BAS 246 Mountain View Methodist Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The Methodist Episcopal movement in Montana had begun with churches in Ft. Benton and Missoula, established in 1872 by Rev. William Van Orsdel and Rev. Thomas Iliff, respectively. By 1877, Van Orsdel and colleague Rev. Francis Riggin were “Circuit Riders” bringing services to outlying areas from Missoula, including Butte which had perhaps 2,000 residents then.

In the fall of 1877 Van Orsdel and Riggin conducted Butte’s first Methodist services, at Loeber’s Hall, a brewery, dance hall, and meeting room on Broadway just east of Main Street, a location that later came to be known as the California Saloon.

A chance meeting with a prominent Butte resident, Charles S. Warren, led the missionaries to financial backing from W.A. Clark, Henry Jacobs (a Jew), Warren (a Quaker), W.A. Hensley (a Deer Lodge rancher), and Pat Carney (an Irish-born Catholic), who guaranteed a $7,000 note to the pastors from the Clark & Larrabie Bank. On August 21, 1878, the cornerstone was laid for a new church at the corner of Montana and Quartz Streets. W.A. Clark was the president of the board of trustees, and Mountain View Methodist Episcopal was Butte’s first Protestant congregation.

By 1899, as Butte approached a population of 48,000, Mountain View, along with many other churches in Butte, had outgrown its original building. The 1878 church was torn down in 1899, and a massive new brick structure was built by contractor A.S. Whiteway to the design of prominent Butte architects Link & Donovan.

The 1899 cornerstone and entryway façade are made of granite from the Welch Quarry near Homestake Pass, and the items from the original cornerstone were placed in the new one. This included a piece of ore from the Original Mine and various newspapers from August 1878, to which were added 1899 newspapers and documents relating to the new church. It all barely fit in the 30x30x18-inch cornerstone, so a hymnal intended for the space had to be left out. The cornerstone ceremony on July 22, 1899, was attended by W.A. Clark, who had been inaugurated U.S. Senator not quite five months earlier. Clark had been present at the previous cornerstone dedication as well.

The 1899 church cost about $25,000 to build, and leadership had raised $20,000 of that when the cornerstone was laid. Most of the original stained-glass windows show complex geometrical and floral designs in rough textured glass designed to give depth and to increase the scattering of light. The style is typical of glass manufactured by the Butte Art Stained Glass Works, which was near its peak of productivity in 1899 from its facility in the 300 block of South Main Street. In 1949, one of the most spectacular pipe organs in the Pacific Northwest was installed in Mountain View at a cost of $12,000, nearly half the cost of the church building itself.

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.