

Adult Education in Barkerville, 1863 to 1875

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No attempt has previously been made to present a reasonably full account of the adult education and related cultural activities which existed in Barkerville and the nearby communities on Williams Creek during their heyday, from the early 1860's to 1875. The story is a unique one, just as Barkerville's story is unique. Barkerville sprang into existence during the gold rush of the 1860's and soon became the largest community in the northwest, within a decade it rapidly dwindled in size, and became one of the ghost towns of the province. Yet during its brief period of prominence, it was large enough to sustain a number of educational and cultural organizations offering an interesting range of activities. Many towns in this province and elsewhere have flourished and faded away, but none reached the size or contained the rich social diversity characteristic of Barkerville at its height.

The story of the Cariboo Gold Rush and the development of Barkerville, Cameronton, Richfield and the other nearby communities has been presented in detail by various authors and is well known.¹ Prospectors pushing on from the earlier discoveries on the Lower Fraser found gold on Williams Creek in February of 1861. By August the search brought them to the site of Richfield, the earliest settlement in the Barkerville area. Some 80 men stayed in Richfield through that winter and the first sizeable influx of population appeared in the spring of 1862. By March, 20 business establishments had been completed at Richfield. In August Billy Barker and John Cameron struck it rich a mile or so down the creek. Within a month the first cabins began to go up near these claims, at what were to be the communities of Barkerville and Cameron-

¹ See especially M. A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History*, Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1958, chap. 6 and 8; F. W. Ludditt, *Barkerville Days*, Vancouver, Mitchell Press Ltd., 1969, pp 11 ff.; G. R. Elliott, *Quesnel: Commercial Center of the Cariboo Gold Rush*, Quesnel, Cariboo Historical Society, 1958, pp 16 ff.

ton, although most of those who stayed in the area through the following winter lived at Richfield. Before the middle of the following May (1863), more than 2,000 people arrived at Richfield. Businesses were soon established at the other two communities as well. F. W. Ludditt gives a picture of the incredible pace of development during the season.

Countless cabins now were erected on the hillsides of the creek. By the end of the year over three thousand claims had been located. At the height of the mining season the population had risen to four thousand miners and businessmen.²

1863 was in many respects the big year for discovery in the area, but gold production figures continued to grow for the next several years. After the first wave of discoveries had been made by individual miners or small groups, the methods of operation began to change. As Dr. Ormsby has pointed out, "the days of the rocker and the sluice were past"; the solitary prospector or the small group with little capital could not hope to make their way in that area any longer. Mining conditions were such that only the larger companies could afford to provide the equipment and construct the large scale machinery, water wheels and shafts required to develop the claims.³ By 1867, the number of men actually working on the diggings had considerably decreased from the earlier peak.

The communities in the area were, in the meantime, developing at an exciting pace.

The growth and development of Richfield, Cameronton and Barkerville was steady after 1863. They gradually became mining towns rather than mining camps and soon contained the businesses, societies, schools and churches that relate to a growing society.⁴

Margaret Ormsby has stated that it is impossible to estimate the population of the Cariboo mining communities in this period. Some figures went as high as 16,000, "but officials doubted whether the total population of British Columbia was much in excess of the Vancouver Island figure of 7,500."⁵ Bruce Ramsay, in his guidebook to Barkerville, indicates that the Chinese population alone was estimated to be 8,000 at one point.⁶

Barkerville, at the time of its rapid growth in 1864, was colourful, but not particularly attractive:

² F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 37.

³ M. A. Ormsby, *op. cit.* p. 212.

⁴ F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 73.

⁵ M. A. Ormsby, *op. cit.* p. 209.

⁶ Bruce Ramsay, *Barkerville*, Vancouver, Mitchell Press Ltd., 1961, p. 59.

The following year the merchants came, and wooden buildings, generally of whipsawed lumber, were erected in an irregular fashion on an irregular street. Because the creek was subject to freshets and flash floods, most of the houses were on log posts, hardly two of the houses the same height. Consequently, the sidewalks in front were at varied elevations and made walking unsafe. Overhead the signs of various businesses protruded over the muddy, filth-strewn, hole-pitted, eighteen-foot wide street.⁷

The early educational opportunities for adults in the area were centered in Cameronton. The key figure in these developments was John Bowron. Bowron arrived on the creek in the spring of 1863. He had been born in Quebec, received his early education there, and studied law for a time in Cleveland, Ohio. He came West with the "Overlanders" in 1862, arrived in Quesnel in September of that year and like many of that party, proceeded to the coast for the winter months. After returning to Williams Creek, he travelled all over the mining area.

