

BUTTE

Interviewer: Jennifer Miller
Person Interviewed: Joe Archer

In Kalispell, Montana
On October 17, 1998

For Montana History
With Mr. Harrington
On Wednesday nights

Prepared questions for the interview:

- How long did you live in Butte?
- What did you do in Butte?
- Who did you work for?
- What do you know about the tunnels under Butte?
- Do you know anything about the major underground fire they had?
- What year was it?
- Have you ever been in the mines under Butte?
- How far down do they go?
- Is it true that some of the houses in Butte are connected to the mines? Their basements?
- Was there a lot of culture, as in theaters, plays, and concerts in Butte?
- Was the Copper King still alive when you were there?
- Did you ever see or hear anything about the Copper King?
- Were you around to see and go to China Town before the pit took it over?
- If so, did you ever of to the parades I here they had?

Outline of interview

I. Introduction

- October 17, 1998 with Joe Archer

II. How long did he live in Butte?

- 14 years
- while in Butte attended the Monroe, Greely and Emerson schools
- went to high school for a couple years
- joined the CC's in 1935
- in 1937 went into the Navy for 8 years total

III. China Town

- a lot of Chinese stores
- pretty good size for the town of Butte
- firecrackers for the fourth of July
 - remember watching kids fight over ones that didn't ignite
- was a typical town
- lived like the Chinese do

IV. Parades that went on in Butte

- especially St. Patrick's Day had a lot of commotion
- very proud people in Butte
 - one group of people went to California to compete in a parade
- Butte was a unique town
 - there was a lot of fighting and scuffling, especially during the depression

V. The Depression in Butte

- Butte mainly operated off of paychecks
- there was no gardens that could survive

VI. The mines in Butte

- the mines are just cadacombed underneath Butte all over
- went down only one shaft while he was there
 - the Leonard mine, but didn't really enjoy the experience
- people were literally dropped down the shafts to work them
- the gold and silver paid for the whole operation
- the main smelter was in Butte until 1910 when it went to Anaconda
 - worked up there for Montana Power after his first time in the Navy
 - dad worked for Montana Power and can still be seen in the Montana Power building in a picture of him in his lineman suit.
 - lineman is an electrician
 - getting insurance was a problem

VII. The big fire they had in one of the mines, was he there?

- it was before his time
- there was fighting over the corpses
- the cabbage patch
 - Eleanor Roosevelt built condominiums for the people to live in
- the union was beginning to form by the miners in 1929
- gangs in Butte
 - his dad taught him how to fight, to protect himself from the gangs
- You could hear the mining going on under peoples houses
 - was like an earthquake
- one women was left hanging onto the cloths line when the ground gave out beneath her, from the mining below
 - when this sort of thing happened the ACM bought out the house
- the Columbia Gardens
 - was beautiful
 - went on the rollercoaster with his parents and he was really afraid
- the street cars that operated in Butte
 - he explained how the operated by generating electricity

VIII. Where did the Trolley cars go?

- in 1929 they were all the way down on the flats
- even in the winter
- his dad used to ride them to go to work

IX. What about the culture in Butte at the time?

- the fox theater, the Vod Ville, the American theater
- magicians and magic shows that everyone would come to see
- the Tom Mix theater
 - got run out of town because it was cheating people out of their pay

X. The Copper King

- did anything to get control
- Marcus Dailey who founded the town of Butte
 - prominent figure
 - stayed in the Marcus Dailey hotel in Anaconda where his offices where

XI. Walkerville

- covered more area in his time
- a model T he remembers driving around town with a sign
 - it said, "This isn't the Mayflower, but a lot of girls would come across it."

