BAS 195 Ramsay Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Although Anaconda has some elements of a company town, the ultimate company town in southwest Montana has to be Ramsay.

The town was built in 1916-17 by the DuPont chemical company to house officials and workers for their new dynamite manufacturing plant about a half mile to the north (across the interstate from Ramsay today). Ramsay was a fully planned community, owned outright by the DuPont Company and named for William Ramsay, DuPont’s vice president and chief engineer who died in 1916. DuPont built and maintained the water, sewer, and streetlight systems as well as infrastructure including streets, sidewalks, parks, and a baseball field. The average construction cost for the homes in 1916-1917 was about $3,700 each. The post office was also established in 1916.

DuPont’s presence in Montana was a direct result of Butte’s wartime economy, with surging copper demand. The dynamite plant could supply Butte’s mines with 750,000 pounds of explosives every month, brought into town on one of the three railroad lines that passed near Ramsay, together with more dynamite from DuPont’s other factories in Washington state and elsewhere. But the boom was short lived, and when the war ended and copper mining practically ceased in Butte, DuPont shut down the dynamite plant in 1921 and most of the employees moved elsewhere.

Through the 1920s only a handful of families lived in Ramsay, essentially in a caretaker role for DuPont. Tenants returned during the depression, attracted by low rents of $19.75 a month, but they could not own the homes. In 1942, the company sold the entire town to a former employee, George Russell, who then sold houses and lots to individual buyers. Most of the 35 properties that contribute to the Ramsay National Historic Landmark District follow three architectural styles that the DuPont Company developed for its ten or more company towns across the United States.

Before Ramsay was built the Anaconda Company stored dynamite in powder houses along the railroad east of Durant Canyon, just west of present-day Ramsay. The seven windowless stone houses built there in 1906 replaced an older powder house at Rocker. At that time much of the dynamite used in Butte and everywhere in the United States was made by the Giant Powder Company, a subsidiary of DuPont, under license from Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite. It was so common that it had taken on the qualities of a generic term, and the Anaconda Standard referred to it as “giant powder” in reports of 1906.

In 1906 the Anaconda Company was using about seven tons of explosives daily, but 12 years later, DuPont’s Ramsay plant alone supplied more than double that amount to Butte. Some piles of debris and scars on the land north of the Ramsay interchange, now used as ranchland, are about all the remaining evidence of the dynamite plant.

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.