

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GALA event to stage new evidence in 140-year-old Barkerville mystery June 18th

BARKERVILLE, BC, JUNE 15, 2011 – Barkerville pioneer Florence Wilson was a purveyor of firsts. A single woman from England who booked passage on the *Tynemouth* - the first of the so-called “bride-ships” - in 1862, Miss Wilson chose entrepreneurship over spontaneous marriage when she first arrived in Victoria. By 1865 she had earned enough money to secure a ticket from Yale to Barkerville on the inaugural journey of the Barnard’s Express stagecoach line, which carried her along the freshly completed Cariboo Waggon Road into the goldfields of British Columbia’s central interior regions.

Miss Wilson arrived on Williams Creek later that summer, and immediately set to work bringing her love of cultural activities to the lives of Barkerville’s mining community. As founder of the Cariboo Literary Institute, Miss Wilson was arguably the first librarian in British Columbia. She was also the owner of two genteel saloons in Barkerville, a major shareholder in two mining claims, and a founding member of the Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association, the *original* producers of Barkerville’s famed Theatre Royal.

This last distinction is being celebrated in a remarkable way on Saturday, June 18th, when Barkerville Historic Town hosts its annual Theatre Royal Gala presenting the premiere performances of Newman & Wright Theatre Company’s 2011 Theatre Royal summer season. The event kicks off at 11:00 am with the Barkerville Heritage Trust’s Annual General Meeting, followed at 1:00 pm by the first of Newman & Wright’s 2011 Theatre Royal offerings: *The Bride of Barkerville*.

Written and performed by Danette Boucher, *The Bride of Barkerville* is a tour-de-force, one-woman history of the aforementioned Miss Wilson: from her decision to join the London Female Middle Class Emigration Society in 1862 to an obscure report of her last known activities in an 1875 edition of the Cariboo Sentinel newspaper. At times both hysterical and dramatic, the 35-minute *Bride* is a thundering ride through the known facts of Florence Wilson’s rather colourful life and times. Although Ms. Boucher is no stranger to the character of her historical counterpart (she played Florence Wilson on the streets of Barkerville for eleven years and first staged *The Bride of Barkerville* for Newman & Wright’s Theatre Royal in 2010) the writer-actor admits that *this* year’s production contains new information about her protagonist that even she hadn’t know before – information discovered this past winter by her producer, Richard Wright, that is sure to change the way Miss Wilson’s story is told from this point forward.

“We’ve never really known what happened to Florence,” said Boucher. “In fact, the mystery surrounding her post-Barkerville life is something I flirted with last year in our first production of *The Bride of Barkerville*.”

“This year, Richard brings me the journal of a Barkerville resident seemingly unrelated to the Florence Wilson story, and one passing line in that diary blows the lid off everything.”

As to what that journal entry contained, both Boucher and Wright have been sworn to secrecy... until their June 18th premiere. Judging from the rest of what Saturday’s gala

has on offer the wait should be well worth it. The mysteries continue after *The Bride of Barkerville* at 1:00 pm, when Newman & Wright presents the premiere of their 2011 full-length musical drama, *Bernadette's Gold Rush Escape*.

Written by and starring Theatre Royal musical director Amy Newman, and co-starring Brendan Bailey, Alison Jenkins, Robert Ahad, Maya Meron, and Danette Boucher, *Bernadette's Gold Rush Escape* transports its audience to Antler Creek near Barkerville in the early days of the gold rush. It is the fictional tale of Bernadette, a woman who comes to Cariboo with a mysterious past. At Antler Creek she meets Margaret Cusheon and Johanna Maguire, characters based on real people from Barkerville's history, who are fighting for their own stake. When Bernadette's admirer, Joseph Carleton, stumbles on a clue to the truth behind Bernadette's carefully hidden history, things become complicated. Will Bernadette's secret come out at last?

Saturday's Theatre Royal Gala continues at 8:00 pm with the newest installment of Newman & Wright's ever-popular musical variety show, *Gold Rush Revue VI*. This exciting, humorous and edifying variety hour, set in the 1860s, is presented as many things were at the Theatre Royal in Barkerville's heyday - where talented townfolk performed a wide selection of material, from comedy to operetta, poetry to traditional folk songs. This is the Theatre Royal's most popular show, and is sure to please audiences of all ages.

Barkerville Historic Town's annual Theatre Royal Gala will conclude with entertainment, refreshments, and dancing once the *Gold Rush Revue* lets out at 9:00 pm. Evening events will last throughout the night, and will take place at Barkerville's Theatre Royal, the House Hotel, the Barkerville Hotel, and the Mason & Daly General Merchants.

For more information about this historic event, contact Barkerville Historic Town at 1-888-994-3332, or visit www.barkerville.ca. For more information about Gala admission and entertainment packages, or to book theatre tickets, please phone the Theatre Royal Box Office at 250-994-3225. Living in the past has never been this much fun!

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ABOUT BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN

BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN is the largest historic site in Western North America (www.barkerville.ca). Barkerville is provincially, nationally and internationally recognized for its historic significance associated with its place in western Canada's gold rush era and the role the gold rush played in BC joining Canada. Barkerville is widely known as a "must see" for travel itineraries in western Canada. The historic town is also a significant contributor to the Cariboo regional economy and is widely regarded as a unique component of the regional identity.

The Barkerville Heritage Trust, as Barkerville's operating and managing partner, works in conjunction with the Province of British Columbia, the owner and statutory guardian of Barkerville's heritage resources, to ensure that Barkerville is efficiently managed, entertaining and educational to visitors, and financially stable as the premier heritage resource and tourism attraction for the Cariboo. The ultimate aim is to maintain and

enhance Barkerville's position as a nationally significant heritage resource and tourism attraction for British Columbia and Canada.

Barkerville is situated 80 km east of Quesnel, British Columbia in the foothills of the Cariboo Mountains, close to Troll Mountain Ski Resort and Bowron Lake Provincial Park. The nearby community of Wells (8 km from Barkerville) is the service and housing centre for the area (www.wellsbc.com) and is itself a dynamic cultural community, home of Island Mountain Arts, the acclaimed Toni Onley Artists' Project, the International Celtic Harp School (www.imarts.com), the dynamic indie music festival ArtsWells (www.artswells.com), and the Sunset Theatre (www.sunset-theatre.com). Wells is also situated close to a wide variety of winter and summer outdoor activities.

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