BAS 128 When the Whiskey Froze Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The winter of 1866-67 was a cold one in Butte. Actually, there wasn’t much “Butte” – the population as recalled by pioneer Charles S. Warren was fewer than 200, but the placer gold camp at Silver Bow down the creek from Butte still had perhaps 2,500 people, including “not more than 25 women and children,” according to Warren.

One of those women in Silver Bow was Mrs. H.A. Price, who ran the only restaurant. She was doing well with meals at $1.50, but for Christmas dinner 1866, she charged $2.50 (payable in gold dust) for a spread of rabbit and elk meat, but no turkey. Unfortunately, her traditional English Christmas specialty, plum duff, was a failure. That was a plum pudding made with raisins or currants. But there were other treats available, for a premium price: A dish of sauerkraut from Salt Lake City for a dollar extra, or a boiled onion for 25 cents.

Most of the miners were out of work for the winter, and a frigid Christmas week was spent with fires in the street and general “jollification,” even when the thermometers that were good to 40 below zero froze solid on New Year’s Eve. The spring of 1867 was no better, and Warren recalled that Eddy & McMahan’s Silver Bow Saloon could not open on March 15 because “every drop of whiskey was frozen.” As much as 10 feet of snow was on the ground at Silver Bow on June 1.

Charles Warren, born in Illinois in 1847, became one of Butte’s early, if less remembered pioneers. He partnered with William Clark in the Black Rock Lode in 1880 and with Charles Mussigbrod in the Cossack, but he sold his interest in the Lexington to A.J. Davis for $50 or less – and Davis sold it a few years later for more than $1,000,000.

Following a short stint as Sheriff of Deer Lodge County in 1873, Warren became the first police magistrate in Butte about 1879. He invested with Lee Mantle in the Silver Bow Electric Company, the Inter-Mountain Newspaper, and was one of the founders of the Electric Street Railway in 1890, when a fare was 10 cents (which was to be reduced to 5 cents after the first five years).

Warren’s fortune allowed him to become a charter member and first president of the Silver Bow Club. In 1872, he and his wife Mittie were among the first to be married in Montana Territory. Their Butte home was at 211 South Washington, a near neighbor to internationally known Black singer Robert Logan, who sang at Warren’s funeral in 1921. Warren Island in Lake Pend Oreille, Idaho, is named for him.

 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.