

The Boettcher Connection

Among the prosperous self-made businessmen at the turn of the twentieth century was Charles Boettcher. Boettcher arrived from Germany in 1869 and became a partner in his brother's hardware store in Cheyenne, Wyoming at the age of 17. As the economy moved, Boettcher followed the boom, and changed or added new businesses to his empire as he went along. By 1899 Boettcher had been involved in mining, banking, mercantile, cattle, real estate, meat packing, sugar beet farming / sugar mill, and he had even retired for six months.

After his retirement, he started building one of the biggest cement manufacturing companies in the United States. In 1924, Charles Boettcher, a major shareholder of Three Forks Portland Cement Company, and his partners consolidated their various cement manufacturing interests, forming Ideal Cement Company. Boettcher was the president of Ideal and his son, Claude, was vice-president. The two plants of Three Forks Portland Cement Company (Trident and Hanover, near Lewistown) became a wholly owned subsidiary of Ideal Cement.

By 1933 Charles Boettcher, now in his early eighties, was still going to work every day. He owned Denver's famous Brown Palace Hotel and lived there. Each morning he was chauffeured to the Ideal Cement Building not far away. His son, Claude, oversaw the majority of the Boettcher empire, while Claude's son, Charles II, was part of the upper management of several firms and heavily involved in the Ideal Cement Company.

Charles II had been born in 1901 and had married a girl from Helena, Montana, Anna Lou Piggott. Charles II and Anna Lou had a daughter in 1927. On the evening of February 12, 1933, Charles II and his wife Anna Lou returned to their home in Denver after a dinner party. Two men were hiding in the garage as the couple drove in. One held Charles II at gunpoint while the other handed a note to Anna Lou. They then sped away with Charles II. Anna Lou called her father-in-law, Claude, who called the police. Charles II was held for two weeks. Claude paid \$60,000 in ransom and Charles II was released.

Charles II was a friend of Charles Lindbergh and an avid pilot himself. While in captivity, Boettcher paid attention to overhead



Photo Credit: Colorado Historical Society

Charles & Anna Lou Boettcher, circa 1933.



Photo Credit: Boettcher Foundation

Charles, Claude, and Charles Boettcher II.



Ideal Cement Company at Trident, Montana c. 1953

flight patterns and was able to lead police to a house in rural South Dakota where he had been held. The police were later able to apprehend the kidnapers. The leader of the kidnapping gang, Canadian born Verne Sankey, hung himself in a South Dakota penitentiary while waiting for arraignment. He was tied to at least one other kidnapping.

The kidnapping was just a year after the Lindbergh baby kidnapping. There were 18 high-profile kidnappings from 1930 to 1933. One Time Magazine article blamed all the kidnappings on the winding down of Prohibition;

The return of beer has similarly forced the nation's underworld into evolution. As amply evidenced last week, the defunct beer racket is swiftly being superceded as a source of criminal revenue by the uglier, more desperate crime of kidnapping.

Substitute for Beer, Time staff, *Time Magazine*, July 24, 1933

As I finish this story, I realize that super-rich have a completely different set of problems than we normal people. But I'm still going to buy a lottery ticket tomorrow.