise that turnover was not even worse, considering the living conditions. Buck Baker says he never before lived in a place so hot in summer, yet cold enough in winter to freeze water pipes. Temperatures in January 1943 plunged to 10 degrees, inflicting great suffering on those forced to live in "goods box houses." As we shall see, all production workers, decently housed or not, faced daily chlorine gasings and torrid temperatures in the factory. Throw together large numbers of men without families under such conditions, and drinking is bound to be popular.³⁵

Despite grueling working conditions, the BMI management still somehow kept a constant stream of workers coming to southern Nevada. For black workers in particular, family ties and friendship played an important part in their steady migration to BMI. In June of 1942, Woodrow Wilson was driving to California, anticipating attendance at college that fall. He detoured to Las Vegas to visit a friend. As luck would have it, he accompanied his friend to the McNeil Construction Company hiring hall, where the personnel man persuaded a surprised Wilson to take a job at BMI. He could, argued the man with compelling logic, wait for college just as easily in Las Vegas as in California. Wilson went to work as a construction-gang laborer, and never made it to college. He has lived in Las

Vegas ever since. Dennis Shelton's brother came to Las Vegas two months before Shelton and a carload of friends decided to chance the trip. With no map, and only the vaguest idea of direction, they headed for the open road, arriving in Las Vegas several days later, thanks to help elicited along the way. Cement finisher Emit Hoya made the trip from Tallullah after two of his brothers-in-law found work on the project. Economically depressed areas of the South, where close-knit black communities quickly spread word of steady work and good pay, proved to be rich recruiting grounds for BMI.³⁶

The Las Vegas City Commission was confronted by the need to provide business and recreational facilities for the new black residents. A delegation of black Westside residents, however, objected to the plan to locate such facilities there, citing the effect these establishments might have on "the best residential area." One of them went to the heart of the matter when he protested that colored Americans had as much right as whites to shop where they pleased. In making its plans, the City Commission was attempting to keep the new black population on its own side of the tracks. Nevertheless, the facilities they established, such as the black USO club, located on the corner of E Street and Van Buren Avenue in Westside, were badly needed. This particular facility was open to both servicemen and defense workers. It was an old Civilian Conservation Corps building, moved into place from its last stop in Whitney, a small town between Las Vegas and Henderson, where it had been serving as a school. By late October of 1943, even though the *Review-Journal* called the structure "half finished," up to 400 people were attending the weekly Saturday night dances there. Although not designed for overnight guests, the club allowed many black servicemen who could find no other lodging to sleep on its floors.³⁷

Because black workers were no more welcome at Basic Townsite than in Las Vegas, the BMI management built Carver Park. Construction of this "all Negro," 499-unit plant-site apartment complex, which was to include a cafeteria, a school, a market and a nursery, constantly lagged because of the unavailability of funds. The first 116 apartments finally opened for rental in October of 1943. The elementary school, designed to accommodate an anticipated four hundred students that September, enrolled only about ten percent of that number, but the six white teachers were enthusiastic about their pupils. Children from the Deep South sang folksongs for their teachers, who praised their singing voices and heartily declared that "nearly all the children have an uncanny sense of rhythm." A tenant council also directed weekly recreation programs. Nevertheless, the Carver Park apartments never attracted very many BMI families, perhaps partly because they opened so late. By February of 1944, only seventy-two renters occupied the project. Most blacks lived in Westside, and

continued to do so after the war ended.³⁸

Workers in general came to BMI through various channels. Publicity and word of mouth helped in the never-ending struggle to fill the open positions. Trueworthy, for example, read about the plant in a magazine article, wrote to BMI's personnel department, and was hired. Roy Hughes learned of the opening from his then employer, a brick supplier to the project. Buck Baker's union told him about the new openings for electricians in the southern Nevada desert. But special recruiters also spread the gospel of BMI throughout the country, placing ads and distributing leaflets. Trueworthy remembers a dozen workers who were former bell-hops in a large Kansas City hotel where the recruiting team had stayed. Workers came from every walk of life: There were former truck drivers, jockeys, carnival hustlers, and jewelers. George Jones remarks that some came to do a patriotic chore, some came to earn a living, and some came to avoid the draft by getting a defense job. Some also came because it was better than where they had been: Hughes had supervised a crew of sixteen parolees from a Tennessee prison. A surprising contingent was the one that arrived frequently on buses from California. Week after week, Los Angeles judges sentenced drunks to thirty days in jail—or at paid labor for BMI. Billy Sanner spoke to many such men who were doing their third or fourth term at BMI, and he says they worked in all kinds of positions, even as metallers who were magnesium cell tenders, where a careless moment could cause serious injury.³⁹

By August of 1943, one year after the first production of magnesium and two months before Carver Park opened its doors, blacks held sixty percent of the production jobs at BMI. This concentration invites one to examine the issue of racial discrimination. In fact, E.E. Ward, representative of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) told the Truman Committee that month that BMI generally consigned "Negro" workers to certain lower-level occupations, and then paid them less than whites in the same jobs. Interviews with workers both black and white also suggest that black electricians, engineers, chemists, and laboratory technicians were scarce, if not entirely lacking. Blacks were confined to "the hottest, dirtiest work," as Woodrow Wilson puts it.⁴⁰

Eventually BMI decided to turn away black applicants. Ward, in his August 1943 congressional testimony, said that the management had recently instructed BMI's medical department to use any pretext to fail blacks at their pre-employment physical examinations. Ward also alleged that John Keyes, BMI's superintendent of training, told him that he personally believed "in segregation, in minimizing the points of contact between Negroes and whites in the plant." Evidently other supervisors shared Keyes's opinion, for in October of that year 200 black employees



Workers at BMI shown connecting the last busbar in the last unit, May 26, 1943. (*Dow Metals Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library*)

walked off their jobs to protest the establishment of segregated washrooms and toilets. The company defended itself by pointing out that the facilities had previously been foremen's quarters, and thus were equal to those provided for whites.⁴¹

The blacks in Las Vegas like their brethren across America were also suffering from discrimination. Negative community attitudes could only have encouraged BMI in its practices, and the fact is that what Las Vegans considered too free a mingling of the races did provoke anxiety in the city. In July of 1943 the Bonanza Star Bar, for instance, lost its beer and slot machine licenses after the City Commission received "many complaints" that it had "been playing to a mixed trade, with Negroes and whites encouraged to congregate in the establishment promiscuously." During the war the Overland Hotel would not even permit the black soldiers who

were transporting Japanese-Americans internees to eat inside with their charges. Local "Negroes" could dine downtown themselves only at the invitation of prominent whites, and then only if they entered and left by a rear entrance. Retail stores were apparently no better. Woodrow Wilson will never forget the ice-cream store clerk who refused to sell him a cone for his little daughter one hot summer day, leaving him to explain to her why a white girl could have one, but she could not. Finally, if blacks wished to see a movie, the theatres compelled them to enjoy it in the back rows or in the balconies, a custom that continued even during the postwar years at Mayor Ernie Cragin's theater.⁴²

Such practices were clearly not out of step with nationwide attitudes; the United States government itself simply followed tradition when it financed BMI's segregation housing. It also built separate accommodations for blacks and whites at the Las Vegas Gunnery School. Both before and after World War II, the American armed forces discriminated against blacks by assigning them to separate units, by imposing maximum recruiting quotas, and by earmarking them for the less-desirable jobs. Despite strong opposition from top military men, President Harry Truman instituted policies that eventually brought an end to such practices in the military. But for society at large, discriminatory attitudes, with restrictions in housing, education, and social life, were the norm in North and South alike. During the war, job opportunities, a powerful attraction to black immigrants from the South, produced an encounter between black and white that brought the conflict into the public consciousness. That encounter ultimately led to the civil rights movement and the lowering of many barriers. In the 1940s, however, the BMI management was unaware of any backwardness in its attitudes; on the contrary, Superintendent of Training John Keyes could proudly declare that BMI had set its policies only after surveying "the most progressive industrial concerns" throughout the country.⁴³

Besides race relations, Keyes and the BMI management also had to address the issue of job safety. The instructions in BMI's policy manual, which was compiled by Keyes, reveal some of the dangers faced by magnesium workers. The chlorination department, for example, presented the "extreme" hazard of leaks caused by seal failures; instructions emphatically warned employees that they must stay out from under chlorinator furnaces or risk severe burns. Less serious incidents often occurred, for management also cautioned workers to buy high top shoes because of "too many foot burns." Refinery precautions included crucible inspections after every pour, but crucibles still cracked all the time, according to Charles Trueworthy. One such incident ignited a fire that burned a refinery building to the ground.⁴⁴ Metallurgists who stood close to the electrolysis



Women workers at Basic Magnesium, Inc. (*Dow Metals Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library*)

cells so that they could ladle out the fluid were exposed both to intense heat and to painful burns. A little coolness or moisture on tools caused molten magnesium to spit out from cells onto the workers. It was essential that each operator carefully inspect his tools before beginning work. Shelton and Trueworthy both knew men who sustained serious injury because they neglected this seemingly minor detail.⁴⁵

Built according to English designs, the electrolysis buildings lacked evaporative coolers and adequate ventilation. Conditions inside the buildings became so unbearable that management finally installed ventilators, but it was so hot that the metallers received frequent breaks. Metaller Denby Wade says they could even take off early if they met their quotas.⁴⁶ Evaporative coolers could not be used to cool the chlorine cell-house buildings, because when chlorine gas encounters moisture, which is produced by such coolers, a dangerous chemical reaction results. Instead, the cell-house building sat five feet off the ground on cement pylons; as

chlorine is heavier than air, the greenish-yellow gas settled to the floor and floated out of the building.⁴⁷

Billy Sanner says that this arrangement vented billows of chlorine gas into the atmosphere. He worked in the cell-renewal building, located between two cell houses, and the drifting gas sent him home every night with chlorine-saturated clothing. At times he worked inside the cell houses, subjected to even heavier doses of chlorine. Until he left his work at the chlorine plant more than a decade later, he forgot what it was like "to breathe free." Sanner says that "people were always being hurt, burned, cut and everything else.... It was hazardous, pretty slapdash." Yet, it was wartime, and most men never questioned what they did. One suspects that most of the workers also had little appreciation for the dangers of chlorine.⁴⁸

