BAS 272 Night Nurse Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Beatrice Murphy was 29 years old in 1909 when she worked as a night nurse at the Murray Hospital at Quartz and Alaska streets in Butte. She kept a diary for the month of November 1909 that reveals much about the times as well as Miss Murphy’s humor and wit. Each short entry covers her 12-hour shift from 7:00 p.m. to 7 the next morning, when she would cross the street to the Nurse’s residence in today’s bail bonds building.

The Murray Hospital’s location close to the mines made it the usual stop for mining related emergencies.

Wednesday Night November 3, 1909. Admitted three men. One with a rock in the tail of his eye. Another with a dilapidated finger and still another who declared his hand was broken but which proved to be a ruptured vein. Tried to get a little sleep on the table with a roll of cotton under my head. Didn’t get any sleep at all. Bells buzzed constantly. Reported to Miss McGregor, was told to not bang doors, felt rather guilty. Departed downstairs with solemn step and downcast eye. Bully good night.

Sunday Night November 7. Favored the sick with a vision of my cheerful face. Administered medicines in all shapes and forms. Admired Mrs. Gage’s new hat with white plume. Sewed up miner’s ear. Made the terrible mistake of the season by waking up Dr. McCracken.

Some nights were of course less busy than others. Sunday Night November 21. Reported on deck promptly at 7. Found two new patients awaiting my gentle care. Pushed a drunken man off the elevator and showed him the door. No bells ringing for some unknown reason. Wrote two letters and read the society news. Started to study my Physiology and Anatomy. Got to thinking seriously on the vanities of this world. Built some beautiful dream castles in the sunny land of Spain. Came back to earth and found myself in the unromantic atmosphere of Murray Hospital. Pinched myself and went around to see if my charges were all right. Lonesome night.

Historian Teresa Jordan compiled Beatrice Murphy’s recollections in the Summer 1985 issue of The Speculator, a short-lived journal of Butte history. As Jordan pointed out then, some of Miss Murphy’s memories highlight a level of racism that we find uncomfortable and unreasonable today.

Monday night November 29, 1909. Was knocked off my trolley to find an individual in the shape of a coon in for treatment. Tried to be charitable and not notice the difference. Had to hold a vial of aromatic spirits to my nose every time I had nerve enough to go in her room. Was glad for once in my life that I belonged to the Celtic race. Worked on till it came time to call the day nurses. Unspeakable night.

Beatrice Murphy’s night nurse diary, together with a reminiscence of a week-long trip to Yellowstone in 1911, are held by the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives. Miss Murphy later married, and died in San Francisco in 1972.

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.