XII. Was it true that some basements were connected to the mines?

- some may have been offices

XIII. The Berkeley Pit

- everything looked like ants in the bottom of the pit
- it made you almost dizzy
 - people fought about where or not to keep the pit, because it caused jobs
- the ACM hired gunmen to protect the hill
 - were ordered to shoot to kill
 - looked like a war zone
- people from all over who were not part of the union came "scabes"
 - tried to get jobs and lived up on the hill afraid to come into town
 - were eventually run out of town

XIV. School during the depression

- supposed it was a little harder
- Butte was a boomtown with over 100,000 people
- people sometimes were found in the shafts half starved to death and crumbled at the touch

XV. Butte mines under the city.

- many miles of shafts and tunnels
- the whole hill is practically made up of the ore and whatever waste was pulled out of the mines.
 - some where said to even go as far as Helena

This is Jennifer Miller, interviewing Joe Archer for my Montana History class about the history of Butte Montana. On October 17, 1998.

So how long did you live in Butte?

Well my home was there fourteen years. We... so I guess that's all there is to that I guess.

What did you do while you were in Butte?

Well I went to school mostly.

At Montana Tech?

Oh no, no, I wouldn't even make janitor there. No, well anyhow I went to the Monroe school, the Greely school, and took manual training, and the Emerson school. Therefore we ah, lived in different parts of the town. About three different places, one on 1116 Wyoming, 1113 Oregon, and 2311 Elm Street. I went at that backwards. Well anyhow that was about it for that part.

Were you in Elementary school, is that what your saying? Or were you like working?

Yah, Elementary. Oh, I see. So that was it for grade school. Butte high for about two years, and that was about it for that there. I joined the CC's from there you know in about 1935. In 1937 I went to the Navy, and got out after four years. When the war broke out, I went back in the Navy. So that was it there, during the war. Eight years in all total.

Do you know any history about Butte, like personal history? Like China Town, or...

Well China Town was quite a place you know, they had ah lot of regular Chinese stores and stuff like that. It covered a little bit of territory there. It was pretty good size for the town of Butte. And ah, we, they had a lot of fire crackers for the fourth. I've seen kids run out there when those big, big firecrackers, giant crackers. Some of them wouldn't go off, and they wouldn't go off, and they would literally fight over them firecrackers. It's a wonder they didn't get killed. It was terrible to watch that. Anyhow China Town was typical, like Trisco you know, they just lived like the Chinese do, and that was about it there.

Did you ever see any of the parades that went on, I heard about the parades being pretty spectacular, is that true, did you ever see any of them?

Well they was very much for parades. Especially St. Patrick's, you know, there would be quite a lot of commotion there a lot of times. They'd put on the dog there, pretty much. They was proud of there people. They ah, had one team there I guess go down to California, years back, and they were very proud of it. The town of Butte is proud of it's people. Very much so. And it was quite a town to live in. It was very unique. And there was usually a lot of fighting and scuffling going on. But then they managed to survive, that was quite a town to survive in. We was in there during the depression, and by golly it was really a tuff go around. So that was about it there.

Can you tell me more about the depression and how it effected Butte.

Well, it effected Butte, because Butte was mainly on paychecks. They didn't have any farming to speak of, or much, you couldn't grow much of anything around there. Because of the soil I guess. But anyhow it was pretty high up there, and the growing season was too short. You couldn't grow anything like tomatoes, I don't think. I didn't see any gardens much at all there. Little spots maybe. But mainly they were into mining and main industries, what ever it was. So they depended on that. And I don't know just what else was there.

Can you tell me anything else about the mines?

Well, they had mines just cadacombed underneath, you know, it was quite a big deal there, it was all shafts you would go down shafts to different levels and everything. I'd only been down one mine the whole time I was there, that was the Leonard mine. It was just to go down to see what it looked like. But I didn't care for mining.

What did it look like?

