BAS 081 Barnard Block Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Contrary to the dire reports of the day, the devastating fire on September 29, 1889, did not completely destroy the Barnard Block, at 15-25 West Granite Street, where the Montana Standard building stands today.

The fire began in a building under construction across the street, and although the damage estimate exceeded $500,000 in dollars of the day, the Barnard Block did survive. Anthony W. Barnard was a real estate and mining broker who built the building in 1886 during one of Butte’s many building booms. There were a total of eight spaces in the two-story brick block, four on the ground floor and four above.

Among the early tenants were Orton Brothers – seven brothers, all musicians, who organized the Orton Silver Cornet Band and operated the music store in the western ground-floor office of the Barnard Block. Orton Brothers moved to the 200 block of North Main by 1889 where they had a decades-long operation. The Lotus Club, above Orton Bothers, was a 100-member social club with a parlor, reading room, billiard hall, card rooms, and “loafing rooms” for upscale businessmen. Officers included John Forbis and J.F. Beck, both of whom went on to construct their own buildings (housing the Uptown Café and InstyPrints today), and C.F. Mussigbrod, eventual caretaker of Warm Springs asylum whose name is commemorated in lakes and creeks around western Montana.

Dr. T.J. Murray was staff surgeon to the Montana Union Railroad. Both the railroad and Murray had offices in the Barnard Block, and Murray’s success was such that he constructed his own hospital at Quartz and Alaska Street, second only to St. James in importance in Butte. The Montana Union railroad, owned jointly by the Northern Pacific and Union Pacific, leased Utah & Northern track from Garrison to Butte beginning in 1886, and within a year was carrying 66,000 passengers and a million and a half tons of freight annually on just 51 miles of track.

C.J. Andrews, called “the leading tailor in the territory,” brought his experience in London and New York to Butte. His shop employed about 20 tailors in a store that was “an emporium of art.”

George Cushing’s drug store, with his residence in the rear, rounded out the businesses in the Barnard Block in 1887. Despite the damage from the 1889 fire, by May of 1890 a third story had been added to the building, and it survived another 67 years, housing diverse businesses, offices, and lodgings over time. A fire destroyed it in 1957, and the present building housing the Montana Standard was built in 1958.

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.