BAS 271 Charles Lennox Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

About midnight on the night of May 19, 1902, John Williams, a railroad brakeman, was about to board the Great Northern train for Anaconda at the Silver Bow station when two armed men attempted to rob him. In the struggle Williams was shot at least three times and died a day later. The suspects were seen running toward Feely Station where they boarded the southbound train.

Butte sheriff’s deputy Quinn called the Melrose town marshal, who notified train conductor McMamirie to be on the lookout for the two men. He chased them through the moving train eventually locking them into a box car, and Charles Lennox and James Martin were arrested without incident when the train reached Dillon.

Charles Lennox, the probable shooter in the Williams murder gave a full confession in Butte a few days after his capture following the 1902 killing, but also implicated his partner James Martin. Both were convicted and sentenced to be hanged October 29, 1903.

But on August 9, 1903, while they were in the Silver Bow Jail awaiting an appeal of their convictions, six men including Lennox and Martin escaped from the jail, which at that time was in an annex directly north of the old County Courthouse, on the same block where the new 1912 court house stands today. Lennox, who was reported to be “quite intelligent,” was the suspected mastermind of the jailbreak. One prisoner feigned sickness, and when the jailer and the doctor came into the cell, they were confronted with a revolver and locked in while the six men fled. All were in jail for significant charges, including Lennox and Martin who were under death sentences. Four other prisoners in the jail declined to flee although they were offered the chance.

Two of the escapees were captured within a half hour, and two more soon after. James Martin made it into the Lowland hills north of Walkerville, but thirst and his inability to ride a horse drove him to a woodcutter’s cabin on Hail Columbia Gulch, where two deputies scouring the area found and arrested him two days after the jailbreak.

Appeals delayed Martin’s execution until February 23, 1904, when he was hanged at 4:42 in the morning on the Silver Bow county gallows in the yard between the Court House and the jail annex.

Charles Lennox was never captured and never seen again, although according to historian Tracy Thornton a $200 reward was still offered for his capture seventeen years later.

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.