It was during those early weeks, and later, when he did some prospecting on his own, that he conceived the idea of forming a society where men could meet and talk and once again feel themselves to be part of the world of music, books and the arts that had been left behind on entering the gold-fields.⁸

Within the first few weeks of arriving in the area, Bowron interested a few others in the idea and founded the Cariboo Literary Society. The first meetings were held in his small cabin in Cameronton. A further step was taken the following year, when this group decided to create a library for the community. In the name of the Cariboo Literary Institute, they raised \$1,000 by public subscription and then appealed to the provincial government to supply a building in Cameronton to house the library. One was, in due course, provided and the library opened its doors to the public on June 7, 1864.

There is some disagreement on two points related to the early days of the library. The first has to do with whether the government or Bowron himself supplied the library building. Ludditt, in his history of Barkerville, states that the government supplied the building.⁹ Miss Wolfenden, in her pioneer work on the libraries in the province, states that the building was

⁷ G. R. Elliott, *op. cit.* p. 27.

⁸ F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 125. For further details on Bowron, see Lottie Bowron, "Early Libraries on Williams Creek, Cariboo, B.C.," *B.C. Library Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1 (July 1962) pp. 3-4.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 125.

constructed at Bowron's expense.¹⁰ On a more significant point, there is disagreement as to who was the first librarian of the Institute. Holmes, in her historical account of library service in the province, states that "Florence Wilson of Victoria" was the librarian for the first year, after which Bowron assumed the post.¹¹ Other historians, including Ludditt, Wolfenden and Elliott, state that Bowron was the librarian from the outset. Bowron certainly held that position (and was Secretary of the Institute) by the summer of 1865 and remained the dominant figure for a decade.

The sole purpose of the Cariboo Literary Institute soon became the maintenance of the library. Wolfenden states in her article that "lectures, debates, musical and dramatic entertainments were sponsored,"¹² but the record does not bear this out. The local newspaper, the *Cariboo Sentinel*, which first appeared in June of 1865, gave detailed attention to the activities of the Institute and other educational and cultural events, and with the exception of a lecture for the benefit of the Institute given in September 1865,¹³ there is no mention of such events actually being sponsored by the Institute itself.

The Institute and the library remained in existence for a decade, the last known reference to the latter appearing in the *Cariboo Sentinel* in November of 1874.¹⁴ Maintaining the library was clearly a struggle throughout the period. But maintained it was, thanks to the devoted efforts of a small group of supporters, most notably John Bowron himself.

Ludditt states that when the library opened, it contained 300 volumes.¹⁵ The first issue of the *Cariboo Sentinel*, on June 6, 1865, carried an advertisement as follows:

READING ROOM and CIRCULATING LIBRARY!
Cameronton, Williams Creek

The terms of subscription have been reduced to two dollars per month; above 100 volumes of New Works have been only lately added to the Circulating Library. Parties are solicited to subscribe.

John Bowron, Librarian¹⁶

¹⁰ Madge Wolfenden, "Books and Libraries in Fur-Trading and Colonial Days," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. XI, no. 3 (July 1947) p. 180. On this matter, as others, Miss Bowron relies on the Wolfenden account.

¹¹ Marjorie C. Holmes, *Library Service in British Columbia*, Victoria, Public Library Commission of B.C., 1959, p. 10.

¹² M. Wolfenden, *op. cit.* p. 180.

¹³ *Cariboo Sentinel*, September 2, 1865. Hereafter referred to as *C.S.*

¹⁴ *C.S.* November 7, 1874.

¹⁵ F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 125.

¹⁶ *C.S.* June 6, 1865.

The Institute advertised the library and reading room in the *Cariboo Sentinel* frequently over the next few years. Sometimes the item was similar to the one presented above. Beginning in July of 1866, a second, longer form of advertisement appeared, as it did frequently thereafter. This item listed the officers of the Institute, quoted the subscription rates (\$2.00 per month and \$5.00 per quarter), listed some of the significant books in the collection (stating that there were "about 500 volumes" in stock), and indicating that the hours of service were 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.¹⁷ These ads state that the President of the Institute was Mr. J. S. Thompson. Thompson was a lawyer and one of the best known and respected citizens of the whole area. He, like Bowron, was active in the local dramatic society. He served for a time as editor of the *Cariboo Sentinel*,¹⁸ and was the first representative of the area in Parliament after the colony joined Confederation in 1871, having been elected on the first occasion by acclamation. No doubt the support of such a prominent and influential person as Thompson was extremely important to the Institute over the years.

