

History

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Polis’hing’ up his fishing technique

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Cars, golf and hunting are his current passions but there was a time when Prince George resident Greg Polis lived and breathed hockey.

He was a first-round NHL draft pick, seventh overall in 1970, which led to a 10-year professional hockey career and 174 career goals.

He was raised in Dapp, Alta., a town with no more than 80 people in it, and soon after he became an NHL player, he moved to Prince George.

“I broke into the NHL in 1970 with Pittsburgh, was Rookie of the Year, and basically made the all-star team during my first year in the NHL and in total for three years in a row,” he recalled.

“In ’73 I won most valuable player in the all-star game and I won a new Dodge Charger.”

In 1973, while heading to New York for the next day’s all-star game, Polis got word that his wife, Llewelyn, had gone into premature labour. The plane returned to the Pittsburgh airport so he could be there for the birth of his son, Jason.

“My son was born that night and at 6 o’clock the next morning, on very little sleep, I got on the plane heading for New York where I got a couple goals and assists and ended up winning MVP,” said Polis.

Polis spent three and a half years with Pittsburgh, moved to St. Louis for three short months, and then was traded to the New York Rangers, where he spent four years, before finishing his career with the Washington Capitals.

“I always say I had 10 years in the NHL, seven were good and three were poor ones because of knee injuries,” said Polis, who had six operations in his last three years in the NHL on ligaments, tendons, and carti-



CITIZEN PHOTO BY BRENT BRAATEN

Greg Polis holds his 1973 MVP trophy from the all star game and a ticket from the final game in the Igloo in Pittsburgh.

lage, in his right knee.

After his career, Polis returned to Prince George full-time.

“I always tell people I stopped for a cup of coffee and decided to stay,” said Polis, who was on his way to Quesnel to make an appearance at a hockey school when he fell in love with Prince George.

That Day in September, 1868

Danette BOUCHER

One hundred and 45 years ago this week, Barkerville was experiencing a very hot and dry September. Miners were busy pulling the last of the gravel and ore out of claims along Williams Creek, for in a few short weeks the ground would freeze, and picks and shovels would be packed away until next spring.

Seasonal residents were winding down their professional and social activities and getting ready to head south for the autumn and winter. Year-round residents were chopping wood, filling their pantries, and mentally preparing for the long cold months to come.

I’ve always imagined the afternoon of Sept. 16, 1868 was quiet and a little bit lazy – the kind of day where you know you should be getting more work done, but the sun is shining and bones are weary from a long mining season. The last thing on anyone’s mind would be the thought that life is about to change forever.

The story of the Great Fire of 1868 that has been passed down through many generations in Barkerville tells of a man (he is usually said to have been a miner) in the back of Adler and Berry’s New Fashion Saloon. The stove was lit on this dry day to accommodate the flat iron of a Hurdy Gurdy dancing girl, who was pressing her evening attire.

There was an incident (it is almost always described as an unwanted advance, a stolen kiss, perhaps an assault) and somehow, the

History Town by vanstralen



miner and the girl ended up engaged in a kerfuffle. The result was a knocked-over stove-pipe. Within minutes the town was ablaze.

The saloon fire quickly spread across the street to the Bank of British North America. The blaze then ripped through the rest of Barkerville so fast there was barely time to think. Many residents tried to save their belongings by carrying arm loads of goods to the creek side and even dropping some of them in the water. The town was all but destroyed in less than two hours. At noon Barkerville was business as usual, by the evening it was gone.

My mind’s eye has traveled to that day many times over the years. What was it like

to be there? What runs through your head as you watch building after building engulfed in flames and you know there is nothing anyone can do to stop it? Was there time to feel fear, or did gut survival instinct kick in and cause everyone to just instinctively save themselves and their stuff? Was there time to contemplate the rapidly approaching winter, and lament at the timing of it all? Was there hollering, or was there only silent shock inside the roar of the flames?

The Barkerville character I have played for 20 years, Miss Florence Wilson, saw her saloon burn to the ground that day. She is listed as having lost \$500 worth of property and goods – an enormous sum for an unmarried 1860s businesswoman.

Like so many others, Miss Wilson began rebuilding her business and her life almost before the ground stopped smouldering. Whenever I have imagined myself into that day, it has always been through her eyes. I even wrote a scene about it in my Theatre Royal show, The Bride of Barkerville.

Every season, near the anniversary of the Great Fire of 1868, I make a pilgrimage up the main street of Barkerville to a spot between the Wake Up Jake restaurant and Moses’s Fashionable Haircutting Salon; to the place where the fire likely started.

The veil of time separates me from those Barkervillians who were actually there in 1868, but in September I feel the whispers of these friends I’ve never met as they live through a day we will probably still be talking about 145 years from now.

Today in history

The Canadian Press

- In 52, Marcus Trajan, emperor of Rome from 98-117, was born. He was the third Roman emperor to rule, after Nero (54-68) and Domitian (81-96), who persecuted the early Church. During Trajan’s reign, the apostolic Father Ignatius of Antioch was martyred, in 117.
- In 1759, the French formally surrendered Quebec to the British following the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.
- In 1762, the French garrison at St. John’s, Nfld., surrendered to the British in the last battle between the French and English in Canada.
- In 1810, Chile declared independence from Spain.
- In 1839, Nova Scotia politician Joseph Howe published his famous letters to Lord John Russell on the subject of responsible government.
- In 1841, an act was passed to establish and maintain public schools in Canada.
- In 1851, the New York Times was published for the first time.
- In 1875, the Supreme Court of Canada was organized under Chief Justice William Buell Richards. The court held its first session the following year, but did not become Canada’s final court of appeal until 1949.
- In 1885, compulsory vaccination caused riots in Montreal.
- In 1888, the writer-conservationist known as Grey Owl was born Archibald Stansfield Belaney in Hastings, England. After an unhappy childhood during which he dreamed of becoming a North American native, Belaney moved to Canada at 17 and claimed to be the son of a Scot and an Apache. Using the name Grey Owl, Belaney became a popular author and lecturer on the need for wilderness conservation. His true identity was not discovered until after his death in Prince Albert, Sask., on April 13, 1938. Grey Owl was the subject of a 1999 movie starring Pierce Brosnan.
- In 1893, Stanley Thompson, considered Canada’s finest golf course architect, was born. His world-renowned designs include Jasper Park Lodge and Banff Springs in Alberta, Capilano in Vancouver, and St. George’s in Toronto. He died in 1953.
- In 1895, John Diefenbaker, Tory prime minister from 1957-63, was born in Neustadt, Ont. He died Aug. 16, 1979.
- In 1899, built at a cost of \$2.5 million, the original Toronto City Hall was formally opened by Mayor John Shaw.
- In 1928, the Graf Zeppelin, considered the finest airship ever built, had its first flight. It flew more miles than any airship had done to that time or would in the future.
- In 1931, the Japanese army invaded Manchuria in northern China.



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