



Barkerville...then and now

The Cariboo Sentinel

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THE CARIBOO SENTINEL II

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for more fascinating stories, photos &
information visit The Sentinel
on the web at:

www.Barkerville.com

MAIL TO CARIBOO

“Our coach was a great swinging and swaying stage, of the most sumptuous description – an imposing cradle on wheels...”

The arrival of the mail was always cause for great excitement on Williams Creek. At the extreme fringes of the British Empire – far from the cosmopolitan centres of San Francisco, Chicago or Montreal and before a telegraph line was built in 1865 – the arrival of the mail was more than just a letter from a loved one, it was news of all that was going on in the world beyond the goldfields.

Mail from East was quite unreliable and took months or even years to reach the Cariboo. One Barkerville prospector wrote to his wife: “I got a letter from you the other day dated March 1863... so it was about two years in reaching me.” Even for historically momentous events, the news traveled slowly. When California was admitted to the United States in 1850, residents of Los Angeles did not hear of it for six weeks.

In 1860 the primary route for mail from London, England to the Cariboo began by rail to Liverpool. Two ocean steamers carrying mails for Canada left Liverpool for Quebec City each week during the summer months and every alternate week for Portland, Maine during the winter months. The routes for the two packets differed and so did the rates. If you posted your letter to arrive in Liverpool between Sunday through Wednesday the letter would ship out on the Canadian packet bound for Quebec City, but if your letter arrived between Thursday through Saturday, it was sent by British packet to Maine and the rate was 25% higher.

During the California gold rush of the 1850's, the U.S. Post Office contracted a company to carry California-bound mail by ship from New York to Panama, where it was taken across the Isthmus of Panama by horseback or rail, and then put aboard ships bound for San Francisco. Under the best of conditions, a letter could be carried to the West Coast in three or four weeks, but that schedule was often optimistic.

By 1858, most mail was sent from points in the East – including Canada – by rail as far west as the Mississippi. An American transcontinental railroad was still years (and a Canadian route decades) away. Mail was hauled by the Overland Mail Company using the 2,795-mile “Butterfield Route” between Tipton, Missouri through the American South to San Francisco. Although the advertised traveling time was 24 days, as a practical matter, mail delivery was often delayed for months. Mark Twain describes a typical incident in an account of his 1861 journey to the Nevada Territory.

Our coach was a great swinging and swaying stage, of the most sumptuous description – an imposing cradle on wheels. It was drawn

by six hand-some horses, and by the side of the driver sat the “conductor,” the legitimate captain of the craft; for it was his business to take charge and care of the mails, baggage, express matter, and passengers. We three were the only passengers, this trip. We sat on the back seat, inside. About all the rest of the coach was full of mail bags – for we had three days’ delayed mails with us. Almost touching our knees, a perpendicular wall of mail matter rose up.

We had twenty-seven hundred pounds of it aboard, the driver said – “a little for Brigham, and Carson, and ‘Frisco, but the heft of it for the Injuns, which is powerful troublesome ‘thout they get plenty of truck to read.” But as he just then got up a fearful convulsion

of his countenance which was suggestive of a wink being swallowed by an earthquake, we guessed that his remark was intended to be facetious, and to mean that we would unload the most of our mail matter somewhere on the Plains and leave if for the Indians, or whosoever wanted it.

Later when the stage’s thoroughbrace – a leather strap supporting the body of a carriage – broke under the weight of the mail, Twain reported that the driver did as he had promised and left the mail in “a great pyramid by the roadside.”