In 1866, Bowron was appointed postmaster for the area and the post office and library were combined in the same building. In the meantime, Barkerville had come to the fore as the largest, most influential centre in the area and it was decided to move both of these facilities there from Cameronton. The *Cariboo Sentinel* reported that the post office and library "were removed from Cameronton to the old Parlor Saloon, Barkerville, where they shall remain until the new buildings are ready for their reception."¹⁹ Bowron had purchased the residence of a Mr. Winnard and housed both services there.²⁰ The library opened in its new quarters on May 11, the newspaper referring to it as a large room housing "the News Room and Library."²¹

The library was growing in size and diversity and receiving some support in the community. But it seems that there were not enough people in that rugged frontier town who would support the library over the long haul. The *Cariboo Sentinel* reported in July of 1868 that the "public reading room" would close if more subscribers could not be obtained. A few days later it reported that the room had closed.²² But some way of carrying on must have been devised for in mid-September the Institute

¹⁷ This ad first appeared in *C.S.* July 19, 1866.

¹⁸ G. R. Elliott, *op. cit.* p. 117.

¹⁹ *C.S.* April 15, 1867.

²⁰ Some sources, including Holmes, indicate a new building was constructed.

²¹ *C.S.* May 13, 1867.

²² *C.S.* July 19, 1868.

ran another advertisement which indicated that it was still open and providing service.²³ Two days later, on September 18, Barkerville burned to the ground in an hour and twenty minutes. Only one building in the community was saved. In the list of properties destroyed was the entry "John Bowron, library and post office — \$4,000."²⁴ The town was rebuilt with impressive speed and on October 27, the newspaper reported that the library had been "re-opened and replenished with a good stock of books . . .," 200 of which had been supplied by Mr. Chartres Brew, the Gold Commissioner. Judging by the reports in the *Sentinel*, the library struggled on for several years after that, although the most prosperous time for Barkerville had passed. There were indications in May of 1869 that more members were urgently needed if the service was to continue, subscription having fallen to sixty, far below the required 100.²⁵ Reports in August referred to the serious debts of the organization.²⁶ There was a further flurry in April of 1870, when Bowron was dismissed as post-master.²⁷ The future of the Institute was in jeopardy, and was the subject of a meeting in late May.²⁸ The Institute survived that crisis. An advertisement appeared in the paper in mid-September announcing reduced fees for the library (\$1.00 per month), signed by Bowron, still in the capacity of librarian.²⁹

Things seem to have gone from bad to worse thereafter. The regular advertisements in the *Sentinel* no longer appeared. In January of 1872, J. S. Thompson, the President of the Institute, left the community to take up his seat in the House of Commons.³⁰ In May of 1873, a meeting was held of interested persons "for the purpose of taking steps for the re-organization of the Cariboo Public Library." A collection was taken up and a committee appointed to carry the matter forward. Bowron acted as the secretary of the meeting, but when the work of the committee was reported a week later, it was stated that a Mr. Jonathan Nutt had been appointed librarian.³¹ Bowron had in the meantime been appointed Mining Recorder at Richfield (1872).³²

²³ C.S. September 16, 1868.

²⁴ C.S. September 22, 1868.

²⁵ C.S. May 22, 1869.

²⁶ C.S. August 14, 1869.

²⁷ See C.S. April 2, 1870.

²⁸ C.S. May 28, 1870.

²⁹ C.S. September 10, 1870.

³⁰ C.S. January 13, 1872.

³¹ C.S. May 10 and 17, 1873.

³² John Bowron was subsequently appointed Government Agent (1875) and Gold Commissioner (1883). He held this latter post until his retirement in 1906. He

In early June the *Sentinel* reported that the library was once again open to the public and made an appeal for the return of missing books.³³ (This had been a recurring problem, such appeals having been made as early as 1867.)³⁴ The final reference to the library was a rather plaintive notice which appeared in the paper in late 1874. It reminded readers of the existence of the library and expressed the hope that more use would be made of it now that "the long winter evenings have set in."³⁵

