**Beer, copper, cigars, and golf**

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Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson. ~4:30 **Way back in 1970, I found a file folder with four old stock certificates from Butte in a basement in Bloomington, Indiana, and I’ve been hauling them around ever since. Back then, I had no idea about the names – Butte-Argenta Copper Company, Montana-Continental Development Company, Keating Gold Mining Company. Butte Country Club was obviously the golf club. I kept them because they were cool, and they have been in a box buried in a closet until now. Now, with my focus on Butte history, names like J.E. Oppenheimer and A.J. Davis and F. W. McCrimmon mean something to me: principal in the Symons Company, president of First National Bank, and a doctor with a fancy house at 313 W. Broadway, respectively. They’ve all signed one or more of these stock certificates, all of which are for shares owned by Joseph Oppenheimer.

The coolest one, in terms of appearance, is for 4,000 shares owned by Oppenheimer in the Butte-Argenta Copper Co. The company was organized Feb. 12, 1906 by Oppenheimer, Henry Mueller, and others to exploit the old claims at Argenta, in the Pioneer Mountains northwest of Dillon. Mueller was president of the Centennial Brewing Co. and Butte mayor in 1891-92. His son Arthur had the Mueller Apartment building erected on Granite Street in 1917 as an investment.

The Argenta District is one of the oldest mining areas in Montana: mining started in 1865. Argenta had 1,500 people at its peak as well as the first smelter in Montana in 1866, but the town was essentially abandoned by 1874.  A short-lived rise in prices led Oppenheimer and company to invest in the Iron Mountain Mine in the Argenta District. Independent sources indicate that for a year or three, the mine yielded ore as rich as 16.5% copper, 18% lead, and 30 ounces of silver per ton (average, 12 oz). It also averaged $3 in gold per ton, and employed 35 men in 1909. Two shafts supported a 700-foot-long tunnel with two shorter crosscuts, mined using an 8-drill Ingersoll Rand air compressor. I have not verified the timing of the operation’s end, but it looks like the Argenta district was effectively abandoned again by about 1910.

The Butte-Argenta Company had its Butte offices at #3 Lewisohn Building, which stood along Hamilton Street and faced Granite. The parking lot there today resulted from the fire in 1978 that destroyed the Lewisohn and Silver Bow Blocks. Joseph Oppenheimer lived at 809 W. Broadway. Among his many interests in addition to being Treasurer of Symons Department Store and President of the Butte-Argenta Copper Company, Oppenheimer had his own J.E. Oppenheimer & Co., dealers in fine cigars. His corporate secretary in that venture was Sylven Hughes, who in 1899 had established the Olympia Brewery on Harrison Avenue where it crosses Silver Bow Creek. Joseph was the son of Elias and Mina Oppenheimer, commemorated in the stained glass of the B’nai Israel Synagogue. Thanks to Joseph’s sister’s marriage into the Symons family, the Oppenheimers established an important presence in the Symons merchant empire.
Andrew Jackson Davis, president of the First National Bank, countersigned the back of the Butte-Argenta stock certificate in 1908. He lived at 845 W. Granite Street, one of the “twin sisters” mansions.**

As writer Edwin Dobb has said, "Like Concord, Gettysburg, and Wounded Knee, Butte is one of the places America came from." Join us next time for more of Butte, America’s Story.

This podcast is based on items in the Butte History Blog, Gibson’s book Lost Butte, Zena Beth McGlashan’s book Buried in Butte, newspaper articles from the Montana Standard, and original research.

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