The brewing civil war between the northern and southern states made the Butterfield route untenable by 1860 and the U.S. Post Office tendered a contract for a new northern route. Thus was born the famous ‘Pony Express’, which

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



Events in

BARKERVILLE

HISTORIC TOWN

2003

Dates or events may change without notice please call for information

May 11th

Theatre Royal Spring Show “Fables and Friends” begins
(No Shows on Saturday during spring season)

May 12th

School Program Begins

May 12th

Admission Fee Begins

May 19th

Victoria Day Afternoon Tea at the Wake Up Jake Restaurant to honour Queen Victoria

June 14th

Gala opening of the Theatre Royal summer show, ”The Cariboo Conicals”. Doors will open at 7:30 pm with a reception to follow. Please reserve tickets in advance at (250) 994-3232, (250) 994-3427 or 1-800-860-2299

June 15th

Theatre Royal Summer Show ,”The Cariboo Conicals” at 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm (NO SHOWS ON FRIDAY during the summer season)

June 28th

Theatre Royal Evening Show ”CNIC ‘ begins– (Saturday and Sunday evenings only)

June 29th

Singer Maria Dunn performs at the newly restored Kelly Saloon (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

July 1st

Dominion Day Celebrations. Celebrate Canada’s birthday the way they did in 1870. Children’s races, Tug – O – War, Funny Face Contest, Greasy Pole Climb, and many more fun family events

The Royal Engineers will set up camp in Barkerville after having travelled the Cariboo Waggon Road from Ft. Langley.

Special for July1st/2003 Barkerville will be holding a **Citizenship Court** welcoming new Canadians.

July 8th

Anne Lederman performing two short performances during the day in the newly restored “Kelly Saloon”. (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

July 19th

Special reunion performance by the “Boys From Joe Denny’s Saloon”

July 23rd

Singer Maria Dunn performs at the Kelly Saloon (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

July 25th

Singer Tom Lewis performs at the Kelly Saloon (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

August 9th

Williams Creek Invitational Hose Carriage Races (Tentative)

August 15th

Singer Gary Fjellgaard performs at the Kelly Saloon (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

August 22nd

Singer Mikel Miller performs at the Kelly Saloon (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

August 23rd

Seventh Annual Eldorado Gold Panning Championship. Panners from all over BC and the Yukon compete in the best gold panning championships in BC and the

Mid-Autumn Festival. A traditional Chinese celebration honouring Barkervilles Chinese heritage. Begins at dusk with a lantern parade through the streets of Barkerville. Bring your own lantern or make one at our lantern making workshops.

August 31st

Theatre Royal evening performance ends

September 1st

Children’s Sports Day and last day of Theatre Royals summer show.

Barkerville businesses, displays, full interpretation programs and The Theatre Royal will remain open until September 30th.

September 3rd

Theatre Royal’s fall show “Friends and Fables” begins.
(No shows on Friday)

September 12th

Singer Kerry Grombacher performs at the Kelly Saloon (Fund Raising for the Friends of Barkerville.)

September 12-14th & 19thto 21st & 26 to 28th

“A Stitch In Time” Cross-Stitch Retreats. (Visit mrsneates.com for more information)

Oct 31st

Celebrate Halloween with a “Ghostly Town Tour” in Barkerville.

December 13/14
December 20/21


Barkerville “Old Fashion Christmas”.
Two weekends before Christmas.
Decorated displays and home baking in the Wendle House. The Goldfield Bakery, and Mrs. Neate’s Sewing Room will be some of the businesses open for Christmas. . Many displays will be open. Carol singing at St. Saviour’s Church. Special Christmas displays and events throughout the month. Different activities happening each weekend

For Information on special events in Barkerville visit: www.Barkerville.com ~or~ Call 1(250) 994-3302 ext. 29 or email: barkerville@sbtbc.gov.bc.ca

The Cariboo Sentinel

Newspaper

"Barkerville Then and Now"



Cariboo Sentinel ^{II}, Box 24, Barkerville, B.C.
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Phone (250) 392-7119 or E-mail publisher@barkerville.com

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Disclaimer: Readers please note that many of the articles published in the Cariboo Sentinel II are taken from much older periodicals and may reflect views concerning race, gender, financial status, height, weight, origin & c. that were widely held at that time but do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Ministry, nor of the publisher nor staff of the Cariboo Sentinel Newspaper. The editorial staff has made the decision to retain in all instances the original text and meaning of these articles in order that the Sentinel may be a window on our heritage rather than a filter. In this context, we hope that you enjoy the paper and learn something from reading it.