One very striking aspect of the history of the Institute and the library is the degree of support that was provided for it by certain elements in society. The surprising thing is not that the organization has such serious problems, but that it survived as long as it did and continued to provide the level of service that it did. The contribution of John Bowron, of course, was crucial, as was the support of prominent citizens such as J. S. Thompson, the Institute's president. The Institute also was afforded remarkably strong and constant support from the *Cariboo Sentinel*. The newspaper seemed to take advantage of any excuse to mention the library. On occasion, the acquisition of a noteworthy single book, or the receipt of a box of books from a donor would be the subject of an item in the news columns.³⁶ The newspaper repeatedly encouraged citizens to become subscribing members, stressing its value particularly to those who lived in the area all year round. At the time of the move to Barkerville it stated that the institution "well deserves the support of the community."³⁷ When in the summer of 1868 it appeared that the library would close because of lack of revenue, the *Sentinel* urged, "Let the friends of literature rally at once and see what can be done."³⁸ In an article on the institutions which had been lost in the fire, the paper commented, "The oldest and perhaps the most useful was the library and reading room."³⁹ The *Sentinel* gave space generously to announcing and reporting on any fund-raising events which were for the benefit of the Institute. Throughout the whole period, under its various owners and editors, the *Sentinel* gave outstanding support to the Literary Institute and the library.

died later that same year, having moved to Victoria after his retirement. He had practical experience in the mining industry, having prospected briefly, having cleaned miners' gold on a part time basis and having been a partner in a mining company, the Hard-Up Company, formed in 1867.

³³ *C.S.* June 7, 1873.

³⁴ *C.S.* September 19, 1867.

³⁵ *C.S.* November 7, 1874.

³⁶ See, for instance, *C.S.* September 3, 1866.

³⁷ *C.S.* May 13, 1867.

³⁸ *C.S.* July 16, 1868.

³⁹ *C.S.* October 2, 1868.

Help was forthcoming from elsewhere as well, both inside and outside the community. When Governor Frederick Seymour visited the area in the spring of 1866, he went to see the library, gave encouragement to those connected with it and promised to send additional books for the collection. Three boxes of them arrived in late June.⁴⁰ A year later an additional box was received from "the government."⁴¹ Governor Seymour visited the area again in August of 1867 and once again he visited the reading room.⁴² But the most significant help, of course, came from within the community. A number of persons made contributions to the funds of the Institute over and above paying their regular subscription, but no details are known. Mention has already been made of the lecture given in September of 1865 in the reading room in Cameronton by the Reverend A. C. Garrett as a fund-raising event. Later in the same month the Cariboo Glee Club and others staged "a grand musical entertainment" for the benefit of the reading room and the event was later described as "the most successful in every sense that has ever been held here."⁴³ Two years later, a visitor in the community, Mr. Legh Harnett, gave two lectures in Barkerville, the second of which was offered for the benefit of the Institute.⁴⁴ In August of 1869, the Reverend Thomas Derrick of the local Methodist church gave a lecture at the Royal Theatre, for the Institute. It was announced that, "the proceeds will be devoted to the liquidation of a debt contracted by the Directors of the Cariboo Literary Institute."⁴⁵ It was a most successful affair.⁴⁶ It can be seen that in these ways, many persons in the community who were in a position to be of assistance to the Institute and its library did what they could.

Only fragmentary information is available about the size of the library, its circulation, and the number of persons served. It has already been mentioned that there were approximately 300 volumes in the collection when the library was opened.⁴⁷ In July of 1866 the *Sentinel* referred to

⁴⁰ C.S. June 28, 1866.

⁴¹ C.S. July 1, 1867.

⁴² C.S. August 12, 1867.

⁴³ C.S. September 30, 1865.

⁴⁴ C.S. September 5 and 9, 1867. Harnett's findings were later presented in two lectures, which were published: *Two Lectures on British Columbia*, Victoria, Higgins and Long, 1868.

⁴⁵ C.S. August 14, 1869.

⁴⁶ See account C.S. August 21, 1869.

⁴⁷ Some writers have stated that some of the books in the original collection came from the library of Reverend John Sheepshanks, the first Anglican clergyman in the area.

the library as having "upwards of 500 volumes of standard works,"⁴⁸ later in the year the columns of the same paper report that as of October 1, there were 104 subscribers to the library and 437 books.⁴⁹ As has been mentioned, the library closed in the middle of 1868 because there were so few subscribers, 100 being stated as the required minimum. It is not known whether any books were saved in the fire later that year, but the Institute had received a gift of 200 books from Mr. Brew, the Gold Commissioner, as the nucleus of the new collection. A press report of May 1869 indicated that there were only 60 subscribers and once again indicated that a minimum of 100 was required.⁵⁰ No further figures in relation to either the holdings or the membership are available for the declining years of the library service.

