Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI) Records MS-00126

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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Summary Information

Creator: Basic Magnesium, Inc.
Creator: Eells, Howard P., 1892-1978
Title: Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI) Records
ID: MS-00126
Date [inclusive]: 1933-1965
Physical Description: 3.5 Linear Feet 8 boxes
Language of the Material: English

Abstract: The Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI) Records document the planning, constructing, and managing of the BMI magnesium manufacturing plants near Las Vegas (now Henderson) in Clark County and a magnesium mining operation in Gabbs, Nye County, Nevada from 1933 to 1965. It contains chronological reports, official statements, photographs, telegrams, budgets, and building diagrams. The records document employee housing and infrastructure projects, magnesium production statistics, and employee data.

Preferred Citation Note


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Historical Note

Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI) formed in June 1941 as a joint business venture of Basic Refractories, Inc. of Cleveland, Ohio and Magnesium Elektron, Limited of England. Basic Refractories, Inc. owned a magnesium ore mining claim named Brucite in Gabbs Valley, Nye County, Nevada and Magnesium Elektron, Limited owned a patent for the electrolytic process of extracting metallic magnesium from magnesium ore. The United States Federal Government required magnesium, a lightweight metal, for the creation of an aluminum alloy used in the production of incendiary bombs, munitions casings, and
airplane bodies during World War II. In August of 1941 the Federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation subsidiary the Defense Plant Corporation (DPC) granted BMI a contract to build a magnesium manufacturing complex codenamed Plancor 201. The contract also allowed BMI to extend mining operations in the Gabbs Valley. With funding from the DPC the mining camp grew to include open pit quarries for the mining of magnesium oxide and magnesium carbonate, concentrating and roasting plants, and a town named Gabbs for employee housing.

The United States army ordered BMI to build the magnesium manufacturing complex at least 250 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean and BMI selected an area of 18,400 acres southeast of Las Vegas, Nevada in the unincorporated land now known as Henderson. The location met BMI's requirements for electricity and water needed for the electrolytic process due to the proximity of the Hoover (Boulder) Dam and Lake Mead, the Hoover Dam reservoir. Basic Refractories, Inc., under the leadership of Howard P. Eells Jr., held majority control of BMI and completed roughly 80% of construction at the Henderson site until November 1941 when Anaconda Copper Mining Company gained control of BMI. BMI contracted companies to build chlorine, refining, and magnesium metal plants at the site which eventually employed approximately 14,000 workers. BMI also constructed a railroad for the transportation of raw magnesium from Gabbs located 350 miles northwest of the Henderson site and a line from Henderson to the Union Pacific branch line in Boulder City, Nevada. Additionally, BMI established an area for employee housing named the Basic Townsite, codenamed Plancor 201-H. BMI paved 27 miles of road, erected phone and telegraph lines, built the Henderson, Trailer Camp and Carver Park schools, a theater, a baseball park, protestant and catholic churches, and the Basic Magnesium Industrial Hospital. For the thousands of BMI workers, BMI planned two segregated housing projects for both families and single individuals north of the Las Vegas-Boulder Highway, Carver Park designated for African American and Victory Village for white employees and their families.

BMI reached the capacity output of refined magnesium required by the DPC and the Federal Government in June 1943. From October 1942, the first operable month, until November 1944, the Henderson BMI plant produced 166,322,685 pounds of refined magnesium metal. The plant continued operating above production capacity until April 1944 when the War Production Board issued a curtailment order, cutting the magnesium output by 40%. Production reduced until the Henderson BMI plant shut down in November 1944. In 1947 the War Asset Administration offered the Henderson site for sale as war surplus property and the Nevada State Legislature approved a bill granting the Colorado River Commission authority to purchase the BMI complex in Henderson. Basic Townsite and the town of Pittman incorporated in 1953 into the city of Henderson. In 1949 Basic Refractories, Inc. purchased the mining operation in Gabbs, built a refining factory, and continued to sell refined magnesium to the private sector.

