BAS 088 Richard Liljemark Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Richard Liljemark “was one of the most popular and widely known youths of the south side” when he died May 29, 1917, at age 21 after two weeks of pneumonia. He’d just be one of thousands of tragedies in Butte’s long history but for a discovery in the basement of the Dellinger Block, 117 N. Main, recalled by many Butte folks as the Toggery.

In 1911, Richard wrote his name on the wall in that basement. Like many others who scribed their names there, he wrote it in shoe polish. Richard was a clerk for the Gamer Shoe Store that occupied the southern half of the Dellinger Block from 1895-1923. Fred Gamer’s more well-known business, a confectionary (candy store) was on Park Street, Gamer’s Restaurant today.

Six-year-old Richard came to the United States in 1901 with his father, Erick Richard, mother, and four siblings. They immigrated from their home at Øre, Sweden – probably on the west coast of what is now Norway, as it was part of the United Kingdom of Sweden and Norway at that time. The Liljemarks sailed on board the Cunard steamship RMS Campania, the fastest ship afloat in the 1890s as well as the most luxurious. It set the speed record for the New York to Liverpool run at under six days in 1893. The Campania and her sister ship the Lucania had the first Marconi wireless radios installed in major passenger liners in 1901, the same year the Liljemarks came to America.

The Campania carried 2000 passengers —600 first class, 400 second class, and 1000 third class. The Liljemarks probably traveled in third class and paid something like $50 for the trans-Atlantic passage for the entire family.

The father, Erick Richard was born in 1870. When he and his family landed at New York, they apparently took the train straight to Montana, because he declared his intent to immigrate to the United States at Glendive, Montana, not New York as was usual. Erick Richard does not appear in the Butte city directories until 1907, when the family lived in Butte’s German neighborhood of Williamsburg and Erick worked as a shoemaker at the O’Rourke Shoe Company at 17 North Wyoming.

Erick was naturalized in Butte in 1908, disavowing allegiance to King Gustav V of Sweden, and soon thereafter the family moved to their long-time residence at 1822 South Franklin, nearly under Interstate 15-90 today. Richard the younger got his start at Gamer’s Shoes in 1911 as a messenger when he was 15 years old. He likely earned about $6 a week, but when he died in 1917 he was working as a clerk for Gamer’s, with a salary probably close to $12 a week or more.

Richard Liljemark’s name from 1911, together with those of Fred Gamer and others, are preserved in the basement of the Dellinger Block and can be seen on building tours offered by Old Butte Historical Adventures.

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.