BAS 089 Mardi Gras Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Mardi Gras in Butte in 1904 had nothing to do with “Fat Tuesday,” nor even with the Lenten season. It was a week-long carnival in late August and early September, attended by thousands of people.

Promising patrons “more for a dime than they have ever seen before in Butte,” the show included death-defying acrobatic performances, including that of Miss Fravolia. She was encased in a hollow sphere which was sent down a steep incline, looped the loop and was flung out into a net. Although this act had reportedly cost an actress her life some time in the past, Fravolia emerged unscathed, to loud cheers.

Although the Ferris Wheel got stuck and stranded riders for an hour, and King Rex forgot his lines, the event seemed well-loved by everyone, and obviously paved the way for today’s Butte festivals. The celebration culminated on a Saturday with echoes of a traditional Mardi Gras – revelers in masks, tossing confetti to their heart’s content – in fact, a “record-breaking confetti battle” was promised. Professor Phil Green made “the ascent and descent of the spiral tower on the revolving sphere,” while the electrically illuminated fountain had to be seen to be believed according to newspaper promotions.

The female snake charmer had only one snake, reportedly having divested herself of “a whole case of squirming reptiles,” but it escaped from her room at the Ablemarle Block at 44 West Granite, the vacant lot west of the Casey Block today. The landlady did not take well to customers with snakes in her rooms and quickly posted a notice that “Parties having snakes will kindly look elsewhere.”

Daring Edwards, clearly an inspiration for Evel Knievel, rode a bicycle 130 feet down an inclined platform, then jumped the 30-foot gap to another platform, and you got to see that for free if you came masked. A German Village, a Japanese Tea Garden, and a full-blown circus were all part of the carnival.

The kick-off parade formed at Quartz and Main, then proceeded along Granite, Washington, and Park Streets before heading out to the Ranchero Park at the Racetrack, in the neighborhood of East Middle School today. Sponsors Arnold and Hutchinson brought the traveling Mardi Gras and carnival to Butte, touting their investment of many thousands of dollars. Even Queen Freda Young’s dress was reportedly worth $1,000. Voting was promoted in the papers for more than a week until finally Queen Freda was chosen from a long list of local contestants and crowned as the grand finale of the celebrations, to the enjoyment of some 3,000 people.

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.