BAS 188 Bakeries Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Flour for making bread was in great demand in the early mining camps of western Montana. W.A. Clark famously began his mercantile career by bringing flour, butter, tobacco, and eggs to Bannack in the winter of 1863-64, where he made a 1500% profit on eggs purchased in Salt Lake City.

Butte’s earliest documented baker was Gustavus Bogk, a German immigrant (born 1826) by way of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where he operated a bakery for several years before moving to Deer Lodge (1870) and Butte (1877). He was operating a bakery here in 1879, and within a few years was managing the Virginia Chop House and Hotel (also known as the Revere House) at 267 Main Street. Because of changes in the address system, that location was probably about the middle of the block between Park and Broadway, on the west side.

When Bogk operated his bakery in 1879, Butte’s population was 2,911, including 92 Chinese, 19 colored, 472 under 10 years of age, 189 between 10 and 21, and 2,139 age 21 and older. By the census of 1890, Silver Bow County would boast 23,000 inhabitants.

With the start of good records in 1884, we find Fred Loeber, livestock dealer and butcher, branching out into other occupations including a brewery and a bakery. His Eagle Bakery stood at 15 East Granite, directly across from the Centennial Hotel, where today’s Hennessey Building is located. One of his managers, Jacob Osenbrug, would come to own and operate the Eagle for many years. By 1901, Osenbrug, another German immigrant, employed four bakers who were producing 1,000 loaves a day, together with pies, cakes, and other pastries.

In 1884, in addition to the Eagle, commercial bakeries were operated by Mrs. C.M. Demers at 33 West Park, and Stanley John at 206 Main.

As Butte’s population exploded in the late 1880s, so did the service businesses. In 1885, in addition to the Eagle and Stanley John, we had The French Bakery (29 W. Broadway), Great Western (Anton Nau, proprietor, 14 W. Broadway), and Nelson & Reksiek’s bakery at the corner of Main and Daly in Walkerville.

By 1892, E.J. Harris was baking at 103 E. Park, William Reksiek had his own bakery at 84 W. Park (later known as the California Bakery), Wittlinger & Rudman were working at 23 Arizona Street, and H.J. Rathelmiller had started the operation that would become the Vienna Bakery at 320 E. Park.

Henry Rathelmiller ran his Vienna Bakery at 320 E. Park from 1889 until at least 1917. The oven was still beneath the sidewalk there as recently as 1951, although the bakery no longer was in business. Rathenmiller was born in New York about 1860 and came to Butte in 1882. The Vienna Bakery had two outlets by the middle 1890s, with a second store at 54 W. Park.

Established by about 1905, the Home Baking Company would be a major wholesaler of baked goods in Butte for decades, still operating during the Depression in 1931. The business was a joint venture among Jacob Osenbrug (President), Henry Rathelmiller (Vice President), and John Haller, Treasurer. Osenbrug’s success with the Eagle Bakery had bought him a fancy house on the west side, at 825 West Broadway in 1910 (a vacant lot today), although Rathelmiller was still living above his old Vienna Bakery at 320 E. Park.

The Home Baking Co. at 107 Olympia was located (conveniently?) one block south of another grain consumer, the Olympia Brewery, just off Harrison along Silver Bow Creek near the site of the Met Tavern today. But the Olympia Brewery, owned by the Centennial Brewing Co., was closed in 1911, while the bakery lasted many years longer.

Butte’s bakery count was fairly stable through the 1900s and 1910s, with 17 in 1906 and 19 at the peak of population in 1917-18. Even during the Depression in 1931, the directory lists 24 bakers.

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.