

REUNIONS: RECONNECTIONS THROUGH HISTORY

By Paul G. Ulrich
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My wife Kathy and I attended the Butte High School 1956/1957 class reunion in Butte, Montana on August 4-6, 2017. I graduated in 1956. Our classes have held combined reunions every five years. Recently, they've occurred more often. I've attended as many of them as possible. The organizing committee announced that this year's reunion would be the last. I no longer have any family in Montana or any other reason to return. This trip therefore would be our last one as well.

My family moved to Butte in 1946, when I was seven. We had no prior connection with it. My father was transferred from Spokane to open a new branch office for Graybar Electric Co., a wholesale electrical distributor. We lived at 658 Travonia Street, across from the Travonia mine. The mine operated night and day. I didn't know it was famous as one of Butte's first silver mines.

I started third grade at the McKinley School, now a Baptist church. Although Butte appeared to be different from Spokane, I saw nothing unusual about it. I didn't know Butte's history or how it got to be the way it was. I had no basis for comparing it with anywhere else. I simply accepted it.

After high school, I graduated from the University of Montana and Stanford Law School. I've lived in Phoenix since 1965. I practiced as an appellate lawyer there until I retired in 2012. However, I've returned to Montana many times to see my parents and attend reunions.

As I've traveled, and read more about Butte,¹ Montana² and the West,³ I've increasingly appreciated their unique history. That history includes Butte's "copper kings," whose battles eventually led to the Anaconda Company's control of Butte's mining,⁴ Montana's daily newspapers⁵ and state-wide politics.⁶ Those battles occurred in elections and the state legislature,⁷ in courtrooms⁸ and underground.⁹

Other interesting facets of Butte's history include how its children grew up,¹⁰ the importance of its large Irish population,¹¹ and stories of the people who are buried there.¹² Many of Butte's neighborhoods, schools, businesses and churches, like its mines and smelters, no longer exist. ARCO, which purchased the Anaconda Company in 1977, stopped its mining operations in 1980.¹³

I now see events and places from more of a historical perspective. That history is embedded everywhere, including places I've passed many times without much thought. One of history's lessons is that nothing ever remains the same. I'd like to write about our trip from that point of view.

Reunions are not simply about visiting with a few old friends across a table every few years. While that's important, reunions are also about reconnecting more deeply with people, places and their history along the way. Kathy and I therefore decided to fly to Butte two days before the reunion, to allow time for side trips elsewhere in southwestern Montana.

August 3—Missoula.

We drove to Missoula via Anaconda and Philipsburg, then returned to Butte via Interstate 90. We first passed **Opportunity**. Opportunity was founded by the Anaconda Company in 1912 as

a garden community for retired smelter workers. About 500 people, mostly low-income and elderly, now live there. For most of the 20th century, the adjacent 4,000-acre Opportunity Ponds were used as a dump for Butte's toxic mine tailings and Anaconda's smelter waste.¹⁴

More recently, the EPA and ARCO shipped millions of cubic yards of such waste from behind Milltown Dam, east of Missoula, to the Opportunity Ponds when that dam was torn down, using Dennis Washington's Montana Rail Link Railroad.¹⁵ That waste had flowed down the Clark Fork river over many years and accumulated behind the dam. The rationale for doing so was that Missoula didn't want to store the waste anywhere near the city and it had originally come from the Opportunity area. That was incorrect. Nearly all of the waste had come from Butte.¹⁶

Anaconda. We drove through Anaconda and stopped briefly front of the county courthouse. Anaconda is the county seat of Deer Lodge County. It has a consolidated city-county government and a 2015 estimated population of 9,139.¹⁷ Marcus Daly planned and developed the city in 1883, while the Anaconda smelter was being built to process the ore from Butte's mines.¹⁸ In 1894, Anaconda lost a run-off election to Helena to decide which city would become Montana's state capital.