Well, just big long shafts, and they'd have these sciffes to take people to get on two or three levels. And then they'd just literally drop you just down through. The workers would get on there and they'd, if the mine shaft would be a little pinched or something they'd just raise you up and just bang their way through on that, and stuff like that. It was just, I forget about just how deep they are, you know there quite a, quite a long ways down on that, even on that Leonard mine. And there's several mines around there that go and branch off after they get down so far, well, then they'd branch off. Different veins of ore, which ever was that. And they had a lot of ore I understand that they, gold and silver that they'd get out of those mines that would pay for the whole operation, smelting and the whole thing. The main smelter was in, it was before my time in 1910 I guess, I was born in 1916, but they had a smelter in Butte at first, and then they finally wound up in Anaconda with the Smelters. That's were that big stack comes, its 585 ft. tall from what I remember. And when they opened that smelter up it was big enough for a small dance hall, they held a dance up there on the top of that stack, and it was quite a thing. Yah, you'd go in there and it was really quite something. Kind of unique. Latter on in the years I worked at the Anaconda deal at ah, I did after my first hitch in the Navy, I did work up there for the Montana Power. But dad worked for the Montana Power there and they had a picture of him up there on the wall, I don't know if it's still there or not, its ah. They showed him in his lineman's outfit, and the whole thing. And so it was quite a nice picture, and I was sure proud of him, by golly he really took it by the horns there. You know a lineman in butte that was the rough way of making it.

A lineman what's that?

An electrician, electrical handling of the power. They handled hot stuff almost all the time, 2,300 volts mainly, and they'd go up the pole and work on that. Sometimes a guy would get burnt up, literally burnt up on the poles, lose fingers and everything else. I forget how many died there climbing those poles, I know it was quite a deal. Getting insurance was quite a problem. Well, let's see, what else?

Well, were you there when they had that big fire in one of the mines? They have that big memorial there for all the people that died in it.

Well I don't remember being there at that time, I think it was before my time. But I heard about it, there was bodies laying all over and everything. The undertakers up there, they even got to fighting and squabbling over the corpses, trying to see who got the most of them. So that's, that's Butte, it was typical, it's a rough, rough way to go. The graveyards are just full of people. You know, and mostly Irish it seemed like. And they had a, you go off on kind of a tangent here. You go into, In Butte they had these gubblen gulch and cabbage patch. I lived about three or four blocks from the cabbage patch. I think it was on Arizona street. And ah, Elenor Roosevelt seen how the people were living there and ah, dog gone it, it was just really bad. So she says, we'll have no more of that, so she had them built a bunch of condominiums or whatever you call it for the people to live in. And so that made, ----- that a great deal and there was all kinds of people there, just different nationalities. And, so it was quite a crowded town, you know, in that way it was something. And ah, I lived by the Monroe school at the time when we was living there. And ah, dog gone during the depression my dad would get some work out there from Montana Power. They'd cut him down as far as ten days a month, so we had either choice of cutting down on what we could eat, and pay the rent; or quite paying the rent and eat better. That's about the way it went. And everyone was about the same you know, we was all in the same boat. People was around, a lot of the men was working the mines and everything, they'd go on strike and everything. They organized about 1929 I think it was. And into a union, and they had a rough time of it. It was just something to behold. Those fellows got ah, just loiding around doing nothing in particular. So they learned how to pitch horseshoes, they'd pitch ringers just about every hitch. So they was really good at it. And then handball came in a little bit too. I got in on a lot of handball. And I got pretty good at it. It was the way of life there, you know, just rough and tough. Been noted as quite a city. You know, it was kind of a drab looking town in some ways, and yet they had beautiful homes there. And ah, dog gone it, I liked Butte, I liked the people there, they was strait forward mostly. And dog gone it, they had gangs, I never did belong to a gang. I always thought I could stand on my own two feet. But I wasn't big enough to do that too much. I lost quite a few fights, and then I learned how to fight. My dad taught me how to fight, and he was pretty good at it himself. And so I'd protect myself pretty good that way, and then they'd leave me kind of alone, and didn't bother with me too much. And so we went through quite a deal. But ah, it was really something. Yah, and down in Butte there they had the, oh the, had these mines of shafts, you know they had these veins they'd just about come up to the grass roots. Where ever the ore was that's were they'd follow that vain. Sometimes you could hear em blasting underneath the houses. It was just kind of like a mild earthquake of something. You'd hear a dull thump you know, and there'd be people getting, they could hear it all over different places, where ever they was mining. And ah, sometimes it would cave in. I did understand that one women was left hanging onto a cloths