The library sponsored by the Cariboo Literary Institute was not the only one in the area, but little is known of the others. The Reverend John Sheepshanks is said to have brought 250 books with him when he was based briefly at Antler in the early 1860's. Mr. Elliott, in his history states that, "private libraries also existed on the creek: the Occidental Cigar Store had novels, while the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches had books of a more serious nature."⁵¹ The Cambrian Hall, which was built in 1866 as a result of the efforts of Welsh citizens (and rebuilt after the fire) was described as to be used as a "Meeting House and News and Lecture Room."⁵² The library of the Catholic Church came to public notice briefly in 1868. Just five days before the fire, "the St. Patrick's Lending Library" based in the church at Richfield was written up in the *Sentinel* and an advertisement appeared listing the rates as \$3.00 per quarter and \$5.00 per year. The paper commented that "the library is well stocked with useful and interesting books and the terms are very liberal."⁵³ A further ad was run for the library on October 2, shortly after the fire (and the destruction of the Institute's library), but no further notices appeared. There is a record of one other reading room in the area. The third issue of the *Sentinel*, in June 1865, carried an ad for the Parlor Saloon which contained in it a notice of, "A First Class Reading Room! All the latest English, American, Canadian and Colonial papers taken

⁴⁸ *C.S.* July 2, 1866.

⁴⁹ *C.S.* October 22, 1866. The article also states that a year earlier, October 1, 1865, there had been 85 subscribers and 348 books.

⁵⁰ *C.S.* May 22, 1869.

⁵¹ G. R. Elliott, *op. cit.* p. 30.

⁵² *C.S.* June 4, 1866.

⁵³ *C.S.* September 13, 1868.

in."⁵⁴ This establishment ran advertisements in the *Sentinel* regularly thereafter and these never failed to mention the reading room until May of 1866, when that part of the ad was deleted.

Frequent mention has already been made of the *Cariboo Sentinel*. It was, in its way, an educational influence in the community. It was started by George Wallace, who arrived in Barkerville in May of 1865. He had had some newspaper experience in Victoria prior to that. The paper was first published on June 6 of that year, at first a weekly and then bi-weekly, sometimes suspending operations for a few weeks during the winter. Within a year, Wallace sold the paper to Allan Lambert, who had also come from Victoria where he had worked on the *Colonist*. After a short period Lambert sold out to Robert Holloway, who carried on for the balance of the life of the paper — until the fall of 1875. The *Sentinel* gave strong support to all educational and cultural activities in the community and also carried from time to time a considerable amount of locally produced poetry (especially that of John Anderson) in its columns.

Two protestant denominations in the area were active in educational activities. The most prominent in this respect was the Anglican church, especially during the tenure of Reverend James Reynard from 1865 to his departure in August of 1871. When he first arrived, Mr. Reynard and his congregation acquired an old building and converted it into a church, only to have it destroyed in the great fire of 1868. They then began to raise funds in order to have a new church built. The fruit of his effort was a new St. Saviour's Church, which was opened on September 18, 1870, and became perhaps the best known building in Barkerville. Mr. Reynard's church had an active educational program long before that building was available, however. He organized a Church Institute along the lines of those existing in Great Britain.⁵⁵ There were other church institutes in British Columbia in the early years of the colony, but as far as can be determined, none was more active than Barkerville's. The *Cariboo Sentinel* carried the following news item in mid-December of 1868, three months following the fire:

Cariboo Church Institute — On Monday evening next, December 21, the elementary and other classes, as under, will assemble. The Bible classes on Wednesday and Friday evening are open to the public. On alternate Thursday evenings there will be an entertainment of singing and reading, or lec-

⁵⁴ C.S. June 24, 1865.

⁵⁵ See Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1962, pp. 153-54 and 200-01 on church adult schools and pp. 112-134 on mechanics' institutes.

tures on popular science, or history, or music. The fee for the course of elementary classes will be ten dollars. The proceeds will be devoted to church purposes.⁵⁶

The *Sentinel* carried notices of public meetings which occurred in the course of the Church Institute's activities. The first of these was a lecture by Mr. Reynard on "John Bunyan and Pilgrim's Progress," which was given to a "large and attentive audience" in the following month.⁵⁷ Reports followed of a band concert, two evenings of song and readings, and two lecture-concerts on "English Ballads," Mr. Reynard both lecturing and singing.⁵⁸ In a financial statement published in the *Sentinel* as part of his campaign to raise funds for the new building, Mr. Reynard showed an income item of \$235.25 as "Net proceeds of lectures, etc."⁵⁹ The most outstanding occasion perhaps was a concert on September 20, 1869, to raise funds for the church institute at which the Welsh Glee Club performed as well as church members, which was attended by Governor Seymour.⁶⁰