Publisher & Editor: Ron Young

Administration: Pat Young

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with special thanks to our contributors:

Jason Young, Raina Young & Barkerville Historic Town

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to Richfield 1.6 km

Once You Reach the Gold Fields have Your Photo Taken in Period Style

Ready While You Wait

NEW e-cards
E-mail your Photo Postcard Anywhere in the World!

LOUIS BLANC BARKERVILLE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY

Fresh Film & Batteries Available for Photographers

- 1 KWONG SANG WING GEN'L STORE
- 2 LUNG DUCK TONG RESTAURANT
- 3 WASHROOMS
- 4 CARIBOO SENTINEL
- 5 THEATRE ROYAL
- 6 BARKERVILLE HOTEL F.O.B.
- 6b STROUSS & CO.
- 7 MASON & DALY GEN'L STORE
- 8 MACPHERSON'S WATCHMAKER
- 9 HOUSE HOTEL, ROOTBEER SALOON
- 10 PIONEER CLOTHING COSTUME RENTAL
- 11 L.A. BLANC PHOTO STUDIO
- 12 ST. GEORGE HOTEL BED & BREAKFAST
- 13 KELLY HOUSE BED & BREAKFAST
- 14 POST OFFICE
- 15 GOLDFIELDS BAKERY
- 16 WAKE-UP JAKE RESTAURANT
- 17 MRS. NEATES DRESSMAKER
- 18 SCHOOLHOUSE
- 19 STAGECOACH
- 20 HOLT & BURGESS CABINET SHOP
- 21 FRANK MCMAHON CONFECTIONERY
- 22 EL Dorado GOLD PANNING & GIFTS
- 23 VISITOR INFO CTR.

to Cemetery 800 m

INTERAC MACHINES are available at the Visitors Information Centre and several businesses in Barkerville.

Be Part of the Magic of Barkerville ... dress in period style



(250) 994-3235

Pioneer Clothing

costume rental~



Victoria, 1st January, 1884. J47

REDUCTION

In Price of Letters !

TO CARIBOO.

Barnard's Express !

Connecting with Dietz & Nelson,

CARRY LETTERS TO CARIBOO FOR \$1

Prepayment Compulsory.

J47 lm d&w **F. J. BARNARD.**



BARNARD'S EXPRESS

—FOR—

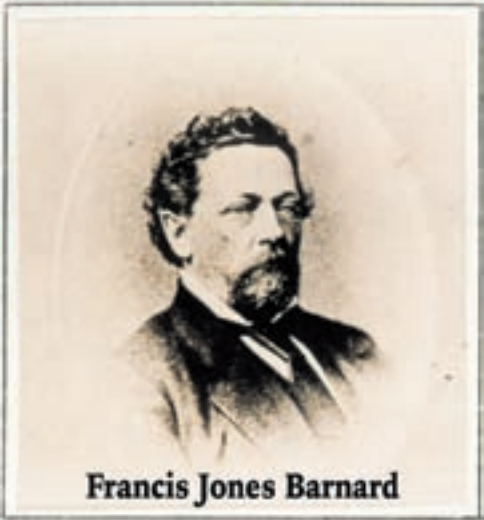
LILLOOET AND YALE,

CONNECTING WITH

DIETZ & NELSON'S FOR VICTORIA.

Will arrive at Richfield on Wednesdays and Saturdays and close on Mondays and Thursdays at NOON, carrying Trunks, Letters and Valises for ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

F. J. BARNARD.



FORWARDED BY

DIETZ & NELSON'S

British Columbia & Victoria

EXPRESS.



Barnard's Stages.



OWING TO THE INUNDATION OF

portions of the wagon road above Yale, the stage will

Leave Yale on Mondays

Of each week only, until further notice, carrying

MAILS and EXPRESS.

Passengers for Big Bend and Cariboo will require to leave Victoria on Friday's steamer.

17 **F. J. BARNARD.**



Barnard's Cariboo Express

—AND—

STAGE LINE.

THE TARIFF OF CHARGES BY THIS EXPRESS

has been revised, and REDUCTION in prices made to suit the times. The charge on Letters to and from Victoria and intermediate places is now 50 cents, Stage Fare to Queenstown, \$50.00, " " through to Yale, \$80.00.

