BAS 113 Reno Sales Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Reno Sales has been called the “Father of Mining Geology,” with some justification.

David Brunton (who invented the pocket transit, or Brunton compass known to most geologists) hired Horace V. Winchell to work with him in Butte beginning in 1898. Together they devised the approach to mapping in underground mines still recognized as usually the best way to attack such a challenging problem, and still used today as the “Anaconda Method.” Winchell organized the company Geological Department in 1900, and hired Reno Sales, whose name is more closely associated with the expansion and popularization of the Brunton-Winchell method. This process for mapping ore bodies became the industry standard.

Sales was born in Iowa in 1876, and came with his family to the Gallatin Valley when he was five years old. Their homestead gave their name to Salesville, now Gallatin Gateway. He received his graduate Engineer of Mines degree in 1900 from Columbia School of Mines in New York City, and returned to Montana to his first job in Butte, as a surveyor and engineer for the Boston and Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Company. The founders of the Boston & Montana company, the Lewisohn Brothers, made significant financial contributions to the Columbia School of Mines where Sales was trained, so it’s no great surprise he started with that company. But within a year, he was assistant geologist with the new geology department of the company that became the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

As Chief Geologist for the ACM in 1906 and earlier, Sales was actively involved in the law suits that we call the War of the Copper Kings, and his plan for careful, accurate underground mapping together with details of mineralogy and geology were critical to the Company’s legal position. Sales was among the first miners to comprehensively integrate field and laboratory work to enhance the exploration and exploitation of metal ores.

On the purely technical side, his “Ore Deposits at Butte, Montana,” published in 1913, was called “the most important contribution to economic geology” in 1939, and again in 1967.

Sales retired from the ACM in 1948, after work all over the Anaconda world, from Chuquicamata, Chile, to mines in Africa and Europe. He continued to work as a consultant for the company for years after retirement, and his “Underground Warfare at Butte,” published in 1964, is an important record of the battle for Butte’s copper, even if it does have a bit of an Anaconda bias. He died in 1969.

In his early days in Butte, Sales lived in various boarding houses, including the Lenox at 132 West Granite and the Beresford at 14 West Quartz, both gone today, and the Leonard Hotel soon after it was built in 1906. Reno and his wife Lorene were married in 1909, and established their home at 954 Caledonia, which still stands. Their daughter Mary died in 1911 before her first birthday, and Lorene evidently became mentally deranged by the tragedy. She and Reno divorced, but Reno continued to live at the Caledonia street home for many years.

Bobcat Stadium at MSU in Bozeman was named Reno H. Sales Stadium when it was built in 1973, for Sales’ philanthropy and allegiance to his alma mater, where he received his first science degree.

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.