

Guide to the Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI) Records

This finding aid was created by Hannah Robinson. This copy was published on April 01, 2019.
Persistent URL for this finding aid: <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1v017>

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Basic Magnesium, Inc.
Contributor:	Eells, Howard P., 1892-1978
Title:	Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI) Records
ID:	MS-00126
Date [inclusive]:	1933-1965
Physical Description:	3.68 Cubic Feet (8 boxes)
Physical Description:	3.33 Linear Feet
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

Basic Magnesium, Incorporated (BMI) Records, 1933-1965. MS-00126. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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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

Conditions Governing Access Note

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Reproductions and Use](#) on the UNLV Special Collections website for more information about reproductions and permissions to publish.

Acquisition Note

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

Processing Note

Material was processed by a Special Collections a 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.

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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

The following resource may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:
Sadovich, Maryellen Vallier. "Basic Magnesium, Incorporated and the Industrialization of Southern Nevada during World War II." Master's thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1971.

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Names and Subjects

- Basic Magnesium, Inc. -- Clark County (Nev.) -- Twentieth century
- City and town life -- Henderson (Nev.) -- Twentieth century
- Magnesium industry and trade
- World War, 1939-1945
- Gabbs Valley (Nev.)

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Containers	
Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. I, 1937-1942	box 01	folder 01
Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. II Supporting Data, August 27, 1940-June 11, 1941	box 01	folder 02

Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. III Supporting Data, June 20, 1941-March 30, 1942	box 01	folder 03
Factual History of Engineering Basic Magnesium, Incorporated Defense Plant Corporation Plancors 201 and 201-H Henderson and Gabbs, Nevada, April 30, 1945	box 01	folder 04
BMI clippings, Early 1942	box 02	folder 01
BMI clippings, Late 1942	box 02	folder 02
BMI clippings, Late 1942	box 02	folder 03
BMI clippings, August-September 1942	box 02	folder 04
BMI clippings, 1942-1943	box 02	folder 05
BMI clippings, 1943-1944	box 02	folder 06
Harvey C. Lee Reports on Sundry Western Magnesite Prospects and Operations in California, Nevada, and Washington counties, August 26, 1933	box 03	folder 01
Correspondence and supporting documentation about writing a history of BMI, 1933-1965	box 03	folder 02
Basic Magnesium Incorporated Production Chart, Official Road Map of the State of Nevada, General Flow Sheet Magnesium Production, 1942	box 03	folder 04
Bound chronology report, Basic Magnesium Incorporated Vol. IV Supporting Data, April 5, 1942- September 30, 1942	box 04	folder 01
Foreman Manual issued to J. A. Carpenter director of the Nevada State Bureau of Mines, October 21, 1943	box 04	folder 02
Defense Plant Corporation Emergency Facilities Plancor 201 Preliminary Appendix "A", August 15, 1942	box 03	folder 03
8 x 10 inch black and white photographs, 1941-1942 Physical Location: A full record of the photographs associated with the Basic Magnesium Incorporated (BMI) Records can be found online described as Eells Howard (BMI) Photograph Collection, 1941-1942. PC-0154. Special Collections, UNLV Libraries, Las Vegas, Nevada. Photographs are physically housed in two locations, in MS-00126 Boxes 05-08 and in PC-0154.	box 05	
8 x 10 inch black and white photographs, 1941-1942	box 06	
8 x 10 inch black and white photographs, 1941-1942	box 07	
8 x 10 inch black and white photographs, 1941-1942	box 08	