

## Anaconda and Neighbours

This is a tale of three former mining cities; Anaconda, Butte and Helena. They are located in Western Montana and have a quite amazing history. The recent resurgence in hard commodity prices (copper, gold, etc) is beginning to raise their profile again.

Anaconda is about thirty miles north west of Butte, Montana, just off the US Interstate Highway 90; Helena is about eighty miles north east of Butte, adjacent to Highway 15; and Butte is adjacent to the overlap of the 15 and the 90.

Anaconda itself was home to what were probably the most famous primary metallurgical operations of the early twentieth century.

As always it is important to focus on the individual(s) that led developments and the one that really leaps out is Marcus Daly. To put this in context however it should be remembered that Daly had political as well as commercial ambitions. The Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACM) served two purposes; as a generator of wealth and as a political power base.

Marcus Daly was a major figure in the development of the copper mining industry, initially in Butte and later in Anaconda. Daly was a visionary from a gold mining background who developed the local copper business in a way never seen before. He was lucky to have strong backers with long purses who enabled him to pursue his dreams. The technology he employed was far away in advance of the times, with copper being taken through locally to the refined product.

Anaconda was the residential area created to support the nearby ACM Washoe smelter which comprised copper, manganese, phosphate and zinc ore processing and smelting, copper and zinc refining operations, sulphuric acid and superphosphate plants, and a ferro-manganese production facility. It also had a world class research organisation to back up and develop these operations. Anaconda is located in a climatically mild (by Montana standards) and attractive location, with a good water supply.

A notable record for Anaconda was the very first electrified railway in the United States, which connected Anaconda and Butte. When commissioned, this railway was the second smallest in the United States but also the busiest. At its peak, thirteen ore trains ran daily between the two cities, plus a twice-daily passenger service which apart from normal traffic, transported fans on horse-racing days. Marcus Daly's racetrack in Anaconda was then considered one of the finest in the West, drawing crowds from many miles around. The local newspaper, the Anaconda Standard, was the first in the US to have colour illustrations from its very first day of publication, in September 1889. In its heyday, the paper was distributed to most major cities in the United States.

Sadly, little sign of the Company appears in modern Anaconda, currently comprising two major avenues, Commercial and Park, and about ten cross streets. All that remains visible of the former vast operations is a chimney on the outskirts of town.

The City of Butte is bordered by the old open pits of Berkeley and East Berkeley. It has old headframes still in evidence (Anselmo, Kelley, Belmont and Orphan Girl Mines) and a number of museums including the evocative Rookwood Speakeasy and the Myra Brothel Museums. Street names also reflect the past with Quartz, Granite, Galena, Mercury and Platinum Streets in the old core of the city. The geology and hence mineral production were very complex. It is home to the Montana School of Mines.

All Montana's cities were at one time candidates in the public election for the state capital, when mining drove the state economy. Butte's main disadvantage was its topography, that was considered to make it unsuitable. Although technically very eligible, it only came in third in the first round of the election. The election was finally decided in a runoff between Helena and Anaconda. Helena won narrowly, and although now still the state capital, is a pleasant but rather sleepy administrative backwater with only minor echoes of a more active gold mining past.

The operations at Washoe peaked in employment terms in 1916, when the workforce almost reached 5000. Thereafter, economic depressions and a takeover of ACM by Standard Oil to form part of the Amalgamated Copper Company, clouded development and operation. The operations were finally closed down in 1980 by the Atlantic Richfield oil company, which had taken over ACM some years earlier.

Much of the ACM's history is to be found at the Marcus Daly Historical Society's headquarters, which is located in Anaconda in a basement on East Commercial Avenue. It is an adjunct to the Copper Village Museum and Arts Centre, housed in a still-imposing civic building of the early mining era. The Society has no official funding and depends on donations from visitors and friends, and voluntary work by supporters.

The man to see or contact is Jerry Moran Hansen, its historical consultant. Jerry is a former ACM employee, who by the vagaries of takeovers by Atlantic Richfield and BP is now a BP pensioner. He and his co-workers have assembled an amazing collection of local mining memorabilia. While I was there, Jerry retrieved an old handwritten company employment application for another visitor seeking information about a deceased relative. Part of the application indicated that the relative had spent time 'rustling'. This was the term at the time for casual working; ie rustling up a job.

Why have I written this article? I personally ran into ACM indirectly during my mining career, in Chile (Chuquicamata) and in Iran (Sar Cheshmeh), and met a few of its engineers along the way. As a result, I have always been curious about it.

