BAS 153 A Walkerville Party Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

A friend of mine shared an invitation to the AOUW’s third anniversary party in Walkerville, two days before Christmas, 1885. The grand ball was held on a Wednesday evening and actually honored the establishment of the Silver Bow Lodge Number 11 of the AOUW.

The AOUW was the Ancient Order of United Workmen, a fraternal organization that began in Meadeville, PA, in 1868. Its goal was to adjust “all differences which may arise between employers and employees, and to labor for the development of a plan of action that may be beneficial to both parties, based on the eternal truth that the interests of labor and capital are equal and should receive equal protection.” Members paid $1 into a private insurance fund for members’ survivors—the AOUW was the first fraternal organization to offer this. By the middle 1920s, lodges were merging and insurance took precedence over the fraternal aspects. The organization eventually evolved into the Pioneer Mutual Life and other insurance companies.

H.O. Christenson, the party invitee, was a clerk. The arrangements committee for the party, listed on the invitation, included George Holbrook, a carpenter, while William E. Hall was superintendent of the Alice Mine, and Frank Kramlick was proprietor of the American House hotel on the north side of West Daly Street in Walkerville.

George Hillebrand was foreman at the Lexington Stamp Mill (and that would be the “new” mill in Walkerville, not the old one that stood at present-day Lexington Gardens, Broadway at Wyoming Street). The invitation and reception committees were represented by J.J. Carroll, Ed Reimel, and James Coppedge, all of whom were also workers at the Lexington Stamp Mill. The mill was connected to the Lexington Mine on Main Street by a series of trestles, and was located in the open space that now lies between Walkerville and Centerville.

Party committee member F.W. Fisher was an amalgamator at the Alice. He would have worked the machines and buckets that combined mercury with gold to free it from the rock. N.C. Anderson was a miner and Charles Bruhn was a butcher, the Butte partner of Nick Bielenberg of Deer Lodge in a meat market.

All the members of the party committee lived in Walkerville at a time when there were no street addresses, though most of the streets were probably there and named. They all lived on Daly or Main St except for Anderson, who lived on Dunn.

The Walkerville Hibernia hall of the Ancient Order of Hibernians where the ball took place stood on Main Street just south of the intersection with Daly.

Walkerville in 1885 probably had a population of about 1200, with perhaps that many more in the immediate vicinity outside the town limits.

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.