JOHN H. LOVELL,

Agent Barnard's Express.

August 2nd, 1888. 26



Barnard's Express !

STAGE LINE RUNNING BETWEEN

YALE, VICTORIA, V. I., and LYTON, B. C., will, on and after the 1st July next, be changed into the

British Columbia & Victoria Express Co.

F. J. BARNARD.

VICTORIA, V. I., 22d June, 1882.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

—AND—

Victoria

EXPRESS CO.

(CARRYING HER MAJESTY'S MAILS.)

THE FIRST REGULAR WEEKLY EXPRESS

to Cariboo will be discontinued from Victoria July 1st, leaving Vancouver and Yale on the arrival of the steamer at those points. The Express via Douglas and Lillooet will connect at Williams Lake with the Express via Yale and Lyton; and thence to Antler City, where carriers will be dispatched to the various mining camps.

Relying on the respect of a discerning public, the undersigned have spared no expense in their arrangements, nor with any effort be spending on those part to render this the most reliable and speedy means of conveyance to and from the mines

J47 **F. J. BARNARD & CO.**

ROYAL MAIL.

ON AND AFTER THE 1st

December the

Steamer Isabel

Carrying H.M. Mails, Wells Fargo & Co's Express, Passengers and Freight,

Will leave Victoria for Port Townsend

Mondays and Thursdays at 5 a.m.,

Returning to Victoria the same afternoon, and connecting at Port Townsend with U. S. Mail steamers for Tacoma and all Ports on Puget Sound.

1409 **L. M. STARR.**

THROUGH TO YALE IN 6 1-2 DAYS.

EXPRESS FREIGHT AND PASSENGER LINE

Stages and Saddle Train !

THE MOST EXPEDIENT AND ECONOMICAL, as well as the most comfortable mode of travel to the lower country is by this line.

SADDLE TRAIN leaves Richfield on Mondays and Thursdays at NOON, in time to catch the STAGE at Uxapwood for Squamish Mouth and the steamer for Soda Creek. **BARNARD'S STAGES** leave Soda Creek every Monday and Thursday at 8 a.m. The Thursday's Stage will stop at Blaine's, 111 mile post, and on Friday stop at the H. & N. Stage at Cariboo; both arriving at Yale in time to catch the steamer for New Westminster.

For Through Tickets and to be obtained at the Office

PASSENGER LINE

STAGES !

TO SODA CREEK,

Steamer Enterprise

To Quesnelle City,

—AND—

SADDLE TRAIN TO RICHFIELD.

Through Tickets can be had at the Office of Barnard's Express, Yale.

J47 lm **F. J. BARNARD.**

Gerow & Johnson's Stages

WILL LEAVE BARKERVILLE EVERY WEEK, on Mondays with the Stages to Quesnelle and Soda Creek, with H.M. Mails, EXPRESS and Freight.

FOR YALE & INTERMEDIATE PLACES.

GEROW & JOHNSON'S

Express and Stage Line

carries

LETTERS, TRUNKS, VALISES,

EXPRESS FREIGHT AND PASSENGERS

AT REDUCED RATES.

For Collecting, Commission and General Express business call on us personally or by dispatch.

1409 **MR. DAVID ALLEN STONE,** Barkerville.

Railroads.

THE CHICAGO ROCK ISLAND & PACIFIC RAILROAD.

The Great Central Iowa Short Line. Overland Route !

With its connections East and West, is the Shortest, Quickest and Best Route between the

Pacific and Atlantic,

Via Des Moines, Rock Island and Chicago.

THE ONLY ROUTE CARRYING THE Through Overland Letter Mail, making close and reliable connections at

OMAHA

With Trains arriving from the West by Central and Pacific Railroads, and at

CHICAGO

With all Fast Express Trains East, North and South

The most elegantly furnished Sleeping Cars ever used on any railroad are now built, owned and run by this company between Omaha and Chicago.

Through Tickets to all points East can be obtained at C. P. R. Office in San Francisco and Sacramento.

For sure your Tickets read via Rock Island.

