BAS 133 Rainbeau Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

It’s well known that Walkerville was named for brothers Samuel Sharp, Joseph, David, and Matthew Walker, Salt Lake City bankers and investors who were excommunicated from the Mormon Church. They brought Marcus Daly to Butte to manage the rich silver mines along the Alice Vein.

Less well known is that the area along the Alice Vein had been known for a few years as Rainbow – for the Rainbow lode, from which the Alice Vein branched. Professor John E. Clayton, in company with one of the Walkers, recognized the Rainbow lode in 1876 as Butte’s silver rush was taking off, and chose the site for the Alice Mine shaft. The silver-bearing outcrop they found described a sweeping, rainbow-like curve across the brow of the hillside.

The Rainbow-Alice vein system probably produced most of the district’s free-milling silver in the early years. Rich claims including the Alice, Magna Charta, Valdemere, and Moulton were all on the Rainbow lode, and made the Walker Brothers rich while giving Marcus Daly enough money and knowledge of the Butte District to personally invest in the Anaconda Mine. Daly had worked for the Walkers at Ophir, Utah, and when the Alice reached a depth of 200 feet, a 20-stamp mill was brought to the mine from Ophir, but success was such that within three years a new 60-stamp mill was built.

By 1877 Walkerville’s population was several hundred people, and the town was ready to have a post office. It had to have a name. Apparently the name “Walkerville” didn’t sit well with some residents, and a formal request by the “young women of the community” asked that the town be named Rainbow.

News reports of the day, clearly tongue-in-cheek, said “We thought Walkerville would be the most appropriate name for their village from the astonishing amount of walking in that direction that had for some time previously been done by the young gentlemen of Butte.” In fact, the writer acknowledged the young women who wanted the name change by suggesting that “it must rain beaux out there,” so give it the name Rainbeau.

Despite all this, when the post office was established in 1878, the town was named Walkerville. The Rainbow lode survived in name to the present day and the Rainbow Hotel, run by E.D. Sullivan, was on Main Street a bit north of the Lexington Mine in the late 1880s. The Rainbow Saloon stood on Main just below Daly Street.

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.