

From Boomtown to Incorporated Community A Short History of the City of Shasta Lake



With the announcement by the United States Bureau of Reclamation in the summer of 1937 that a "large concrete dam" would be constructed in Shasta County, hundreds---later thousands, of hopeful job seekers poured into the area. Many of them had labored previously on government irrigation and water projects in a number of Western states. Desiring to get as close to the Shasta Dam work site as possible, they spread out along the newly graded road stretching from Highway 99 west. Some made their first homes in well worn tents, others slept in small cramped trailers, while still others simply lived out of their automobiles. All of them waited nervously, as money and food supplies ran dangerously low, for the hiring on the big dam to begin. Three distinct cores of residential and commercial developments sprung up along Shasta Dam Boulevard by the summer of 1938. Project City, lying at the intersection of Highway 99 and Shasta Dam Blvd., was quickly developed by William and Gene Hammans. Further west on Shasta Dam Blvd. J.J. Humphreys, L. R. Kronschnabel, Albert Rouge, and Charles McConnell all purchased large tracts of land with the idea of subdividing their holdings. A settlement trend appeared in which a wide variety of commercial establishments fronted Shasta Dam Blvd. with blocks of residential homes immediately behind. This grouping of buildings became known as Central Valley. At the intersection of Shasta Dam Blvd. and the Kennett-Buckeye Rd [now Lake Boulevard] another boomtown rose up--Summit City. A wild boomtown atmosphere prevailed as recently hired dam workers spent considerable portions of their off-duty hours in dozens of beer halls, saloons, taverns, and dance halls. Charley's Place, The Mint Pool Hall, and The Round-Up were among the favorite entertainment establishments. Grocery stores, smoke shops, cafes, and dry good stores also flourished. Soon a sign announcing "Boomtown Center" was erected in the middle of Central Valley declaring that this community was "the hub of commercial activity." As more and more families arrived in the boomtown vicinity, pressure grew to provide schooling for the children of dam workers. In a true spirit of cooperation the Bureau of Reclamation donated the land for a new school site, while Pacific Constructors Inc., the private contracting company building Shasta Dam, donated building materials. Off-duty dam workers raised the structure in record time. Newly enrolled students put the finishing touches to the new institution, Toyon School, installing cupboards, shelves, even erecting a fence. A flourishing Parent Teachers Association chapter was established in short order, testifying to the strong desire that parents wanted their children to receive a quality education. Toyon School principal, Matt Rumboltz recalled being overwhelmed with large numbers of students when the school first opened. "I

couldn't believe it," Rumboltz remarked, "some classes had over 70 students!" Boomtown developer Jonathan Tibbitts and others organized a "Hell's Gulch" community festival as a means to forget the doldrums of the Great Depression, to celebrate the success of the new towns, and to encourage civic participation. In one ritual, a coffin signifying "old man gloom" was ceremoniously burned. People from miles around came to the festivals during the early years from 1938-1941, seeing realtor signs offering prime building lots for \$95--\$5 down and \$5 a month. Many festival participants would have a sumptuous chicken or beef dinner at the Southern Barbecue restaurant, and then for dessert enjoy Rudi Raki's award winning ice cream at The Big Dipper. With the oncoming rush of World War II scores of men terminated their jobs and joined the service. Still others moved away to higher paying wartime jobs in Los Angeles, the Bay Area, and Seattle. Numerous vacant homes sat idle until late 1945 when returning servicemen and new job hopefuls moved back into the area. With a strong demand for lumber imminent, the construction of more well paved roads, and the availability of automobiles once again, the area thrived. The Main Lumbering Mill and the Rocky Mountain Lumbering Mill, located in Central Valley, provided scores of good paying jobs. Others commuted south to Redding and Anderson for employment. Dozens of Shasta Dam area workers recall car pooling to the giant Shasta Plywood plant in Anderson. Still more ex-dam workers found jobs in building Keswick Dam, downstream from Shasta, and in erecting power lines. With this economic boom of the late 40s and 50s the permanency of the boomtown communities was assured. Despite a short slowdown due to the national oil embargo of the mid 1970s, the towns grew. By 1980 population figures stood at 1,139 for Summit City, 1,659 for Project City, and 3,424 for Central Valley. By 1993 when talk of incorporation spread, the area's population stood at 9,800. On July 2, 1993, with 60% of the registered voters participating, the new community, the City of Shasta Lake became legal.

-Al Rocca, Ph.d.