BAS 227 California saloon Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The California was one of Butte’s longest-lived saloons. The building on Broadway just east of Main Street was erected in 1877 as Loeber’s Hall, a dance hall, meeting hall, house of worship, bakery, venue for marriages, theater, and site for political conventions all rolled into one. When Loeber’s opened, a drama called “The Long Strike” with local talent played there for weeks. It was followed by a visit from Sawtelle’s traveling theatrical company with Ella Viola the star.

In 1881 the place was renamed The California, housing a brewery, saloon, and concert hall, but it still served as the general meeting place for Butte residents. The first high federal official to visit Butte, Vice President Thomas A. Hendricks, was entertained there in 1885 during his short term. He died in office just eight months after being inaugurated with President Grover Cleveland, but he indicated that his visit to the California pleased him as much as anything he saw in Butte.

The original one-story California was demolished June 10, 1905. The Anaconda Standard lamented, “With the tearing down of the California, to make way for a more modern building, Butte loses about the last of its real old historic landmarks… The old California had to go; the growing demands of a prosperous community demanded it. The building which takes its place will be of stone—real stone—and brick.”

The second California was in place within a year, in time to serve as one of Carrie Nation’s targets in 1910. She brought her hatchet and sharp tongue to the California and other saloons, and although she sold many hatchet pins and pamphlets in Butte’s churches, she made little headway in the bars. At the California, the bartender threatened her with arrest. She referred to herself as a “defenseless gray-haired old woman.” She told the bartender, “Your mother was a woman; would you call an officer to arrest her?” He was reduced to pleading, “For God’s sake, get out of here!” But Carrie Nation responded, “I won’t. It’s for God’s sake that I came here,” and she left on her own timetable after delivering a temperance lecture.

Louis Lienemann and Charles Schmidt were the long-time proprietors of the saloon in the California building.

The 1906 two-story California survived until a fire consumed the entire southeast corner of Broadway and Main on June 24, 1969, when the saloon in the building was the Board of Trade, the third and final incarnation of that famous establishment. The Board of Trade moved to the California in 1965 when its second and most famous location east of the Rialto Theater on Park Street, was demolished.

Today, the site of the California Saloon is a parking lot.

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.