BAS 215 Doc Holliday Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

When John Henry Holliday arrived in Butte in 1886 at age 34, he was already infamous enough that his indictment in Silver Bow County Court was captioned simply, “Territory of Montana versus Doc Holladay.”

The charge was exhibiting a pistol “in a rude, angry, and threatening manner.” Holliday had arrived in Butte the month before, January 15, 1886, lodging at the Revere House on Main between Park and Broadway. On a visit a year earlier, the Butte Daily Town Talk, a short-lived newspaper of the 1880s, noted that he was “well known throughout the entire country and is a hale fellow well met.”

Holliday drew his pistol at the Eureka Chop House at 273 North Main. Because of changes in the address scheme, that was probably in today’s 100 block, between Broadway and Granite streets. Frederick Wey, the proprietor of the restaurant, witnessed the event, along with Oliver Blaine, superintendent of the Silver Bow Water Company. They both lived nearby, at 7 West Copper and on Montana near Broadway, respectively.

After the Grand Jury returned the indictment, a deputy sheriff went to the Revere House to serve a warrant for Holliday, probably on February 17, but he was so ill from tuberculosis that a physician thought it would be unsafe to take him to jail, so he was left in his room. The Butte Miner newspaper reported on February 20, 1886, that Holliday was gone, probably fleeing Butte by train to St. Paul, Minnesota the previous day. He never returned to Butte.

Holliday was born in Georgia and earned a degree in dentistry in Pennsylvania. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis in his early 20s and suffered from it all his life. His notoriety as a gambler and gunslinger derived in large part from his friendship with Wyatt Earp and his brothers; Holliday participated in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona, in 1881.

Doc Holliday spent most of his later life in Colorado, and during his final visit to Butte he was listed as being from Leadville. He died in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, a year and a half after his Butte escapade. He had gone there seeking the reported curative waters of the springs, but his tuberculosis was too far advanced. He was 36 years old when he died.

Wyatt Earp’s brother Morgan also spent a short time in Butte, from December 1879 to March 1880, when he reportedly served as a policeman in the newly incorporated Butte City. Morgan was murdered in Tombstone in March 1882, a few months after the O.K. Corral shootout.

Thanks to research by Ellen Crain and Cindi Shaw for some of the information in this episode.

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.