Dangerous or merely inconvenient, the greenish-yellow gas was everywhere. As previously suggested, the manufacturing process involved both intentional and inadvertent venting of chlorine into the atmosphere. Trueworthy comments that he had smelled chlorine before coming to southern Nevada, but in the amount found at BMI "it was scary." There was always a smell of chlorine about the plant grounds, even far from production areas; it could even be smelled at Basic Townsite or on Boulder Highway. Improper sealing of chlorine plant cells caused repeated discharges. Frequently, small power outages struck the plant, exposing electrolysis workers to gasings because venting pipes would not function. In a matter of minutes, says Trueworthy, an entire building could fill with chlorine gas. An electrical malfunction of some sort had the same effect in the recovery unit. One day George Jones came to work only to find the pumps running backwards, and gas billowing from every window in his building.⁴⁹

Even below levels of 3.5 parts per million, when its odor first becomes noticeable, chlorine gas is extremely irritating to the eyes. At higher levels it produces throat irritation, pulmonary edema (congestion and swelling of the lungs), and racking cough. Exposure at BMI was sufficiently serious to cause continual problems with irritating coughs. Although production workers had gas masks, they found them inconvenient and uncomfortable. Even when worn, the masks were not effective in protecting against heavy emissions. Remedies were improvised; George Jones chewed tobacco and worked with a handkerchief covering his mouth; Roy Hughes told his workers to wet turkish towels and breathe through them; management directed that a worker who was suddenly exposed should hold his breath and quickly walk away, "into the wind if possible." Management also provided an unusual remedy: essence of peppermint in every first-aid kit. Three drops of peppermint in a glass of water would stop the cough—at least until the next time. Nevertheless, workers suffered from coughing and

throat irritation daily. Roy Hughes went to the extreme of inhaling chloroform at home to deaden the pain.⁵⁰

In February of 1943, Dr. Chauncy Baird of BMI's hospital assured a meeting of concerned Townsite residents that they faced no danger from chlorine gas. It is very irritating and uncomfortable, he declared, but "never causes permanent injury." This echoes a statement in BMI's policy manual that the reaction to exposure "wears off without permanent after-effects." Despite their own discomfort, supervisors Hughes and Trueworthy even today remain convinced that there was, indeed, no permanent damage.⁵¹

As a matter of fact, chlorine gas certainly can inflict "permanent injury." As little as 0.001 percent per litre can be tolerated for only for a few hours, but a dose of 0.035 percent per litre (2.5 milligrams) will kill a man in minutes. Chlorine was actually the first poison gas used in wartime. In April of 1915 a German barrage of liquid chlorine canisters at Ypres, France, produced a cloud of gas that killed 5,000 men, and wreaked grim revenge on brave survivors who refused to flee. Historian James Stokesbury notes that many survivors of this battle "spent the rest of their lives in agony in veteran's hospitals," their lungs and air passages irreparably damaged by the effects of chlorine gas. Admittedly, BMI's workers never faced a canister attack. But the knowledge that chlorine gas in sufficient quantities can cause—indeed, had been used as a weapon to inflict—permanent lung damage or death makes easy assurances that chlorine "never causes permanent injury" seem unprincipled at best.⁵²

Repeated chlorine exposure may well have caused progressively worsening illness for some workers at BMI. After five months at his metallur's job, Denby Wade began experiencing chest pains and difficulty in breathing. The company doctor told him that he had pneumonia, probably caused by the chlorine gas. Wade's private physician concurred. E.E. Ward's testimony before the Truman Committee indicates that the company refused to compensate workers for the lung infections commonly contracted by inhaling gas on the job. Buck Baker met a number of men with such illnesses. After getting involved in an accident, Baker went to the BMI hospital for treatment. In the waiting room he met workers with lung infections and hacking coughs who told him that the company refused to grant them workmen's compensation benefits. Some of them had furnished x-rays from California hospitals that clearly showed spots on their lungs. Despite lack of hard evidence, it is difficult to escape the suspicion that these symptoms were produced by the daily breathing of chlorine gas at the BMI plant. Who can tell what harm that exposure may have caused even years after the war ended? ⁵³

By April of 1944, even though the war was a year from ending, it was clear that American factories were making more magnesium that was

needed for the war effort. Although War Production Board cutbacks that month resulted in the closing of four BMI magnesium units, the company tried to reassure workers that the magnesium industry had a bright postwar future. In June, Phillip Webb of the War Production Board sent BMI General Manager F. O. Case a telegram, published in the company newspaper, the *Basic Bombardier*, promising that his agency planned no further production cutbacks. Nevertheless, in July the production board closed two more of BMI's magnesium units. Late that month, diehard optimists might have found hope in the news that the DPC had granted the company \$350,000 for, among other things, research into new (postwar) uses of magnesium. But for those who were willing to look, the handwriting was on the wall. The government's order to end magnesium production at BMI came on September 6, and by November 15 all the magnesium units lay idle.⁵⁴

But even as the government terminated magnesium production at BMI, it requested a substantial increase in the factory's chlorine output. Chlorine is useful for making products as diverse as paper, textiles, metals, plastics, and varnish. The company also continued producing caustic soda, which is used in manufacturing chemicals, soaps, and petroleum. And so in the closing days of 1944, though only a handful of workers who once toiled there remained, the BMI plant continued to operate. Those who remembered the booming employment and production of the past might have taken encouragement from a December 8 editorial in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* announcing that Rheem Manufacturing Company would soon go into operation at the BMI plant. That company expected to employ about 800 workers in making artillery shell casings. In March of 1945 Bechtel-McCone Construction began conversion of unit number 5 for Rheem's use, but a union dispute as to whether the millwrights or the machinists should set up some machinery halted all activity. Shortly thereafter, with wartime needs diminishing, and perhaps motivated by pique over the delays caused by union conflicts, the government cancelled Rheem's contracts.⁵⁵

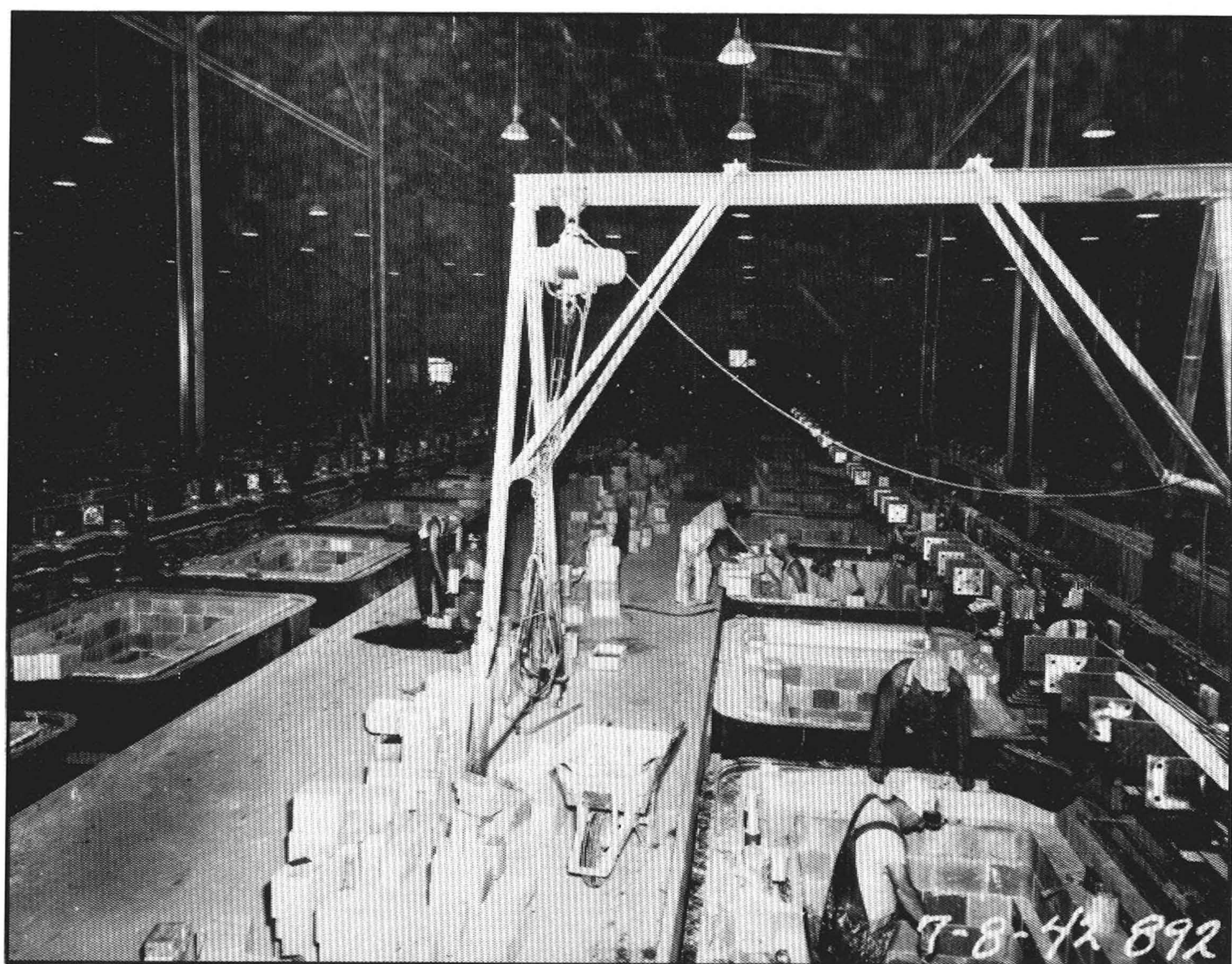
If the plant hoped to continue operating on any level, let alone resuming business on a large scale, it needed an assured uninterrupted supply of power. Nearby Boulder Dam was the source of BMI's supply, but, except for wartime arrangements, the plant had no legal right to 90 percent of what it used. At the DPC's request, the California allottees that had first call on the power voluntarily relinquished it to BMI during the war. But thereafter, this arrangement had to be renegotiated. Beginning in late 1945, representatives of the Colorado River Commission of Nevada (CRCN), the federal government, and the California power allottees entered into a series of difficult negotiations that did, despite many misgivings along the way, keep the power flowing to BMI. The parties reached a

tentative understanding in May of 1946, and by that December there was a signed agreement.⁵⁶

