BAS 126 BA&P RR Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Like other capitalists and industrialists of the late 19th century, Marcus Daly understood well the value of vertical integration to his company – ownership or control of as many aspects of the business as possible.

That meant expanding from mining into obvious connections like smelting and refining, but also into control of other elements vital to his operations, including ownership of timber reserves and transportation systems.

The transcontinental railroads that served Butte by the early 1890s were in it for their own profits, not to make Marcus Daly’s life easy. Artificially high freight rates and inconsistent service drove Daly to establish his own railroad, the Butte Anaconda & Pacific, in 1892.

The first trains ran from Anaconda Company mines to the smelter January 1, 1894, and the line from Rocker into the Butte Hill opened in January 1895. The railroad was owned by Marcus Daly’s Anaconda Copper Mining Co. and was served by 33 steam locomotives until 1913, when the company took the bold step of electrifying the main line.

The BA&P became the first heavy-haul electrified railroad in the world, and while “Pacific” was never really part of its scope, it was a major part of Anaconda operations for decades. In addition to ore, passengers were carried between Butte and Anaconda until 1955 on two to four trains a day.

Twenty-seven electric engines were built between 1913 and 1917, and served until 1967. Today, only one survives: #47, built in 1914, is part of the World Museum of Mining collection and is on display at the Anselmo Mine Yard in uptown Butte, restored by retired railroad workers. All the other electric engines were scrapped.

Diesel engines, built in the 1950s, took over for both the remaining steam engines (which operated on parts of the road until 1952) and for the electric engines in 1967. The diesel locomotives were transferred to the Rarus Railway in 1985, when Dennis Washington’s company took over the BA&P line.

In 2002-2003, the tracks were taken up along with some of the road bed itself, because it had been constructed using mine tailings and smelter waste which can react when exposed to the elements to produce acid and other undesirable pollutants. The road was covered with new rock and shaped into the walking and biking trail we see today — but you may still find some chunks of rock with pyrite or copper sulfides if you look carefully along the path.

The BA&P Railroad and this trail are contributing elements of the Butte-Anaconda-Walkerville National Historic Landmark District. The definitive resource for BA&P history is Charles Mutschler’s book “Wired for Success.”

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.