J. M. SMITH, General Passenger Agent, Chicago.

HUGH RIDDLE, Gen'l Sup't, Chicago. 1st 1910

GEROW & JOHNSON'S
BRITISH COLUMBIA

EXPRESS
AND
STAGELINE

CARRIAGE

Her Majesty's Mail.

AN EXPRESS WILL BE DISPATCHED From Victoria on the 8th March, next for Cariboo and Way Stations once a fortnight during March, and weekly thereafter. Express matter of all kinds forwarded with regularity, and at cheaper rates than any other line.

Passengers carried at greatly reduced rates.

AGENTS:

VICTORIA, H. C. KIDLOW,
Office: Government Street, between the Post Office and Customs House.
NEW WESTMINSTER, J. T. SCOTT,
YALE, C. W. SAWYER.
Victoria, B. C., Feb. 12th, 1871. 1051HF

NOTICE.

IS hereby given that we have this day disposed of all our interest in the Express business known as Dietz & Nelson's British Columbia and Victoria Express, to F. J. BARNARD, of Barnard's Cariboo Express, and beg to solicit for him a continuance of the patronage bestowed upon us for the past five years.

DIETZ & NELSON,
New Westminster, Dec. 3d, 1867. 427

In reference to the above notice we have to request immediate payment of all sums due us, and any parties having claims against us will oblige us by presenting the same at New Westminster for settlement.

DIETZ & NELSON,
New Westminster, Dec. 6th, 1867.

PAID
DIETZ & NELSON'S
BRITISH COLUMBIA & VICTORIA EXPRESS

BARNARD'S
Cariboo Express
PAID.

Mr. T. Allen
Sentinal Office
Barkville Williams Creek
B.C.

LILLOOET FERRY.

THIS FERRY is now in successful operation. Crossing LOADED TEAMS and PACK TRAINS of any size. Pack animals are in both directions with their loads, at the rate of 25 each. Freight upon wagons or otherwise at ONE HUNDRED POUNDS.

Lillooet, May 1, 1862. J. B. FLYNN.
K411 Chrouleau copy.

BRITISH COLUMBIA AND VICTORIA EXPRESS COMPANY.

Victoria to Cariboo,

CARRIAGE

Her Majesty's Mails.

THIS COMPANY will make regular trips, Summer and Winter, between Anker City and Victoria, dispatching Messengers to all the Mining Camps in

CARIBOO,

Carrying Treasure, Letters, Papers and Valuables. Purchasing Drafts on San Francisco, New York, Canada and London, executing Commissions, making Collections, passing Goods through the Customs, Forwarding, and transacting the business of Expressmen generally; calling at all Cities, Towns, and Wayside Houses on

BOTH THE

Douglas-Lillooet & Yale-Lytton Routes.

Traders ordering Goods may avail themselves of the services of this Company to advantage. Orders handed to any of the Messengers will be executed by Mr. Barnard personally, who has had considerable experience in the Victoria Market, and will make every effort to purchase on the most favorable terms.

