BAS 080 Salvation Army Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

“The territory appears to have better churches and educational facilities than one would at first expect, but still they are far removed from having as much as they need. Gambling is carried on publicly.”

That 1888 description of Butte in the Salvation Army’s newspaper, War Cry, came on the heels of the first two “hallelujah lasses” who arrived in Montana that year. Although the salvation in question often focused on gambling, alcohol, and other problems, the Army in Butte did a lot of work with children, both early on and well into the late 20th century.

The earliest listed barracks in Butte was at 224 East Park in 1890, under the command of Captain Millie Pauline Lick (born in Germany), a 20-year-old who lived at 405 East Mercury (well east of the red-light district). She and her fellow Salvationists were arrested at least once, for disturbing the peace with their marching bands and singing—but the complaint seems to have come from saloonkeepers who feared the Army would reduce their client base, and the case was dismissed. She met her husband-to-be, Kenneth MacInnis, in Butte, reportedly a drunk who she rehabilitated. They left Butte but continued their ministry for decades.

The organization bounced all over uptown, to 30 East Granite (1895), 47 West Park (1898), 236 South Main (1900), and 11 North Wyoming in 1903, when they also had a rescue house for women and children at 306 West Broadway. In 1906 they occupied the sub-sidewalk office at the Hirbour Tower.

The main barracks moved to 107 East Broadway in 1907, and the organization expanded with a Scandinavian Branch at 107 West Porphyry and a separate Swedish Branch at 238 East Park. A relief store was established in 1908 at 116-118 East Broadway, in a building where the Finlen parking lot is today.

When James Durand became head of the Montana-Wyoming-Idaho Division in 1909, its headquarters was in his home at 960 Lewisohn, but Adjutant J. Valentine Hawk was in charge of the local corps.

The Salvation Army built its own building at 121 East Broadway in 1923, and it served as headquarters for both the Division and the Butte Corps. Mens’ social services were at 209 S. Main, the Mens’ Shelter was at 122 S. Montana, and the childrens’ day nursery was at 1128 California, previously officers quarters.

In 1910, the Army provided food and winter clothing for 250 children in Butte, and services were provided every night at 8:00 with a rousing free concert on Saturdays. Salvation Army nurses gave personal care to those in need, including a Chinese mother and baby. The 19-year-old mother, sold to her husband by her father in Spokane, was afraid to wash the child because of the cold, so a nurse visited her daily to bathe the baby and bring food.

As recently as 1987 the Salvation Army provided more than 13,300 fellowship meals in Butte. Today, the 1923 headquarters still stands, but it is vacant.

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.