BAS 286 School of Mines Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

In addition to the contentious fight for the location of the state capital after Montana became a state in 1889, the legislature faced the political decisions involved in divvying up various state institutions. Not surprisingly, the School of Mines was assigned to Butte.

The School of Mines was established by the legislature in 1893, but the first classes were not until September 1900. Main Hall, the first and for some years only building, was constructed in 1896-98. Nathan Leonard, the first president, is commemorated in the name of Leonard Field at the east side of the campus. Initially only two degrees were offered, in Mining Engineering and Electrical Engineering, with 21 students in the first class of freshmen.

The first student enrolled was Miss Clara Clark, a Butte high school graduate with some college education at Bozeman as well as practical experience working as an assayer with her brother in Idaho. She followed a program in geology, chemistry, and assaying. Clara lived with her parents at 201 North Jackson Street. Her father Henry was a miner.

In addition to President Nathan Leonard, who was a professor of mathematics, the first faculty included William King, professor of chemistry and metallurgy, Alexander Winchell, who handled geology, mining, and mineralogy, and Charles Bowman for mechanics and mining engineering.

In 1919 the State Bureau of Mines and Metallurgy was created as a department of the School of Mines. Today, that’s the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology.

The first graduate programs were offered in 1929. Over time, the school’s name changed several times, from the State School of Mines to Montana School of Mines, to the Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology to Montana Tech of the University of Montana. Today, the official name is Montana Technological University.

Francis Andrew Thompson, a mining engineer, was President of the School of Mines from 1928 until his death in 1951. He was also active with St. John’s Episcopal Church, Butte’s oldest standing church, and consequently St. John’s has a miner’s hard had, carbide lamp, and pick and shovel in stained glass in one of its windows.

The M on Big Butte went up in 1910 and was illuminated in 1962. The tradition of students whitewashing the rocks that constitute the M continues to this day.

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.