BAS 181 Longfellow school Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Until about 1910, growth on the Flats south of Front Street was mostly focused along Harrison Avenue, the main way out of Butte to the east over Pipestone Pass. But by about 1914, the street car system had extended onto the flats, and increasing automobile ownership expanded the viability of suburban living. While Montana only had 6,000 registered vehicle owners in 1913, there were over 60,000 just seven years later in 1920.

By 1914, the school census counted 7,589 students, and enough families with children were living on the Flats that several new grade schools were built and opened in 1917.

All told, the Butte School District constructed 14 schools or major additions between 1916 and 1921. On the flats, school district architect Wellington Smith designed three almost identical schools in the collegiate-gothic style: Madison, Hawthorne, and Longfellow. Longfellow School, on Roosevelt Drive in the Gilman Addition near Stodden Park, cost $55,000 and initially only held six classrooms, an auditorium, and a 40x60-foot gymnasium, but long wings were added in 1949 and 1952, significantly increasing the size.

Hawthorne School, in the Lake Avoca area, was almost identical to Longfellow and Madison. Architect Smith also designed a 1917 addition to the 1901 Greeley School that was similar, in a Classical Revival style. The Silver Bow Park Addition, where Greeley School was located, was one of the earlier developments on the flats because the street car line to Columbia Gardens passed through the neighborhood on Walnut Street.

Madison School served students in the neighborhood of South Montana Street and Rowe Road, east of Mt. Moriah Cemetery.

The schools were wood frame structures with polychrome (multi-colored) brick veneer and carved sandstone and terra cotta trim. Castle-like towers in the Tudor style enhanced the entrances. Actual construction was done by local builder Hugh Johnson, with plumbing by Harry Hanson.

Longfellow School was used until 2001, when it was closed because of declining enrolments. The School District declared it surplus property in 2006, and despite various attempts to sell it for redevelopment it was demolished in 2007, when it was one of only 15 individually designated National Register properties in Silver Bow County. It received that listing for both its architectural significance and its role in the historical development of the Flats.

Wellington Smith worked with the School District until about 1921 and told the Butte Miner in 1918 that he considered the schools to be his masterpieces. He also designed the Immaculate Conception church convent and the Knights of Columbus Hall.

 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.