BAS 090 New Year’s Eve 1897 Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The society corner in Victorian Butte newspapers recorded all and sundry events, including New Year’s Eve parties. An item from the Butte Bystander for January 8, 1898, reports such a gathering at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Erastus Thomas, 213 East Quartz Street. East Quartz is one of the oldest parts of Butte, with the first cabin allegedly built there in the 1860s. By 1900, there were 58 dwellings in the block bounded by Granite, Quartz, Arizona, and Ohio Streets. Four were three-story boarding houses and six were two-story homes, four-plexes, and apartments, while the rest were single-story homes, but many of the latter had additional buildings that were likely inhabited. It’s reasonable to estimate that the population of this block exceeded 200 in 1900. Today, there are two houses in this area.

The narrow single-story Thomas home must have been crowded with 27 party-goers at a sit-down dinner. The house was built between 1888 and 1891 as part of the Thornton Addition, so it was fairly new in 1897. The location was convenient, just two blocks north of the site of the Washington School, two blocks east of the Butte Brewery, and immediately below the Parrot Mine complex where Erastus worked as an engineer.

The 1897 New Year’s Eve party list reveals the cosmopolitan nature of Butte. We can determine that the attendees came from all over town, and from all walks of life. Mrs. Ellof Peterson managed a boarding house at 10 E. Gagnon Street; Martin Brecke was a miner who lived at 725 N. Montana. Michael Geiger, who attended with his wife and daughter, lived at 1109 W. Woolman where he ran the Home Industry Publishing Company. The Bjorglums were probably Mr. and Mrs. Martin Bjorgum. He was a tailor with a shop at the northeast corner of Main and Mullins in Centerville; he and his family lived at #6 O’Neill Street in Walkerville. Another tailor, George Erickson, worked for Henry Jonas at 11 E. Granite Street, but lived at 503 S. Montana.

Mary Hoban, widow of John, boarded at 107½ West Quartz (The Sherman, which stood immediately west of the O’Rourke Building, in part of today’s jail parking lot). Another widow, Mrs. Albertine Minger, establishes a connection to the East Side: she lived at the boarding house at the northeast corner of East Galena and Shields Avenue, just below the looming Pennsylvania Mine headframe at the southern margin of the Butte Hill. The two-story building there also was home to party attendees David Trotter (a machinist), and Louis Demars, who both lived there and operated a grocery store at the same location. Demars also ran a confectionery at 323 S. Main (across from where Naranche Stadium is today). Today, the old corner of Galena and Shields is under the waste rock on the rim of the Berkeley Pit just a bit northwest of the viewing stand; Shields has been significantly relocated.

The party list gives a cross-section of Butte’s middle class, from tailors and grocers to engineers, publishers, machinists and miners, boarding-house mistresses and widows living (apparently) independently. Michael Geiger was active with the clerks’ union and was among the defendants in the law suit brought by Hum Fay and other Butte Chinese businessmen against the unions for their attempted boycotts in 1896. The Chinese won that lawsuit.

The Butte Bystander that reported these festivities was a short-lived labor-oriented newspaper published from 1890-1898.

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.