BAS 141 Spanish American veterans parade Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

When the Montana volunteers returned from the Philippines in 1899 after the Spanish-American War ended, it was a big deal.

The entertainment committee, led by Senator Lee Mantle, raised more than $18,000, a huge fortune in those days, with more than half of it coming from four men who donated $2,500 each: William A. Clark, F. Augustus Heinze, Marcus Daly, and G.M. Hyams. While the first three names are certainly familiar as Butte’s copper kings, Hyams may not be. He was a resident of Boston, and General Manager of the Boston and Montana Company, second only to the Anaconda in copper production.

“The boys”, as the newspapers called the veterans, arrived in Butte by train on October 23, 1899, at about 1:30 in the afternoon, more than three hours late. They disembarked at a point a quarter-mile from the race track, an area where “the whole of Butte” could be present to greet the soldiers. Earlier in the day, some 5,000 people were present, but it was a cold blustery day and the crowd had dwindled to about 500 by the time the train arrived, but many more were waiting at the race track. An estimated 20,000 were finally present when the troops paraded across the track, and the chaos of the joyful welcome was “worse than an attack on the Filipino trenches,” according to one soldier.

Lunch and speeches followed, including the presentation of commemorative medals to the returning troops. Charles W. Clark paid for the medals for the First Regiment and Carlisle Mason and James H. Lynch covered the cost for the Montana Rough Riders. The inscription read “First to respond to their country’s call.”

The scheduled 2:00 parade to the uptown was finally underway in late afternoon. You know about the giant elk at Broadway and Main in 1916, but that wasn’t the first monumental structure to span a Butte intersection. The First Montana Regiment marched beneath a huge, electric-lit four-cornered arch that covered most of the intersection of Granite and Main that day, in front of the then brand-new Hennessey Building. It was designed by Butte artist Edgar Paxson, who was working on his famous painting of Custer’s Last Stand when he was mustered into the force that went to the Philippines.

A much later commemoration of Montana’s role in the Spanish-American War is found in the Court House today. One of the capstans, the rotating cylinders used to wind ropes and anchor cables, from the USS Maine has resided in the court house entry almost since it was built in 1912. The Maine was the ship that exploded in Havana harbor to touch off the war. The ship was raised from the sea bed in 1912, and artifacts were dispersed to towns all over the United States as memorials.

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.