BAS 240 Anselmo Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The Anselmo headframe, an icon on the west side of Butte today, was just a trifle in its early days.

Research by historian Mary McCormick shows that the central part of the Anselmo mine yard sits on the Trifle Lode, a claim located July 26, 1878, by Simon Hauswirth. The adjacent Anselmo Lodes #1 and #2 were also controlled by the Hauswirth brothers, including John and Simon.

Ferdinand Hirsch established the first Anselmo lode claim on September 3, 1875, but he apparently didn’t have the money to develop it. Within two months the Hauswirths were “sinking a shaft for interest,” meaning they earned ownership in the claim by doing the work, investing their own money. At a depth of 25 feet, they encountered a 15-foot vein with 15 inches of ore that ran 70% galena, the main ore of lead but which also often contains silver.

Within a few months, Hirsch and the Hauswirths were producing free-milling silver that did not require chemical processing or leaching. In 1881 the shaft reached a depth of more than 200 feet, exploiting the western extensions of the Gagnon and Steward veins. By 1906, Robert Hauswirth reported that the combined Anselmo and Trifle claims had yielded about $650,000 in ore, and that year he and others organized the Butte Copper Company to focus on the Anselmo and Trifle lodes.

The mines were abruptly shut down on July 25, 1907. The reasons are unclear, but it seems likely that a dispute between shareholders in Butte and in New York resulted in the closure. The Butte Miner newspaper speculated that the Amalgamated (Anaconda) Company was “trying to squeeze out the original stockholders” so the Amalgamated could take over. The mines were dormant for ten years.

By 1917-18, with increases in silver prices and apparently under the effective control of the Anaconda Company (through a subsidiary, the Anselmo Mining Company) the Anselmo reopened, operated through the 600-foot-deep Trifle Shaft, which was ultimately renamed the Anselmo. Shipments to the smelter in 1919 netted $1,500 to $3,000 in rich silver, gold, and zinc per railroad car of ore.

Mining operations at the Anselmo took off in the 1920s and 1930s, necessitating a larger headframe. The present steel headframe and hoist engine were moved in 1936 from the Black Rock Mine east of Walkerville, a mine which had closed in 1930. The headframe is about twice the height of the previous wooden headframe, and it was erected over the old structure to avoid interruption in ore production.

The Anselmo ultimately reached a depth of 4,301 feet. The strike in 1959 shut down many mines in Butte for months, and the Anselmo never reopened. The tipple on the side of the headframe that served to fill railroad cars is the last in place in Butte, and the interiors of the Anselmo mine yard buildings retain much of their historic nature.

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.