BAS 253 Anaconda’s First School Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

The city of Anaconda began to grow the instant construction began on Marcus Daly’s concentrator and smelter system in the summer of 1883. Children lived in Anaconda from the start, and they first attended school in a small cabin about a mile west of town. The teacher there was Judge M.J. Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick had so many connections to the early business, judicial, and political life of Anaconda that the Ohio native was commonly called the “Father of Anaconda.” He lived on Cherry Street between Fourth and Fifth.

By the spring of 1884, at least 35 students justified the new school that was built and opened in October 1883 on the north side of Commercial Avenue near its intersection with Chestnut Street. The first regular teacher was Professor R. C. Ames, but he only taught in the new school during 1884 before moving to Butte, where he worked as the agent for the Utah and Montana Machinery Company.

Joseph V. Suprenant was a miner working on the construction of the milling and smelter facility in Anaconda in 1884, when his daughter Dora posed for a group picture at the school, perched on a horse belonging to William McCaskell, a colleague of James Ben Ali Haggin, one of Marcus Daly’s principal investors. McCaskell came from California to supervise the construction of the Old Works smelter and stayed to become its superintendent. The Suprenant family moved into Butte where they lived at 107 West Quartz, the Sherman Apartments. That building is gone today but stood just west of the O’Rourke Apartment Buildings.

The 1883 school was in a section called “Hoge’s Row,” a double row of houses built by real estate developer W.L. Hoge, vice-president of Hoge, Daly & Co., Anaconda’s first bank. House lots in Anaconda, brokered by the bank for Daly’s real estate company, cost from $350 for one on Front Street to $500 for others, with those on Main Street going for $750. After Hoge built the homes on Hoge’s Row, he donated one to the city for it to become the first real school building.

Following R.C. Ames’ short tenure as an Anaconda school teacher, Miss Mary Tuohy took over. She married pioneer doctor Oliver Leiser, whose home and office were initially near Second and Main Streets in Anaconda. He also served in the state legislature.

By 1901 the school building had been converted to its intended use as a residence. It only served Anaconda until 1889, when a bond issue was passed allowing for the construction of a proper school. Central School was built on the southwest corner of Main and Fourth Streets, the site of the Old Junior High School today.

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.