BAS 057 Before the Hennessey. Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Volume 1, No. 1 of the Butte Miner, August 5, 1879, included front-page ads that suggested Butte was already becoming a settled metropolis rather than an ephemeral mining camp.

Eight physicians and surgeons advertised their services, as well as one dentist. Dr. J.W. Beal, a native of Ohio, had practiced medicine at Alder Gulch and German Gulch for 12 years before coming to Butte in 1876. In addition to his work in medicine Beal was an entrepreneur, building and running the Centennial Hotel (which opened July 4, 1876) at the corner of Main and Granite where the Hennessey Building stands today. It only lasted 12 years, until it burned down April 24, 1888. Beal served in the territorial legislature and was elected Butte mayor in 1881. He died at German Gulch, where his son owned at least two mines, on June 8, 1901 at age 73.

The two-story Centennial Hotel included a saloon run by Beal’s son-in-law George Newkirk, plus an office, the 30-by-40-foot dining room, kitchen, laundry, wood house, and a two-level outhouse, as well as a nearby ice house. George Newkirk’s Butte mineral collection was reported to be the best in the Territory and was (perhaps) sent for display at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

A minimum of eight lawyers and notaries provided legal aid to the growing town. Three assayers offered their analyses, while a watchmaker and jeweler held forth at Dellinger’s store on Main Street that summer of 1879.

Henry Valiton’s livery stable at the West Park Street Bridge (presumably the bridge over Missoula Gulch at about Clark Street today) rented barouches, which were fashionable carriages with collapsible hoods to protect the passengers from the elements, bench wagons, sulkies, covered carriages, and saddle horses, and claimed to have the finest hearse in Montana. The stable had a “GRANITE FLOOR” claimed to be superior to any other in Butte. Like Dr. Beal, Valiton went on to become a Butte mayor, and partnered with Marchesseau in the 3-story Beaver Block that stood at the corner of Granite and Main (where the Wells Fargo Bank is today) until it burned in 1968.

The St. Nicholas Hotel advertised a dining room that could seat 100. It was on East Broadway, straight across from the site of the 1890 City Hall, and bragged that it was the largest hotel in Butte.

All this in a city whose population in the 1880 census was 3,363.  
  
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.