BAS 150 Dentists Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Butte’s first professional dentist was probably F. E. Gleason, who provided dental services from 1878 to 1885. He was the only dentist in 1879, when Butte’s population was 2,911, served by at least six physicians, but he was joined by Robert Todd in 1883 and J.W. Reed in 1884.

The count of dentists, along with most services, grew along with Butte, so by 1901 there were 28, and at the peak of Butte’s population, in 1917, there were 34 dentists.

Surprisingly, the number of dentists has not declined in proportion to the loss of residents. In 1957, there were still 33 dental surgeons and dentists, and in 2008 Butte had 31.

Probably the most famous – or at least most noted because of his frequent, prominent advertisements in the newspapers – was Frederick A. Ironside. “The Painless Dentist” was a native of Canada, where he was born about 1872. His family emigrated to the United States when he was 12, and he eventually graduated from the Chicago Dental College. His western adventures included Cripple Creek, Colorado, where he was a founding member of the Elks Lodge there, and he landed in Butte to open his dental office in 1898 when he was 26 years old.

Ironsides’ first office was in the Curtis Block (Gamer’s today) and he lived upstairs in the same building. But he had a long tenure on the first block of North Main, in the Owsley Block (Medical Arts Building) and in the adjacent building at 22 North Main. By 1923 he was no longer living in the same building as his office, and had a home at 1911 Argyle. His last entry in the City Directories is in 1937, a year before the nylon toothbrush appeared on the market.

Ironside offered gold crowns at a cost of $5 per tooth, and complete sets of dentures for $10. Ironside was probably at the forefront of dental technology, using cast porcelain for dentures (invented in 1903) and Novocain, introduced in 1905.

Ironsides’ colleague, John Wesley Reed, built his home at 318 West Granite between 1884 and 1888. His office was on the second floor of the building on the southeast corner of Main and Broadway (a parking lot today) in the late 1880s and early 1890s. By 1900 his office was 115 N. Main, the second floor of the Dellinger Block. He continued to live at his home on Granite Street until after 1900, but was not listed in Butte in 1910.

Dr. Reed was born March 27, 1838, in Boone County, Missouri. He graduated from the Pennsylvania College of Dental Surgery in 1877, and practiced a few years in Mexico, Missouri, where he served in various officer positions with the Missouri State Dental Association. Reed came to Butte in 1882, and was the first President of the Montana Dental Association.

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.