

BARKERVILLE DAYS

Fred W. Ludditt

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Publisher's Note

Having been written in the 1960s, Fred Ludditt's *Barkerville Days* reflects ideas of the nineteenth century, and it contains now obsolete ideas of settler colonial "pioneers." We have chosen to alter the original text in places where a word or term, though descriptive in the last century, is now considered offensive. Such wording has been changed to reflect current and more respectful language. The publisher wishes to acknowledge that Barkerville sits on the ancestral and unceded territories of the Dakelh and Secwépemc Peoples.

MY BARKERVILLE DAYS

I can still, to this day, hear the *clickity-clack* of my mom's typewriter as she worked on my dad's book—this book, *Barkerville Days*. My father had placer mined around Barkerville in the 1930s. After the Second World War, he brought his bride, Esther, to the Barkerville area where they built a log cabin and sluiced the gold-bearing creeks during the summer and fall for a few years.

But by the time my brother and I came along, our family lived in the “big house” on the only street in Barkerville. All the homes faced the one (nameless) street (there was also a back lane). At that time, Barkerville boasted a population of about one hundred people. I have fond memories of growing up in Barkerville, hauling water and wood, even as a small child. My brother, Frankie, and I were the only two children living year-round in the town until 1958 when we were moved to the nearby gold-mining village of Wells. We had to move from our hometown so that it could be turned into a “tourist trap” by the government of BC. At least, that's how I felt about it then.

I don't really know how long it took my dad to write *Barkerville Days*, but as a child it seemed to me to take forever. My parents, constantly poring over photos sent by my father's friends and colleagues, had little time for us kids. We played outside over by Williams Creek (named after William “Billy” Barker) with our dog Toby.

My mother's typewriter was a big black thing with round keys that sat at one edge of our large wooden table. Beside it were the completed sheets of paper. Piles and piles of paper. It fascinated me to watch her push the carriage return and hear the *ding!* She used carbon paper to keep a rough copy for herself. The room they worked in was heated with a huge barrel-drum furnace, and at night the cat and dog would lie under it and burn the ends of their whiskers.

Our living quarters and bedrooms were upstairs, and this heater sent its warmth above. We did have a small electric heater up there as well, beside which my mom had her homemade wine bubbling in a wooden cask. I was just tall enough to peer inside it and watch the grapes fermenting away. My bedroom faced the street, and at night



Fred Ludditt with his daughter Karin, and son, Frank, in front of their home in Barkerville, 1957. Photo Esther Ludditt

I could see Mr. Dowsett reach up with his long pole to twist the streetlamps on at dusk. In the mornings he would be there again, when the sun came over the mountains, to twist the lights off.

I remember being entrusted to help sell my dad's first pamphlet, entitled *Gold in the Cariboo*, during the summer months, long before Barkerville became a Historic Site. My mom would set up our green card table in front of St. Saviour's Church, put two chairs there for Frankie and me, give us a pile of pamphlets and a float and tell us to sell as many as possible to the odd tourist who hap-

pended to either drive or walk through the town. The pamphlets sold for fifty cents each.

Meanwhile, my parents would be working on *Barkerville Days*. During my years in Barkerville my father's employment varied. At first he had a gold mine up at Grouse Creek. After my mom convinced Dad to stop placer mining, the bottom half of the big house became a small store; I believe it might have been called The Trading Post. That didn't last long, and the bottom half of the house became the Government Agent office. When in 1958 we moved to Wells, the office came with us. My father was furious about this because if the Government Agent's office had remained in Barkerville, it would have celebrated one hundred years there. It did amaze me to see my dad so worked up about this, as he was the most even-tempered person; he smiled a lot and always looked on the bright side.

The creation of the book continued, my dad writing and my mom deciphering his handwriting and typing up page after page. We were in Wells until I was about twelve, then we moved to Comox. But it took years for the book to be edited; all the “political stuff” my dad had written had to be cut out. The original version of the book contained many more stories about the old-timers and other interesting people; these were also removed but later published as *Campfire Sketches*. *Barkerville Days* was finally published by Mitchell Press in 1969, the year I graduated from high school.