In the following year the Church Institute was, if anything, even more active. In February and March of 1870, advertisements ran in the *Sentinel* which once again set out the schedule for the week and which put more stress on the availability of a reading room and study materials than had previously been the case. An indication of the popularity of the Church Institute's events is provided by the fact that although the new church building became available for use in the early fall of 1870, many of the meetings, both before *and* after that time, were held in the Theatre Royal building rather than in the church. Public events that season included a music concert given by Mr. Reynard, two performances of general musical entertainment and a band concert.⁶¹ This last meeting, which was reported as being "very well attended," included as well a "magic lantern show," a recent innovation in the community.⁶² Nothing else is known of the work of the Church Institute, but even these activities represent an impressive achievement on the part of Mr. Reynard and his church.

⁵⁶ *C.S.* December 19, 1868. See also F. A. Peake, *The Anglican Church in British Columbia*, Vancouver, Mitchell Press Limited, 1959, pp. 43-45, where the author quotes a letter from Mr. Reynard written at the time indicating his plans to organize an institute and the proposed schedule of activities.

⁵⁷ *C.S.* January 16, 1869.

⁵⁸ *C.S.* February 6, March 13, April 10 and 24, 1869.

⁵⁹ *C.S.* June 23, 1869.

⁶⁰ *C.S.* September 22, 1869.

⁶¹ See *C.S.* April 30 and December 17, 1870 and March 4, 11 and April 22, 1871.

⁶² *C.S.* April 29, 1871

There is some indication that the Wesleyan Methodist Church was also active in educational affairs. It has already been mentioned that the minister, Reverend Thomas Derrick, gave a lecture for the benefit of the Literary Institute in August of 1869. Earlier that year, he had given two public lectures in his own church. In early January he spoke on "Enthusiasm," admission fee, one dollar. The proceeds were to be used to help retire the church debt. A long report on the lecture appeared in the *Sentinel* and described the church as being "well filled."⁶³ The following month he lectured on "Stumbling Blocks and How to Remove Them" and once again the newspaper carried a long summary.⁶⁴ At various times during this period there were references to Mr. Derrick's lecturing at the nearby community of Van Winkle.

The most active cultural organization in Barkerville was certainly the Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association, the members of which were often referred to simply as "the Amateurs." A number of prominent local citizens were active in the group, including Bowron, J. S. Thompson and the poet, John Anderson, who also wrote plays and poetry for the group and usually appeared in a singing part. Over the years the group staged a large number of performances, often as frequently as one a month. The evidence seems to indicate that their first performance was given in June of 1865. An advertisement in the *Sentinel* of June 24 for the Parlor Saloon stated that "A Theatrical Entertainment will be given once a week by the Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association." The next edition carried an enthusiastic review of the performance and expressed the hope that more would be forthcoming.⁶⁵ It is not clear whether the group performed regularly thereafter, as suggested in the ad.

The Society felt that it needed a more adequate and perhaps more appropriate hall for its presentations and during 1866 and 1867 a number of interested people began to raise funds for the building of a theatre.⁶⁶ The campaign was successful and culminated in the construction of the Theatre Royal, which was officially opened with a performance on May 11, 1868. This building was an important asset to the community and was used for a wide variety of educational, cultural and social events. Ludditt, in his book *Barkerville Days*, relates that when the building, as rebuilt after the fire, was eventually torn down a few years ago, it was

⁶³ C.S. January 9, 1869.

⁶⁴ C.S. February 13, 1869.

⁶⁵ C.S. July 1, 1865.

⁶⁶ F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 82.

revealed that five different floors had been laid on top of the original one.⁶⁷

The opening night was a gala occasion. The *Sentinel* carried advance advertising of the event and through the news columns repeatedly reminded its readers to attend.⁶⁸ The account of the evening included a highly enthusiastic review of the Amateurs' performance and indicated that 250 people had attended the performance, with others having been turned away.⁶⁹ Four further performances of different works were presented in the following two months, each followed by long and laudatory reviews in the *Sentinel*.⁷⁰ Other touring theatre and music groups appeared in the theatre from time to time.