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Scope and Contents Note

The Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI) Records document the planning, constructing, and managing of the BMI magnesium manufacturing plants near Las Vegas (now Henderson) in Clark County and a magnesium mining operation in Gabbs, Nye County, Nevada from 1933 to 1965. It contains
chronological reports, 1937-1942, produced by BMI that include correspondence about the formation
of BMI and the contract with the Federal Defense Plant Corporation, official statements, photographs,
telegrams, budgets, and building diagrams. In addition to the chronologies, the records include the
1943 BMI Foreman's Manual that includes organizational charts, department layout schematics, safety
duties, and company policies. The records also include a history of BMI written by the BMI engineering
department that details housing and infrastructure projects, magnesium production statistics, and
employee data.

The records include a 1933 report about magnesium prospects, mining plans, and site sketches in
Stanislaus and Kern counties, California, Nye and Clark counties, Nevada, and the Northwest Magnesite
Company operations in Chewelah, Washington. It contains photocopied Las Vegas and nationwide
newspaper articles, promotional materials, flyers, and magazine articles pertaining to BMI from 1942
to 1944. The records also comprise of a small amount of personal correspondence mainly to or from the
president of BMI (1941-1942) Howard P. Eells Jr. about writing a chronology and history of BMI.

Boxes 5-8 hold 8 x 10 inch black and white photographs. The photographs depict aerial views of the site,
the construction of various buildings, excavation, and interior construction at the BMI Henderson site. A
portion of the photographs also show the BMI Oxide Plant in Gabbs, Nevada.

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Arrangement

Material is arranged by object type.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Acquisition Note

Donated by Howard P. Eells Jr. in the 1960s; accession number T-06.

Processing Note

Material was processed by a Special Collections staff member. In 2014, as part of a legacy finding aid conversion project, Hannah Robinson wrote the collection description. Subsequently Hannah Robinson entered the data into ArchivesSpace.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Related Materials

Separation Note

A full record of the photographs associated with the Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI) Records can be found in the Eells Howard (BMI) Photograph Collection, 1941-1942. PH-00154. Photographs are physically housed in two locations, in MS-00126 Boxes 5-8 and in PH-00154.

Related Materials Note

### Controlled Access Headings

- Magnesium industry and trade
- World War, 1939-1945
- Gabbs (Nev.)
- Basic Magnesium, Inc.
- Eells, Howard P., 1892-1978

### Collection Inventory

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<tr>
<th>Title/Description</th>
<th>Instances</th>
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<td>Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. I, 1937-1942</td>
<td>Box 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. II Supporting Data, August 27, 1940-June 11, 1941</td>
<td>Box 01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. III Supporting Data, June 20, 1941-March 30, 1942</td>
<td>Box 01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factual History of Engineering Basic Magnesium, Incorporated Defense Plant Corporation Plancors 201 and 201-H Henderson and Gabbs, Nevada, April 30, 1945</td>
<td>Box 01</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI clippings, Early 1942</td>
<td>Box 02</td>
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<td>BMI clippings, Late 1942</td>
<td>Box 02</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI clippings, August-September 1942</td>
<td>Box 02</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI clippings, 1942-1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI clippings, 1943-1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harvey C. Lee Reports on Sundry Western Magnesite Prospects and Operations in California, Nevada, and Washington counties, August 26, 1933</td>
<td>Box 03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correspondence and supporting documentation about writing a history of BMI, 1933-1965</td>
<td>Box 03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Magnesium Incorporated Production Chart, Official Road Map of the State of Nevada, General Flow Sheet Magnesium Production, 1942</td>
<td>Box 03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. IV Supporting Data, April 5, 1942- September 30, 1942</td>
<td>Box 04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreman Manual issued to J. A. Carpenter director of the Nevada State Bureau of Mines, October 21, 1943</td>
<td>Box 04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defense Plant Corporation Emergency Facilities Plancor 201</td>
<td>Box 03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preliminary Appendix &quot;A&quot;, August 15, 1942</td>
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<td>8 x 10 inch black and white photographs, 1941-1942</td>
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