The Anaconda smelter also closed in 1980. ARCO stated it did so because it was unwilling to pay the cost of reducing the smelter's emissions to comply with new federal air quality standards. However, Governor Thomas Judge then speculated the smelter was closed because of foreign competition in the copper industry.¹⁹ The smelter has since been torn down. However, its stack remains standing. There were too many toxic chemicals inside the stack for it to be destroyed safely. It provides a lasting reminder of a bygone time.

Silver and Georgetown Lakes. We then drove west, past Silver and Georgetown Lakes. The Anaconda Company created Silver Lake as a reservoir for its smelter. Georgetown Lake is surrounded by summer homes. We've also seen ice fishing shelters on the lake during the winter. I surveyed Forest Service timber access roads near there during the summers while I was in college.

Philipsburg is located just west of Georgetown Lake. It's the county seat of Granite County, with a 2016 estimated population of 920. It originally was a mining and lumbering town with its own smelter. The mines and sawmills closed during the 1980s. Its principal industries are now sapphire mining, craft and antique stores, candy manufacturing and a brewery.²⁰ We looked through several shops, then bought some fudge before going on to Missoula.

Drummond and I-90. The Philipsburg highway connects to I-90 at Drummond. Drummond was built on the site of a trapper's camp.²¹ It has a 2016 estimated population of 348.²² I-90 runs down the middle of the Clark Fork river valley toward Missoula. The old US-10 highway runs along the hillsides. It's a two-lane road, full of hills and curves. I-90 wasn't yet built when I attended the University. I therefore drove on US-10 through sometimes snowy, icy weather when traveling to and from Butte.

Missoula is Montana's second largest city, with a 2016 estimated population of 72,364.²³ It's the county seat of Missoula County. It was founded in 1860 as Hellgate Trading Post, then located in Washington Territory. It was moved five miles east and renamed Missoula Mills in 1866. The mills provided supplies for settlers traveling along the Mullan Road. Fort Missoula was built in 1877 to help protect settlers. The Union Pacific Railroad arrived and the Town of Missoula was chartered in 1883. By the 1990s, Missoula's basic lumber industry had gradually disappeared.

We arrived in Missoula shortly after noon, looking for a place for lunch. We recalled an open-air restaurant, somewhere near the railroad depot, where we ate several years ago. We couldn't find it this time. Another restaurant we've liked was open only for dinner. We therefore ended up at the Oxford restaurant, an old-time, decrepit dive. Although it's been there since long before I attended the University, we'd never eaten there. The Ox's specialty has always been "brains and eggs." We passed on that particular treat.

After lunch, we walked through several uptown art galleries. We then drove along University Avenue to the University of Montana campus. My former fraternity house, Sigma Phi Epsilon, at 333 E. University Ave., is now a private residence. So is my former wife's sorority house, Delta Gamma. I don't know where those members are now housed.

The Montana legislature awarded the University to Missoula in 1893, in exchange for an agreement by Missoula's leaders that it would stay out of the bidding for the state's new capital and instead support Helena over Anaconda in the 1894 runoff election.²⁴ The University opened in a formerly condemned Missoula school building in 1895.²⁵ It began with about 50 students, only five of whom were fully prepared for college work.²⁶ When I was there during 1957-61, its enrollment stood at between 3,500 and 4,000 students.

Enrollment thereafter continued to grow, peaking at 15,669 students in December 2011. It then declined to 12,419 students in 2016.²⁷ That decline was caused at least in part by a sexual assault scandal involving football players and an athletic department cover-up that received national adverse publicity.²⁸ It also was caused by fewer Montana high school graduates; increased competition for them with other schools, both inside and outside Montana; the nature of the courses it offers; and an inability to maintain its enrollment of out-of-state and foreign students.

As the result, former president Royce Engstrom was forced to resign in December 2016. A search for his replacement is now underway. Whether, when and how the University's enrollment situation will be corrected and it will return to normal is hard to say.

The university campus was very quiet. It must have been in summer recess. The campus interior was closed to traffic. We therefore drove around its outer edge. There were many new buildings I didn't recognize. Most of them were probably built between 1990 and 2010, when George Dennison was president and enrollment increased substantially.