In September, the building was destroyed in the fire. The circumstances surrounding the rebuilding of the theatre are not known, but the "grand re-opening performance" was held on January 16, 1869, and presented to a "crowded house."⁷¹ There were frequent performances through the 1869 and 1870 seasons, with special occasions arranged over the Christmas and New Year holidays. It may well be that the rebuilding of the theatre and its upkeep were proving to be a serious burden on the community. In September of 1870 there was mention in the paper that the theatre was in debt and the Amateurs were selling "shares" in the building in an attempt to raise money.⁷² In the meantime, performances continued over the next few years always followed by a long and appreciative account in the *Sentinel*. On a number of occasions, the performances were advertised as being a benefit for some individual in the community, usually a woman who had lost her husband.

The fact that the Amateurs continued to function successfully into the 1870's, when the community generally was on the decline, is a tribute to the energy and, possibly, talent of the performers and an indication of the strong support they had earned in the community. The group offered several performances in the spring and summer of 1872, most to good houses but at least one, "somewhat thinly attended."⁷³ In November of that year, three key members left the community.⁷⁴ Only one performance

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁶⁸ *C.S.* May 5 and 12, 1868.

⁶⁹ *C.S.* May 14, 1868.

⁷⁰ *C.S.* May 28, June 6, 25 and July 16, 1868.

⁷¹ *C.S.* January 23, 1869.

⁷² *C.S.* September 24, 1870.

⁷³ *C.S.* September 28, 1872.

⁷⁴ *C.S.* November 16, 1872.

was offered the following year, a benefit in early March.⁷⁵ The next notice was for a presentation held a year and a half later, in October of 1875. In a somewhat wistful notice, the newspaper commented that the excitement surrounding the occasion was like "days gone by."⁷⁶ There was a long review of the event in the paper and some indication that there would be a further performance in November, but with that same issue the *Sentinel* ceased publication and it is not known whether any further productions were actually offered.⁷⁷

There was also considerable musical activity in Barkerville in these years. Reference has already been made to the amateur activities in the churches and in association with the Dramatic Society, and as well to the fact that touring professional groups often appeared. There was also musical activity associated with several of the saloons in the area and the *Sentinel* would occasionally refer to a particular performance, or even, on occasion, to the fact that a particular musician in one of the establishments had received a new piece of music which he or she would perform. Special mention was made of one couple who arrived in 1867 and set up "The Concert Hall, Richfield," where the wife, Mrs. Lange, who was described as being an accomplished artist, played sophisticated music on the piano while the customers consumed appropriate alcoholic beverages — presumably Mr. Lange's department.⁷⁸

A number of Welsh citizens in the area had an active glee club whose activities were centred on the Cambrian Hall. But as has been pointed out, they played a part in the musical activities of the broader community as well. The group occasionally gave a public concert on their own.⁷⁹ Among these various groups, the Dramatic Society, the churches, and the glee club, there were quite a number of amateur vocalists and on at least one occasion there was a concert in the Theatre Royal by "the amateur vocalists" and the *Sentinel* encouraged everyone interested to attend in order to encourage these persons in their development as musicians.⁸⁰ The only evidence of instruction in instrumental music is the reference by Elliott in his book to Mr. J. B. Melanion. He was said to be "an excellent violinist who had played with the Paris opera. A carpenter by trade, he taught music to some of the Barkerville boys."⁸¹

⁷⁵ *C.S.* March 8, 1873.

⁷⁶ *C.S.* October 16, 1875.

⁷⁷ *C.S.* October 30, 1875.

⁷⁸ *C.S.* June 27 and July 22, 1867.

⁷⁹ See *C.S.* May 22, 1869, a fund-raising concert for the Hall itself.

⁸⁰ *C.S.* May 22, 1869.

⁸¹ G. R. Elliott, *op. cit.* p. 29.

There were several organizations in the community which offered educational activities for their members. The Welsh group, centred on the Cambrian Hall, has already been mentioned. Their building was described as being devoted to "literary, moral and religious meetings."⁸² There were Masonic organizations in the city, among both the white population and the Chinese. In the summer of 1867 it was announced that a local Caledonian Society was being organized and in September the *Sentinel* reported that "in order to increase the information of its members," a brief lecture was to be given at each meeting of the group prior to the handling of the regular business.⁸³

Apart from the church institute, there were two examples in Barkerville at this time of what we would today refer to as "evening classes for adults." The first was connected with the name of "Mons. B. Deffis." The first reference to him appears in an item in the *Sentinel* on October 7, 1867, where it was stated that he was staying in Barkerville through the winter and would give "lessons in French, Spanish [and] English grammar [*sic*]." The writer commented that, "this is a good opportunity afforded miners to employ profitably the long winter months."⁸⁴ During the following May, notices were run three times of new classes beginning at that time.⁸⁵ That fall, similar notices were carried, arithmetic having been added to the list of subjects and \$12.00 per month being stated as the fee.⁸⁶ The following fall, a news item was carried in four successive issues (beginning October 29, 1869) once again announcing the classes, this time including English composition and "private lessons in the dead languages etc. if desired." There is no indication of what enrolments there were in these courses.

