

Pittsburg & Montana Copper Co.

by Dave Johnson

The Pittsburg & Boston Copper Company, with main offices in the Farmers Bank Building Pittsburgh, PA and mine offices in Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana, was organized July 9, 1902 under the laws of West Virginia, with capitalization of \$3,000,000. The company possessed land and 46 claims with 850 acres near Butte with another 634 acres in the Helena, Elk Horn and Greenhorn Districts of Montana. The main tract of 260 acres, adjoining Anaconda Hill, about 2 miles east of the center of Butte, included the McQueen placer and adjoining claims, formerly owned by Franklin Farrell, former president of the Parrot Silver & Copper Co. , and was adjacent to the Silver Bow Mine of the Butte & Boston property.



By 1906 two shafts had been sunk to a depth of 1,240 feet each, with 4 miles of underground workings developed. Ore bodies were considered small when compared to the big veins to the east but carried good silver values, ore ranging from 3.5% to 12% copper, and 8-12oz. silver per ton, with small gold values.

The Pittsburg & Montana reduction plant, known as the Pittsmont Smelter contained a 200 ton blast-furnace, with room for 4 additional furnaces. The furnace was a remodeled Garretson pyritic smelter that had been modified by Ralph L. Baggaley, vice-president of the company. The "Baggaley Process" of pyritic smelting called for the treatment of ore without water concentration, heap-roasting or carboniferous fuel. Production from this process was blister copper, carrying 99% copper, 200 oz. silver and 3.5oz. gold per ton. This new ore reduction process was declared a success by the Pittsburg & Montana Copper Co. in 1904.

By June of 1908 the Pittsburgh & Montana Copper Co. was in default on bonds of \$3,000,000 and all property was sold at public auction to the Pittsmont Copper Co. in 1909, which then turned the property over to the East Butte Copper Mining Co. under an agreement in which East Butte agreed to advance all funds necessary for the further development and operation of the properties. In the 1911 the Pittsburg & Boston Copper Co. was controlled, through 90% stock ownership and 100% bond holding by the Pittsmont Copper Co., which was in turn controlled by the East Butte Copper Mining Co. Even though the principal property of the East Butte Copper Mining Co. was actually vested in the Pittsburg & Montana Copper Co. , that was merely a corporate maneuver, it served only as a stepping-stone in the corporate structure.

The Pittsmont Copper Co. retained the former offices of the Pittsburg and Montana Copper Co. in Pittsburgh, PA. Pittsmont had been organized Sept. 8, 1909, retaining James H. Reed as president. Reed was also made vice-president of the East Butte Copper Mining Co. when that firm took over the Pittsburg & Montana Copper Co. properties. At that time Ralph Baggaley was no longer an officer.

An interesting artifact of the aforementioned reduction process is the 3 1/4" ingot pictured here. On one side it reads: PITTSMONT BLISTER COPPER 99.4% and on the other side it reads: PITTSBURGH & MONTANA COPPER CO. BUTTE MONT. FEB. 12th 1904 SAMPLE OF FIRST COPPER MADE BY THE "BAGGALEY PROCESS". It seems that This process was not as successful as first reported and was soon replaced by a conventional process. In 1918 the Pittsmont Smelter contained a 600 ton and a 300 ton blast furnace. As of 1920 the Pittsmont reduction plant was the only operating smelter in Butte and did a considerable custom business treating ore from several independent mines, including the Davis-Daly group of mines, which later sold out to Anaconda Copper. At this time the Pittsmont Copper Co. also owned and operated the Swissmont Mine at Butte. After August of 1924 all Pittsmont Copper Co. ore was shipped to the new Anaconda Smelter for processing.



As of 1919, the parent company company, East Butte Copper Mining Co., had gone into the oil business, purchasing oil properties in Kansas, Texas and Wyoming. In 1922-23, the company acquired mining properties at Silver Plume, Colorado from the Silver Plume Mines Co. In 1923, an option on 40,000 shares of the Consolidated Metals Co. was exercised and a cross-cut was driven from the Pittsmont Mine 700' level to the Consolidated Metals Co. property. For many years the company also held 61% of the stock in the Tonopah Western Consolidated Mining Co. of Tonopah, Nevada. In 1925, a long-held option was exercised on the Continental Chief Mine , a group of claims at Leadville, Colorado, and exploration was begun. Here our story Stops.

I have always liked collecting and researching what I believed to be historically significant mining artifacts, such as the Pittsmont ingot shown here. This type of artifact I believe to be under-valued by collectors of mining artifacts both from a monetary and historical perspective. How many of these ingots were produced and how many probably survived? How many items come with the type of provenance that this piece comes with, How many artifacts are dated and give the specific mine (by reference to the company) it was produced from and the process by which it was produced.? This type of artifact, in my estimation, has real historic significance.