BAS 137 Sheriff Furey Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The union-supporting Butte Bystander newspaper cheered the election of James B. Furey as President of the Butte Miner’s Union in 1897. As they reported December 18, 1897, he was into his second term in “that important office,” re-elected with virtually no opposition. He ultimately served four terms as President of the Union.

Furey was born July 6, 1854, in Quebec, to parents who had emigrated from Derry, Ireland. By age 18 he was working in mines in New York, and he headed west about 1878 to the Coeur d’Alene area of Idaho for several years before relocating to Butte in 1893. Furey was elected Silver Bow County sheriff in 1900 as a member of the Labor Party. He belonged to the Order of Elks as well as the Ancient Order of United Workmen, whose initials embellished the façade of the Miners Union Hall on North Main in 1900.

When Furey was elected Sheriff, all of Silver Bow County’s elected officials were either from the Labor Party or were Democrats or Populists. District Judge William Clancy, for example, was a Populist, while the county was represented in the state legislature by five Democrats, five from the Labor Party, and two Populists. Mary Mullins, a Democrat, was the Superintendent of Schools.

Furey’s salary as sheriff was $375 a month, a rather princely sum at a time when most miners made less than $100 a month. County commissioners in 1901 received $192 a month as per diem pay.

The Bystander, with W. Mitchell, Editor, was published by the Standard Manufacturing and Printing Company with offices at No. 3 East Park Street, within the Owsley Block (Medical Arts Building when it burned in 1973). The paper cost $2 per year (in advance) or 5¢ a copy. The paper was the official organ of the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly.

Sheriff Furey traveled to San Francisco in late 1902 to bring back to Butte one Ruth LaBonta, alias Eva Hart, alleged murderer of Dr. H.A. Cayley on October 11 in Butte, one of the most notorious cases during Furey’s tenure.

Furey, age 53, died at his home at 34 West Copper Street in April 1908 following a stroke. His home, an apartment in a six-flat complex, was at the site of today’s parking lot at Copper and Alaska Streets. The Anaconda Standard recalled him “as good a sheriff as the county ever had.”

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.