BAS 265 Trinity Methodist Church Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Situated at the border of two working-class neighborhoods, Centerville and Walkerville, Trinity Methodist was known as the “miner’s church” in Butte’s heyday, to distinguish it from Mountain View Methodist, which was the “mine owner’s church.”

The Trinity Methodist congregation was established in 1889 and the church was dedicated in 1896. The brick structure displays the simple architectural lines common in small church construction at the time. The building cost $4,000, including something quite remarkable for the mid-1890s: Electric lights. The lighting was donated by Lee Mantle, US Senator from Montana from 1895 to 1899. Mantle was a native of England who served in the Montana Territorial Legislature and was Mayor of Butte before he was elected to the US Senate, and he also established the Daily Inter Mountain Newspaper in Butte.

The original stained glass windows in Trinity Methodist were donated by M.J. Connell, a prominent Butte storekeeper. The Connell store, site of Butte’s first elevator, was on the northwest corner of Granite and Main, across the corner from Hennessey’s, and his home with its mansard roof still stands at Granite and Idaho, across the street from the W.A. Clark mansion.

Trinity Church was erected by and for the Protestant Cornish residents of Centerville and Walkerville. Catholics in those neighborhoods attended St. Lawrence O’Toole, just an eighth of a mile up Main Street from Trinity.

Most of the stained glass windows in Trinity Methodist are dedicated, with honorees named in the glass itself. The names were usually added at times later than the original church and windows, with some as recent as 1955. The stained glass is not signed but most of it is the opalescent variety, which would have likely been manufactured by one of the principal stained glass manufacturers in the east.

New York artist John LaFarge, the most important competitor to Louis Tiffany, patented opalescent glass in 1880. While it cannot be proven that the glass in Trinity Methodist was made by LaFarge, his company did make stained glass for two other Trinity Churches, in Boston, Massachusetts, and Buffalo, New York. Connell was certainly wealthy enough to afford the pricey stained glass LaFarge made.

Trinity Church served a shrinking congregation until 2015. It is vacant 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.