The other occasion on which evening classes were offered came considerably later. In early October 1871, the *Sentinel* carried an advertisement for a Night School which was to be supervised by Mr. John Mundell (the teacher in the local public school, which had been opened the previous year). There were to be five classes weekly, in subjects which were unspecified but were presumably the regular school subjects. The fee was announced as \$5.00 per month.⁸⁷ A news item a week later indicates that the school house, which had been announced as the location for the classes, had proven to be inconvenient and that the program was to be

⁸² *C.S.* January 15, 1867.

⁸³ *C.S.* September 12, 1867.

⁸⁴ *C.S.* October 7, 1867.

⁸⁵ *C.S.* May 5, 8, 11, 1868.

⁸⁶ *C.S.* October 16, 1868. Further notices December 13 and January 2 (1869).

⁸⁷ *C.S.* October 7, 1871.

moved to the Cambrian Hall instead.⁸⁸ There is no indication as to whether these classes actually materialized, but it is known that Mr. Mundell left the community in March of the following year.⁸⁹

One other educational organization should be mentioned. In late August 1869, a notice appeared in the paper of a meeting of "the Barkerville Pickwick Club." It is referred to as a philosophical discussion group and the impression is conveyed that it was not a new organization in the community. The topic for the next meeting was described as being "a departure from the ordinary class of topics selected by the club for their literary and discursive exercises" and because the topic did not involve "profound or abstract doctrines," members of the public were invited to attend.⁹⁰ On three more occasions over the following six weeks reference was made in the *Sentinel* to the activities of the club and then it too dropped out of sight, never to reappear.⁹¹

During this decade there was at times a surprising amount and variety of educational activity for adults in the Barkerville area.⁹² It was an extremely difficult community in which to establish and maintain such work because of the percentage of the population that was transient, and also the considerable portion of even the "permanent" population which left the area during the winter. As we have seen, some provision for educational activities on the creek was made as early as 1863 and by 1868 and 1869, a wide range of activities were under way. Leadership was given to these enterprises by a relatively small number of devoted and able men and women. And it seems to have been the case that there was at least a small corps of people in the community, apparently drawn from several of the ethnic groups, who had some education and were persuaded of the importance of educational and cultural activities to their own lives and that of a community as a whole.

It should not be forgotten that the Barkerville of those days was no ordinary town. It had all the characteristics of the frontier community and was swept from time to time with rumours — some well based and some not — of exciting new ore discoveries in the area. While we may observe that there was considerable educational and cultural activity in Barkerville by 1869, it should also be remembered that by the middle of

⁸⁸ *C.S.* October 14, 1871.

⁸⁹ F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 50.

⁹⁰ *C.S.* August 21, 1869.

⁹¹ *C.S.* September 11, 15 and October 9, 1869.

⁹² There were relatively few children in the community, especially during the winter months.

that year there were eighteen saloons in that community and nearby Richfield combined. The local newspaper reveals a constant procession of businesses being sold and going bankrupt, partnerships being dissolved, and property being auctioned. It was in many respects a rapidly changing and unstable community. And yet much was attempted — and achieved — in the direction of social and individual betterment.

But the Barkerville of those boom days was short-lived. In many respects, the community began to go downhill by the latter part of 1869. The decline became a skid by the early 1870's and by 1873 many of the longest-established businesses had been sold at auction or simply closed.⁹³ The *Cariboo Sentinel* ceased publication in the fall of 1875 and by the early 1880's, the total population on the creek had fallen to two or three hundred.⁹⁴ The end of an era had come for Barkerville and with it the end of a stimulating story of people attempting to build a better life for themselves and their community in the rough and ready surroundings of a frontier mining town.

⁹³ B. Ramsay, *op. cit.* p. 45.

⁹⁴ F. W. Ludditt, *op. cit.* p. 103.