BAS 114 Board of Trade Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

*Up the street, and ‘cross the corner*

*Stood the spacious Board of Trade;*

*It was noted for its whiskey.*

*They served but the highest grade.*

—The Saloons of Old-Time Butte, by Bill Burke, 1964

(one of 106 verses)

A saloon occupied the southeast corner of Park and Main, its angled door facing the intersection, from before 1884 until 1916, when the multitude of buildings around that corner were torn down to make way for the Rialto Theater.

The heart of town, Park and Main was always a focal point for Butte’s citizens—and therefore a focal point for saloons. In 1900, at least ten bars could be found on the south side of Park between Main and Wyoming, and five more on the east side of Main from Park to Galena. The Board of Trade, on the corner, anchored them all.

Early Butte saloons typically were known simply by their proprietors’ names. William Fritz was the first known operator of the saloon on this corner, beginning before 1884 and continuing through 1892, but it was called the Board of Trade at least by 1891. Subsequent owners included Michael Donovan, Doherty & Satterly, Parker & Mathews, and Zorn & Gregovich until 1900 when long-time managers at the California Saloon and Brewery, Louis Lienemann and Charles Schmidt, branched out to the Board of Trade. Schmidt’s name would be associated with the place until its demolition in 1916. The central location meant that unlike many saloons that catered to particular ethnicities, the Board of Trade's clientele was “of necessity of all sorts and conditions of people.”

When the Rialto Theater opened in 1917, a new two-story building also went up immediately to the east to house the second Board of Trade Saloon and Restaurant on the ground floor at 16-18 East Park. Managed through the late 1910s by Greek immigrant George Papp, it survived prohibition in typical Butte fashion, as a “soft drink parlor and cigar store.”

The sign in the front, behind the newsboy in a 1939 photo, said “Thru our Doors Pass the Nicest People in the World—Our Customers… Board of Trade, 16 & 18 E. Park.”

A long and colorful history at this second location was highlighted by the June 8, 1959 killing of Andy Arrigoni as he sat at a gaming table, by his common-law wife, Lee Arrigoni. She was better known as Ruby Garrett, the last madam of the last brothel to operate in Butte, the Dumas, in use until 1982. There was no doubt that she shot Andy, but she pleaded abuse by him: she said “I didn’t plan on it, but if he beat me up again I wasn’t going to take it any more.” Ruby Garrett died in Butte March 17, 2012.

The Board of Trade on East Park continued in business until 1965, when the Rialto was demolished. Today, the US Bank occupies much of the footprint of the old Rialto, and the drive-thru to the east is where the Board of Trade and other buildings stood.

But 1965 was not the end of the Board of Trade. Company president Ernest Bruno and café manager Arlene Rule moved to 10-12 East Broadway—the California Saloon building (second structure on that site to bear that name) and opened the Board of Trade in its third building in 1965. Unfortunately, a disastrous fire on June 24, 1969, destroyed all four buildings on the corner of Main and Broadway, including the Board of Trade. It did not rise again.

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.