As wartime production diminished, Congress abolished the Defense Plant Corporation, leaving its parent agency, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), in charge of the southern Nevada plant. In May of 1945 the RFC appointed J. M. Montgomery Company of Los Angeles as its manager, supplanting Anaconda Copper, and Stauffer Chemical Company took over the production of chlorine and caustic soda. Toward the end of the year, Montgomery announced that the project would change its name from Basic Magnesium, Incorporated, to Basic Magnesium Project (BMP). A couple of weeks before Stauffer arrived, a fire completely destroyed unit number 3, where Bechtel-McCone had its offices. Bechtel had been renovating unit number 4 for future occupancy by Western Electrochemical Company, a producer of potassium perchlorate. The fire destroyed that firm's equipment, probably delaying their occupancy for many months. Fortunately, "heroic efforts" by Las Vegas firefighters prevented the blaze from spreading beyond unit number 3.⁵⁷

The fire, the loss of Rheem, and, most of all, the end of the war, had taken their toll on business at BMI. Even so, in September of 1945 the plant's general manager, H. H. Gillings, told a Kiwanis Club gathering in Las Vegas that management expected BMI to become, in the next few years, the most productive chemical plant in the western United States. That was a bold prediction for, besides Montgomery and Stauffer, there were only two businesses at the plant: the New York and Ohio Chemical Company and the Cornwall Warehouse Company. Stauffer Chemical was having trouble persuading other enterprises to come and take advantage of the chlorine supply at the plant. President John Stauffer complained that Union Pacific's "exorbitant freight rates" were scaring them away. During the next few months management did obtain commitments to lease from U.S. Vanadium Company and Hardesty Chemical Company. But however great the potential of BMP, by February of 1946 only "four production companies" were in operation, according to Montgomery personnel manager, William Brynes.⁵⁸

One other project inspired high hopes that were never fulfilled. In October of 1946, Allied Studios leased three former peat-storage buildings for use as movie-making stages. Front-page publicity in the *Review-Journal* announced that the company had rented twenty-five acres for twenty-five years, including residences for studio personnel, and that it intended to employ some 400 people. It was even said that United Artists planned to turn out its Hopalong Cassidy movies at the new facilities. As of April 1947, however, Allied Studios had only stored a few costumes at BMP, and there was no word on when, if ever, they intended to move in. The company did not even pay rent, since lease terms provided that nothing was



Workers at Basic Magnesium, July 8, 1942. (*Dow Metals Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library*)

due until they actually occupied the premises.⁵⁹

By then, however, the government had relieved the RFC of these administrative worries, shifting responsibility for BMP to the War Assets Administration (WAA), which in late November of 1946 appointed the Guy F. Atkinson Company of San Francisco to replace Montgomery Company as BMP plant manager. Federal records show that efforts to attract tenants had been rewarded with seventeen leases by mid-1947. Tenants included an engineer, a warehouse, a state employment office, and a meat processor. There were also nine firms engaged in manufacturing products like synthetic scheelite, molybdenum, aluminum chloride, hydrochloric acid, and manganese sulphate. Nevertheless, all together the tenants employed only 600 workers, and it is possible that the WAA did not have its heart in attracting new businesses. Nevada's Senator Patrick McCarran wrote President Truman to complain that the WAA seemed more interested in disposing of the project than developing it, and that tenants

were unsure of their future status there. McCarran even suggested that Nevada might be willing to buy BMP from the federal government.⁶⁰

Like McCarran, Nevada's businessmen and elected officials—especially those from Las Vegas—anxiously hoped for an economic renaissance at BMP. On February 28, 1947, Carl Hyde, managing director of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, wrote to state legislators in Carson City warning that millions of dollars would be lost if the plant were closed. He invited them all to an expense-paid tour of BMP's facilities. Despite some grumbling about their heavy workloads, forty of the state's fifty-eight lawmakers did make the flight from Reno to Las Vegas on March 6, where they were wined and dined at the Last Frontier Hotel. They were suitably impressed with their tour of the Henderson Plant grounds the next day. Perhaps typical was the comment of M. B. Humphrey, assemblyman from Washoe County, who remarked: "All of us from the north have had our eyes opened. There are unlimited possibilities here." Within ten days of their visit, the legislators unanimously approved a bill giving the CRCN authority to negotiate with the federal government for acquisition of the plant. In June of 1947 the CRCN and the WAA reached a tentative understanding for transfer of the property, but not until April 1, 1948, did the state of Nevada actually take control of the facility. Terms of the sale required payment of operating profits by the state for twenty years, up to a maximum of \$24 million. By 1951 Governor Charles Russell was able to tell the legislature in his biennial address that BMP was "operating as a self-sustaining project." He recommended that it be sold to private industry, both to generate tax income and to free the state of managerial responsibility. A group of tenants at the plant, under the name of Basic Management, Incorporated (the enterprise would be known as BMI once more) acquired the project on May 23, 1952. Although Nevada had paid only \$6 million toward the purchase, the federal government waived further payment from the state, thus allowing the sale to go through.⁶¹

As previously noted, BMI exerted considerable influence on the development of southern Nevada. Although the magnesium industry was short-lived, the city of Henderson remained as a legacy of BMI, a new town complete with water, electricity, shops, and housing. The development of the old plant grounds in the years that followed was not spectacular, but eventually a respectable business community, mainly chemical companies, did arise there. With the infrastructure left by BMI, Henderson has steadily grown: In 1950, there were 5,700 residents and five years later there were 12,000. Today there are about 55,000 residents.⁶²

Following the end of the war and BMI's departure, many of the black immigrants decided to stay on in Las Vegas. The familiar legacy of discrimination also remained. In 1950 the almost 3,000 Westside residents

were still unwelcome as customers at downtown casinos and hotels, and they could find little employment except as kitchen workers, maids, and porters. Even prominent black entertainers were forbidden to stay overnight at the hotels where they performed. After an evening's work they had to rent rooms in Westside homes or boarding houses. A threat by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to march on The Strip in early 1960 set off an emotional public debate, inspiring fears of violence and adverse publicity—a dim prospect for tourism. The city heaved a collective sigh of relief when most downtown and Strip casinos finally decided to admit black customers, and the demonstration was cancelled. While BMI's doors remained open, however, these events were only a dream for the future, and it is doubtful that blacks from the South could have been surprised by discrimination in Nevada during that era. Although improved social treatment would certainly have been welcome, the black migrants came to BMI hoping mainly for steady work and pay. Emit Hoya speaks vividly of what pay meant when he says that he thought the amount on his first BMI paycheck was a mistake because it was so much more than he had made at the sawmill in Tallullah.⁶³

Other than the few firms at BMI, southern Nevada has failed to attract a significant industrial component. But the hotel-casino business in Las Vegas boomed, and continues its dizzying expansion today. Huge high-rises and mammoth hotel expansions are the order of the hour. Newspaper articles periodically lament the lack of industrial diversification, but with the prosperity brought by the casinos, one might question whether Las Vegas really feels an urgent need to attract other business. Even if they do, out-of-town businessmen are far more willing to take an exciting Las Vegas vacation than to set up shop in this city where the image continues to be, however unjustifiably, "booze, gambling, and brothels." It is as though such critics, while willing to enjoy gambling in Las Vegas, cannot believe that it coexists with the work ethic, civic pride and charitable concern. The May 1988 explosion of the Pacific Engineering Company plant, a manufacturer of rocket-fuel oxidizer only a half mile away from the BMI complex, has made many people uneasy about the dangers they might face from factories near their homes. The blast ruined houses for miles around, even breaking windows as far away as North Las Vegas. In light of this disaster, it seems likely that industrial expansion will generate little enthusiasm in the near future. Judging from the past, we may also expect that any economic transition in the state's future will be marked, like that of the early 1940s, by turbulence and controversy.

NOTES

¹ William L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years* (Little Brown and Co., 1984), 231, 232; Investigations of the National Defense Program: Hearings Before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, U.S. Senate, 77th Congress, part 13, March 9th to 24th, 1942, 5671.

² Investigations, 5671, 5672; Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, 3rd Session, vol. 86, July 10, 1940, 9433; See also Congressional Record 5/16/40, pp. 6233, 6244; 5/31/40, pp. 7282, 7313, 7314; William E. Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (Harper and Row, 1963), 299, 300; Gerald T. White, *Billions for Defense: Government Financing by the Defense Plant Corporation During World War II* (University of Alabama Press, 1980), 72-75; Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Indiana University Press, 1985), 3,4,14,18,37,38. On Las Vegas, see pp 84-87.

According to Nash, the Defense Plant Corporation built almost 350 industrial plants in the West, at a cost of nearly \$2 billion. Federal projects pumped almost \$70 billion dollars into the region's economy during the war years. These projects brought about a great migration; California alone gained 3.5 million in population from 1940 to 1950. (California's increasing population and prosperity were naturally extremely significant to the Las Vegas economy.) See Nash, 19,20,25,38.

³ Refractories are bricks used to line furnaces and are capable of withstanding very high temperatures. In the BMI project history that Eells provided to the Senate committee, he says that the outbreak of the war prompted him to enter the magnesium business, since his mineral resources were "apparently inexhaustible," and far greater than he needed to make refractories. Just a few lines earlier in the text, however, he also says that BRI began making its mineral claims in October of 1936 with the idea of entering the magnesium business.

⁴ Christopher Currin, "Desert Land Transformed into the City of Henderson," 1983, manuscript, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Special Collections, 1; Investigations, 5672-5676; White, 42; Isaac F. Marcossan, *Anaconda* (Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, n.d.), 235-239. World Magnesium production in 1940, including that of the United States, amounted to 44,900 metric tons. BMI's rated production capacity was 112 million pounds per year, or 50 metric tons. At the peak of production in 1943, BMI actually turned out magnesium at the rate of 120 million pounds per year. See production table on p. 124b, 1949 edition of *Encyclopedia Americana*; *Basic Bombardier*, July 31, 1943, date of 9/22/44 in chronology; Marcossan, 241.