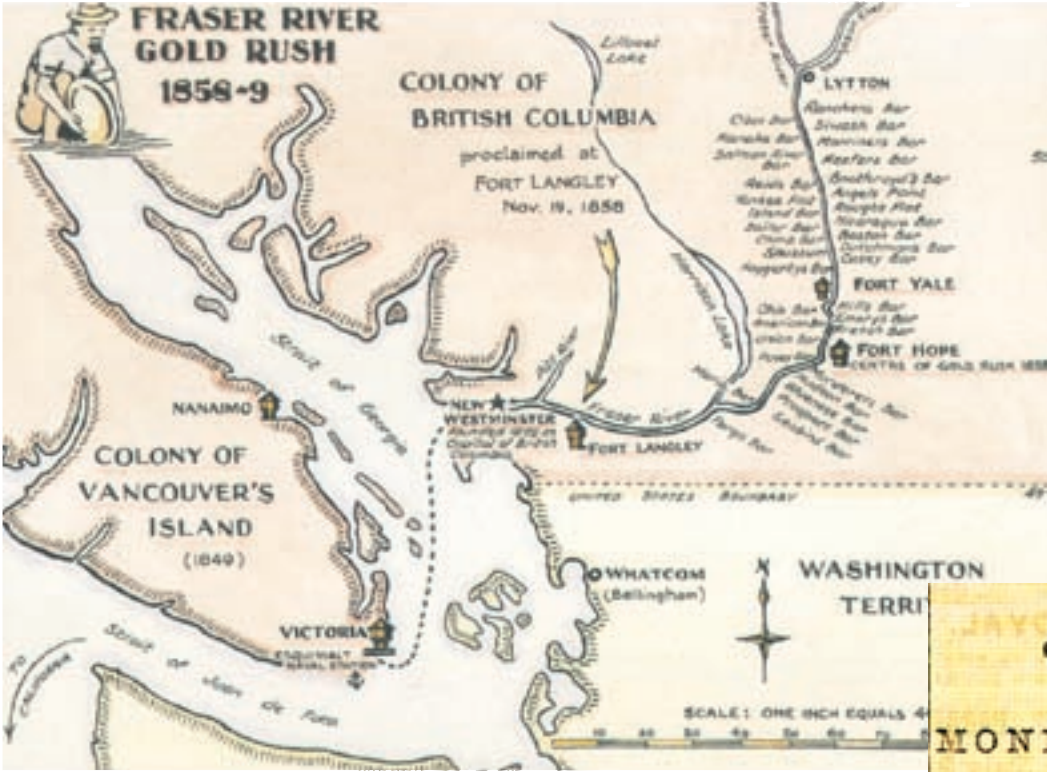
July 18th, 1862. Jy20

PAID
Wells Fargo & Co.
OUR CALIFORNIA

EXPRESS
B.C.R.V.S.

22 SEP
B.C.R.V.S.

Wm Cunningham Esq



Victoria to San Francisco 990 Miles

POST OFFICE
PAID
VICTORIA VANCOUVER

10 CENTS

NOTICE.

MONEY ORDERS
ON THE UNITED KINGDOM.

ON AND AFTER THE 1st OF MAY, 1871, MONEY orders will be issued on the United Kingdom by the Post Office at CARIBOO, New Westminster and Victoria.

RATES OF COMMISSION AS FOLLOWS:

Not over £25,	25 cents.
Over £25, and not exceeding £50,	50 cents.
Over £50, and not exceeding £100,	75 cents.
Over £100, and not exceeding £200,	100 cents.

No single order will be created for more than £200. No orders will be issued on the day the Mails depart.

By order of
A. V. BURNBY, Acting P.M.G.
New Westminster, 25th April, 1871.

In compliance with the above notice, MONEY orders will be issued on the United Kingdom by the Post Office at Cariboo.

JOHN BOWEN,
Acting Postmaster.

RICHLAND
B.C. EXP.

A LETTER ... TOO LATE

RAINA YOUNG

London, April 1866

My Beloved Angus,

Since you left for Barkerville eighteen months ago I have written you more letters than I can count, and have not received a single reply. I do not even know if you are still alive. Not much has changed since my last



correspondence. Alas, father still struggles with consumption. We fear he will not last the summer. Mother cries herself to sleep every night. I cannot understand why you have not responded to my letters. Are you ill or injured? Please Angus send me some indication that you are well. My father wishes me to be securely wed before he dies; he is pushing Lord Cotterwoods suit, and will not wait much longer. If he does not hear from you soon, telling him you have made your fortune, he will marry me off. Angus, he gives you just three months before I will be Countess Cotterwood. I implore you to write with much haste. Write Angus!!

Forever yours

Elizabeth Hartley

Elizabeth sealed it with the family crest and pressed a final kiss to the letter that would determine her future. Silently praying for its speedy delivery she rang for Cooper to deliver it to the post office, and started her toilette for the Cotterwood’s ball; certain to be an evening of deflecting a marriage proposal from Lord Cotterwood himself.

As Cooper ran down the street with his Mistress’ letter he passed Meg, the pretty maid from the widow Hucklebut’s townhouse. As he watched her she turned and winked at him. Just when he was about to step off the curb he tripped nearly into the path of a smartly moving phaeton. Cooper rolled to the side, barely missing the huge horse hooves and leapt to his feet with embarrassment, glancing to see if Meg had seen him. The letter lay forgotten, splattered with mud in the gutter.

