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HENDERSON HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

City Hall plaza

Introduction

Water Street was once the commercial and civic heart of Henderson.. The name of the street is rooted in Henderson's industrial heritage after the water pipeline used to pump water to the Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI) plant.

The story of Henderson started in 1939 when Cleveland businessman Howard Eells obtained the mineral rights to the magnesium deposits in Gabbs, Nev., 350 miles from Las Vegas, for use in making refractory, or heat-resistant, bricks. Understanding the value of magnesium for lightweight metal and incendiary bombs, Eells worked with Senator Pat McCarran and others to create a processing plant in Nevada, nearer the source of the ore. The plant opened in 1942.

BMI workers were conscious of their contribution to the war. "Together we'll crush Hitler and his gang!" proclaimed a telegram to employees from Washington D.C. on June 25, 1942, and reprinted in the BMI newsletter, The Big Job.

Almost 15,000 people came from across the country to work at the plant, which was the "world's largest magnesium plant." This caused a housing shortage in the immediate area, spurring construction of Basic Townsite, beginning in February 1942, providing temporary houses to accommodate the influx of families. As the community grew, schools, churches, shops and other small town features were completed. In 1944, a post office was established and named in honor of former Nevada U.S. Senator Charles B. Henderson, who as head of the government's Reconstruction Finance Corporation provided the federal funds necessary to build the plant.

