BAS 226 Street names Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Street names in the United States tend to be long-lived, but changes do happen. In Butte, some street name changes honored certain people, many were lost to mining developments, and some just changed.

Clark Street on the West Side got its name to honor William A. Clark before 1916, well before Clark died in 1925, but in 1900 it was Columbia Street. Until about 1892, there were two Utahs – Utah Avenue, which branched from and then ran parallel to Arizona down to Front Street, and Utah Street, the one-block street between Granite and Broadway west of Main. That short street was renamed Hamilton after the Hamilton Block was constructed in 1892 at the corner of Utah and Broadway. The building was built for businessman Patrick J. Hamilton, and apparently he had enough clout with the city to get the street named for him as well.

When the original Butte Townsite was laid out the western limit was between what is now Washington and Jackson Streets. In 1884, there was a semblance of a road where part of Jackson Street is today, but it was labeled “Arbitrary” on the 1884 map. Outbuildings of the Stephens Mine sat in the middle of the intersection of Jackson and Mercury, and north of Broadway was nothing in terms of a north-south street. By 1890, the Barnard and Davis & Barnard Additions added homesites along Broadway, Park, and Galena as far west as Alabama, but north of Granite, the street west of Washington (Jackson Street’s position) was called Grizzly – probably not for the bear, but for the first-level grate used in mining to begin the milling process. Grizzly Street changed to Jackson in late 1890 or early 1891.

Another short Uptown Street, Academy, ran between Park and Broadway east of Montana. Its original name might be related to the massive Central School that stood there, along with the Butte Public Library. The analogous street, Dakota, ended on the north at Galena, so there was no street, not even an alley, between Park and Galena adjacent to the Terminal Meat Market building. Even after the buildings there were demolished and Dakota was pushed through to Park in the mid-1890s, the continuation north of Park was still named Academy. It didn’t become Dakota until 1905 or so.

Given Butte’s numerous streets named for minerals and elements, it may not be a great surprise that there was once a Radium Street. The element radium was discovered by Marie and Pierre Curie in 1898, and Marie Curie announced its isolation as a pure metal in 1910. Radium Street first appeared on the 1916 Butte Sanborn map, but it was barely more than a short alley extending about 250 feet west from Wyoming between Mercury and Silver. On its north side stood a Chinese laundry and stable, and on the south for 100 feet was a set of 10 cribs, part of the red-light district. Five of the ten were two stories and two were 1½ stories, and there were four more cribs across a terrace to the south, west of a small brothel at 209 South Wyoming. Radium Street and the 10 cribs were still there in 1951, although the cribs were labeled “apartments.” Today the area once occupied by Radium Street is a parking lot and bare ground.

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.