line, while the ground gave out from under her. Now I heard that, but I couldn't prove that, because I didn't see that. But anyhow, sometimes it would cave in, and maybe part of a house would cave in too, or some yard or something would just cave in. That's all there was too it. They'd dig up too close, where ever that ore was they'd go after it. Then the ACM would buy the home out or something like that so that they could move em, or something to get at that ore. So that ore was the, come up at ah, is the quite a deal to get it. Cause they valued that more than they did the homes around there. Yeah, so then they had ah, the Columbia Gardens there that was quite a deal. The ACM had that as big playground, it was wonderful there. They had a big dance ponilian, and rollercoaster. I went on the rollercoaster the first time I ever did. My mother and dad was in the frontseat, and I was in the back. Everything was fine and my mother said, " Gee this is lovely," cause we was going alone that first bend, then when they made that big dip I just got crouched down, and quailed the backseat around me as best I could, because I thought that was the end of the world. And, so that rollercoaster ride was really something. But after that, I rode it in pretty good grace, but I was sure shuck up the first time. And my mother about pitched my dad's leg off, cause she was hanging onto him. So those rollercoasters wasn't the biggest, big one. One time my cousin and a friend of mine, before they opened up. We climbed up that rollercoaster, and they had kind of a boardwalk up the top. And ah, we went up the top of that, it was night time, and ah, dog gone we just, something to do. And went up there, and you know the next day I heard that so guy fell and killed himself working on it. And you hear a lot of things, a lot of hear say see. But I didn't see all of that, so it would be hearsay to me. And ah, dog gone, we'd have wonderful dances, demalay dances and ah, demalay was part of the mason, mason, Masonic lodge you know I guess it was. And we'd have little bid's for dancing with this and that girl, and we was pretty good, had it pretty good. And they'd have a wonderful time. And the fourth of July would ah, was quite a spectacular fire play. Cause ah, you could see it from all over town, most any part of town. We'd stand in our backyards and watch the play, just good as if we was up front watching it. Cause they had these ah, sky rockets they'd just keep climbing it seemed like, way up and then a big burst of colors you see. And they just seemed to be going up and up and up. I thought, " Gosh they was just about ready to out into space." But it was beautiful that way, and they had real spectacular deal. And then ah, they had ah, we'd go ah, on ah, a free ride out there on Thursdays I think it was for the kids you know, out on the street cars. Some of them cars was open you know, you'd get on the sides of it. Kind of like San Francisco's deal. And ah, some of the kids you know, sometimes they'd be conductor going along these street car, and some gang or something would pull his stinger pull and he'd have to get out and chase em, and then he'd have to put the thing back on and away he'd go again. That stinger pull would go up on the trolley line, it had quite a deal. They had what they called dynamic breaking see, on those deals they had ah, the motors on them would run you know, off the trolley. Those that's was going down hill would be helping charge the line back clean to the

back end of the line. And helps the other cond... other...ah, street cars go up of down. See they, then that helped save on electricity a lot, cause they'd generate it, and then they'd use it going up hill. So that was the way that worked.

Where exactly did they... I mean did they...were they like on Montana street, or Harison street, or was Harison even there yet? I mean...had they'd gone onto the flats yet?

Oh yes Harison, oh yah they'd been, they'd go out to the flats ah, even in 1929 they'd have out in the flats, they'd have ah, these ah trolley cars you know going.

So you could take the trolley car all the way from the flats to the...

Yeah, my dad went to work a lot of times on em, you know even in cold weather. Butte was noted for being pretty cool in the winter. And it could get hot in the summer too. Yeah it was ah, kind of a harsh climate.

So, was there a lot of culture there, as far as like theaters and ah...