⁵ *A Report of the Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States: 1950, Census of population, Volume II, part 28, "Characteristics of the Population,"* Washington, D.C., 1953, p. 28-6, table 6; Perry Bruce Kaufman, "The Best City of Them All: A History of Las Vegas, 1930-1960," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1974), 8,22,28,41,46; John M. Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society: From Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 113,116,117,121,128,129,147; Florence Lee Jones and John Cahlan, *Water: A History of Las Vegas*, 2 volumes (Las Vegas, 1975), 111.

⁶ Currin, 2; Cahlan, 111; Findlay, 116,117,121,122,125,126,128; Kaufman, 41,46.

⁷ *Las Vegas Review-Journal* 2/5/41, 4 (hereafter cited as RJ); Findlay, 125, 129; Investigations, 5677-5679; Basic Plancor 201, Published by Office of Real Property Disposal, War Assets Administration, Washington, D.C. (1947?) U.S. Government Printing Office (advertising flyer regarding sale of BMI facilities). Ralph J. Roske, *Las Vegas: A Desert Paradise* (Continental Heritage Press, Tulsa, 1986), mentions the \$1 million weekly payroll on page 91. Unfortunately, the source for that information is not cited there. Although a reference was published in a *Review-Journal* article of the period, we have not been able to locate it. The \$1 million figure may be high. Assuming a 48-hour work week and an average wage of \$1.25 per hour, the weekly payroll for 13,000 employees would be \$780,000. This is purely a guess. It goes without saying, however, that even that figure would have been tremendous for the Las Vegas of that period. For information about Mojave Desert military training camps, see RJ 3/24/85, 1a and 4a.

⁸ Sixteenth United States Census, 1940, vol. II Table 4, 722; RJ 6/17/42, 3; Interview with John Cahlan and Florence Lee Jones, November 8, 1984. Black immigration to Las Vegas was part of the broader exodus of black men and women from the southern to the western states during World War II. Defense projects in the West brought an unprecedented immigration to cities in the region. According to Gerald Nash, California alone attracted 340,000 such black immigrants from 1942 to 1945. Areas in the Pacific Northwest also experienced a heavy immigration. The black population of Portland, Oregon, for example, increased from 1,800 in 1940 to 15,000 in 1945. See Nash, 40,91,92,99.

⁹ Investigations, 5676; Memo of 11/14/41 from J.D. Platt to H.P. Eells (Eells Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas); Memo #300, dated 7/5/41, regarding meeting in H.P. Eells' office; Memo of J.D. Platt regarding meeting of July 21-24, 1941; *History of Civil Engineering*, by E.H. Clary, 10/21/44 (Eells Collection); Elbert B Edwards, *Two-hundred Years in Nevada* (Publishers Press, Salt Lake City, 1978), 351-352; Basic Plancor 201H, located at Henderson, Nevada and adjacent to Metals Plant (War Assets Administrations, Washington, D.C., 1947? Advertising flyer for sale of townsite.).

¹⁰ Eells collection chronology 7/28/42; *Big Job*, 7/30/42. In the RJ of 5/20/43, 9, BMI Superintendent Guernsey Frazier is quoted as saying that the project employed 16,000 workers at its peak. The Eells collection chronology estimates 12,955 employees were on the job on July 28, 1942, but the *Big Job* of 7/30/42 gives a total of 13,618. The *Big Job*'s figure might also include employees at BMI's Gabbs processing facility. Wesley Stout, "Nevada's New Reno," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 31, 1942, 12 ff; Currin, 3; RJ 9/4/42, 2.

¹¹ Findlay, 126, 129; Eugene Moehring, "Las Vegas and the Second World War," unpublished manuscript, 34, 35 (Later published in *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 25 [Spring 1986]: 1-30); RJ, 1/6/42.

¹² Marcossan, 239; Jesse H. Jones, *Fifty Billion Dollars: My Thirteen Years with the RFC (1932-1945)* (The MacMillan Co., New York, 1951), 333; *Basic Bombardier*, 11/17/44, 3; Basic Plancor 201; RJ 11/5/43, 8; 11/19/43, 5; Whitehead, 177; *Bombardier* 9/22/44. Jones says that BMI alone produced a quarter of all magnesium made during the war.

¹³ See Alyce Canfield, "Boom Town With a Sombrero," *Liberty Magazine*, May 8, 1943, 22-24; see also articles in *Saturday Evening Post*, Oct. 31 1942, and *Life*, Jan. 10, 1944.

¹⁴ Comments regarding working conditions are necessarily impressionistic, and addressed to a handful of job categories; I have relied heavily on the BMI policy manual, and on interviews with several former project workers. There is insufficient information to distinguish conditions faced by McNeil Construction Company workers from those encountered by employees of Basic Magnesium, Inc. Much of the discussion that follows is about general conditions faced by those who immigrated to Las Vegas during these years—challenges including scarce housing, high rent, snarled traffic, inadequate recreation, and wartime rationing. The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* is an indispensable source of information about the period in general, and BMI in particular. The goal of this article is to tell the story of the rise, progress, and decline of the Basic Magnesium project, to suggest its significant effects on Las Vegas, and to convey some of the feeling of what it was like to work at BMI and to live in southern Nevada during these transitional years.

¹⁵ According to BMI's personnel manual, "In full operation [the chlorinator furnaces] give off about two million cubic feet of gas per day." Policy manual available in Eells Collection. UNLV Special Collections.

¹⁶ This description of the manufacturing process is necessarily greatly simplified. My sources are Florence Cahlan's RJ article of 11/5/43, 8; Basic Plancor 201, 2; *Saturday Evening Post* article of Oct. 31 1942, 12ff; BMI's policy manual, job descriptions, flow charts, and flow chart descriptions; Interviews with Roy Hughes, May 4, 1985, and Charles Truworthy, April 27, 1985.

¹⁷ RJ 9/23/43, 5.

¹⁸ RJ 11/22/41, 7; Nash, 89, 42, 43, 61, 62, 66, 68.

¹⁹ RJ 1/31/42, 1-2; 4/30/42, 1; 7/22/42, 1.

²⁰ *Liberty Magazine*, 24.

²¹ *Liberty Magazine*, 23.

²² Interviews with Buck Baker, May 4, 1985, and George Jones, March 9, 1985. According to Alyce Canfield, in *Liberty Magazine*, *op. cit.*, there were more than 200 packed trailer camps in the Las Vegas area.

²³ RJ 1/15/42, 1; Jones, Baker, and Hughes interviews.

²⁴ Interviews with Woodrow Wilson, 3/14/85 and Billy Sanner, 4/13/85; Interview with Emit Hoya, April 3, 1985; *West Las Vegas at the Crossroads: A Forum* (sponsored by Westside Community Comprehensive Economic Development Plan, and Nevada Commonwealth, Inc., with a grant from the Nevada Humanities Committee, July 19, 1977), 15-16 (henceforth referred to as *West Las Vegas*).

In the 1930's black residences and businesses were located downtown, and the residents of Westside were mostly white. As more blacks moved in to Las Vegas, they were channelled into Westside, and the black residents and businesses were gradually forced from the downtown area. Las Vegas lenders would not finance construction of Westside housing, and therefore flimsy and inexpensive structures, lacking plumbing and utilities, became the rule. See Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "The Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium Corporation on Southern Nevada," *Nevada Public Affairs Review* (1987 Number 2): 29, 31, 33.

²⁵ RJ 1/3/42, 4; *Liberty Magazine*, 24; Interview with Sanner, April 13, 1985. Sanner went to work as a busboy for Anderson's Cafeteria shortly after it opened. For a description of the cafeteria, see RJ 11/12/43, 7.

²⁶ Interview with Dennis Shelton, May 3, 1985; Jones interview. Jones told me about cars traveling in the oncoming lane of Boulder Highway.

²⁷ RJ 2/24/42, 1; 2/25/42, 1; 9/4/42, 2. The September RJ article indicates that of the approximately 9,000 McNeil Construction Company employees, 6,500 lived in North Las Vegas, Las Vegas, or settlements along Boulder Highway.

²⁸ Interview of with Berkeley Bunker, Feb. 15, 1985; RJ 12/11/41, 4: Memo of 12/16/41 from Eells to H.G. Mann, Project Manager in Las Vegas.

²⁹ Congressional Record, vol. 88, part 3, 77th Congress, second session, March 26 to May 21, 1942, 3413,3414,3814,3815; RJ 9/29/42, 1; 10/28/42, 4.

³⁰ Investigations, March 1942, 5678-5679; Basic Plancor 201 H, 4,11; Eells collection chronology; RJ 4/5/43, 12; 2/8/45, 13; Trueworthy and Hughes interviews. George Jones says he got a vacating supervisor's Townsite home by agreeing to purchase the man's furniture. The supervisor "pulled some strings" and Jones was able to by-pass the waiting list. BMI worker Billy Sanner contends that Townsite housing was limited to supervisors. Basic Plancor 201 H indicates that 703 of the Townsite houses had two bedrooms, and floor space of 620 square feet. The remaining 297 homes had three bedrooms and 785 square feet of floor space. For examples of the housing built in Las Vegas, see RJ 9/23/42, 2;

³¹ Moehring, 18; RJ 1/4/42, 2; 2/18/42, 2; 2/26/42; 7/22/42, 1; 3/17/42, 9; Interviews with Jones and Sanner. Gas rationing began in December of 1942: see RJ 11/27/42, 1 and 12/1/42.

Interstate Transit Lines also provided bus service between Las Vegas and the plant. See RJ 9/4/42, 2. After the War Production Board ordered BMI to halt magnesium production, *Basic Bombardier* columnist Al Weinberg praised BMI workers for perseverance in dealing with adversities such as trips of "fifteen miles to a shopping center for food in a packed, stinking, broken down fleet of antiquated busses." See *Bombardier* 9/9/44, 1.

³² Currin, 24. Basic Townsite was renamed in honor of Nevada's United States Senator, Charles B. Henderson, chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (the agency in charge of the DPC) from 1941 to 1947. For the notice of his death, and some information about his career, see *Henderson Home News* 11/11/54.

³³ RJ 10/2/42, 2; 2/17/43, 8, 10; Interview with Sanner, Trueworthy, and Hughes; Basic Plancor 201 H, 5; RJ 7/6/44, 7.