It was hot. There was no reason to walk around the oval, to take a picture of the Main Hall clock tower, or to attempt to find Rudy Autio's grizzly bear sculpture or the statues of former Senator Mike and Maureen Mansfield at the main library named for them.²⁹ We'd taken those pictures before. I no longer knew anyone at the University, except its interim president, Sheila Stearns. I hadn't made an appointment to see her. There was no reason to just drop in. We therefore continued driving around the outside edge of the campus, then returned to Butte on Interstate 90.

Deer Lodge, Warm Springs and Galen. On the way back to Butte, we passed by but didn't stop at Deer Lodge, Warm Springs and Galen, all located in the Deer Lodge Valley. That valley became part of the United States and the Oregon Territory with the signing of the Oregon Treaty by the United States and Great Britain in 1846. Settlement began during the 1850s and 1860s.³⁰ Farmers and ranchers in the valley later became involved in years of unsuccessful litigation with the Anaconda Company when its smelter smoke caused severe losses to their crops and livestock.³¹

Deer Lodge became part of the Idaho Territory in 1863 and the Montana Territory in 1864. It then grew rapidly as a base for supplies to mines in the surrounding mountains.³² William Clark established a bank in Deer Lodge in 1872 before coming to Butte to begin acquiring and financing mining and smelting operations there.³³ Deer Lodge is now the county seat of Powell County, with an estimated 2,994 population in 2016. The Montana State Prison was located at the south end of Main Street in Deer Lodge for many years. It's now located 3.5 miles west of town.³⁴

Warm Springs is a small, unincorporated community southeast of Deer Lodge. Montana's only long-term state psychiatric hospital was established there by the territorial legislature in 1877.³⁵ The state tuberculosis sanitarium was located nearby at **Galen** in 1912. Many of its patients were Butte miners. I recall participating in musical performances at Warm Springs and Galen when I was growing up in Butte. However, I don't now remember specifically what groups were involved.

The Uptown Café. That evening, we ate at the Uptown Café in Butte. The Uptown is an upscale restaurant recognized by national restaurant and travel organizations. It's been there for many years. We'd decided that this would be our 35th wedding anniversary dinner. We've been there with my parents many times. They knew some of the former owners, who have since sold their interests. Our dinner was excellent, just as before. The evening reminded us of the times we were there with my parents.

August 4–Helena.

We decided to travel to Helena to see Last Chance Gulch, have lunch, drive past the state capitol, then return to Butte before the class reunion started that evening. To get there, we drove north from Butte on Interstate 15, passing Basin and Boulder. Both were historic mining districts.

Basin began as a placer gold mining camp in 1862. Lode mining started there in the 1870s. By 1880, Basin became the local source of supplies for mines and miners. During the early 1900s, Basin's population peaked at about 1,500. In 2010, it was 212. Basin was served by two railroads, carrying both passengers and freight. F. Augustus Heinze took over its mining properties in 1905, improved them, then abandoned them in 1909. The last of Basin's mining booms ended in 1925.³⁶

Basin has abandoned mine tunnels containing radon gas that were widely advertised as places in which to sit for hours to cure arthritis and other ailments. However, that radiation also possibly causes cancers. There also used to be placer mining dredges left abandoned in the stream bed beside the highway, leaving mounds of boulders and gravel behind.

Boulder is the county seat of Jefferson County. Its 2016 estimated population was 1,230. Boulder was established in the early 1860s as a stagecoach stop between Fort Benton and Virginia City.³⁷ It grew into a regional trading center for farmers, ranchers and miners. It also has institutions offering services for disabled or troubled adults.³⁸

Helena. Helena is the county seat of Lewis and Clark County. Its 2016 estimated population was 31,169.³⁹ Helena became Montana's territorial capital in 1875, displacing Virginia City, after three elections on the issue.⁴⁰ It continued as Montana's state capital by defeating Anaconda for that position in an 1894 runoff election. That election was fought between two of Butte's copper kings: William Clark, who favored Helena, and Marcus Daly, who favored Anaconda. I participated in speech contests and attended meetings in Helena while I was in high school.