Today, after paying a few visits back to Barkerville—notably for the fiftieth anniversary of its founding as a Provincial Heritage Site—I have been asked by many who are interested in keeping this history alive to reprint my father’s book. Thank you to Vici Johnstone and her team at Caitlin Press for making this happen.

Karin Ludditt
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THE GOLD TRAILS

There's gold in the Cariboo! It was with these words, spoken by thousands and thousands of people in 1859, '60 and '61 that the story of Barkerville really begins. Men in California, Canada, and later England and even the Continent, were learning of gold in fabulous amounts in the Cariboo. The history of British Columbia from 1858 on is studded with the names of thousands of men who found gold, until anyone reading it would think this great territory was one immense gold field!

As early as 1858 Kinahan Cornwallis published a book entitled *The New Eldorado, or British Columbia*. The amazing thing about this book is a map it contains on which is printed *Supposed Gold Regions*. These three words appeared in nearly every part of the Cariboo where gold was actually discovered two years later. This illustrated the belief of the prospectors that the trail of fine gold in the Fraser and Thompson would eventually lead to heavy deposits of coarse gold in the mountains at the headwaters of these rivers.

At that time British Columbia and Vancouver Island were remote colonies of Great Britain. Most of the vast interior of British Columbia was as yet unexploited by White settlers. Yet in the short space of ten years, from 1858 to 1868, literally thousands of men trekked through this great interior wilderness, creating settlements and towns, ranches and farms. The event that brought these fantastic numbers of men into this hinterland was the epic Cariboo Gold Rush. The greatest part of this colourful event centred on Williams Creek. It was here on the Creek, fifty-eight miles from the present town of Quesnel, that Barkerville came into being. During the 1800s it was the flourishing centre of the Cariboo's mining activities, and with variations in its fortunes, it continued to hold its place as a stable community until 1958.

These thousands of gold seekers, rather than the early fur traders and Hudson's Bay men, were instrumental, too, in the opening up



The lure of the Cariboo—gold! Barkerville Museum P6567

of roads throughout this vast area, most of which was accessible only by water and by following the Indian trails on foot, horse or mule. The need for roads to the goldfields, and the subsequent building of them, also did much to prevent the political disruption of the western part of British North America. The fact that Governor Douglas saw this need and instigated the building of the Cariboo Road, thus establishing it as the main line to the goldfields, was a great factor in firmly establishing British law and justice north of the forty-ninth parallel. By this time hundreds of men were arriving daily from the United States, and they came not only by steamboat from San Francisco to Victoria and thence to Yale, but also hundreds more came via Fort Colville in the United States through the Okanagan Valley to Kamloops and so north to the Cariboo.

But all were seeking the same thing—gold!

Although in 1858 gold was still being mined at Hope and Yale, the rush that started on the Lower Fraser had already taken men to the Thompson and Similkameen Rivers, and to countless streams, bars and benches everywhere in the lower part of the province. Miners were making as much as twenty dollars a day on the Similkameen and getting coarser gold than elsewhere. They were mining for gold at Lillooet—then called Cayoosh—on the Fraser River (the ancestral and unceded territories of the St'át'imcets people). But what is significant is that in 1858 three hundred ounces of gold was taken from Cedar Point, the mouth of a stream that flows into Quesnel Lake. Cedar Point was the boat landing of the fur brigade taking furs from the Quesnel and Cariboo Lake areas into Fort Alexandria, more than a hundred miles north of Lillooet.

By 1859 almost a thousand men were mining for gold between Fort Alexandria, Fort George and Quesnel Forks. In 1860 large quantities of gold were found in the Horsefly River which, too, flows into Quesnel Lake. Then, in the summer of 1860, gold was discovered on the shores of Cariboo Lake. Here men, travelling to and from their destinations over its great expanse on rafts, were making as much as two hundred dollars a day. All this before any fabulous strikes had been made!