BAS 199 Hogan’s Army Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

William Hogan was a teamster at the Moulton Mine in Walkerville, where he boarded at the American House on the north side of Daly between A and B Streets. At least, that was his job until the silver crisis of 1893 threw many employees at the Moulton out of work.

The nationwide depression that followed the silver price crash led Ohio businessman Jacob Coxey to organize the first significant protest march on Washington, D.C., to lobby for public works government jobs for the unemployed, such as those that came during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The Montana contingent of Coxey’s Army was organized in Butte by William Hogan. His lieutenants, William Cunningham and John Edwards, were unemployed miners who lived at 332 East Woolman and 421 East Galena, respectively. During the winter of 1893-94, nearly 20,000 Montanans were out of work, and while Butte’s copper meant the impact here was less than it might have been, silver mining was devastated.

Hogan’s army gathered in Butte in April 1894, camped at the Northern Pacific railroad yards. The financial crisis had driven the NP to declare bankruptcy, but the railroad was the only way Hogan and his hundreds of followers were likely to get to Washington D.C. Five hundred men encamped in Butte were actively supported by both the local population, who donated food, and the local government, which supported Hogan’s plea for use of a special NP train.

The NP wasn’t in a position to grant anything, since the bankrupt company was in the hands of a federal receiver, and fearing Hogan’s followers might simply commandeer a train, they sought and received an injunction to restrain the Coxleyites, even though it seemed to be the position of most rank-and-file Northern Pacific workers to support Hogan. A train, legal or not, would be allowed to run east.

Hogan’s followers included railroad men who took an engine in Butte on April 24, 1894. A car for provisions, and coal cars for men to ride in were attached and the “wild train” – unscheduled, for which all others must clear the track – headed east. At every stop the Hoganites were cheered.

Ultimately a chase train and delaying tactics by Northern Pacific executives, together with federal troops dispatched west from Fort Keogh at Miles City, stopped and arrested most of Hogan’s men at Forsyth.

One man was killed by a federal deputy in an altercation at the Billings train station, but otherwise Hogan’s run had been remarkably peaceful. When they were arrested, the band had three guns, two of which were inoperable, and 43 bibles.

Following a trial for contempt that freed hundreds of the Hoganites (Hogan himself got a 6-month term in the Lewis & Clark County Jail), about 250 men made their way to Ft. Benton in late May and took boats as far as Omaha, where they joined other Coxleyites heading east. But by then the protest had effectively ended, with no useful result. Coxley himself was arrested for “walking on the grass” at the U.S. Capitol.

Hogan apparently regained his job in Butte by 1895, when he is listed again as a teamster for the Moulton Mining Company. Butte’s rebound from the Panic of 1893 was well underway, and its boom years would be pretty much continuous until the end of World War I.

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.