Last Chance Gulch began as a gold mining camp in 1864. It later became Helena's main downtown street. Since we were last there, Last Chance Gulch has become a car-free pedestrian mall, running for several blocks. It was very quiet. There was no directory of shops and restaurants. A number of store fronts were empty. We found a restaurant with some outdoor tables. We also found a jewelry store where Kathy purchased some miniature geode earrings, as a souvenir of Montana's minerals. However, the clerk couldn't tell us where those geodes had come from.

We then stopped at the Montana state capitol to see the historic equestrian statue of Thomas Francis Meagher. The statue was unveiled before a large crowd on July 4, 1905.⁴¹ It was paid for by the Thomas Francis Meagher Memorial Association, a group of Butte and Anaconda Irishmen whose honorary chairman was Marcus Daly. Daly was one of Butte's copper kings. He also was an Irish immigrant who supported Irish immigration to Butte and Irish causes generally, employed thousands of Irish miners, and became America's leading Irish-American capitalist.⁴²

Meagher was Montana's acting territorial governor between 1865 and 1867. He was a remarkable character. He began as an Irish nationalist leader and advocate. As the result, after being convicted of sedition by the British government and sentenced to death, he received royal clemency and was "transported" to the Tasmanian penal colony in Australia in 1849. He escaped in 1852, eventually reaching New York City. He there became a lawyer and a prominent advocate for Irish rights. After the Civil War broke out, he urged Irish in the north to support the Union. He became brigadier general of the Irish Brigade, fighting many battles for the Union during the Civil War.⁴³

Meagher envisioned creating a new home for the Irish people in the Montana territory, similar to the Mormon territory in Utah. However, he made many political enemies in Montana. His death cut that ambition short. He died on July 1, 1867, when he jumped, fell or was pushed off a river boat at Fort Benton and was swept down the Missouri River. His body was never recovered. Although there were conflicting stories, no one ever was held responsible for his death.⁴⁴

August 4-6--Class Reunion.

Our 1956-57 class reunion events were all held at the Star Lanes in Butte. More than 150 people, including spouses and guests, were there. My sister Annette Campbell, who graduated in 1958, was our guest. The reunion consisted of a Friday night reception, a Saturday night dinner with a band, and a Sunday morning brunch. It was "no frills," but that didn't matter. Those events provided opportunities to see old friends again and to remember those who are no longer living.

Our two high-school classes were melting pots. They reflected the numerous, diverse populations that had shared in creating Butte's and Montana's history. For example, one of our classmates is a great-granddaughter of one of Montana's first senators and the prosecutor for the Montana Vigilantes.⁴⁵ Another is a grandson of the former editor of the *Montana Standard* during many of the years when the Anaconda Company owned or controlled, and set editorial policy for, nearly all of Montana's daily papers, and the *Montana Standard* was its lead paper.⁴⁶

Others are descendants of Butte's business and professional people, miners and other working families. Many went to grade schools, attended churches and lived in neighborhoods, such as Meaderville and McQueen, that no longer exist. However, our classes undoubtedly under-represented Butte's large Catholic population. Many of those students instead attended parochial grade schools, and Boys and Girls Central high schools.

Our reunion was a continuation of that melting-pot heritage. Our classes' diversity has continued through the years. Some classmates married early, then pursued careers and raised their families in Butte or its surrounding areas, continuing their families' traditions. Others left Butte for higher education or other opportunities, then pursued careers and raised their families elsewhere. Those careers have included businesses, engineering, medicine, producing community theater shows, college athletics, social work, the ministry and law practice, to name just a few.

Whatever path we've taken, we're now nearly all retired. We've achieved our lives' outcomes, whatever they might be. We're also closer to the endpoint of our lives. What we did during our careers doesn't matter so much any more. In my conversations, some classmates seemed more satisfied than others with what they've done and where they now are. I enjoyed the conversations that I had. My only regret was there wasn't sufficient time to visit with more people.

August 7--The Last Tour.

