BAS 097 paving Harrison

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

From the 1910s onward, Butte issued Special Improvement District (SID) bonds to finance various projects, just as most cities do. People would buy the bonds, to be repaid with interest over time.

One bond was issued to John Hexem on May 8, 1925, in the amount of $100. The bond generated Mr. Hexem $6.00 annually (6% interest) that was paid when he redeemed the coupons associated with the bond, theoretically until 1933, but this bond’s final balloon payment was in 1929, suggesting that the city was doing well.

SID 323, authorized by Ordinance #1790, August 16, 1924, was for the paving of Harrison Avenue and installing a storm sewer system there. The 46 pages of specifications for the project used in letting the bids, can be seen at the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives. They include estimates of “approximately” 38,525.73 square yards of “Rodamite” paving two inches thick; 8,176.33 cubic yards of grading; a total of 4,530 linear feet of storm sewer ranging in diameter from 8 inches to 15 inches; 24 concrete catchbasins about 6 feet deep, and one standard manhole. Rodamite is probably a typo for Romanite, a trade name for a patented asphalt mixture popular in the 1910s and 1920s.

The work extended from Grand to Harvard on Harrison and included construction of intersections and curbs. This was almost certainly not the first time Harrison was paved (and definitely not the last!), but I have not yet verified when the first paving occurred, nor have I found the cost.

John Hexem was a contractor who just might have had an interest in the project beyond that of an investor in the bonds. His office and home were at 1941 Harrison, just north of the Socialist Hall (Fran Johnson’s sports shop) and right in the middle of this paving project. His home was built after 1916, so it was fairly new when he made his bond investment in 1925.

The bond is signed by the Mayor, City Clerk, and City Treasurer. Mayor William D. Horgan lived at 211 S. Jackson (which is still standing); clerk Con J. Harrington lived at the Goldberg Block, run by Mrs. Alice Wilson at the northwest corner of Park and Dakota Streets, the building that became the J.C. Penney store and burned down in 1972; and Treasurer Joseph C. Riley lived at 611 N. Wyoming, a little house due east of the Steward Mine and gone today.

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.