BAS 268 When Bryan Came To Butte Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

In the presidential election of 1896, Butte and most of the western mining states favored William Jennings Bryan because of his pro-silver stance in the wake of the silver crisis of 1893. Although in Montana he gained nearly 80% of the vote, Bryan ultimately lost that election to William McKinley. But his loss didn’t diminish Butte’s admiration for him.

Bryan’s train came into Montana from the south. It stopped in Monida, where Bryan shook everyone’s hand, in Lima, where he spoke for five minutes from the train, and in Dillon, where he addressed 4,000 people in the city square.

Anaconda Standard editor John Durston foretold Bryan’s visit: “Bryan's coming to Montana will be like a triumphal march; his reception will unquestionably be a demonstration the like of which this region has never seen.” If anything, that prediction was an understatement.

The train tracks into Butte on August 12, 1897, were thronged with people, and Bryan was met at the depot by a tumultuous crowd. The Anaconda Standard reported, “The top of every car was loaded with people. The people were on the roofs. The people filled every window in the vicinity. Three combined bands, numbering 63 pieces, played "Hail To The Chief," as the train drew up, but no one could hear the strain. The screaming of the whistles and the shouts of the frantic people drowned out everything else.”

Bryan gave a brief speech from the balcony of the Butte Hotel on Broadway Street. After dinner, he took a carriage up to Walkerville for another glorious celebration, and he gave his principal speech the next day at the Racetrack, on the flats west of where East Middle School stands today.

But the longest lasting memory of that day is probably the poem written by Charles H. Eggleston, a reporter and editorial writer who joined the Anaconda Standard on its eighth day of publication in 1889. Identified in the paper only as “C.H.E.,” Eggleston wrote his poem in classical epic style.

I have read of Roman triumphs in the days when Rome played ball,

When she met all other nations, taking out of each a fall;

When victorious Roman generals marched their legions home in state,

With plunder of the conquered— and the conquered paid the freight.

Gorgeous were those vast processions rolling through the streets of Rome;

Mad with joy went all the Romans welcoming the veterans home.

Gold there was for fifty Klondikes, silver trinkets big as logs,

Marble statues by the cartload, gems enough to stone the dogs.

Following chariot cars were captives, dainty damsels by the score,

Ballet dancers from far harems, savage men and beasts galore.

Millions cheered and yelled and thundered; shook the earth as by a storm;

All Rome howled—and yet Rome's howling after all was not so warm,

For these monster Roman triumphs, at which not a stone was mute,

Couldn't hold a Roman candle— When Bryan came to Butte.

The visit was compared to Napoleon’s victories, Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee, and the Russian Czar’s coronation. Eggleston’s poem ends

Of earth's great celebrations 'twas the champion heavy-weight,

'Tis the champion forever and a day, I calculate,

For it knocked out all its rivals, and, undaunted, resolute,

Punched creation's solar plexus— When Bryan came to Butte.

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.

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