

# HOOVER DAM CONSTRUCTION BEGUN IN FACE OF POOREST CONDITIONS ON DRY DESERT

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Ragtown Mushrooms Over Night Beside Site  
Selected by Six Companies to Start  
Monumental Operations

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## THOUSANDS SWARM TO FIND WORK ON PROJECT

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Disorder Following Early Rush to Give Employment  
to Itinerrant Crews Comes to Climax  
in Strike

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*How man is pitting his science against nature and the elements in one of the world's greatest engineering feats is told by Arthur Caylor, News staff correspondent, in the following article, the fourth of a series on Hoover dam.—The Editor.*

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**BY ARTHUR CAYLOR**

Conditions couldn't have been much worse than they were when work on Hoover Dam was started. The site was out in the desert. There was no food, no water, nothing. And thousands of jobless had already flocked in.

Pressed by the government to provide jobs as soon as pos-

sible, the Six Cos., contractors, started in before they were ready. The result was a mess, officials of the syndicate admit. The only compensation for it is that the situation might have been worse had they delayed.

The ragtown that mushroomed up beside the muddy Colorado was worse than the sort of town a gold strike in the wilderness might have produced. Few of the thousands had a grubstake. How they ever got there was a mystery.

#### Slept in Autos

They slept under their cars, under company trucks. They invaded the buildings in search of shelter. They ate whatever they could lay hands on. Some, it appeared, ate not at all.

The town itself grew out of canvas rags, old pieces of corrugated iron, scraps of treasured lumber. Necessity was the city planner. Chick Sale was the consulting architect. When the desert began to burn under a summer sun, typhoid and other disease was inevitable. The wonder was that more didn't die.

#### Water Trucked

The company brought in water from Las Vegas in tank trucks and tank cars, but it was not very tasty and had to be hoarded. Hungry men who got jobs often ate themselves ill the first time they got inside the chuckhouse. One died. How the women managed is past understanding.

Foremen did the hiring, with the result that job hunters swarmed all over the place, going from group to group in hope of being taken on. It gave the foremen a chance for favoritism and petty graft. Everybody was discontented. Under such circumstances a person has to be discontented or crazy.

The situation came to a climax with a strike. The strike helped things at the dam site, although it made them worse at Las Vegas. The site is a government reservation, policed by deputy United States marshals. Everybody was herded out as a protective measure. Sentry posts were established at the reservation limits. Nobody could get in without a pass. This system still holds.

#### Ragtown to Go

Ragtown still exists, but Dr. Elwood Mead, reclamation chief, has set a deadline by which it must shortly be abandoned. He held out against it for a long time, but finally ruled it out when marshals discovered a lot of liquor there. It is against the law to take liquor on the reservation.

Most Six Cos. workers now live in Boulder City, about seven miles from the dam location. They are carried to and from work in covered trucks. They are well fed and comfortably housed. Single men pay \$1.60 a day for all this. Some complain because they would prefer to live less comfortably at less expense. Married men are furnished houses—two rooms \$19, three rooms \$30 a month. They can buy supplies cheaply at the company store, but can do their shopping in Las Vegas if they prefer. Some prefer to live for less in Ragtown.

#### Hospital Provided

In case they are hurt or fall ill, Boulder City Hospital is there. Huge, smiling Dr. W. A. Haas, in charge, says it's the best equipped small hospital in the country. There are five doctors and five nurses. They take care of the men's families, too. The out-patient department represents about 60 per cent of the hospital's work.

Although most of the cases are fractures, the hospital staff handles whatever may come along. For instance, there was the arrival, on New Year's Day, of Master Rodney Paul Williams, first baby to be born in Boulder City. He weighed six pounds seven ounces. His father, Kermit Williams, is a carpenter.

## Many Complaints

It is, of course, hard to learn the legitimate complaints of the men when they don't know who you are. But even in the hospital the most discordant voice was that of a man who felt he shouldn't be made to work when he had paid for hospital service. They made him fold gauze.

Pure water is now everywhere, and signs posted on all sides carry the reminder:

“The Doctor Says Drink Lots of Water.”

When the hot weather comes, there will be unlimited ice water in the canyon. The men eat all they want—four meals a day if they like. The mess hall runs 24 hours a day. Even the cakes and pies are baked fresh for each meal. Sometimes 1200 men sit down at once.