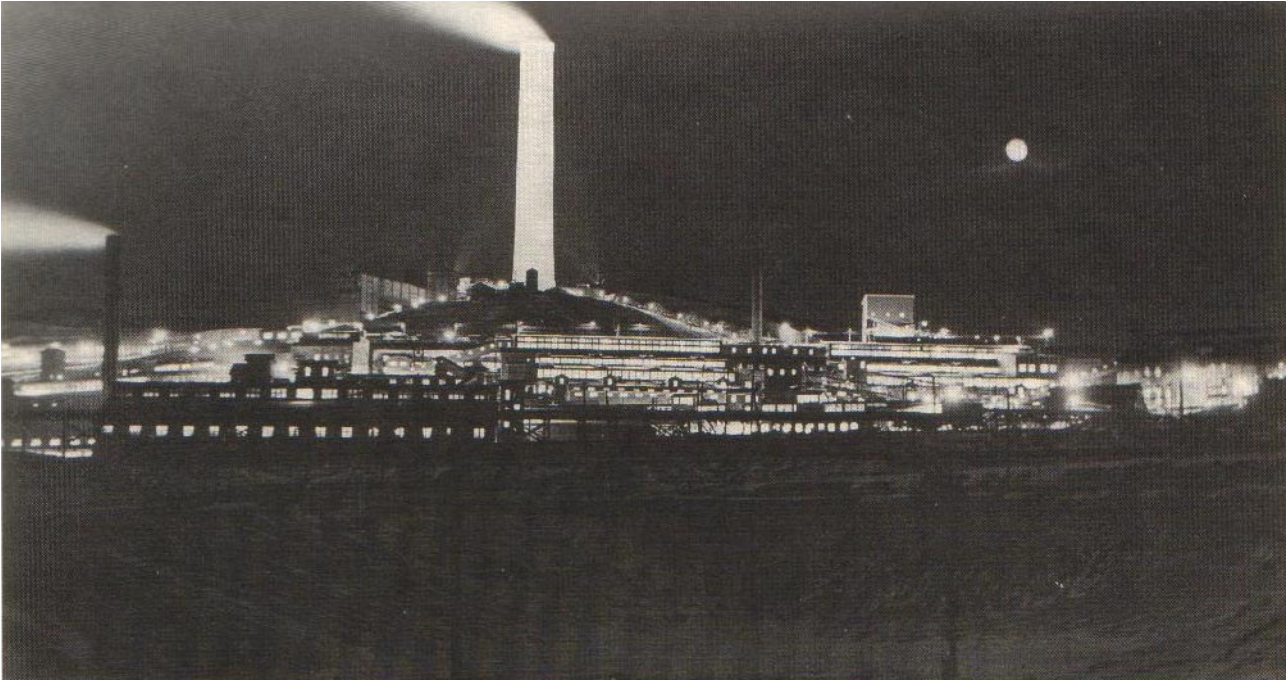
It all tied in for me with a recent visit to the US, when I spent some time in the American Northwest. But beware if you ever go Montana; it is a very big state indeed and you need plenty of time to investigate and enjoy it. I rapidly found out that to see what I wanted meant over 300 miles per day of driving. On the plus side and contrary to popular wisdom, there are now speed limits on the Montana Interstates and the traffic is generally very light. The Montanans that I met were unfailingly helpful and courteous.

Jerry Hansen can be contacted by phone or letter as follows:

Telephone: US (406) 563 2220 (he is there Tuesday to Saturday 1pm-4pm local time only)  
Address: Marcus Daly Historical Society, 401 E. Commercial Ave., MT 59711, US of A

Please feel free to mention my name.

**Bill Bradford** (with contributions from Jerry Hansen)



The Washoe smelter at night. Photo attribution is unknown, but it was printed in a book, 'Anaconda Montana' by Patrick F Morris, published by Swann of Bethesda, MD in 1997.

## Copper: a footnote

The one factor that ultimately drives the mining industry is commodity price.

There is a very interesting economic cycle, particularly relevant to the mining industry, named after the Russian economist Kondratiev. He claimed his cycle had a duration of 50-60 years and was reflected in primary commodity prices. He proudly announced the discovery of his cycle to his communist bosses in the 1920s, when it was at a downswing. Their response to what they saw as political bad news was simple and predictable; a one-way trip for him to the gulag. The pen being mightier than the sword, his idea has survived; their politics have not.

Eighty years later (predictably?) we are seeing an upswing in commodity prices. Hard commodity prices (copper, gold, etc) have recently risen substantially, following a very difficult twenty-five years or so. Many mining and mining-related businesses and communities have either failed, shut down or been taken over during the interim, like ACM.

Copper is a particularly important commodity because of its relationship with burgeoning global electrical energy demand, particularly in South and East Asia. As a result, the red metal is currently moving towards a chronic undersupply.

The world's leading country in copper production terms is Chile. Its generally low production costs have a major influence on world primary copper price. Chile however is a 'dry' country and since water is essential to primary copper production, supply constraints are beginning to emerge. It all means that copper demand (and price) will rise steadily as Asia develops, even if you ignore demand from the rest of the world.

What sort of future can Anaconda, Butte, Helena and locations with similar histories and geological endowments look to now with rising commodity demand and price? A very interesting conflict is shaping up between the environmental lobby and industrial/ commercial/ geopolitical interests.