³⁴ For examples of social activities, see *Big Job* 12/3/42, 10/10/42, 3/11/43, and RJ "Basic Notes" sections, e.g., RJ 5/28/43, 7/3/43; RJ 11/28/42, 1; 4/3/43, 6; 8/17/43, 1; Moehring, 16-17.

³⁵ RJ 8/17/43, 1; 12/21/43, 12. In the former reference, the RJ reports that 5% of workers quit their jobs every week. The latter reference is a CIO advertisement proclaiming that "the War Manpower Commission has officially rated BMI as the second highest plant in the nation for labor turnover" because of "bad working conditions." RJ 9/8/42, 1; *State of Nevada, Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, July 1, 1940 to June 30, 1942* (State Printing Office, 1942), 8. BMI still put pressure on workers who wanted to quit. Management threatened George Jones with the draft when he left in 1944. Dennis Shelton quit when plant closings made it clear to him that the project would soon close, and he says that as a result he was imprisoned for a week in Las Vegas. According to the RJ of 1/17/42, 1, temperatures hit an all-time low of ten degrees. The demand for power caused a blackout in Las Vegas. Interviews with Baker, Hughes, Trueworthy. "Goods box houses" is Roy Hughes's phrase. High rates of turnover and worker shortages were not, of course, limited to southern Nevada. United States Senator Sheridan Downey of California pointed out that many of his state's war workers "are living in such deplorable conditions that they do not have the proper [living facilities] and they just move around attempting to better their conditions." See Nash, 39,41.

³⁶ Interviews with Wilson and Shelton; Interview with Emit Hoya, 4/3/85; Fitzgerald, 31.

³⁷ RJ 6/17/42, 3; 7/17/42; 8/12/42, 3; 2/12/43, 5; 3/26/43, 5; 10/28/43. See also RJ 1/5/43, 10, where white property owners petitioned the City Commission to "shut out liquor and gambling on the west side of North First Street, occupied mostly by negroes."

³⁸ RJ 10/11/43, 2, 6; 12/11/43, 6; 12/16/43, 4; 12/30/43, 3; 2/14/44; BMI policy manual, announcement regarding Carver Park, under "Housing."

³⁹ Interviews of Hughes, Trueworthy, Baker, Sanner, and Jones; RJ 11/1/43, 6 (Drew Pearson's column).

⁴⁰ Investigations, August, 1943, 8359-8361; RJ 1/15/43, 8; Interviews of white workers Baker, Hughes, Sanner, and Trueworthy, and black workers Hoya, Shelton, and Wilson. The black workers deny, however, that they received lower pay than whites for the same jobs. A January 15, 1943, housing announcement (page 8) notifies readers that apartments sponsored by the Federal Public Housing Authority would soon be available for incoming black workers earning \$1,500 to \$2,400 annually; white worker housing, on the other hand, would accommodate those earning mainly from \$2,400 to \$3,000. Thus the expectation of lower pay for black workers across the board is implied.

There were some black supervisors at BMI. Woodrow Wilson, for instance, first an employee of McNeil Construction, worked six months as a laborer when he received promotion to the position of masonry

department foreman, responsible for shipping bricks inside the plant. Wilson continued working at BMI through the departure of McNeil and the cessation of magnesium production. After the war, management denied Wilson a promotion superintendent of stores, telling him privately that they considered him the best man for the job, but white workers simply would not accept him in that position. He helped train the white man who got the job. Interview with Wilson.

Robert C. Weaver, Chief of the Negro Employment Branch of the Office of Production Management's Labor Division, informed Senator Harry Truman in a 1941 letter that restrictive employment patterns' were practically universal in defense industries. He blamed negative attitudes of management and the white workers.

⁴¹ Following reports of the walkout at BMI, Las Vegas Police Chief Harry Miller evidently feared violent reaction in town, for he placed his men on twenty-four-hour duty. Interview with Jones; Investigations August, 1943, 8348, 8349, 8354; RJ 10/20/43, 1; 10/21/43, 3. A.T. McCoy, a participant in the protest, told me that the workers were fired. The RJ 10/21/43 does indicate that fifty of the men turned down jobs at the Hawthorne Naval Depot. See also Drew Pearson's column in RJ of 11/1/43. Nash indicates that some strikers claim they were beaten; he confirms that all were fired. See Nash, 105,106. According to Roosevelt Fitzgerald, the investigators from the Fair Employment Practices Committee who came to Las Vegas to probe the walkout recommended the end of segregation at the plant. It is reasonable to assume that though management made no further attempts to segregate restrooms, segregation of housing, schooling, worship, and other de facto separation of the races continued. Our informants say that work crews were not segregated; Fitzgerald's informant evidently told him the opposite. Fitzgerald, 33,34. See also Al Cahlan's column criticizing the Fair Employment investigators and blaming trouble between the races on rabble-rousing union (CIO) agitators, RJ 4/5/44, 12. Nash indicates that some strikers claimed they were beaten; he confirms that all were fired. See Nash, 105,106

⁴² RJ 7/1/43, 3; City Commission Minutes 7/2/43. The beer license had only just been granted on June 24th. *West Las Vegas*, 25,34,38,39,41,49. According to Kathryn Joseph (see *West Las Vegas*, 49), buses took recreation-seeking black servicemen from Indian Springs to Westside, where they jammed the four black clubs there. Downtown businesses would not accept their patronage. Interview with Wilson. The ice cream store incident actually occurred during the postwar years, but Wilson makes it clear that similar things happened in the early 1940s all the time. Residents who lived in Las Vegas's small black community in the early 1930s say that they had free access to all businesses except houses of prostitution. Evidently, discriminatory practices grew in the mid-1930s, and the arrival of BMI's black employees promoted increasingly rigid segregation in Las Vegas. In 1939, well before the BMI project, City Commissioner Jay Ronnow told protesting Westside leaders that white community sentiment prevented the city from granting their petition to lift restrictions that prohibited blacks from using the city golf course, swimming pool, library, and cemetery. In the end, the city fathers' only concession was to say that they would permit burial of "Negroes" in a section of the cemetery. One wonders how long such exclusion from city facilities had been practiced. It is interesting that no blacks were hired on the Boulder Dam project until after bitter protests against exclusion. In July of 1932, the *Las Vegas Age* announced that contractors had hired the first ten black workers on the project, "all ex-servicemen and such entitled to preferential treatment." See Roosevelt Fitzgerald, op. cit., 29,30; Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "The Evolution of a Black Community in Las Vegas: 1905-1940," *Nevada Public Affairs Review*, (1987 Number 2), pp 25-27; *Las Vegas Age*, 12/19/31, 3; 7/8/32. See City Commission Minutes, 10/4/39, 202-203; 11/16/39, 212; RJ 10/5/39, 3; 11/17/39, 6; 11/29/39, 4. The 1939 session of Nevada's Assembly rejected a bill giving all races equal rights to the enjoyment of public facilities. Hotel owners and other businessmen opposed the measure. Nevada also outlawed interracial marriage. In 1946, the Las Vegas police jailed a black man after he tried to take out a license to marry a white woman. See RJ 2/28/46; also RJ 1/8/47, 2.

⁴³ RJ 12/19/42, 3; *Years of Trial and Hope: Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*. Nash, 10,91,93,97,106; (Doubleday and Co., Garden City N.Y., 1956), 182-183; Nash 10,91,93,97,106; BMI policy manual, introductory page. In fairness to Keyes, his statement about BMI's progressive policies was not made in the context of race relations. But Keyes evidently saw no conflict between "progressive" policies and the kind of racial separation practiced at BMI.

⁴⁴ BMI policy manual, safety precautions and job descriptions; Interviews with Trueworthy.

⁴⁵ Interviews with Shelton and Trueworthy.

⁴⁶ Interviews with Denby Wade, March 14, 1984; Interviews with Trueworthy and Shelton. BMI installed ventilators on the metals unit sometime between September 1943 and August 1944. See *Basic Bombardier* 8/25/44, 4, caption of photograph.

⁴⁷ Interviews with Hughes and Sanner.

⁴⁸ Interviews with Sanner and Wilson.

⁴⁹ Interviews with Trueworthy, Hughes, Jones, Sanner, Wilson, Baker, and Bunker.

⁵⁰ N. Irving Sax, *Dangerous Properties of Industrial Materials* (Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1984), 674; BMI policy manual; Interview with Hughes, Trueworthy, Sanner, and Jones.

⁵¹ RJ 2/9/43, 2; BMI policy manual, Safety Rules for Chlorine Plant, rule 12; interviews of Hughes and Trueworthy.

⁵² James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (William Morrow and Co., New York, 1981), 95.

⁵³ Interviews with Wade and Baker. Sax, op. cit., says that workers should not be exposed to more than one part per million of chlorine gas, well below the level at which unpleasant odors or eye irritations occur.

⁵⁴ RJ 4/20/44, 1; 7/26/44, 1; 11/21/44, 3. For a chronology of significant dates in BMI's history, see *Bombardier* 9/22/44.

⁵⁵ *Bombardier* 8/25/44; RJ 12/8/44, 14; 12/28/44, 3; 3/17/45, 1, 5; 3/30/45, 6; 4/11/45, 1; 4/13/45, 6.

⁵⁶ Eric N. Moody, *Southern Gentleman of Nevada Politics: Vail M. Pittman* (University of Nevada Press, Reno, 1974), 51-53, 58; *Colorado River Commission of Nevada Complied Reports, September 1, 1935 to June 1 1946* (Carson City, Nevada, 1946), 163-168; RJ 10/29/45, 4; 4/11/46, 3; 4/17/46, 1; 9/10/46, 1.

⁵⁷ Moody, 51; RJ 3/29/45, 3; 4/13/45, 6; 5/4/45, 6; 5/8/45, 6; 5/18/45, 1; 2/13/46, 9.

⁵⁸ RJ 9/27/45, 4; 10/5/45, 5; 10/16/45, 3; 2/13/46, 9; 2/25/46, 1. According to the RJ, New York and Ohio Chemical Company was not scheduled to start operating for another month, and was expected to employ 50 to 60 workers. According to Chamber of Commerce advertisement on October 5, American Chemical Company had just "completed contractual arrangements." According to the September 27 article, 1,100 workers were employed at the plant.