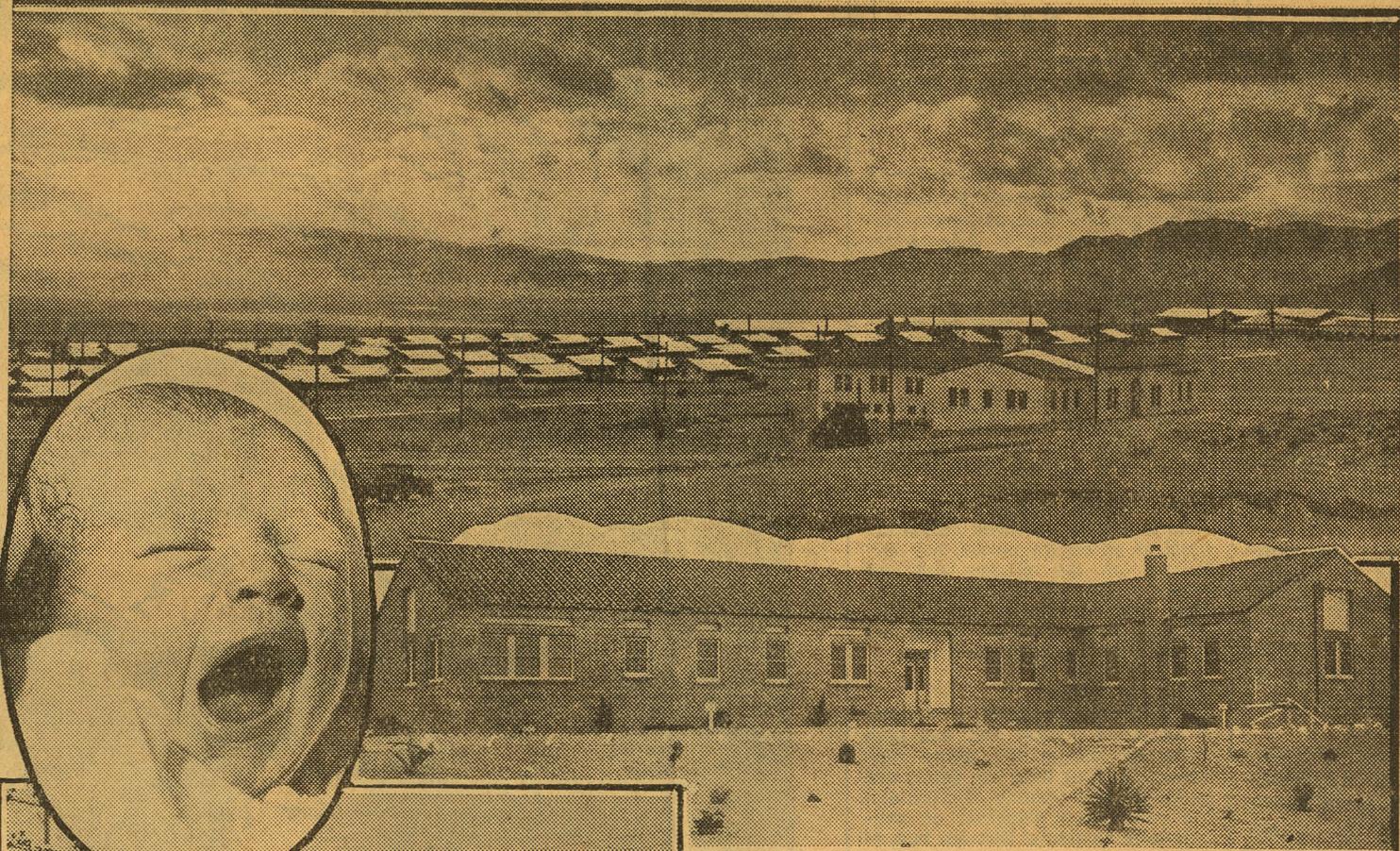
Here is a sample midday menu: Sweet relish, cottage cheese, lettuce

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and tomato salad, steak, beef stew with vegetables, fried cornmeal mush and syrup, steamed potatoes, carrots, baked beans, macaroni au gratin, rye and wheat bread, jam, pudding, apple pie, fresh fruit, coffee, fresh milk, buttermilk. Other meals represent just as elaborate a layout.

All men are now hired at Las Vegas by Leonard T. Blood of the U. S. Department of Labor. The foremen must okeh them, but they cannot select anybody. A man must also pass a medical examination. Nobody not fit can get through a Hoover Dam summer and do any work. Fit workers are only about 33 per cent efficient then, company officials estimate.

# Engineering Magic Conquers Nature's Harshness



*A panoramic view of Boulder City is shown at top; below, the hospital at Boulder City; inset at left shows Rodney Paul Williams, the first baby born at Boulder City; lower left, one of the dormitories housing single men.*