Old Edgar walked his Thursday night watch through Berkley Square, and something unusual caught his eye; he bent to pick it up. He realized it was a letter of some sort and he recognized the Hartley family crest. He would deliver it tomorrow, he thought, it must surely have been dropped. As he walked down the road towards home he began to feel a familiar but ominous tightening in his chest. Collapsing across the threshold of his cottage his last thoughts were of Estelle, his dear wife.

Estelle awoke with a start, it had been a month since her darling Edgar had died yet still she had nightmares about it. Oh, how she missed him! But today was the beginning of a new life. Today she would board a ship to Canada, where she would live with her sister Belinda. Checking her beloved cottage one last time for any forgotten possessions, she noticed a square of paper sticking out from under the stove. She pulled it out thinking it was trash and saw that it was an envelope with an address for Canada, elegantly scrawled across the front. Where did it come from

she wondered? She had never been in contact with the nobility and by the feel of the paper it was definitely rich. Edgar must have had it. He was always such a sweet man, always doing odd jobs for friends. As the tears slowly fell for the husband she would never again hold, she tucked the letter into her cloak and walked out the door to her new life.

Victoria, June 1867

Jerome slowly walked to the house with all the belongings of the poor shipworn woman Estelle, his aunt, who had just arrived after weeks of rough travel. Jerome was small for his eleven years, but strong. He had volunteered for the arduous job of packing a steamer trunk up through the town. Aunt Estelle had always been nice to him. As he passed the post office he dropped in the letters she had written. There were fourteen to an address in London, one for every day at sea, and one for an Angus McGowen in Barkerville.

, September 1867

Caroline waited patiently, for Mr. Chow to sort through any letters addressed to her. The Barnards Express mail coach was late coming from Victoria as apparently it had suffered a broken axle. Caroline had ten minutes before her class started. She had twenty-three students that attended the Quesnellemouth schoolhouse. Mr. Chow handed her six letters and a packet of newspapers. He always saved the old papers for her. She hurried out of the post office and down the street to the schoolhouse. She quickly put the newspapers on the small table in the back room, and rushed to let in her students. She didn’t notice the small, dirty, ragged looking envelope that fell under her bed.

Months later as Caroline finished cleaning the her little house for the last time she started to dream about the life soon to come in Barkerville. As she pulled her trunk out from under her bed she discovered a dusty letter addressed to a Mr. McGowen in Barkerville. With an affectionate shake of her head she realized Mr. Chow must have given it to her by mistake. She noticed the date and was shocked to see it was dated a whole year ago. Reprimanding herself for not cleaning under her bed more often, she tucked it into her pocket intending to carry it to Barkerville herself.

Barkerville, July 1866

Angus ran all the way to the Barkerville post office. He had done it, really done it! He had struck it rich! His small claim had struck pay dirt and at this rate he would realize more than 80,000 dollars before the seasons end. Finally he would send for his dear sweet Elizabeth! Her letters were the only things that had kept him going over the long months but he had agonized over replying to her until he had made his fortune. Elizabeth’s last letter had been dated January 1866, a little over a year ago; hopefully his letter would get to London faster.

London, August 1867

Elizabeth was panting with exhaustion by the time her latest contraction finished. She had been married to Cuthbert Cotterwood for nearly a year and this was their first child. She had entered this marriage with a broken heart and Cuthbert had done nothing to mend it. He was a cold and unfeeling man, intent on forcing Elizabeth to bow to his wishes. She had been labouring for two days to deliver this baby and was on the brink of exhaustion. Something was wrong she could feel it. She had lost too much blood and was tired, so tired. Elizabeth felt the darkness creeping in; she couldn’t fight it anymore slowly so slowly she drifted off into peaceful darkness.

London, September 1867

As Elizabeth’s sister Abigail left the graveyard, Cooper came running up from the house. He had a letter from Angus McGowen.

