BAS 085 Dr Wah Jean Lamb Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Huie Pock is certainly the best-known Chinese physician to work in Butte, but a close second goes to Dr. Wah Jean Lamb, who worked here from 1902 until he retired to California in 1929.

In 1896, Lamb was the first Chinese to graduate from the University of Southern California medical school, along with the first woman graduate from that program. He had been selected by missionaries in China to come to the U.S. for his education, beginning a five-generation connection to USC, as several of Dr. Lamb’s children, including Paul, Faith, and John, attended the school as pre-med students, as did later generations.

Wah Jean Lamb was born about 1870, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1885. After his graduation from USC, he came to Butte about 1902. He retired after 27 years here, and lived in San Diego at the time of the 1930 census; in 1940 he was living in Los Angeles, where he died in 1942.

Dr. Lamb’s first office was at 9 West Galena Street beginning in 1902, and he also lived there. By about 1917, much of that part of Chinatown had been demolished and he moved his office for a few years to 116 East Mercury, near the corner with Arizona Street. Also beginning in 1917, he and his family lived in a nice home outside of Chinatown, at 1107 South Wyoming, a house that still stands.

By 1923, Dr. Lamb’s office was located at 46 East Galena Street, where he continued until he left Butte in 1929. This location was probably within the Copper Block (also known as the Empire Hotel), west of the intersection of Galena and Wyoming. The Copper Block hotel was known as a brothel and residence for ladies of the evening, but the ground floor held a restaurant, saloon, and at least seven storefronts, one of which was Dr. Lamb’s office in the 1920s. The Copper Block was demolished in 1990-91.

In April 1901, Dr. Lamb married Ah Oie (Alice), an Asian woman who was about 15 years his junior. With their Christian marriage, she embraced the faith, and was involved for many years with the Chinese Baptist Mission in Butte at 24 West Mercury. Her children attended classes there.

A photo of Alice Lamb with children Gertrude, Gladys, Esther, Ruth, Paul, John, and Faith, circa 1914, was donated to the Mai Wah Society by Winnie Nishimine, Faith’s daughter. Three children were not shown: Eleanor, born in 1920, Leland born about 1924, and Philip, born about 1912, and adopted about 1916. Descendants of Dr. Lamb from California, Alberta, and Kentucky have all connected with the Mai Wah Museum in Butte, contributing to our understanding of the Chinese community here.

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.