BAS 241 Hum Fay Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

When Hum Fay married Miss Ah Yen of Spokane in Butte January 16, 1909, the small space in Hum’s home at Colorado and Mercury Streets meant that reporters covering the event stood in the doorway, but they produced a three-column story on the wedding for the Anaconda Standard.

Hum was one of the most prominent members of Butte’s Chinese community. He was the first named of 219 in the lawsuit brought against the leaders of the anti-Chinese boycott in Butte in 1896, a suit the Chinese businessmen won. Hum is generally credited with being the force behind that victory, argued for the Chinese by Wilbur Fisk Sanders, U.S. Senator from Montana from 1890-1893.

Hum’s new wife, Nina (also known as Chew Gum), had almost completed a bookkeeping and stenography program at business school in Spokane when she relocated to Butte to marry. Hum had completed all the courses available at the Chinese Baptist Mission, including trigonometry and analytic geometry, and wished to take calculus but no teacher was available for such advanced math. Hum’s Baptist connection was further reflected in Reverend Noftsinger of First Baptist Church, who conducted the 1909 marriage ceremony between 38-year-old Hum and 18-year-old Nina.

Hum Fay’s businesses in Butte were mostly restaurants. He purchased the Palace Chop House, 37 West Park, in 1895. It offered meals in both Chinese and American styles, catering to families and ladies, with private rooms available for them. Meals cost 25 cents and like most services in Butte were available 24 hours a day. After a period in which he managed the Pekin, Hum opened the two-story Nanking Restaurant at 20 South Main Street in 1915. He simultaneously maintained his mercantile and Shanghai Restaurant at 28 West Mercury Street (the southeast corner with Colorado, next door to the Chinese Baptist Mission) until about 1921, despite occasional charges of running a lottery at a time when white proprietors could do the same with impunity.

The 1911 Chinese revolution that overthrew the Empire and established the republic was strongly supported by Butte’s Chinese. Hum Fay was president of the local Chinese republican organization; in March 1912, he and others celebrated the establishment of the republic by raising the new Chinese flag at the republican headquarters at 20 West Galena Street.

By 1921 the Anaconda Standard was lamenting the passing of Butte’s early Chinatown. Most of the buildings still stood, but as post-war depression affected Butte and many Chinese left, places like the Shanghai Restaurant fell into disuse. When Hum Fay died at about age 61, April 18, 1932, he was “friendless and alone,” with no one to claim his 90-pound body. He had lived at the county “poor farm” hospital on Continental Drive for his last 10 years, and he was buried in the pauper’s field at Mountain View 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.