BAS 159 Sacred Heart Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The Sacred Heart parish was organized in 1901, the third Catholic church in Butte, following St. Patrick’s and St. Lawrence O’Toole. In 1901-03, they met at 460-464 East Park, in a building adjacent to the site that would become the church at 448 East Park when it was completed in 1903. The church was erected on a lot that had been pretty much vacant throughout Butte’s history to that time.

The first mass, Christmas Day 1903, opened the completed church at 448 East Park Street, on the south side of the street almost directly across from the Wright’s Drug Store that is the only surviving historic building in this section of the block. The building included the school, and the rectory was next door (444 E. Park). In 1907-08, the Sacred Heart Convent was built at 407 East Mercury.

The church and school stood immediately east of the small Lizzie Mine yard on Park, a mine that had ceased operations by 1916. The neighborhood is part of today's revitalization on the East Side.

In 1916, Rev. Stephen Sullivan was the pastor, with two assistants, Francis Lechner and Morgan Morris, ministering to a membership of 2,500. At that time, Sacred Heart’s membership was in the middle range of Butte’s Catholic congregations. St. Lawrence had 5,000, St. Patrick’s had 4,250, St. Mary’s had 4,000. St. Joseph’s also listed 2,500, and the Immaculate Conception and Holy Savior (in McQueen) each had around 1,000. All those numbers dropped significantly as Butte lost population after World War II, and Sacred Heart listed 1,800 in 1918.

The three pastors conducted low mass daily at 8:00 a.m. and five times on Sunday morning before high mass at 11:00. Baptisms were frequent enough to have a regularly scheduled time, 3:00 p.m. on Sundays.

A Sunday night fire on November 17, 1912, severely damaged the church, but the first floor survived and continued to be used as the parochial school until 1969; it was finally torn down about 1974 as the Anaconda Company bought up properties in anticipation of expanding the Berkeley Pit to this part of town (which obviously did not happen).

After the 1912 fire, a new Sacred Heart church was built in a Spanish mission style a block west and across the street, at 355 East Park, one lot west of the corner of Covert and Park Streets; it’s a vacant lot today. It opened in 1913 and the last mass was celebrated in that church July 1, 1970. It was also demolished in 1974.

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.