BAS 127 Bennett Blocks Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The intersection of Utah and Front Streets in the 1880s and early 1890s was the heart of South Butte, a separate town with its own address scheme and population count until the mid-1890s. Front Street was the embarkation point for many travelers, with the Montana Central Railroad just south of the warehouses on the south side of the street. In 1906, the Northern Pacific Depot was completed across the street from these two buildings, and still stands. The area was platted in 1881 as the Noyes & Upton Railroad Addition.

In late 1888 Bennett Block #1 was constructed at Utah and Front. Willard Bennett lived in Deer Lodge but was owner of the building and Vice President of Bennett Brothers Co., a dealer in agricultural implements, carriages, wagons, and produce. In addition to the store and office there, they had a large warehouse across Front Street as well as a store at 128-132 East Park at Arizona in another “Bennett Block,” also known as the Willard House (lodgings) and on the Arizona Street side, the Nelson Block. A saloon of various names occupied part of 128 E. Park for many years—from about 1901-1910 it was called The Council. The southwest corner of Park and Arizona is mostly a vacant lot today, with a small modern store.

On Front Street, Bennett Block #1 in 1890 contained a general store, a cigar and stationery store, and the South Butte Post Office.

Also in 1890, a two-story building was completed to the west as a gambling hall and saloon. In 1906, as reflected in the year emblazoned on the parapet, a new building was erected there, Bennett Block #2. By 1908, the two Bennett buildings together comprised the Bennett Hotel, with “transients solicited” to enjoy electric lights, steam heat, stationary basins, and baths. The ground floor continued to serve as retail space, including a drug store and a restaurant.

The ghost sign on the north side of Bennett Block #1 advertised the 1920s grocery store that was in the easternmost retail space. The Stilwell Grocery was owned and operated by Elias Stilwell (President) and Roy Stilwell (Vice President). They lived with their wives Olive and Rita at 2710 and 2802 State Street, respectively (the Floral Park neighborhood). In 1928 when the Stilwell Grocery was on the ground floor, the upper level continued as the Bennett Hotel, managed by Mrs. Agnes Brady.

By 1944 Block #1 was owned by Harry Brinck, the Montana state distributor for Rock-Ola phonographs, amusement games, and novelties. His long tenure there, into the 1970s, gave the common name to the building: Brinck’s. Block #2 for many more recent years served as the Deluxe Café and Bar, and was still in use in 2012.

The two buildings on Front Street were demolished in 2014.

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.