BAS 084 Success Café Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Butte’s boasts run the gamut, including firsts, biggest, most, and even smallest. The Midget Saloon at 104 North Main was full if it had eight patrons, and modestly boasted it was the smallest bar in the northwest. But Butte’s best-known claim to fame in the smallest category goes to the Success Café, just 3 feet 9 inches wide.

The success of the tiny year-old Success Café almost ended in the summer of 1905 when it lost one of its walls.

The “building” was scarcely “built.” Sometime before 1884 an unknown entrepreneur leased the narrow space between the grocery store on the southwest corner of Broadway and Main, and the California Beer Hall to the east on Broadway. He let the walls of the two adjacent buildings serve as his walls, erected a door facing the street and a bit of wall facing the alley. He put a low roof over it, and 8 East Broadway was born.

For many years the space served as a tiny office, but in 1904, the world’s smallest restaurant, seating four patrons, opened for business. A year later in June 1905, the single-story wood-frame California Bar was being demolished for a grander two-story saloon with spaces for offices and performances. As a crowd of hundreds gathered to watch the demolition of one of Butte’s best known historic buildings, business at the Success “kept up to beat the band.” But in short order, it became evident that once the saloon was gone, so would be the east wall of the café.

Proprietor Sam Botke tried to convince the demolition contractor to not put him out of business, but the contractor could clearly see that the wall he was demolishing belonged to the California, whose owners were paying him. The wall came down by 3:00 p.m., and since “nobody likes to eat with the crowd on the street standing around and rubbering,” the Success was out of business. For the rest of that day.

Botke and his partner Tom Howard quickly put up a new wall and reinforced the sagging roof and were selling lunches again while the new California Saloon was built. You could get Irish turkey – no poultry, but a stew of beef, vegetables, and herbs – for 25¢. Or wrap it in pastry on Thursdays and call it a pasty. Legendary breakfasts meant that even in winter there was a line out the door waiting for one of the four seats in the narrow café, and in 1914 the owners had a contract with a firm in Caldwell, Idaho to supply them with 30 dozen eggs every 24 hours.

Frank Hickman and his son Paul managed the Success from late 1905 until 1952, with the address changed to 10 East Broadway. It was during their tenure that the door famously sported a sign saying “If You Don’t Eat Here I Will Vote for Hoover.” After 1952, the tiny space appears to have been vacant for the next 17 years, as various businesses occupied the larger buildings adjacent. Among the last tenants in the 1905 California Saloon building was the Board of Trade Bar – the third and last establishment of that name.

The entire corner was destroyed by fire June 24, 1969. The space is a parking lot today.

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.