

# Copper Kings: Purveyors of Mineral and Political Wealth

## Insignificant Gold Strike On Silver Bow Creek Leads to Silver, Then Copper and the Storied "Richest Hill On Earth"

When the gold strikes of the 1860's are discussed, one made along little Silver Bow Creek flowing down from the Continental Divide is usually dealt with in another history book chapter. G. O. Humphrey, William Allison, Dennis Leary and Alexander Scott were prospecting out of Alder Gulch in October, 1864, when they came upon some old diggings. Although it was shallow, there was enough of the yellow metal to justify calling it the Missoula Lode and forming a mining district.

Soon more prospectors came along and Silver Bow City, Rocker, McMinnville and Butte City sprang up. The gold played out, and Silver Bow City and Rocker quickly became ghost towns; indeed, in 1874 there were only about 60 people living in Butte itself. It was then that Congress passed the law requiring a certain amount of work be done on mining claims or the owner faced forfeiture. William Farlin, generally considered the man who saved Butte from oblivion, began taking over abandoned claims, guessing correctly that there was mineral wealth in the hard quartz.

Exploitation of the real wealth in the "richest hill on earth", of course, came with the storied Copper Kings: William A. Clark, Marcus Daly, and F. Augustus Heinze. These men were to figure so strongly in the political upheavals before statehood that this aspect will be dealt with in the final section on that subject. But the arrival of the three in Butte, the evolving of their fantastic fortunes, and a brief note on the kind of men they were seems appropriate here.

The first to come was Clark, in 1872. He had followed the gold seekers to Bannack in 1863, described by one who saw him as "a little, red-headed man with a pack on his back . . . he wore a red shirt, an old army coat with one of the tails burned off by too close a proximity to the fire". He did not yet wear the beard which covered a sharp chin, and his high thin voice was not yet raised in flowery oratory. He was not a likeable man, and kept much to himself. But he quickly saw the route he would take: not gold, but merchandising. By 1867 he had expanded his business to Virginia City and had a contract to haul mail from Missoula to Walla Walla. When he began buying mining property in Butte in 1872, Clark was already a man of wealth. With typical sagacity, he went east to the Columbia School of Mines to study metallurgy. When William Farlin defaulted on a mortgage in 1875, Clark obtained the Dexter Stamp Mill, and he owned a bank in Deer Lodge and a good deal of real estate.

Marcus Daly, an Irish immigrant, arrived in Butte in 1876 after serving his mining apprenticeship in California and Nevada. He had made some powerful mining contacts: George Hearst (father of William Randolph), James Ben Ali Haggin and Lloyd Tevis. Employed by Walker Brothers, Salt Lake City miners and bankers, Daly was sent to Butte to examine the Alice, a silver mine. He stayed to become its manager and one-third owner. In 1880 he sold

the Alice and bought the fabled Anaconda, developing it with the help of Haggin, Hearst and Tevis.

Unlike Clark, this uneducated Irishman was intensely likeable, his popularity legendary. But like Clark, with whom he was friendly at first, Daly was intelligent and could be and was utterly purposeful and ruthless. By the turn of the century, he was wealthy, at war with Clark's political aspirations, and dying.

The bitterness between Clark and Daly was not lifelong, as is sometimes thought. It began in 1888, when a confident Clark found himself defeated for territorial delegate by Thomas H. Clark. He guessed, with some justification, that Daly had joined with Sam Hauser and other banking and lumbering interests in defeating him. Clark never forgot this affront, and was to carry on his vindictive feud for over a decade.

The third in the copper triumvirate was F. Augustus Heinze, a brash 20-year-old engineer who came to Butte in 1889 with a \$50,000 inheritance. Quickly sensing the possibilities, he went to Germany to study mining and smelting, and returned to work for the Boston and Montana Consolidated company. Here he learned the complicated vein systems underlying Butte so well that he began seriously challenging the big interests in the courts, including Anaconda, which was bought out by Standard Oil in 1899 and controlled by the grant and complex holding company, Amalgamated.

W. A. Clark was an interested observer as young Heinze won court cases with suspicious regularity, the while taking with impunity the underground wealth of Amalgamated. Thus a Clark-Heinze coalition was effected, and by instituting an 8-hour day in the mines, the partners of expediency even challenged the personal popularity of Daly. The Clark-Heinze alliance did not last long after Daly's death in New York in 1900, and shortly thereafter Amalgamated assessed Heinze's nuisance value at around \$10 million and bought him out. Heinze went to New York, where he hoped to juggle the New York Stock Exchange to his advantage. His machinations failed and are blamed by some for the panic of 1907. He was relatively impoverished and a completely broken man when he died three years later.

Back in Montana, the War of the Copper Kings was about over: Daly was dead, and Amalgamated began buying up the properties of W. A. Clark, by now much more interested in politics. In 1915, the gigantic Amalgamated holding company was dissolved, Standard Oil was no longer involved, and the old operating name, Anaconda, was back to stay.

Contrary to popular belief, the Indian tribes now considered indigenous to Montana were actually displaced persons, driven westward from their ancient homes in the east by the increasing pressures of white settlement.

## Montana Indians—

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leading up the Rosebud, and Custer was ordered to follow it. But he was to stay well in the rear of the Indians so any encounter could be met with the full command. Custer met the Sioux on June 25, 1876, on the Little Big Horn, convinced he could defeat them or any combination of tribes. The fate of Custer and his command has been dealt with too often to go into here.

Colonel Nelson A. Miles began building a cantonment at the mouth of the Tongue in the fall of 1876, and after a band of warriors attacked a pack train headed there, Miles pursued them and south of the Yellowstone turned back the main body. Sitting Bull, however, escaped to Canada with his band and was to be a nagging worry to settlers until his surrender in 1881. Miles continued a vigorous winter campaign, and by January, 1877, the mysterious and recalcitrant Crazy Horse had surrendered and in March more than 2,000 gave up at Camps Sheridan and Robinson.

The year 1877 also saw the celebrated retreat of Chief Joseph and his Nez Perce, driven in the classic pattern from their home in Idaho to seek refuge in Canada. The relentless pursuit of General O. O. Howard and attempts by Col. Gibbon and others to stop him in western Montana were to no avail. But in October, 1877, near present-day Chinook in northern Montana, the exhausted Joseph surrendered his Nez Perce to General Miles. Many believe he had stopped because he was certain he was already in Canada.

## The Steamboat Era

Until it came to an end with the advancing railroads in the 1880s, Fort Benton was one of Montana's busiest spots. Headwaters for navigation on the Missouri, this was a veritable beehive of activity after the gold strikes in the 1860s demanded more and more travel and freight via the Missouri. The first steamboat to come close to Benton's docks was the "Chippewa", which arrived in 1859. Until the end of the era, hundreds of shallow-draft steamers arrived and left from its crowded levees, their skilled captains often losing out to the tricky river bottom, and marauding Indians who delighted in picking off the small parties of wood-cutters who strove to feed the boilers. Thirty-one steamers arrived in 1866, 39 in 1867, 35 in 1868, and 24 in 1869. It was in 1867 that \$1,250,000 in raw gold was shipped to St. Louis.

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