BAS 035 Maud S

Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Maud S canyon has been a favorite hiking destination on the East Ridge above Butte for more than a century. In 1906, the Anaconda Standard called it “one of the most desirable spots for a day’s outing,” and “one of the most beautiful of the range.” Wild roses and syringa “perfumed the air.” But who was Maud S who gave her name to his beautiful canyon?

John D. Leslie of New York established the Maud S Mine in 1888, but it isn’t clear when the name was bestowed on it. Some of his claims bore names like Albany and New York for his home state, but the mine was on the Sky Lark claim. The usual story is that the mine and canyon were named for John and Ida Leslie’s daughter, Maud – but her name was Maud Elizabeth, and she wasn’t born until 1897. She died at age five in 1903. The Leslies had three more children, and they moved with Ida into Butte about 1915, while John continued to live in his cabin near the mouth of Maud S Canyon until he died in 1935.

A more likely origin for the name may be one of the most famous horses of the day, Maud S, “Queen of the Trotting Turf.” She was a Kentucky chestnut mare 15½ hands high, the world’s fastest trotter for more than a decade. Maud S set the record for the mile at 2 minutes, 10¾ seconds in 1880, a record that did not fall until 1891. She was owned by William Vanderbilt, son of railroad magnate Cornelius, who sold her to Robert Bonner in 1884 for $40,000. Anyone attuned to the racing world of the 1880s would have known of Maud S, even though she had no connection to Butte.

Or perhaps the name is just a typo, and Leslie really named it for his daughter Maud E., with a poorly written “E” taken to be an “S.” If that view is correct, then the mine he began in 1888 didn’t get the name until after Maud was born in 1897, which seems unlikely.

We really don’t know for sure how the canyon got its name, but it remains a popular and beautiful recreation destination within easy reach of Butte. In 2004, the Rotary Club chose Maud S as a project for its centennial, upgrading the trail with the help of the East Ridge Foundation and others. Today, the popular trail winds 3.8 miles from the parking lot near Continental Drive to a scenic vista 1,000 feet higher.

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.