Barkerville, July 1866

My dear Elizabeth

Today I struck it rich. I have more money than we could ever need in two lifetimes. I am sending a bank draft with enough money for a ticket to Canada and some extra for yourself. The moment you arrive we will marry in the most splendid manner money can buy. Our dreams are finally coming true! I await your arrival with my heart full of joy.

Forever Yours

Angus McGowen

...The End

ran for 1,966 miles from St. Joseph, Missouri to San Francisco. Although this specialized express service only lasted for 18 months – until a telegraph line was completed to the West Coast – the regular mail followed the same route for many years afterwards.

In the spring of 1858, gold was discovered on the lower reaches of the Fraser River and thousands of miners, mostly from California, streamed north to British Columbia. Naturally the mail followed them. Wells Fargo & Co. began an express service from San Francisco to Victoria in July, only a month after W. T. Ballou had established the first express service inland from New Westminster.

As the lower banks of the Fraser played out and prospectors ventured further north along tributar-

ies in search of the ‘motherlode’, the mail carriers weren’t far behind. In these very early days – before road or even proper trail – the mail was carried by foot and at great expense. By 1863, F. J. Barnard had established a ‘pony express’ service from Yale in the Fraser Canyon to Barkerville. Later the Cariboo Waggon Road was completed and the Barnard’s Express or ‘BX’ became the longest stagecoach route in North America. Mail delivery from Victoria to the goldfields now took just over a week instead of a month. In 1865, the telegraph became the primary mode of news communication and the Cariboo Sentinel often carried news from overseas that was only a few weeks old.

The routes to the goldfields for men and mail were varied and changed rapidly

in the early years. In 1860, it was almost unheard of to take the overland or Prairie route from Canada to British Columbia. Few tried and those who did frequently paid with their lives; those who were successful arrived at their destinations only after the better part of a year had passed. However, a mere twenty-five years later a trans-continental railroad made the journey easy even for those unused to hard travel. A person could board a train in Montreal and arrive only seven days later in Vancouver, refreshed and no worse for wear.

In the age of wireless instant messaging, when email can be sent anywhere in the world with the click of a button, it is easy to forget a time not long ago when sending mail was a much more arduous and romantic affair.

Jason Young

Up A Quarter

Peter Burgis, the actor who artfully portrayed Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie in Barkerville for over twenty years passed away in Olney, Bucks, England this past winter.

Burgis’ depiction of Begbie was captivating and convincing as is reported in the following description by Ron Candy, a former conservator of Barkerville:

“A mile up a narrow path from Barkerville, seventy or so people are crammed into a tiny courtroom in the Richfield Courthouse. Huddled shoulder to shoulder, most are seated while others stand to fill doorways and the adjacent entrance hall. All eyes are fixed on the imposing figure looming down from atop a raised pulpit at one end of the room.” ... “After an hour or so of recollections, stories and memories of a life long since past, the cloaked apparition before us had every last person in that room convinced he was indeed the real Begbie.” ... “As the performance drew to a close, a visitor in the crowd asked the question familiar to all who have donned the guise of a historic interpreter. The question asked, Begbie rose from his bench. With twist of his white mustache and a direct stare towards the seated patron, Begbie answered, “Indeed sir, you may take my picture if it so pleases you. However, I should inform you that no image shall appear on your film”. ... “So far as any visitor in that courtroom was concerned, this person in front of them was Begbie; ghost, apparition, historic interpreter or otherwise.”

In Peter’s own words during an interview with the Sentinel in 1995, “Most rewarding, I think is if we do a presentation and people obviously got something out of it, be it enjoyment, amusement, some information, a sense of the time and a sense of the place.” Without a doubt that was most certainly the case during the more than two decades of Peter Burgis’ presence in Barkerville and Richfield as ‘Begbie’.

At the penny ante poker game held every Tuesday evening in the Nicol Hotel in Barkerville (now the St. George) the ‘Judge’ would often be heard saying “up a quarter” as he celebrated a good hand dealt to him (or bluffed a poor one). Peter Burgis had a dry but engaging wit that illuminated the lives of many. We salute the “Commode d’or”, as he became known during the annual Barkerville 2x4 yacht race down Williams Creek. Fair weather, fine wind.



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