

title **Hoover Dam – An American Adventure**

author **Joseph E. Stevens**

category USA water issues

publisher Red River Books
University of Oklahoma Press
1988 trade paperback edition, 326 pages
ISBN 0-8061-2283-8
<http://www.oupres.com/>

of note Winner of three awards in 1988:

The John H. Dunning Prize – US History
<http://www.historians.org/prizes/AWARDED/DunningWinner.htm>

Western Writers of America Spur Award – best Western Non-Fiction
http://www.westernwriters.org/spur_award_history.htm#1988

The W. Turrentine Jackson Prize – history of American West
<http://www.umsl.edu/~wha/awards/bwtjackson.html>

who should be interested in this book?

Readers interested in water development and social history of the 1920 – 30's in USA.

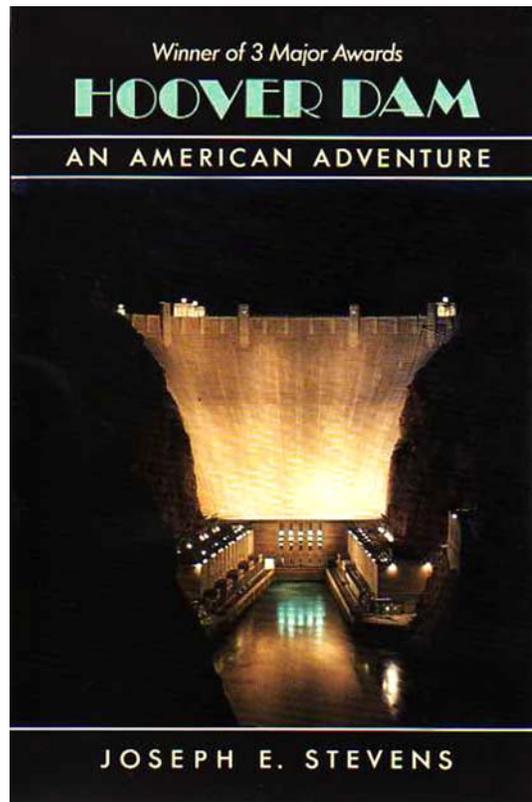
why read this book?

This book is likely the definitive story of the building of Hoover Dam. It truly reads like a novel, as befits the story set in the Depression 1930's.

[Book Overview](#) by Lance Brown, vistadelsol@telus.net

This book is the “novel” of the 1920's and 30's massive “social project”, the building of Hoover Dam. While reviewed elsewhere in this web site is another Hoover book (“The Story of Hoover Dam” – for the detailed construction reader), this one contains all the human drama, etc of such a large project. The formation of the successful contractor (Six Companies), housing problems, union organizing, workers weekends in Las Vegas, along with the construction, all add to a complete feeling of the times as well as the project. Stevens does a great job in setting the era of Depression 1930's and the social aspects of this project.

Anyone with an interest in this era and in Hoover Dam will find this read very rewarding.



Detailed chapter notes, an extensive bibliography for further reading, and numerous photographs are provided.

Preface

Chapter 1 *A River and a Dream*

- background politics
- formation of The Six Companies
- bids for construction

Chapter 2 *"A Deadly Desert Place"*

- work begins; temporary River Camp and Ragtown
- union problems – the Wobblies
- blasting the four diversion tunnels

Chapter 3 *To Turn a River*

- diversion tunnels completed in time – prior to spring freshet
- Nov 1932 - the Colorado no longer runs her natural course – is diverted

Chapter 4 *Under the Eagle's Wing*

- 1931-32 building of Bolder City
- Sims Ely, city manager; Bud Bodell, "special investigator and security chief"

Chapter 5 *"Incessant, Monstrous Activity"*

- upstream and downstream coffer dams built
- 1933 high scalers finish
- Hoover presidential re-election unsuccessful – Roosevelt is elected
- renaming of dam to Boulder Dam (later switched back to Hoover)
- gravel plant and railroads built; March 1932 first concrete poured
- about 1 year pour to line diversion tunnels
- dam base excavated; pouring concrete started June 1933

Chapter 6 *"A Callous, Cruel Lump on Concrete"*

- 5,000 men doing a block-by-block pour pattern of dam - with internal water cooling
- aerial cableways for pouring concrete and moving men and supplies
- by 1934, pouring 262,00 cubic yards a month – 1,100 tram buckets a day, one every 78 seconds
- court case of carbon-monoxide poisoning of workers in diversion tunnels
- problems pouring inclined spillway tunnels
- February 1935 start of water impoundment behind dam
- union and tax problems for Six Companies

Chapter 7 *"Twentieth-Century Marvel"*

- dedication of Hoover Dam Sept 30, 1935
- a bit of trivia – on Dec 20, 1922, the dam's second fatality was J.G. Tierney, a driller in the exploration crew – exactly thirteen years later, on Dec 20, 1935, the last fatality was his 25-year old son

Notes, Bibliography, and Index

[other reviews](#)

From Publishers Weekly

Hoover Dam was the supreme engineering feat of its time (1931-1935), a triumph of American ingenuity and technology. More than half a century later, even with bigger and more sophisticated dams, it remains the benchmark, the granddaddy of big dams, yet this is the first full story of Hoover Dam from conception through construction to completion. Stevens has written a riveting history that reads like a novel; he captures our attention at the beginning and holds it throughout. Here is a powerful evocation of Depression times, of shantytowns in the desert, of hazardous working conditions. Stevens shows us men working in superheated tunnels permeated with carbon monoxide and daredevil scalers high on the canyon walls. We meet the chief field engineer Frank Crowe, who got the project completed two years ahead of schedule; officers of the Six Companies who gambled on the feasibility of building the dam and won; Sims Ely, dictator of the government town, Boulder City; and much of the labor force. Stevens lays to rest the lore that workers are buried in concrete; while the accident rate was high, bodies were always recovered. Superb Americana. Photos.

From Library Journal

This fine monograph about the building of Hoover Dam tells the story from design through construction and opening of the massive structure. Stevens successfully integrates the engineering history with the social history of the work force, persuasively arguing for the importance of the dam in transforming the Southwest and Southern California. Thorough research and brisk writing keep the narrative well-paced and interesting to general readers. Photos are incorporated within the text. The only fault is the book's uncritical view of the intensive development of western rivers. Readers might wish to contrast Stevens's celebratory picture of dam builders with Donald Worster's pessimistic view (*Rivers of Empire*, LJ 2/1/86). James W. Oberly, Univ. of Wisconsin, Eau Claire