



The cast of Theatre Royal leads the way down main street Barkerville.

BARKERVILLE

Gold-rush town blooms again

At the end of the long, winding road, 104 km east of Quesnel, sits an oasis amidst a forest wilderness: Barkerville.

Every year, for the past 20 years, this little town, surrounded by dark forest and deep river canyons, has come alive in a burst of old-fashioned spirit and song. Last year, 178,000 people from all over the world, travelled the road following Cottonwood River, Lightning Creek and Devil's Canyon to visit B.C.'s restored gold rush town.

The personalities of the town, which is "re-born" every July and August for the Barkerville season, rival the liveliness of their summer residence.

Inside Wake-Up Jake's cafe, Fred Bass, piano player for the local Theatre Royal, talks about his 66 years in show business.

"I've just celebrated my 82nd birthday and I'm still writing words and music and playing piano for shows."

"I've played with other revues like the Gaslight

Follies at the Palace Grand Theatre in Dawson City. This year's show at the Theatre Royal here is called Miner's Delight and it's a vaudeville-style show with lots of comedy and dancing. We believe in making people laugh."

Inside the saloon, a pot-boiler stove in the middle of the room keeps the place warm while waitresses in checkered, gingham dresses and white dust caps bustle about serving steaming plates of stew and bowls of homemade soup.

It's raining outside and the fog is spreading across the bleak sky.

But the weather doesn't mar the enthusiasm of a group of boys who've just

discovered an old, wooden cabin outside the saloon.

Along the street, numerous foreign accents are heard from Germany, Scotland, England and the U.S.

Judy Mooring, clerk at the Hudson's Bay Store, talks about the wares she sells inside the store which is an exact replica of the original one built in the 1860s.

"We sell candy pebbles, derby hats, Prince Albert top hats and freshly ground coffee from a grinder made in the 1890s. It takes 10 minutes to grind a pound but the grinder works fine."

The red grinder, a four-foot-high cumbersome apparatus, dominates the room with the 20-foot high

ceiling and wooden floors.

The rain has stopped now and "Gentleman John" Pearson has stopped to talk with some hurdy gurdy or dance hall girls outside the store.

Pearson, a 21-year-old actor from Vancouver, is another member of the Theatre Royal.

"The opportunity to do a show like this is really fun and it's great dressing up in these old costumes."

John is smartly attired in grey flannel slacks and frock-coat, spats and a broad-brimmed hat.

Hurdy gurdy girl, Karen Kerry, 18, also performs with John in the Miner's Delight Revue.

"I love the glamor of

working on stage and wearing these clothes."

Karen's outfit is designed to turn heads. Her hat is bright pink topped with a sweeping feather and her dress, of the same color, is unabashedly revealing.

Inside the Barkerville Hotel's root beer saloon, saloon keeper Murray Brown, reminisces about his fourth summer working at Barkerville.

"You meet people from all over the world here; China, Europe, South America. It's the best education a person could have."

Murray's beard is thick and full enough to rival Santa Claus' and his red

checked vest and watch chain covers an ample girth. He sits in one of the saloon's captain's chairs.

"These chairs used to be a nuisance to the gun slingers because with the arms on the sides they couldn't get their guns out of their holsters fast enough."

Outside the saloon, a bell suddenly rings through the town.

"That's to announce the start of the show at the Theatre Royal," says the saloon keeper.

In the street, children and adults run past the window of the saloon to be first in line for the show.

The Barkerville season runs from now until Labor Day. There's gold panning to do, an Anglican Church built in 1865 to see, a bakery filled with an irresistible aroma of sourdough bread and above all the regulars of the town. They will be sure to remind the visitor of a romantic time when men were dashing and women were few but as colorful as a bright, pink feather.

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Photos by Tim Swanky



Actor Richard Lucas assists actress Mary Bracht off Barnard's Express wagon.



Saloon keeper, Murray Brown, stands at the doorway of the saloon.



Theatre Royal dancer, Karen Kelm, poses in her Miner's Delight costume.



Susanna MacLellan and Ernie Prentice of Theatre Royal promenade.