BAS 216 Williamsburg Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The Colorado Smelter, south of Silver Bow Creek and west of Montana Street, got its name because it was originally financed by the Boston and Colorado Smelting Company of Black Hawk, Colorado. William Clark partnered with Nathaniel Hill of Boston and Colorado to form the Colorado and Montana Smelting Company in 1879, and the smelter was operating by that summer. Ultimately, it came to be one of Clark’s properties and it was often just called “Clark’s Smelter.”

Englishman Henry Williams came to Butte from Black Hawk to manage the Colorado Smelter here. An earlier smelter on the same site had been operated by R.K. Williams, no relation to Henry, on land owned by the Gagnon Company, but that smelter had failed and was demolished before the Colorado Smelter was erected in 1879.

The Colorado Smelter initially processed ore from the Nettie, Fredonia, and Selfrising claims, yielding a 60% copper matte with as much as 800 ounces of silver per ton that was shipped to Black Rock, Colorado, for additional processing, but the smelter ultimately became one of Clark’s primary properties, handling ore from Clark mines all over the Butte District.

The neighborhood that was built within a quarter-mile west of the smelter was called Williamsburg, for manager Henry Williams. Despite his English heritage, the smelter came to employ a fair number of residents of German descent, and the street names in Williamsburg reflect this. Stuttgart, Munich, Bavaria, Baden, Vienna, Leipsig, and Nassau Streets all still exist, but in 1900, Dresden, Berlin, and Frankfort were also streets in Williamsburg. There were at least 62 dwellings there in 1900, including at least 12 log cabins together with several nice brick-veneered homes and duplexes and a grocery store at the corner of Bavaria and Vienna Streets.

German residents likely also worked directly across the creek at the Centennial Brewery, established in 1876 by Leopold Schmidt, and at the Tivoli Brewery, a short distance west of the Centennial. The primary road into Butte from Williamsburg and the Colorado Smelter crossed Silver Bow Creek immediately north of the smelter and passed the Centennial Brewery, then curved north onto what is now Washington Street. You could have reached Montana Street by various roads, but in the 1870s and early 1880s, Washington was the main entry into Butte from the southwest.

Clark sold the Colorado Smelter to the Amalgamated (Anaconda) Company about 1900, and it fell into disuse because they had a much larger smelter in Anaconda. Williamsburg was largely cut off from easy access to Butte when the Interstate went through in 1962, and now is accessed by Greenwood Avenue west from South Montana Street.

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.