⁵⁹ RJ 9/20/46, 5; 10/31/46, 1; 4/12/47, 2; 5/29/47, 1.

⁶⁰ RJ 11/27/46, 1; Basic Plancor 201, 30-33 (See also RJ 4/21/47, 9, which lists fifteen lessees); Moody, 53.

⁶¹ RJ 2/28/47, 3; 3/4/47, 3; 3/6/47, 2; 3/8/47, 1; 3/12/47, 3 (photograph and caption); 3/14/47, 1 (see also RJ 3/18/47, 1; 3/20/47, 1; 4/6/47, 1; *Statutes of the State of Nevada, Passed at the Forty-third Session of the Legislature, 1947* (Carson City, Nevada), 450-451; RJ 6/5/47, 9; 6/12/47, 1; Moody, 64, 99, *Message of Governor Charles H. Russell to the Nevada Legislature of 1951* (Carson City, Nevada, 1951), 21-23.

⁶² United States Census, 1950, p.28-6, table 6; *Henderson Home News* 3/14/55, 15. The Nevada State Taxation Department says that as of 1987 Henderson had 54,900 residents.

⁶³ Seventeenth Census, 1950, vol. 2, part 28, table 34, p. 28. Census figures show a 1950 black population in Las Vegas of 2,725. Almost no blacks lived in Henderson, Boulder City, or North Las Vegas. Carver Park had only 55 black residents. It is apparent that Westside absorbed almost the entire black population increase in southern Nevada during the decade. West Las Vegas 24-25, 27, 47, 61; *New York Times* 3/18/60, 23; 3/27/60, 57; RJ 3/25/60, 1; 3/27/60, 1, 8; interviews of Wilson and Hoya. Fitzgerald, "Demographic Impact," 34-35.

BOOK REVIEWS

Driving to Vegas: New And Selected Poems, 1969-87. By Kirk Robertson. (Tucson: SUN/Gemini Press, 1989, 276 pp.)

MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO my ex-wife and I drove north from Missoula on a November Sunday. We didn't know where we were going, we were new to Montana, a little isolated as we began new lives in another western town, not quite sure who we were.

The late morning light was steely and foreshadowed winter, we were quiet and withdrawn, no doubt I was hungover since that's how things went in those days, and not expecting to be startled and astonished back into my natural and hopeful self. I remember the drift of our old brown Chevrolet as we came over the rise east of St. Ignatius, and the great rock-wall surprise of those mountains above the harvest-time look of the valley, that vision of elegance and paradise and possibility which is the Mission Mountains against a windy aluminum-colored sky.

Someday, I thought, this will be the life I remember, one of the prime rewards of having lived, and now it is. I was drawn back into that long instant of revelation and opening to the world, as with so many moments of recognition, by Kirk Robertson's poetry.

crossroads

one August afternoon
lost in Fallon, Nevada
at that point
when the sun
was still up
the quality
of light on the hills
suddenly changed
and it seemed
somewhat cooler
he realized
that he could never
forget all that needed

to be forgotten that
he was left
with only a few things
trips and places
that mattered...

Kirk spent some time in St. Ignatius, and in and out of Missoula, where I live, some years through the middle 1970s, and lately he's been working for the Nevada Arts Council in Reno but living out in the pretty alfalfa farming country near Fallon. The things Kirk Robertson knows are close to my heart; it is the West I grew up in, our little towns, our crossings and our most transient actualities.

Jean Baudrillard wrote, in *America*, " Drive ten thousand miles across America and you will know more about the country than all the institutes of sociology and political science put together. " Drive it, and grow up in it, like Kirk did, live deep inside it, get it next to your heart. See what you come to know.

my father

I didn't know him
very well he and
my mother split up
and I only saw him
when he came to town
once a year at
the Capri Motel
next to LAX...

Life in our West breaks our hearts all the time; so much beauty and promise, so often cold and boring and lonesome and lost. What should we want? We have been taught to live in images, and to live for, as Baudrillard says, " . . . the immanence of desire in the image. "

Images, Baudrillard says, " . . . are not something to dream about; they are the dream. " Those are so often concocted out of concoctions, they blind us, we can't see any more, images take the place of all that might be actual, and the places we inhabit vanish into movies and advertising and polaroid colors. We get lost.

it's like putting on your hat while reaching out for your ears

some make it by teaching college
by embracing some theory of cosmic unity

some make it with dope
or booze or both
some make it with Christ
some make it by making it with everybody
by making babies
by throwing pots
or the *I Ching*
some make it without meat
eggs milk or other dairy products
some make it by throwing up
by sailing a ship of flowers through Suez
some make it by slashing Rembrandts
some make it by running
some make it by standing still
some make it by hiding
some make it by opening a beer
next to an open window
in a freeway motel
some make it quietly
alone and unnoticed
some make it

some don't

What we should want, I think is more artists like Kirk Robertson, who keep poking holes in the facades we put up between ourselves and the emotional possibilities inherent in our lives and the lives of our communities. We should want more artists who keep saying, *see*, artists who keep pointing out that the place where we live is not necessarily never-never-land; it could be paradise; we could all make a run at happiness.

Pay attention, Kirk Robertson keeps implying, try some decency, for openers. His work is vital and useful, and done on our behalf; Kirk Robertson is to be congratulated. *Driving to Vegas* is compelling and necessary.

William Kittredge
University of Montana

Western Images, Western Landscapes: Travels along U.S. 89. By Thomas R. Vale and Geraldine R. Vale (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989, 189 pp., maps, figures, bibliography.)

IN THIS VOLUME TWO GEOGRAPHERS take a trip. Beginning at the Mexican-American border, at Nogales, Arizona, they explore the entire length of U.S. Highway 89 through Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana to the Canadian-American border at Piegan, Montana. Along the way they observe the passing landscape, noting both natural characteristics of the land and human alterations of it. But their larger purpose is to understand and analyze the characteristics of that most amorphous of regions, the American West.

In accomplishing that objective, they present an introductory chapter on landscape meaning, in which they note the complicated interplay of physical reality and mental image. The American West is a tangible place, located by common agreement somewhere west of the hundredth meridian; but it is also a mental state, evoked by a series of resonant and sometimes contradictory images, such as the oil derricks, cowboys, national parks, and native tribal peoples. The authors want to explore the connections between these two Wests, the physical region of arid, mountainous country, and the imaginary West of myth and memory. As they explain it, "The mental images influence how humans treat the West and thus help determine the appearance of the western scene. But the physical landscape also helps to determine the mental images, by reinforcing or modifying what is in the mind" (p. xiii).

Distilling numerous scholarly and popular studies of the West, the authors identify eight major images of the region. These are the empty quarter, or land to be plundered; the frontier, or familiar Wild West; big rock candy mountain, or land of unbounded opportunity; the middle landscape, or pastoral perfection; Turnerian progression, or growing cities; deserts, or arid landscape; protected wild nature, or national parks and wilderness areas; and playground, or land for outdoor recreation. They acknowledge that some of these images may overlap, and that others may be mutually exclusive. Their quest as they travel is to determine whether these mental images of the West are manifested in the actual western landscape they traverse.

In the course of their travels, they comment on various specific places, including the expanding megalopolis of Phoenix, the apparently static Mormon farming communities of southern Utah, and the western playgrounds of Jackson Hole and Yellowstone National Park. For individual places such as these, their descriptions are generally intriguing, their ob-

servations interesting, and their photographs revealing. The eight categories, however, prove to be less useful, as the authors are often reduced to observing that a given place has a mixture of elements that simultaneously reflects different images.

A concluding section, entitled "Looking Back," is more successful in generalizing about what the authors have seen. Here they distinguish between structural images of landscape, in which a given state of nature persists (frontier, middle landscape, playground) and process images (Turnerian progression, big rock candy mountain) in which change is an essential ingredient. Ultimately, their conclusion is that nature—arid, mountainous, and isolated—is the essence of the West, but that nature is inevitably being threatened. Not only development in places like Tuscon and Salt Lake City, but even the oxymoron of "protected wilderness" threatens the survival of the open country traditionally associated with the American West.

Finally, the writers suggest that new images may be needed to suit the complexity of the modern West, so that the structural essence of the West can be preserved in the face of rapid change initiated by the process of economic development. If traditional western landscapes are to be preserved, then we need, according to the Vales, a new vision of how to maintain them.

This book is beautifully designed, copiously illustrated, and contains a great deal of general information about western landscape in the form of maps and figures that illustrate common western flora and fauna, processes of geologic formation, the range of the coyote, and other intriguing miscellaneous facts. It will be of interest to Nevada readers who are travelling Highway 89, or to students of landscape imagery who may want to apply its insights during journeys along the highways of Nevada.

Elizabeth Raymond
University of Nevada, Reno

Ranching Traditions: Legacy of the American West. Compiled and with a preface by Kathleen Jo Ryan. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989, 296 pp., photographs, index.)

RANCHING TRADITIONS FITS COMFORTABLY within the larger body of photo and photo-essay books about western ranch and cowboy life. Of the more recent and outstanding in this group, Bart McDowell and William Allard's *The American Cowboy in Life and Legend* (National Geographic, 1972), is one of the earliest and best, blending McDowell's words and Allard's photos with historic pictures, paintings, and drawings (for outlaw buffs, there is a photo of Claude Dallas [in the round-crowned hat] with a group of Nevada cowboys on page 132). Kurt Marcus's *After Barbed Wire: Cowboys of Our Time* (Twelvetrees Press, 1985) and *Buckaroo: Images from the Sagebrush Basin* (New York Graphic Society, 1987) feature plenty of Nevada people, places, and events. Markus's books present the strongest photos of the lot; *After Barbed Wire* is all black-and-white, and *Buckaroo* contains both color and black-and-white. The main criticism Nevada cowboys have of Markus is he does not write enough. When he does, they like what he says: "Once you catch what cowboys and their families are inspired by and burdened with, it is a son-of-a-bitch to shake. Soon you quit trying" (*After Barbed Wire*, introduction). Barney Nelson's *Voices and Visions of the American West* (Texas Monthly Press, 1987) is a favorite among cowboys because its author successfully juxtaposes the spoken word (taken from hours of recorded interviews with dozens of people) with her first-rate color photographs. All four of these books feature plenty of Nevada people and scenes. *Ranching Traditions*, unlike the others, highlights the rancher rather than the cowboy.

