

= Dumas Brothel =

The Dumas Brothel was a bordello in Butte , Montana . The brothel was founded by French Canadian brothers Joseph and Arthur Nadeau in 1890 and named after the nominal owner , Delia Nadeau , née Dumas , who was Joseph 's wife . It grew considerably through the years , with the miners employed by the city 's copper mines often patronizing the establishment . After several changes of the " madams " and continuing pressure from authorities , the brothel closed in 1982 , described as " a rare , intact commentary on social history " . At the time of its closure , it was the longest operating brothel in the United States , having operated years after prostitution was made illegal . After closing , the brothel changed hands several times , eventually becoming a tourist attraction owned and managed by a series of Butte residents .

= = Background = =

In the 1870s , a group of women , called " ladies of the line " , began selling sexual services on Park Street , in the north of the city of Butte , Montana . When the tents and shacks on the street were replaced with legitimate businesses some years later , the " Park Street girls " , as they had come to be known , moved to the south of the city . By the mid @-@ 1880s , a variety of dance halls , gambling houses and saloons had appeared in the city . By 1888 , Butte 's East Galena Street was lined with brothels ; in fact , nearly every building on the street housed prostitution . This area of Galena Street would come to be known as the " twilight zone " . Paramount to these establishments was the Casino Theater , a mixture of a saloon , dance hall and brothel . In the late 19th century , several prominent Montanans owned brothels in Butte , including Lee Mantle , who would go on to be a United States Senator , and Anton M. Holter , a wealthy businessman from Helena , Montana .

Two French Canadian brothers , Joseph and Arthur Nadeau , would eventually acquire the most property in Butte 's prostitution areas , or " red light district " . The brothers built a brothel in 1890 on 45 East Mercury Street and named it for Delia Nadeau , née Dumas , Joseph 's wife . By the turn of the century , there were three high @-@ class sex houses in Butte : the Hotel Victoria , the Windsor Hotel and the Dumas Brothel , also called the Dumas Hotel .

= = Description = =

The Dumas Brothel is a two @-@ story brick building facing Mercury Street with a raised basement level and backing onto Venus Alley . The main levels feature a lightwell surrounded by balconies , which provided access to the suites . The basement afforded more basic accommodations , and was connected to Butte 's subterranean mining tunnel system .

= = History and operations = =

Scant details are known about the early history of the Dumas Brothel ; however , two early boarders of the house listed their occupations as " gambler " and " saloon man " in census records . By 1900 the brothel was occupied by Madam Grace McGinnis , her servant , a Chinese cook and four prostitutes . The cost of sex in the brothel at the turn of the 20th century was fifty cents , with the working girls receiving about 40 percent of that amount . Despite the size of the brothel , by 1902 Madame McGinnis had only five working girls and a musician under her employment . In 1903 the Dumas and businesses like it in Butte 's red light district were unusually lucrative ventures . These businesses were frequented by miners from the local Anaconda Copper Mining Company . That year , traffic grew to a point where the Dumas 's operations had to be expanded , building " cribs " (tiny cubicles where the girls worked) in the basement of the house . There were several ways potential clients could access the brothel . A back door of the Dumas opened into Pleasant Alley , near South Wyoming Street , which was the busiest section of Butte 's red light area . The basement cribs could also be accessed by a staircase from the front sidewalk . Even though the Dumas operated 24 hours a day with several girls taking three shifts , by 1910 there were only two women

reported to actually be living there . Instead the prostitutes lived in other parts of Pleasant Alley , and commuted to the brothel for their shifts . In Butte , the activities of the city 's prostitutes were generally restricted to Galena and Mercury Street . From the windows of their street @-@ facing cribs , the girls would attract prospective clients in varying states of undress . The Butte Miner , a local newspaper , explained how the girls did this :

With an abandon that has no trace of modesty in it , these women lean out of their windows and address the vilest kind of language imaginable to people passing on the street , or else boldly make their appearance on the thoroughfare and visit from one crib to another .

The Dumas 's business and those like it were criticized by a number of people who sought to reform the red light district . Reverend William Biederwolf condemned Butte as " the lowest sinkhole of vice in the west , " and that he saw " enough legitimate vice in Butte to damn the souls of every young man and young woman in it . " Biederwolf held revival services for residents which attracted " rounders , gamblers and habitués of the red light district " . However , the local business benefited and even depended on the support of the sex workers at the Dumas and other establishments like it . The prostitutes would buy their dresses at local clothiers , frequent the city 's dry cleaners and would patronize Chinese herbalists , looking for birth control potions and venereal disease remedies . To ensure that their operations were unhampered , the girls at the Dumas would pay the city 's police and governance five dollar " fines " . Instead of the closing or relocating the red light district , the mayor and police of Butte ordered that the women wear longer skirts and high @-@ necked blouses and that they " refrain from any indecent exposures . " After these ordinances were put in place , the Butte Miner reported that " nothing was seen in the district except long dresses and long faces . What the women say about the matter is not fit for publication . " By 1910 the people were petitioning Mayor Charles Nevin to shut down the district ; with the district contributing two thousand dollars to the city 's coffers every month , the efforts eventually died .

