

The First Century

The Dumas was built in 1890 and remained active as a brothel until 1982, making it Butte's longest operating house of prostitution. It was one of the first 2-story brick structures to be built in Butte's notorious red light district along Mercury Street.

The first owners of the Dumas were the French Canadians Arthur and Joseph Nadeau. Joseph came to the United States in 1868, and in 1878 married Delia, a fellow French Canadian. The ownership of the Dumas was registered in her name. The Nadeaus created the Nadeau Investment Company and by 1922 owned several buildings in the red light district, including the Copper Block. Joseph's imaginative descriptions of himself reflect the changing times: in 1885 he listed his occupation as "landlord," until 1905 his self-proclaimed title was "capitalist," and in 1905 he listed his business as "real estate."

Like the city in general, the Dumas fell upon hard times in the early 1980's. In 1981 a violent robbery dealt a crippling blow to the establishment, and in 1982 community concerns forced the closure of the Dumas and the end of an era. Although it ceased to operate as a brothel in 1982, it has escaped the demolition that is rampant in the neighborhood. Although understandably showing its years of disuse, it remains the last intact example of the "Venus Alley" brothels, from its homey upstairs rooms to its ornately numbered downstairs "business" rooms right down to its gloomy basement "cribs."

Ruby and the Second Hundred Years



Ruby Garret was the Dumas' madam—or, as she prefers, "landlady"—from 1971 to 1982. After the setbacks of the '80's she was resigned to letting the building "go to taxes," almost hoping to see the Dumas join its neighbors in demolition rather than have remodeling erase all evidence of its former glory. Fortunately in late 1990 she met antique dealer Rudy Giecek and ultimately gave him the building with the stipulation that he restore it as closely as possible to its appearance of 100 years ago. Ruby is living testimony to the Dumas' colorful past. She knows the story of the bullet holes in the front door, and the history behind the stories of Elinor's ghost. She knows the hidey-holes, the secret crawlspaces, the refrigerator specially adapted to serve as a hiding place for Sandra, a particularly "nervous" but much sought-after employee who worked at the Dumas until she was 61 years old.

While she still shows off photos of those who peopled her past, Ruby looks forward now to the future...her own and that of her beloved Dumas.



Step Back In Time

Even though the "Glory Days" on Mercury Street are past, the Dumas is in business again! Where customers once "shopped for flesh," you can now browse through our shops for a wide variety of unique items. Imagine what the Dumas was like in the Glory Days in the rough, rowdy times when the city never slept.

Dumas®

Red Light Antique Mall

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