BAS 222 Atlantic Bar Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Adolph Reichle came to Butte from Germany in the 1880s and by 1889 was running a saloon at 62 East Park Street. He and his brother August succeeded so well that by 1893 they ran the City Hotel and its bar at 457 South Arizona together with another saloon at 214 East Park.

In 1895 Reichle began a long-term partnership with Arthur Schimpf in a saloon called The Sump on the all-important northwest corner of Park and Main on the ground floor of the three-story Lizzie Block. Schimpf and Reichle’s Saloon operated there for only a couple years until they built their own new building in 1897 at 56 West Park. That saloon was named the Atlantic in 1901 or 1902.

The German heritage of the proprietors was reflected in their wares: in 1911, the Atlantic boasted that it was the only house in Butte to carry imported Muenchner Hofbrau and Pilsner Buergerbrau, together with family wines and—for medicinal purposes—a selection of the “oldest and finest brandies and whiskies in the world.”

Schimpf in 1895 already had a nice home on the west side at 421 West Broadway, while Reichle lived in the City Hotel that he managed on Arizona Street. By 1900 Schimpf had relocated to 207 North Crystal, a vacant lot today, and Reichle still lived in the hotel which had been relocated to 711 South Arizona in the new Reichle Block just south of Aluminum Street. The Riechle Block and City Hotel were gone by 1951. In 1908 Schimpf split the difference between his previous residences on Broadway and Crystal, and built the prestigious Mission-style home that still stands at 414 West Granite at a princely cost in those days of $17,000.

In Butte’s heyday, the late 1910s, the Atlantic reportedly had a dozen bartenders “jumping like turkeys on a hot griddle” on a typical Saturday night. The Atlantic was one of Butte’s most famous drinking establishments, for its claim to “the longest bar in the world” if nothing else. The bar was nearly the length of the narrow 110- by 20-foot building, reaching the alley between Park and Galena Streets. In 1900, the building ended at the alley. It’s been said that the bar continued across the alley into the building that faced Galena street, and that the Galena building was destroyed in a 1905 fire, but there’s no real evidence that such a continuation existed.

It’s unlikely, but not completely impossible, that by 1916 the Atlantic Bar continued over the alley and into the second-floor restaurant in the building that faced Galena Street. There was an overpass connecting the ground floor saloon (on Park) with the second-floor restaurant on the alley at 45 West Galena, but the physical bar probably did not continue there, and in any case, the restaurant was in only the north half of the building, with a carpet sewing business to the south, so the Atlantic Bar definitely did not reach Galena Street.

The Atlantic Bar continued at 56 West Park until 1926–27. During prohibition, which began in 1919 in Montana, a year before the national law went into effect, it was called the Atlantic Buffet or Café and offered “soft drinks,” but it almost certainly sold illegal booze as well, as most of the prominent Butte saloons did.

A new Atlantic began in 1940 a few doors to the east, at 46 West Park. That saloon was out of business after a February 18, 1969 fire destroyed the building. The building that housed the original Atlantic Bar from 1902 to 1927 (56 West Park) became various other shops and was housing Diana’s Woman’s Clothing when it too was destroyed by an arson fire on October 14, 1974 (the first Diana’s Shop fire).

Both Reichle and Schimpf ultimately moved to Los Angeles, but Schimpf later built a home on Flathead Lake, where he died in 1935.

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.