BAS 029 Corner by Corner

Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Today let’s take an armchair expedition to the corner of Quartz and Crystal—a great intersection for a geologist like me to live, and in fact where my own home is located.

The first thing you might notice about this corner is that it’s not a simple four-way corner. Quartz Street jogs. There’s a fascinating historical reason for this. Here, we’re a bit west of the originally platted street grid for the city of Butte, laid out in the 1860s. So the streets were under no obligation to create rectangles, and in fact property lines around here often followed mining claims. When Quartz street was laid out, the part west of Crystal went parallel to Granite Street, which changes orientation at Crystal from east-west to just a little bit north of due east as you proceed toward the heart of town.

To accommodate the change here, a block north of Granite, Quartz street had to jog – and in doing so, the section to the east of Crystal more closely followed mining claims. To the west, in the 600 block of Quartz, little houses got unexpected front yards because the new street DIDN’T follow the mine claim boundaries that their houses were flush with. Details of those properties’ deeds should show that they own parts of two different mine claims.

Looking north from this intersection along Crystal you see a little park—Cherokee park, which marks the site of the old Silver King mine. It was closed down by 1910, but in its life it produced quite a lot of silver-rich ore. In 1905, $150,000 in ore was reportedly visible on the mineyard. The Silver King vein extended to the east and two other mine shafts exploited that portion. The second one occupied the vacant lot you can see on the north side of Quartz, just east of the house on the northeast corner of the intersection. The third shaft was in the vacant lot on Quartz directly north of the Copper King Mansion.

This corner is a good one to see the work of an important local architect, Charles Prentice. The white flat-topped Italianate house at 301 North Crystal was designed and built by him in 1898, and served as his own residence for about 10 years when he moved to Columbia Street – which is today’s Clark Street – in 1908. Prentice also designed the yellow house that formerly stood at 601 West Quartz and the eastern addition to the Connell Mansion at Granite and Idaho. 301 was also the home to Frank Paneek Panisko, a professional clown well known and well loved in Butte.

The elegant blue and white Queen Anne mansion at 212 North Crystal that looks west down Quartz Street was built in 1893 for William J. Alexander, a successful Butte grocer. His store was at 64 West Park, and his home here reflects the rapid growth in the 1890s of Butte’s middle-class west side, especially this neighborhood on the hub of the central business district.

As writer Edwin Dobb has said, "Like Concord, Gettysburg, and Wounded Knee, Butte is one of the places America came from." Join us next time for more of Butte, America’s Story.