BAS 065 The Nine Mile 540 words

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

We’re all familiar with Four Mile Road and the Five Mile House out Harrison Street, but the way east from Butte was dotted with inns – Mile Houses – at least at 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, and 18 miles from the heart of uptown Butte, the last one about five miles east of the Continental Divide. The location that defined the mile house positions was apparently Arizona and Park Street, but the measurements are not precise and it may have been the more logical Park and Main intersection that was used.

Detailed driving directions in 1919 on what was called the Yellowstone Trail included the admonition on the dirt-and-gravel approach to the Continental Divide to “bear left up steep grade, using CAUTION on curves. Blow horn frequently.”

The last hostelry before the mountains was the Nine-Mile House, at the mouth of Nine Mile Canyon, in today’s Thompson Park. The location was along Blacktail Creek, where Highway 2 and Continental Drive intersect. The flat area north of that intersection was an artificial lake, with vegetable gardens run by Chinese just north of the lake.

The Nine Mile house was built as a summer home for the James R. Boyce family. He was a successful dry goods merchant in Butte in the 1880s and early 1890s, with a store on the northwest corner of Main and Broadway (where the 1909 First National Bank building stands today). By about 1900, his rambling home was enlarged and became a venue for parties and dances as well as for traveling guests to spend the night or enjoy a nice meal.

Others built homes nearby, enough so that the neighborhood came to be known as Lynndale. A hilltop cottage was built by Charles Clark for his first wife, Katherine, who died in 1904; Charles was spending most of his time in New York and California by then, and the cottage was purchased by A. P. Heinze, brother to F. Augustus Heinze and husband to Dollie Noyes, from the prominent Butte real estate family. W.A. Clark, Jr., also had a summer home in the neighborhood.

In 1906, the Chicago Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad was expanding, and they let a contract in the princely amount of $350,000 to construct a tunnel for the route, a tunnel that now spans the walking trail along the old road bed in Thompson Park.

Butte was certainly the focus, but Montana was booming across the state. In 1908, eight telephone companies were stringing wires for expanded service. Butte’s Montana Independent Telephone Company had just built a new headquarters building on Granite Street – the Water Company building today – and reported installing 60 new phones a week in June 1908. Toll lines were working their way toward Anaconda, and wires to the east had just reached the Nine Mile House, with the expectation of connecting to Logan, Montana, and the Bozeman telephone network that same summer.

Despite what might have been an adventure in driving, the gravel road from Butte over the Continental Divide was promoted in the 1919 Blue Book for Travelers as “a very beautiful drive and if the tourist is fond of fishing some of the finest trout in the country can be caught in the many mountain streams encountered.”

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.