Kathleen Jo Ryan's book contains twelve medium-length essays about ranch life and related elements, along with 317 color photographs whose content roughly corresponds to that of the essays. All of the pictures are technically fine, sharp, and well exposed, but some could well have been omitted; they add nothing but clutter. A nice feature of the book is a photo-journalistic sequence that shows pulling a calf, and another showing how a dead calf's hide is "grafted" to a leggy calf so that the dead calf's mother will accept the orphan.

The twelve essays cover a wide range of topics, but even so, they barely scratch the surface of cowboy and ranch culture. They are generally, however, admirable starts. The essays and their authors are: "How It All Began," David Dary; "The West of True Myth," Gretel Ehrlich; "The Cowboy," John Erickson; "Heroes of the Saddle," Reuben Albaugh; "Ranch Family," Teresa Jordan; "The Business of Ranching," Elmer Kelton; "Clockwork Agriculture," William Kittredge; "Livestock," Baxter

Black; "Cowboy Art between the Lines," Hal Cannon; "Music and Dance," Guy Logsdon; "Necessity and Fashion," Dick Spencer; and "Rodeo," Randy Witte. A preface by Ms. Ryan and a section called "Reluctant Heroes" round out our contents.

As with any collection of works by authors so disparate and on topics so diverse, these essays vary in tone from solid, well written, and informative, to unabashedly romantic, loose, and fluffy. Most, however, lean toward the worthwhile, especially those by Ehrlich, Jordan, Kittredge, Black, Cannon, and Logsdon. The "Reluctant Heroes" section contains excerpts from interviews with ranchers and cattlemen from throughout the West, much like Nelson's treatment in *Visions and Voices*. Here, however, it just does not work, and I am hard pressed to say why. The words simply do not contain the bite, the oomph, the insight, the savvy, that you know these people have. It seems as though the interviewer did not ask the right questions, or the interviewees were not inclined to ponder, to think out loud, or the essayist picked the wrong excerpts. For whatever reason, this section does not work as it should.

But the collection contains real gems of wisdom, truth, and wit: "[Myths] evolve organically and grow like a vine from compost into images and words, feeling their way into a culture" (Ehrlich, p. 46); "The image of a hired hand riding off alone in the sunset is more likely a cowboy who has just lost his job" (Ehrlich, p. 53); "from the open space still surrounding us, we learn spiritual equivalents: that personal liberation is a kind of psychic space represents clear-headedness and ability to act without fraudulence" (Ehrlich, p. 59) "even though [the rancher and the cowboy] often wear the same brand of clothes and drink from the same cup and look about the same from a distance, they're not the same. . . . The laborers [the rancher] hires to care for his livestock are cowboys," and "a cowboy is a common laborer with heroic tendencies and a sense of humor, who lives with animals" (Erickson, p. 62); "It is an axiom that ranching, like agriculture in general, is a good life but often a poor living" (Kelton, p. 116); "It was a rare season in the bunkhouse when some old man didn't turn up dead for breakfast. That will break your heart" (Kittredge, p. 144); "We are talking about a social phenomenon, a drive to industrialize [the ranch] that soured and undercut the value of what drew people to ranching in the first place" (Kittredge, p. 146); "We all yearn for connection to such a living world and for significant work, like raising food, a way of living so unlike that perfectly alienating factory-land day-dream of efficiency called agribusiness" (Kittredge, p. 146); "[The range cow] has plodded, milled and stampeded over the vast western landscape like the perennial graduate student unaware of her direction and ambivalent about getting there" (Black, p. 149); "You could no more walk up to a range cow than you could an elk or a discount store employee" (Black, p. 149); "[Range

cows] have an IQ somewhere between the sandmill crane and a creosote post. You cannot reason with a cow" (Black, p. 157); "Cowboys are always the most critical of authenticity in the way they are portrayed, [but] they take a deep pride in tradition of being shown in a romantic light" (Cannon, p. 172).

Ranching Traditions is dandy book and deserves its place on the coffee table right alongside the rest. In conjunction with the other four, it gives the reader a good peek at the myths, romance, and reality of ranching life.

Blanton Owen
Virginia City, Nevada

Nevada Newspaper Days: A History of Journalism in the Silver State. By Jake Highton. (Stockton: Heritage West Books, 1990. 328 pp., preface, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

JAKE HIGHTON, PROFESSOR IN the Don Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, has written a lengthy and controversial history of newspapers in Nevada. Beginning with the Comstock press, Highton discusses small town journalism in the state, the immigrant and the specialized press, and concludes with chapter-length treatments of the *Las Vegas Sun*, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (a Don Reynolds newspaper), and the *Reno Gazette-Journal* (a Gannett paper).

In his own words, Highton tries to write history "brightly and sprightly." He has an openly stated bias for the country weekly over the big-city newspaper, and he reserves his sternest judgments for the latter. Nineteenth-century journalism also appeals to him more than twentieth-century journalism. He admires accuracy on the news page and gutsiness on the editorial. He emphasizes the role of the individual in journalism, and therefore plays up the accomplishments of individual reporters, editors, and publishers. Particular heroes of Highton's in twentieth-century Nevada journalism include small county editors Jack McClosky and Walter Cox, reporters Edward Olsen and Robert Neal Bennyhoff, big city editor Paul Leonard and publisher Herman "Hank" Greenspun. Perhaps the man whom Highton admires the most is Frank McCulloch—"an outstanding reporter and editor." What Highton dislikes about twentieth-century Nevada journalism is the increasing tendency toward corporate control where the bottom line becomes preeminent. "The sad truth," the

author declares, "is that where once the role of a newspaper was to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, the role of newspapers today is to make money." (p.286) In particular he criticizes the Don Reynolds chain ("profits before quality") and the Gannett corporation ("the bottom line is everything") for increasingly bland, faceless journalism.

Highton's historical approach is not uniformly successful. He romanticizes nineteenth-century journalism by emphasizing the colorful, the bizarre, and the flamboyant, without asking the larger, more fundamental historical question of what it was that the press contributed to Nevada's nineteenth-century mining society. Furthermore, Highton does not have sufficient skepticism toward his sources, which results in many mistakes. The Comstock did not yield \$1 billion in gold and silver, the proper figure is approximately a third of that. Was the *Territorial Enterprise* really the "most influential newspaper in the West"—a particularly doubtful value judgment since the author does not put Nevada into the wider context necessary to make the comparison. Also hyperbolic is the statement that *Roughing It* ranks "second to the Bible in many homes in Nevada." Mining town population figures are consistently exaggerated.

More convincing is the treatment of the twentieth-century press. Highton does an excellent job discussing such previously ignored subjects as *Nevada Magazine*, the foreign language press, and the minority press. He emphasizes northern Nevada reporters too much at the expense of southern Nevada reporters. There are many surprising omissions, such as no mention of Charles "Pop" Squires, the founder and for many years the leading practitioner of Las Vegas journalism. Even the evidence for his primary thesis is quite selective: There is no mention of the Gannett Corporation's decision to initially starve, and then to kill, the once dominant *Reno Evening Gazette*, and to reduce Reno from a competitive two newspaper town to a more profitable one.

Where the book most suffers, however, is in its organization. Instead of writing a systematic, coherent, unitary historical work, the author has made each chapter into an individual essay. This essay style might have been in the noble tradition adapted by such press critics as A. J. Liebling, Oswald Garrison Villard, and George Seldes; yet, even as essays the chapters do not really work because the essays are cluttered with asides, constant admonitions, gratuitous swipes, and shifting points of view. The fragments remain fragments. Highton does not apply to himself his own rule that "tightness in writing greatly enhances impact." (p.274) In short, the author needed an editor who would talk back to him.

The book is extensively researched, and the photographs well selected. The print, however is too small and there is too much of it on a page, although the layout is not unattractive. The index is woefully inadequate and amateurish. With a more skillful editing, the book would be far

more useful, convincing, and a significant contribution to this important subject.

Jerome E. Edwards
University of Nevada, Reno

Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life. By Robert M. Utley. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. 302 pp., preface, illustrations, maps, notes, sources, index.)

MANY WILL WONDER WHAT MERIT another book on this subject could possibly have. But when the author is the respected Robert M. Utley, serious historians of the American West should take notice. Utley does not claim to have unearthed any startling new evidence that puts the story in an entirely different light. Rather, he has examined the mass of materials gathered largely by others and fashioned from them a study of what, in his hands, is a worthwhile topic: the life and times of Henry McCarty, alias Henry Antrim, Kid Antrim, the Kid, William H. Bonney, and—in his last months—Billy the Kid.

The first indication that the book is worth reading is the absence of naïve or bombastic assertions that this is the work that at long last separates myth and reality, distinguishes fact from fancy, and gives the complete, authentic, never-before-told account of the West's most colorful outlaw. . . . Instead, Utley quietly and competently goes about his business as an experienced professional.

Based on his careful reading of the record, the author portrays his subject without sensationalism. According to his judicious assessment, the Kid was neither a psychopathic punk nor a noble victim of injustice: "Crafty, utterly fearless, heedless of risk, cool under stress, instantly unflinching in taking any life that stood in his way. . . . Billy's sunny exterior concealed a powerfully coiled spring held in by a hair-trigger. When the spring was released, he struck like a rattlesnake, swiftly and fatally" (p. 184). Utley also keeps his man in perspective: "Except in its final months . . . the Kid's career did not measure up to his reputation. Although a superb gunman and arresting personality, he was a quite ordinary outlaw, of uncertain commitment, narrow practice, and ambiguous purpose. In truth, he seems to have had no particular purpose at all, but rather youth's penchant for submerging long-term goals in the pleasures of the moment.

After the Lincoln County War. . . he was a drifter psychologically as well as geographically " (p. 205).

