BAS 288 Christmas 1889. Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

In December 1889, the Anaconda mine in Butte had been shut down for a month, boding ill for the economy, but by Christmas day in Anaconda, “the smoke [was] quote pouring out of the big stacks across the creek in volumes that gave ample assurance of a merry Christmas in the town.”

Christmas 1889 was the first anniversary of electrical light service in Anaconda. The first public power and light utility in Butte was five years earlier, in 1884, and by February 1889 “all the levels” of the Anaconda, St. Lawrence, and Mountain Con mines were lit underground by incandescent lights. Streets in Butte were first lit by electric lights in late November, 1885, so that “pedestrianism is rendered more comfortable.”

In Butte for Christmas 1889, “All stores, public offices, and churches will be closed for the day, but the saloons, gambling houses, the Comique, and hurdy houses, will be running at full blast as usual.” The Theatre Comique was a dance hall and entertainment venue that stood on Main Street just south of Park, about where the southern edge of the Metals Bank building is today.

Goldberg’s Jewelry offered 25% off everything in their store at 12 Main Street. It looks like the discounts were of little avail, however, and David Goldberg was out of the jewelry business by 1893 and was working as a railroad ticket agent. His business was probably purchased and became Leys Jewelry which had a store in the block between Park and Broadway for many years. A Leys ghost sign survives on the wall of a building there.

The Christmas edition of the Anaconda Standard reported that “W.A. Clark and Lee Mantle have had stockings expressly made for the occasion, warranted large enough to hold an election certificate to the United States senate.” Montana had become a state seven weeks earlier, on November 8, 1889, and politicians’ goals were becoming evident. The contests would become more and more bizarre over the coming decade.

In 1889, according to the Anaconda Standard, “Butte is one of the most cosmopolitan cities on earth, and each of the various nationalities represented will eat the dinner most to its liking. The native Americans recognize the turkey as the national bird. The Germans and Swedes of Butte consider the goose much preferable to the turkey. The latter they consider too dry. The citizens of Butte from the British Isles find a roast pig exceedingly palatable, while those from the southern states also choose the pig in the absence of the unequalled ’possum. The French think chicken makes the best dinner. Duck finds favor with a good many of every nationality and is especially liked by the Jews. The Italians don’t go much on eating, while the Chinese think rat giblets with cream sauce is the best dish on earth.” That last line certainly was a reflection of prejudices and racism of the time.

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.