BAS 121 Skating Rinks Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Roller skating was the rage in the U.S. in the 1880s, and as usual, Butte was at the leading edge.

In 1884 Butte had at least two “official” indoor skating rinks. The fancy one at the northeast corner of Granite and Alaska – directly across Alaska from today’s Silver Bow Club Office Building – was a huge, 2-story 170-foot-long barn-like pavilion with a cement floor, and was initially an ice-skating rink. It straddled a stream coming down from the vicinity of the Original Mine; the stream contained a “large amount of water in spring and winter” and went under the pavilion via stone arches. Dressing rooms and a storage shed stood outside the pavilion itself, right at the Alaska-Granite corner. At that time, Alaska Street north of Quartz (alongside today’s O’Rourke Building) was not a street, but was occupied by vegetable gardens with a cow corral to the east.

The second skating rink was on the north side of Park Street, where the Thomas Block is today, across from the new parking garage. This one-story structure was about 100’x100’ and included a basement.

In 1888 the Park Street rink was gone, replaced by the first Thomas Block of stores, including a butcher and sausage factory, dry goods shop, grocery, “gents furnishings” and clothing, and the Justice Court. The second floor was furnished rooms.

The Granite Street pavilion (called Turner Hall) was being renovated in 1888, with plans to make it into an Opera House. The structure had been divided into two large spaces, with smaller shops (a saloon, a grocer, and a fruit store) occupying the Granite Street front. Alaska Street to the north was still unimproved, but it was becoming more like an urban street with several dwellings and a Chinese laundry along it. The stream had been mostly filled in or covered and turned into a subsurface culvert.

In 1890 the Pavilion was still standing, but was divided into three large spaces: two for the Lyceum Theater, and the third for a gymnasium in the north end of the building. About half the building was still used as a skating rink in 1891; and in 1900 the rear half was a livery stable. This building with its long history was torn down about 1915, as Uptown Butte’s last major building boom took off. The building there today dates to this era with a major re-build in 1947.

Butte was growing much too quickly to allocate large spaces in the central business district to skating rinks. Other rinks developed, including the one for ice skating at the corner of Montana and Front Streets. But the next time you pass the northeast corner of Granite and Alaska, remember the hundreds of kids and adults who enjoyed a skating party there over 125 years ago.

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.