BAS 295 Clark-Daly feud Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

It’s well known that Copper Kings Marcus Daly and William Clark didn’t get along, and that they were actually enemies in politics and business. What’s not clear is how it began, and why it seemed to be so much more than normal business competition.

Both men were of Irish heritage, with Daly born in Ballyjamesduff in County Cavan in the northern part of Catholic Ireland. Clark was born in western Pennsylvania, where his parents had emigrated from County Tyrone, barely 50 miles north of Marcus Daly’s hometown, but the Clarks were Protestants. Some have cited the religious difference as one factor in the feud, but realistically neither man was particularly religious, except to the extent that capitalism was the religion of both.

Daly and Clark were both Democrats, and they were even related to each other. Daly’s wife’s sister married J. Ross Clark, William’s brother.

The two men had dramatically different styles. Daly was certainly a man of the people, and he would hang out with miners in saloons even after he was wealthy enough to build his mansion at Hamilton in the Bitterroot Valley where he raised thoroughbred race horses. Clark would barely deign to be seen in anything other than a top hat and tails, and he preferred to consort with others of his station, the glitterati of the Gilded Age.

Those differences of temperament together with business competition boiled over into politics. Daly thwarted one of Clark’s first runs for office, the Montana Territory’s delegate to the US Congress in 1888. Probably mostly for business reasons, Daly supported the Republican in that election.

By 1894 when Montana was deciding where its state capital should be, the feud came to a head with Daly promoting his company town of Anaconda and Clark supporting his adopted and arguably elitist town of Helena, even though he still lived in his mansion on Granite Street in Butte. Clark won that battle, but Daly and his supporters managed to get a Catholic Irishman, Thomas Meagher, first acting territorial governor of Montana, commemorated in a glorious statue on the grounds of the State Capitol building.

Clark’s next and biggest fight was for the US Senate. Clark’s initial election by the Montana legislature was actively countered by Daly in 1898 and 1899, pitting Democrat against Democrat in multiple elections that involved some of the most blatant bribery ever seen in the United States. While Clark was rejected the first time around, after Daly died in 1900, Clark was elected and served one term in the US Senate.

Clark outlived Daly by 25 years. You can debate the question of who won the War of the Copper Kings between the two. In many ways, it was Daly, through the amalgamation of companies that became the giant Anaconda Company after his death, one of the largest corporate entities on earth. But then, when Clark died in 1925, his fortune was estimated at $200 million in 1925 dollars, making him likely the second richest man in America after John D. Rockefeller.

Clark is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx in New York City. Marcus Daly is interred in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, about 16 miles from Clark.

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.