



## History of the Caird Engineering Works

From 1895 until 1985—ninety years—Caird Engineering Works functioned as one of Montana's longest operating foundries and machine shops. It originated because of and to serve Montana's extensive and already well-established mining industry. Operating through both world wars and the Great Depression, Caird survived by a series of thoughtful, strategic business and technological adaptations.

Caird's mining contracts reflect the evolution of mining processes over the years.

It's non-mining contracts with municipalities (street lamps, trolley poles, decorative iron work), the Montana Highway Department (bridge elements), other governmental organizations (e.g. related to irrigation and dam construction), and private businesses (e.g. stair railings, lawn mower blades, gates and frames, elevator repair parts) gave Caird greater business flexibility and a still greater role in the state's development. In 1929, the Caird plant built an enormous fan to clean locomotive smoke from the Mullan Tunnel. During World War II, Caird contracted with the Army and Navy for wrenches, valves, submarine net floats and deck spoons.

Through the years Caird proved a significant Helena employer—even hiring women during World War II.

When Charles Caird and Frank Hawksworth formed a partnership to establish a foundry and machine shop, they located the complex at the corner of Montana, Helena, and Lyndale avenues because it was strategically close to the Northern Pacific Depot and railroad facilities.

Buildings and machinery on the Caird site changed and adapted over time—the result of changing contracts, technologies, and a series of fires. A 1957 fire changed the site more dramatically than any other event. The Caird property included both the pattern house located on Lyndale and the boat shop, located on Montana Avenue but across Boulder

The functions and work at Caird can be understood primarily in two categories: (a) foundry work in which molds for specific contracted products were designed, created, and put to use and (b) machine shop work in which contracted items were fabricated from steel.

The Caird business closed in stages, the result of a variety of events and changes: the closing of the Anaconda Company's Great Falls smelter in 1980; the evolution to hydraulic-driven equipment in mining; increased attention to pollution control.

Caird Engineering Works has had only four owners or sets of owners. Charles Caird sold the plan to nephew George Porte in the 1930s. George's son, Richard, became company president in 1966. Although Richard sold the foundry to AFFCO in Anaconda in 1985, that venture was not successful and ownership returned to Richard Porte who remains president.

In recent years, Caird space has been leased to other small businesses for foundry and machine shop use.

The Porte family donated their extensive collection of historical business records to the Montana Historical Society, where they are available for research.

*(Based on "The Technical Survey Report of Caird Engineering Works," by historian Earl Wilcox, August 1990)*