The main value of this study may well be in showing how fragile and superficial was the machinery of American law enforcement in this period of New Mexico's history. Was Lincoln County and surrounding area a raw frontier? New Mexico had been an American territory for thirty years when the Kid emerged for his brief career, and earlier, as a Spanish and Mexican province, at least parts of it had been well settled for hundreds of years. By the late 1870s, the territory seems to have had no lack of law enforcement officials and institutions. Appearing prominently on these pages are federal and territorial judges, justices of the peace, territorial governors, the regular army, sheriffs, federal marshals, constables, deputies and posses, district attorneys, grand and petit juries and writs, warrants, and indictments. Even a federal treasury agent played a role in attempting to bring the Kid to justice. Billy and his associates (Utley is convinced that he was not a leader of any of the amorphous bands with which he rode) operated in and around towns that had churches, schools, newspapers, and stores. Indeed, the Lincoln County war began as a conflict between rival mercantile interests. Yet all these trappings of government and civilization were remarkably ineffective in curbing or punishing criminality.

Unsophisticated writers on such subjects too often rattle on in the body of their texts about the research that went into their efforts. Utley wisely confines such concerns to his notes, where he expertly evaluates old and new evidence and interpretations.

Michael J. Brodhead
University of Nevada, Reno

High Stakes: The Life and Times of Leigh S. J. Hunt. By Laurance B. Rand. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989, 338 pp., preface, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

FOR HALF A CENTURY LEIGH HUNT cut a dashing figure in American financial circles, making and losing several fortunes in Korean gold mines, Sudanese cotton, American newspapers, and other enterprises. Laurance Rand's book partially fills the long-felt need for a Hunt biography. Though marred somewhat by an excessive veneration of its subject, Rand's book ably surveys Hunt's early career if not his later one, which centered in Las

Vegas. Nevada readers will be interested to know that Hunt came to town in 1920 at the age of sixty-five, looking for a new investment "frontier." In hopes of a partial duplication of his spectacular mining success in Korea, Hunt eventually bought gypsum mines near Black Canyon. Hedging his bet on southern Nevada's potential, he also dreamed of transforming fledgling Las Vegas into a resort city. The success of both ventures hinged on congressional approval for Boulder Dam, whose inexpensive power and tourist appeal were crucial to Hunt's plans.

Convinced that the dam would be built, Hunt incorporated the Colorado River Exploration Company in 1924 and purchased 400 acres of land around what is today East Sahara Avenue. Along with Senator Key Pittman, Governor James Scrugham, and other Las Vegas, Hunt planned to build a 152-room resort hotel one mile southeast of the junction of Sahara and East Charleston Boulevard. Ultimately, the skeptical partners pulled out of the scheme. Unwilling to question Hunt's judgment, Rand minimizes Senator Pittman's valid concern that the proposed hotel was too far (almost two miles) from town.

A lack of critical analysis weakens the Las Vegas sections of Rand's book. For example, while there is no doubt that Hunt's early career reflected considerable business acumen, his later years clearly did not. The ever-laudatory author observes that, following the stock-market crash of October 1929, Hunt "remained confident," but that "the truth finally dawned in May [when] he had lost virtually all of his cash reserves." An effort to raise cash by selling his Sudanese lands around Khartoum also failed because, as in Las Vegas, his property lay too far out—a miscalculation that Rand overlooks.

Undaunted, the always resourceful Hunt revived in the early 1930s his earlier plan to build a great resort hotel in Las Vegas—this time closer to town on Fremont and Seventh streets. Unfortunately, a spring sandstorm enveloped the train that was bringing his California partners to Boulder Dam, and the deal was soon off. The author then asserts that "not until after World War II were investors willing to chance their funds on hotels in and around Las Vegas"—a statement that fails to recognize construction of the El Rancho (1941) and Last Frontier (1942) hotels on the emerging Strip as well as the El Cortez (1942) on Fremont Street near Hunt's land.

Despite these and other shortcomings, Rand's book is a useful contribution to the literature. Based on extensive research, it succeeds in placing Hunt within the larger context of American political and economic history. But the Nevada section needs some revising.

Eugene P. Moehring
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West. By John Burke. Reprint, with introduction by Duane A. Smith. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989 [1974]. 248 pp., notes, bibliography, index.)

JOHN BURKE A PSEUDONYM OF Richard O'Connor, was a professional author who wrote biographies, mysteries, and popular histories. Among his more than sixty published volumes were several that had western subjects, including biographies of Buffalo Bill, Bat Masterson, and "Wild Bill" Hickok. Burke's biography of Elizabeth McCourt Doe Tabor, first published in 1974 and reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press, is written in a breezy, offhand, and slightly racy style: "Elizabeth McCourt was undeniably, exuberantly nubile, yet there she was flaunting her calves in full view of an audience of both sexes" (p. 14).

Appropriate to the period of its subject, this work is a stylistic celebration of an age of writing when men were men, women were women, ethnic stereotypes appear on every page, and the cliché is king of the declarative sentence. Burke describes a childhood in which the young Elizabeth McCourt displayed an early affinity for men, whose company she immediately preferred to that of women. Her first husband, Harvey Doe, was a "mamma's boy" (p. 16), whose father brought the newly married couple to his mining claim in Central City, Colorado.

The rest is part of the folklore of the American West. The Does divorced. Elizabeth, now known as Baby Doe, moved to Leadville, where she set her cap for Horace Tabor. "The man now framed in Baby Doe's sights" (p. 39) was an open-handed multimillionaire, whose generosity and profitable mining deals had made him the talk of the Western Slope. Tabor eventually divorced his wife, Augusta, and Baby Doe became his mistress. Of her rapid liaison with and subsequent marriage to Tabor, Burke writes, "She had found herself a real man" (p. 77). He then chronicles the parade of disappointments visited upon the couple: ostracism by Denver society, political manipulations that denied Tabor the United States Senate seat he sought and thought he had bought, and finally a precipitous decline in their finances. Tabor ended up postmaster of Denver and died in 1899.

Baby Doe, described by Burke as the "Prettiest Widow in Colorado" (p. 179), outlived him by almost forty years. During this time, she tried to disentangle her late husband's financial affairs and to guide the destinies of her two daughters. In both objects, she failed. Most of all, she pursued her former wealth with single-minded determination. The focus of her campaign was the Matchless Mine in Leadville, where Tabor had found an improbable fortune and his widow intended to find another. She moved to Leadville and became a local character and, over a period of years, a

recluse. She was found frozen to death in March 1935, still guarding the entrance to the Matchless.

As history, Burke's biography has several failings. These are well known to Duane A. Smith, whose introduction has the awkward task of justifying the republication of this book while at the same time acknowledging that the work is based in part on the fabrications that appeared in a series of magazine articles published in *True Story* in 1938. Burke's book is also a generation out of date in its treatment of women in the West. Smith does an honorable job, and his description of the biography as "high-spirited, dramatic, very readable" (p. xii) appropriately emphasizes the positive. For the historian of the West, Smith's introductory essay should have been longer and Burke's biography shorter.

Malcolm J. Rohrbough
University of Iowa

NEW RESOURCE MATERIALS

Nevada Historical Society

1905 State Directory

The Society's library recently received a copy of the *Nevada-California States Gazetteer and Business Directory. Vol. I*, which was published by the Suits-Shuman Company of San Francisco in 1905. The first hundred pages of the volume constitute a directory of businesses and business people in Nevada's principal communities, and represent the earliest published directory for the state in this century. (Apparently there was only one Suits-Shuman directory for the state; by 1907 R.L. Polk and Company was issuing a biennial directory and gazetteer for Nevada.)

The 1905 volume contains the earliest known directory listings for such twentieth-century mining centers as Tonopah, Goldfield, Columbia and Bullfrog; and its numerous paid advertisements carry dozens of photographic views of stores and other business establishments.

New Organizational Records

During the past year, the Society has substantially increased its holdings of records from a variety of Nevada organizations. The Washoe County 4-H Club Leaders' Council has donated records for 1964-1989, which contain minutes of meetings, financial records, correspondence, and other materials relating to the direction of the 4-H Club program in the county; financial and membership records, correspondence, and minutes from the years 1945-1980 have been added to the Society's existing collection of Nevada Home Economics Association records; Melody McPherson has added almost four decades (1949-1988) of membership records, guest books and other items from the Reno Branch of the American Association of University Women to our holdings of records from the Nevada State Division of that association; Rod Stock has expanded the Society's collection of programs, booklets, and other printed items from Nevada chapters of E Clampus Vitus; and papers from the

Yerington Women's Club, covering years 1914-1987, have been donated by Mrs. Rob Minister for inclusion in our extensive group of Nevada Federation of Women's Clubs records.

Eric N. Moody
Manuscript Curator

University of Nevada, Reno
Special Collections Department

The Department recently received a small, but important group of records from the Lake Tahoe Division of the El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce. Dating from its founding in 1938 to 1942, the collection includes minutes, bylaws, correspondence, subject files and photos. The chamber lobbied hard for improvements to Highway 50 providing tourists with an easier access to the south end of the lake. They were also active in the 1938 "lake level" hearing to lower the lake's water level to prevent future property damage from high water levels, as well as in a campaign that removed trees growing too close to roads because they were impairing driving. A guide for these records is available in the Special Collections Department.

Another new acquisition is a manuscript copy of what became the Writers' Program book, *Nevada; A Guide to the Silver State*, published in 1940. This typescript copy consists of research papers compiled by various authors under the direction of Jeanne Elizabeth Weir, founder and former director of the Nevada Historical Society; some of the papers were either edited or omitted in the final publication.

Two important collections of papers relating to the Washo Indian Tribe have been donated to the Department. Edgar E. Siskin, author of *Washo Shamans and Peyotists: Religious Conflict in an American Indian Tribe* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), donated field notes which formed the basis of his 1941 Yale University dissertation and the book noted above. These notes of Siskin's interviews with tribal members were compiled in 1937-1940, 1974 and 1981 and are accompanied by Siskin's photographs and a map of the Washo territory, drawn by George Snooks in 1937.

The records of George F. Wright, attorney for the Washo Indian Tribe before the Indian Claims Commission, have been donated to the

Department by Mrs. Lou Wright with the assistance of Professor Warren D'Azevedo. This collection consists of eleven cubic feet and will be accompanied by a collection guide when processing is complete.

Susan Searcy
Manuscript Curator

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