BAS 239 Julius Levy Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

When Julius Levy died March 3, 1901, he was called “the most noted of all western gamblers.” “French” Levy, as he was known because of his birth at Engweiler, Alsace-Lorraine, France, supposedly “had all the money in Deer Lodge County,” obvious hyperbole but a statement of his renown.

Levy, a Jew, emigrated to the United States in 1846 when he was 13 years old, together with his sisters. They started their American experience in New Orleans, but Julius joined the California Gold Rush in 1849 and for the next 20 years or more he floated around the mining camps of the west, including Diamond City in the Big Belt Mountains. When he arrived there in 1865, Diamond City and its vicinity held about a third of the 28,000 people estimated to live in Montana.

A “gambler of the old school,” a gentleman and fair in all respects according to the Anaconda Standard, Levy organized major gambling events beginning in Helena, but by 1877 he was in Butte where he established a club room over the Clark, Larabie, and Donnell Bank at the corner of Broadway and Main Streets. Levy & Gibson’s Club had a reputation for no limits on faro bets. Levy was living a block away at the corner of West Broadway and Montana, while his partner A.A. Gibson (no relation to me) resided near the northeast corner of Idaho and West Quartz.

Levy was well known to Butte by 1879. His sister Adele was the wife of Butte’s first mayor, Henry Jacobs, elected that year. On June 3 of the same year Julius Levy married prominent heiress Sarah Mendelsohn. The ceremony was conducted in the Mendelsohn Mansion at 312 West Park Street, where the 1901 Masonic Temple stands today. W.A. Clark and Episcopal Bishop Daniel Tuttle were among the guests for the traditional Jewish wedding, at which 300 guests reportedly danced until 3:00 a.m.

Sarah Levy ran a restaurant for many years at 72 West Broadway. Sarah and Julius’s sons Simon, David, and Elliott all grew up and worked in Butte in their early years. For many years the family lived at 15 North Montana at Broadway where the Broadway (Montana) Theater was constructed in 1901.

Although Levy’s aggregate gambling winnings were estimated at $2,500,000 in dollars of the day, he lost much of that and also donated generously to charity. By 1900 when he was 67 years old, he still gambled. About six months before he died, he won—and lost—about $3,000 over the course of a few hours.

Julius’s lavish funeral in 1901 was held in Sarah’s family home, the mansion on West Park, just a few months before it was torn down to make way for the Masonic Temple. He is buried in B’Nai Israel Cemetery.

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.