BAS 161 Butte Hotel Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The four-story Butte Hotel at 23-31 East Broadway (where a parking structure stands today) was erected in 1892-93, opening in August 1893. It contained 120 rooms, expensive at $3 to $5 per night when $1 a night was more typical. Street cars “pass the door every 10 minutes,” as their advertising boasted in 1895.

The Wilson Brothers, Frank and Hugh, were merchants in Centerville where they ran a general store at 942 North Main Street in the early 1890s. Apparently it was successful enough for them to erect the Butte Hotel on a vacant lot, the former site of the St. Nicholas Hotel. The St. Nicholas dated to before 1884, and I do not know if it burned down or it was demolished, but the location was a vacant lot by 1891.

Hugh Wilson was the first manager of The Butte. In 1918, brother Frank bought him out and managed it for years thereafter, succeeded by his widow, Mabel. The place became associated with the Democratic Party (Republicans met down the street at the old Thornton Hotel, which later became the Anaconda Employees Club), and was known as “Liberty Hall” for the political addresses delivered from its balcony.

The Butte Hotel was one of the primary residences of Copper King Augustus Heinze. It contained both a public restaurant and a dining room for hotel patrons, as well as various store fronts on the first floor, and of course a big saloon and billiard parlor.

John Jahreiss operated a noted barbershop in the hotel. The Cabaret (probably in the original dining room) was a venue for national performers.

The hotel was vacant for some years until 1952 when remodeled stores opened on the first floor, and in September 1953 major remodeling had created 42 “ultra modern apartments” in the Butte Hotel building.

Unfortunately, the most expensive fire in Butte’s history to that date destroyed the building on August 9, 1954. Almost all of the apartments were occupied, and the fire left 125 residents homeless. Damage was estimated at more than $1,000,000 in 1954 dollars.

The Windsor building to the west of The Butte Hotel was also destroyed in the fire. It had been built in Deer Lodge in the 1870s and moved to Butte about 1880, and held Clifford’s bar and cigar store when it was destroyed in 1954, having survived the Shabbishacks campaign of 1928.

The Butte Hotel had survived at least two previous fires, one on July 13, 1901 ($10,000 damage) and another during World War II in a bingo parlor on the first floor.

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.