Our plane left on Monday afternoon. Kathy and I therefore decided to drive through Butte one last time that morning to recall and photograph significant places in my family's life there, and other points of interest. We started at the former Waterford senior residence, where my parents had lived, and at their last home on Burlington Street. We also stopped at the Ulrich-Schotte nature trail archway behind the Butte Chamber of Commerce.

We drove up Montana Street, past the former Milwaukee Road station (now KXLF-TV), where I picked up papers for a *Montana Standard* paper route, and the former Ireland & Son gas station on Aluminum Street where I had worked when in high school (now an abandoned residence). We stopped at my family's first home on Travonia Street, and the First Presbyterian Church and my father's last insurance office at Platinum and Excelsior Streets. We went up to the old McKinley School, then on up the hill on west Park Street to Marcus Daly's statue at Montana Tech.

We then drove back through the uptown business district, past the William A. Clark mansion, the county courthouse, the original First Presbyterian Church (now a theater), the Art Chateau (originally Charles Clark's home), and the Lexington stamp mill (now a flower garden with a butterfly based on the one at Columbia Gardens). We then stopped at Butte High School and drove past the building where Graybar had been located before returning to the airport.

As I've returned to visit Butte over the years, it's appeared to have slowly declined as it lost population, and as its buildings have aged, and been destroyed or abandoned. This time, it appeared that decline has leveled out, but not yet reversed. Butte's 2016 estimated city-county population was 33,853, down only slightly from its 2010 census population of 34,200.⁴⁷

However, both the uptown business district and the southside mall were quiet. Judging from their parking lots, Walmart and the Dollar Store instead appeared to be doing the best business. Whether Butte can sustain itself as a viable regional commercial center and find other industries to replace its mines remain open questions.

END NOTES

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3. *E.g.*, MICHAEL P. MALONE & RICHARD W. ETULAIN, THE AMERICAN WEST: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORY (1989); MARC REISNER, CADILLAC DESERT: THE AMERICAN WEST AND ITS DISAPPEARING WATER (1987).
4. *E.g.*, C.B. GLASSCOCK, THE WAR OF THE COPPER KINGS (1935); ISAAC F. MARCOSSON, ANACONDA (1957) (Marcus Daly); BILL DEDMAN & PAUL CLARK NEWELL, JR., EMPTY MANSIONS (2013) (William and Huguette Clark); SARAH MCNELIS, COPPER KING AT WAR (1968) (F. Augustus Heinze).
5. DENNIS L. SWIBOLD, COPPER CHORUS (2006).
6. MALONE ET AL., MONTANA 201-31.
7. *Id.*
8. *E.g.*, MCNELIS 51-84; MALONE, THE BATTLE FOR BUTTE.
9. See RENO H. SALES, UNDERGROUND WARFARE AT BUTTE (1964).
10. See JANET L. FINN, MINING CHILDHOOD: GROWING UP IN BUTTE, MONTANA, 1900-1960 (2012).
11. See DAVID M. EMMONS, THE BUTTE IRISH: CLASS AND ETHNICITY IN AN AMERICAN MINING TOWN, 1875-1925 (1990).
12. See ZENA BETH MCGLASHAN, BURIED IN BUTTE (2010).
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14. TYER 16.
15. TYER 116.
16. TYER 104.
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20. Philipsburg, Montana, Wikipedia.org (viewed Sept. 4, 2017).
21. WPA GUIDE TO 1930S MONTANA 210 (1939).
22. Drummond, Montana, Wikipedia.org (viewed Sept. 9, 2017).
23. Missoula, Montana, Wikipedia.org (viewed Sept. 6, 2017).
24. MALONE, BATTLE FOR BUTTE 98-100.

25. See generally H.G. MERRIAM, *THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA: A HISTORY* (1970). For an updated history, see STAN COHEN & DON MILLER, *THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA, MISSOULA: A PICTORIAL HISTORY* (2004).
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28. See generally JON KRAKAUER, *MISSOULA: RAPE AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN A COLLEGE TOWN* (2015).
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