Yes, it was one of the, probably the best show town in the West, North West. It could have been, cause we'd have the Fox Theater, we'd have Vod Vile and everything. And then the movies and everything, we'd get the best. And had the Foxra Alto, and the Fox ah, American Theater, and then a couple others I think, but they were the main ones. But they had, did have a lot of shows. And a lot of peopled come in and act in Vod A'ville's, and magicians and everything else. They'd have magic shows and everybody would just flock to see that. And see and ah, it was quite a deal. They had a place down there for, off of Harison Ave., they had ah circus area, you know where the circus' would come in and ah, it was pretty good. They'd have the Cells Floato, and the Barlin Bailey and what ever theaters. Tom Mix theater come in there too, he had a quite a show outfit. Then they hired these kids to care water and do things and the chores around there for a while and then they didn't pay em, so they got together a bunch of em, and run em out of town. They'd get about trashed and they was just about torn up, so they made for the high country. I tell you, it was quite a go around. I think Butte would be about the only one where they'd fight back a little bit. You know, a lot of places they'd take the beaten and like it I guess. But they wouldn't take that crap in Butte. And so it was quite a town.

What about the Copper King...

I don't know too much about the Copper King, but they did have a book out. I'm gana read that someday. Because they say it was really a rugged one. They'd do anything to get that, to get control. It was ah, they had Marcus Dailey and stuff like that. And he ah, founded the town mostly...

He founded the town, I didn't know that, I thought he just founded the school.

Marcus Dailey? Well I suppose he had to do a lot with the school's too. I don't know. He's a prominent figure. But they used to stay mostly in that Marcus

Dailey hotel in Anaconda. They had kind of a main office there. And ah, Anaconda was just a lot like Butte, the same thing. But ah, it was a pretty harsh climate, people would live pretty rugged at times, but some of those mine owners and everything had beautiful homes up, mostly up in Walkerville, that's where you live. And ah dog gone it ah...

Was Walkerville any bigger than it is now, I mean did have anything else in it besides houses at one time.

Well, mostly houses, they had the school of mines of course, that's where you husband's going. And you go to a different college don't you?

No, I go to Montana Tech too.

Oh, you do, that's great! That's great, that's really quite a school. You either have to get it or get out, you can't foul around too much. And I don't know just how high it rates, ah it was at one time it was the first, on number one, I believe, it was I'm pretty sure. And ah, up right by the big "M", I think about every so often they get up and paint those rocks up there. But, on the big "M", well I used to hike up there, and I used to hike with a bunch of fellows. We'd go out and hike up along the ridge there even were that statue was. So we'd go quite a bit, then we'd go to, we'd do mostly walking cause we didn't have too many cars. And ah, so they only had one, one model T I remember used to drive around town that had a sign on it that says, " This isn't the Mayflower, but a lot of girls would come across it, you see. It was driving all over town, that was in the goody-goody days where you didn't dare say much, you didn't have no bumper stickers. So we'd have a lot of fun. And ah, the old model T's and ah, I used to go a little bit with a girl there by the name of Annett Grunard, she was a nice girl and she went to the Missoula college there in Missoula, and ah I think she graduated there, from there. And ah, her dad I can't think of his first name of course, his name was Grunard and I think he was probably the first man to graduate from the school of mines. I'm not sure, but I know he went there. And, but his mother was the one that really done the running of the western iron works which the held, hold, held, you know. They was quite a prominent family, ah, they had ah. That was quite a school.

So is it true that some of the houses that have basements were connected to the mines, that could you know, there was like paths that could go towards the mines. And people operated on the mines out of their house?

Well, I suppose some of them did, I don't know, they might have had offices there and stuff. But ah, some of the those houses I guess probably did have offices there, they'd be connected to maybe the Leonard mine, or Mountain Con mine. And ah, that Mountain Con mine is up by where you folks are living. I remember that, and gosh they'd literally drop the workers when they'd put em down. They'd have those cables marked for certain levels, you know, like green or blue or whatever. And then they'd just literally drop em down those shafts. And, well I don't think there's any other mine system in the world quite to compare with it at one time. They'd really go out after that.

Did you ever see the pit whenever it wasn't flooded with water?