In 1913 the brothel was expanded again . A one @-@ story structure was added to the building , increasing the number of cribs by eight ; four of the added cribs opened directly onto Pleasant Alley , by that time known as Venus Alley . When copper prices went up , the more than 14 @,@ 000 miners in the city experienced a pay @-@ rise of twenty @-@ five cents and injected an additional \$ 6 @,@ 000 into Butte 's economy . The Dumas also experienced an upswing in patronage . As a result of the added patronage , the brothel added five partitions and a staircase in 1916 , and the ground floor , once a grand parlor , was partitioned into cribs .

World War I and the Prohibition impelled local lawmakers to initiate a crackdown on Butte 's red light district ; by 1917 , the district was effectively closed . Signs saying " Men Under 21 Keep Out " were commonplace , and in the next census , prostitution had completely disappeared as a declared profession in Butte . The Dumas , however , remained in operation . In 1925 Anne Vallet began overseeing the Dumas for the Nadeau family , and in the 1930s , operations had passed to Madam Rose Davis . In 1940 Lillian Walden and her husband Dick began running the brothel , raising the price of sex at the brothel to \$ 2 . Three years later , the US government ordered all brothels shut down to prevent the spread of venereal diseases among soldiers in World War II . In response , the Dumas began operating even more furtively , now under the guise of being a boardinghouse . The " window @-@ shopping " was abandoned completely and a heavy steel door was installed at the back of the Dumas with a small sliding window ; customers would only gain entrance after the sliding window was opened and their identity was acknowledged . Additionally , doorbells were added and a code system for dealing with troublesome guests was also employed .

When Lillian Walden retired in 1950 , the price for a woman at the brothel was \$ 5 . Afterwards , the Dumas 's operations went to Elinore Knott . The Nadeaus also ceased being owners of the brothel around this time . Knott 's management of the Dumas was short . In 1955 she committed suicide after her lover died of a heart attack . When the late 1960s came about , several local police officers were taking the initiative to close the three operating high @-@ class sex houses : Hotel Victoria , Windsor Hotel and the Dumas . The Dumas did not remain closed for long however , with its next madam , Bonita Farren , operating it from 1955 until her death from cancer in 1969 . In 1970 the Dumas was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a " Victorian Brothel " and an active house of prostitution . By the following year , Ruby Garret , a local resident of Butte for some thirty

years , had purchased the Dumas . Garret would pay local police officers and officials \$ 200 to \$ 300 a month in return for their silence about the Dumas 's activities . Under Garrett , the cost of a prostitute was \$ 20 . She would come upon financial difficulties however , being charged with tax evasion in 1981 . The Dumas Brothel was closed the following year .

= = After closure = =

In 1982 Ruby Garrett , the last madam of the Dumas , was convicted of federal tax evasion and served six months in prison . The brothel was closed soon after , but not before a robbery took place there . When it closed , it was the longest operating brothel in the United States , having operated for 92 years , long after prostitution was outlawed .

Garret sold the Dumas to an antiques dealer named Rudy Giecek on the condition that it was preserved in its original state . Giecek turned the brothel into a museum and operated it as such for most of the 1990s . However , in 1998 Giecek encountered financial difficulties and attempted to sell the building . The International Sex Worker Foundation for Art , Culture and Education (ISWFACE) responded . The ISWFACE sought to reopen the Dumas as not only a museum but also a gallery and convention center . Ellen Baumler of the National Register of Historic Places wrote in support for the rescue of the Dumas that " [it] is not only significant as the last standing parlor house in this area of Butte , but also because of its length of operation as a rare , intact commentary on social history . " Some were against the restoration of the Dumas , including former prostitutes in Butte , but the operation proceeded ? at least until September 2000 , when Giecek claimed the ISWFACE owed him \$ 52 @, @ 000 in wages for work performed at the Dumas . Giecek sued and was granted the wages he petitioned for and additional penalties . The business deal with ISWFACE was terminated however . In the years that followed , the Dumas was put up for auction twice as Giecek did not have the money to maintain the building .

In late May 2005 Giecek was escorting a New York Times reporter through the Dumas for an interview when he discovered the place had been broken into . Giecek , low on funds and worried about his health , had shut down the Dumas earlier that month after it had operated offering \$ 5 tours . After the robbery , Giecek discovered " dismantled beds , stolen antique lamps and artwork and emptied glass cases full of brothel artifacts " as well as missing " rare sex toys " .

In June 2012 the Dumas was conveyed to new owners , locals Michael Piche and Travis Eskelson . By this time however , the building was in great disrepair ; among other things , there was water damage , a collapsed wall and no structurally sound roof . The new owners planned to have summer tours for \$ 8 in the following year , but their ultimate goal was turning the Dumas into a bed and breakfast . " It needs to be around . It needs to be here for the rest of the community and the people who want to visit it , " said Piche . In late 2013 the duo sought a loan from the local urban revitalization body in Butte . The requested amount was \$ 92 @, @ 000 with an additional \$ 8 @, @ 750 grant . As of December 2013 , tours were still being offered at the Dumas on a limited basis .

Rudy Giecek claims that the Dumas is haunted by the ghost of Elinore Knott . Author Karen Stevens also recalled paranormal experiences related to the brothel . It is suggested that Knott 's ghost is one of several at the Dumas .