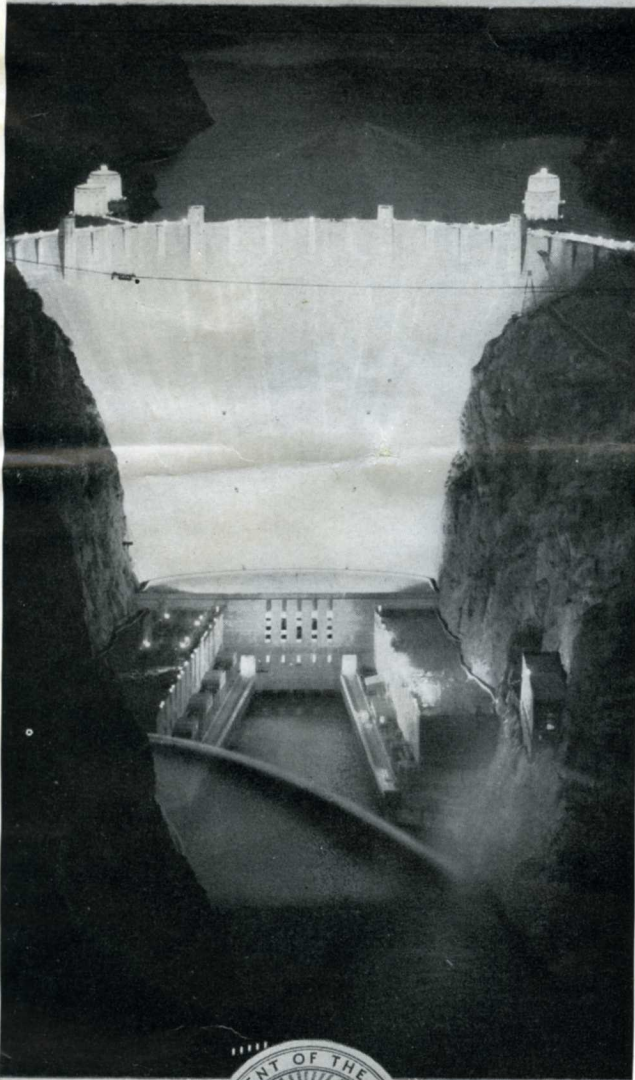


# BOULDER DAM

UNITED  
STATES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION



# History

FROM ITS DISCOVERY in 1540 until it was harnessed by Boulder Dam almost four centuries later, the Colorado River was America's most dangerous stream. Friendly rivers in other sections provided safe highways to lead the pioneers into the wilderness, but the surly Colorado, sulking in its canyons, could not be used. On the other hand, it could be crossed only at widely separated places along its 1,700-mile course from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of California.

Like other western desert streams, this giant fluctuated each year through a cycle which ran from a roaring, flood-swollen torrent when snows were melting, to a sandy-bottomed, sluggish creek during the long, dry summers and autumns.

Man's crying need for water in this thirsty West, however, caused him early to turn calculatingly upon the Colorado in an effort to devise some means to make a servant of this untamed stream.

Before Boulder Dam, whenever he tampered with the river he brought disaster upon himself. Farmers, tempted by dry, fertile desert soil in the Imperial Valley of California and near Yuma, Ariz., tapped the river for irrigation water to create vast and rich gardens. But the unregulated Colorado took its vengeance upon them. Annually it sent destructive floods and annually, by fading to a trickle, it cut off the water supply upon which their crops and their lives depended.

A great cry arose for control and conservation of waters of this river, the waters which were the most valuable natural resource of a vast desert empire.

Agitation for action increased, and in 1922 representatives of the Federal Government and of the seven States in the Colorado River Basin met in Santa Fe, N. Mex., to draft a compact for the division of the waters of the Colorado River.

In 1928 the Congress passed the Swing-Johnson bill authorizing the Boulder Canyon Project; by 1930 it had been ratified by the required six of the seven States, and construction was begun by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1931. In 5 years Boulder Dam was complete, and man had won his victory.

The Colorado River now is a useful and reliable friend to the people of the Southwest. Floods cannot pass the dam, which saves the floodwaters and uses them by generation of electricity to turn factory wheels 250 miles away, and to provide an unvarying supply of domestic and irrigation water for rural and urban communities from Los Angeles, Calif., to Yuma, Ariz.