Yeah I did, and they had them great big buke's and stuff of hauling ore out of there and then ah, it would be, looked like a bunch of ants down in there, that's just how small. It's about a mile across I think. You know, to look over in there just about made you dizzy to look down it. It was a great big pit. People fought against it, cause it meant people out of work. You know going down those mines, going down them mines was a rough old go. I never did work in a mine, but I just thought well I got a chance. What got me off the streets in Butte to ah, my dad kept, had a pretty good, we'd live pretty good compared to some of the people, because he'd work with that electrical stuff. And he'd make a little better wages than most of em. And, such a time as he'd work, dog gone he'd, most the time it was shut down a bit you know, because of the depression. And some them poles, was just rotten right there, you know, all going up and down the alleys and everything it ah, sometimes they'd stick a crow-bar in some of them poles, and it would stick right in it. And ah, then they'd change some of them out, but they didn't do it unless they really had to. Everything's tied up. And so the best thing a kid in Butte could do, was either join the Navy or Army or something like that. So I joined the Navy and got out of there cause there was no real work there. Not much of it, very low wages, and stuff like that. Course when the miners organized they ah, they did better, get a lot better conditions you know, they had quite a time of it. But, you know no facilities hardly formed a change cloths, no changing places. So of them just go home right in their mine cloths. That changed a lot of that. Miners had a lot better conditions when they organized. And it was a rough go after the organized cause it's just the ACM, the ACM during that strike, the ACM would hire gunmen to protect the hill you know. And they was ordered to shoot to kill you know. When they'd shine spot lights down it would look more like a war than anything. It was really rough. And some of those people that stayed on during the strike, while there was someone shipping in, a lot come in from the Dakota side I understand but ah, we didn't know where they did come in from. They'd run em out of town and everything else. But they literally lived up on the hill because they was afraid to go down into town. So they was none union, we called em scabs and that's what they were. But that was it, and ah, there'd be fights on the streets and everything. It was a hard go around. Even after the strike, why then some of those scabs tried to stay on once in a while they'd come up missing cause they'd be dumped down a mine shaft. So they played for keeps, they didn't foul around. That was a rough deal getting organized. But they did get organized and it helped a whole lot. Even during the depression, that was pretty rough there. So there was a lot of hardships. But people there in Butte they was survivors. And I guess all around the country they was survivors. You know in order to live. It depended on a paycheck you don't have no garden or nothing to lean on. Why when, that paycheck stops you stop, that's about all there was to it. If you had anything saved on you, you'd eat that up. And, I never had to get on a soup line or anything, cause my dad did manage to get food on the table, and it was a rough one to, to get that.

How was school there during the depression, the depression, was it harder as far as less supplies and stuff or...

Well it ah, yes I suppose it be a little harder than before the depression. You know, but ah, see Butte was really a bomb town long back, way back and over a hundred thousand people there you know, and it was all most everything was mining. And so there was a lot of people killed in the shafts and everything. Some of em would get down in the shafts and go off in those levels, then they'd get lost in that maze down there and then they'd usually sometimes they'd find someone sitting down in there just starved to death. And they'd touch em, and they said they'd just crumbled. Pitch dark, it's a heck of a way to go. Probably run out of carbi..., they had carbide lamps then, stink up the place a little bit more.

So the mines under Butte, do they like, how far do they cover? Do you know? I mean as far as distance?

Well, there'd be miles of it, just miles, I don't know how many miles. There'd be a lot of it. **Like, there still currently all under, like all of the hill you think?**

Oh yes, it'd cover the whole hill, I think the whole hill is practically built that way, you know, built from ore. Slag and everything, whatever they could get out.

Some of them go out onto the flats too, don't they?

Ah well, I suppose they did, ah, they'd go a long ways out, wherever the vein would be. Why then, I guess some of the veins go, would go clear to Helena but then you hear a lot of things about it, but I never did see anything like that. But they'd find quite a lot of gold and silver along with the copper. And then the gold and silver of course, paid for the whole operation. So someone got rich!

Not the people though.

Not the people, well there's two types of people in this country, and that's the rich and the people who work for em. That's what that amounts to.

Jennifer: Well its been thirty minutes so thank you very much for your time.

Joe: Should we play that back and see if we...

We, Joe Archer and Jennifer Miller
(Person Interviewed) (Interviewer)

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Signed: Joe Archer
(Person Interviewed)

Jennifer Miller
(Interviewer)

Oct. 19, 1998
(Date)

Kalispell, MT.
(City & State)