BAS 083 Passmores of Butte Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Passmore Canyon south of Butte recalls a prominent business family from Butte’s early days. Charles Sumner Passmore came to Butte in 1889 not long after a major fire devastated the growing business district and led to the first city ordinance, mandating construction with brick and stone. He reportedly parlayed the $10 in his pocket into ownership of a real estate firm within seven months.

In 1907, Passmore’s was the architectural firm that designed the new First Baptist Church at Broadway and Montana Streets, although historically the Passmores were devout Quakers with heritage traced back to colonists associated with William Penn, arriving in America about 1717. Their earlier ancestors came from Normandy as part of the invasion of England with William the Conqueror in 1066. But in Butte, the Passmores became stalwarts of the Presbyterian Church.

By 1910, Passmore & Co. were involved in real estate, loans, insurance, collections, conveyancing (property transfer law), building (the first in Butte to sell homes on the installment payment plan), and working as architects, mining dealers, surety bondsmen, liability contractors, and patent guarantors. He named the Maryland Block on West Quartz, a three-story boarding house that stood west of the fire station, today’s Archives, for his native state.

Charles was joined by his older brother John in 1891, but John soon branched out on his own. After a short stint with the Anaconda Standard publishing company, he started the Passmore Paper Company, the only wholesale paper business in Montana, selling products ranging from stationery to asbestos paper for building construction.

John’s son Ellis became proprietor of the Citizens Coal Company (later named S.J. Monroe & Co.), dealers in coal, wood, brick, stone, lime, and cement, with an office at 4 East Broadway, probably upstairs above the old California Saloon and brewery.

The upscale West Side was dotted with long-time Passmore homes. Charles and his family lived for decades at 717 West Granite, while John’s home was a block east at 613. Charles built three homes in the 800 block of West Mercury for family members, including his nephew Ellis and his wife Martha at 827.

Charles Passmore’s offices were in the Barnard Block at 25 West Granite, where the Montana Standard building stands today. He had a 400-acre ranch in the canyon south of Butte that bears his name, together with a 3,000-acre spread in the Musselshell Valley of central Montana. John died in 1900, but Charles Passmore lived until 1946.

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.