

# An Engineering Victory of the First Order: Hoover Dam

by Terri Edwards



After winning the Holmsten Award at the Greater Reno Stamp and Cover show, I was asked to write a story about my Hoover Dam post card exhibit. I'd like to tell you about why I chose that subject, why real photo post cards, and how I put it together.

I am an employee of the Bureau of Reclamation and I actually had the opportunity to work at Hoover Dam for about four years. Every work day I made the 70-second ride down and minute and 10 second ride up the elevators (a fact relayed to the tourists everyday) to and from the top of the dam to the powerhouse. I walked along the gallery (tunnel) built through the dam to reach the powerhouse. I saw the giant turbines on both sides of the river. I felt the powerhouse shake as turbines were started and stopped. I've been inside the scroll cage of a turbine – the lower level where the water comes in to turn the giant turbine and generate electricity. I've walked inside one of the 50-foot diameter diversion tunnels when it was opened up for maintenance. I've been to Stoney Gate at the end of the diversion tunnel. And I've stood on the ramp of the powerhouse and looked back on the dam. It truly is “an engineering victory of the first order” as Franklin Roosevelt described in his dedication speech, but also majestic and grand.

Why real photo post cards? That was an easy one. Although there are plenty of linen post cards from the era of construction, I wanted something that reflected the reality of the time. The Bureau of Reclamation documented the monumental construction project with black and white photos many of which were turned into real photo post cards. It just seemed like a simple, yet elegant way to present the dam.

Although I spent four years at the dam, and I pretty much knew the history and politics surrounding why the dam was built, I didn't know the details of construction. Low and behold, the Bureau of Reclamation has megabytes worth of information on its website. I also found a book with a compilation of several in-depth stories on the construction, written at the time of construction. Finally, I got a tourist pamphlet printed shortly after completion of the dam. Armed with facts and information, I set about writing my story.

The exhibit started as a one-frame exhibit and I used every post card I owned! Over the years, I expanded the exhibit to two frames. I thought there weren't enough post cards to be able to expand it to a third frame and essentially left it alone. One day after stamp club, I thought I'd take a look on line just to see if there were any post cards on sale that I didn't have. Wholly cow! There were enough post cards to fill another frame, all on sale right then. – if I won the auctions. Well, I didn't win them all, but I did win enough and Friday morning, right before we left to go set up for the stamp show, I put in the last post card.

So I will keep looking for post cards – I know there are several out there, since I lost the bids on them. In the mean time, maybe it's time for this exhibit to go to a World Series of Philately show....