

News Release

For immediate release

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Theatre Royal drama unearths early photo

Fire Storm, a musical drama based on the Great Fire of 1868 in Barkerville, presented at the Theatre Royal, has turned up a long-lost photo of one of the play's characters.

In this year's drama at Theatre Royal playwright Richard Wright chose Mrs. Catherine Parker as one of the four main characters. "We have used her several times and Amy Newman had her character well developed. In fact she appeared in an earlier brief scene in one of Newman's one-woman shows. One of Parker's appeals was that she showed a strong Irish strength of character. At the time of the fire Parker and her husband Samuel were running a boarding house, had three young children, including two-year-old Sarah and she was eight and half months pregnant. The Parker's, like so many, lost everything in the fire and had to begin again." However, despite much research in Canada and the UK Wright had made no family connection and had no idea what Catherine looked like.

Amy Newman focused on Parker as a good character to play. "As I looked through Richard's database of women of that time, I kept coming back to Mrs. Parker. I seemed to be drawn to her from the very beginning, so I decided to make her my main heroine of the show. It made good sense: she was here for a long time; she had children, a husband; she was a businesswoman, running her own boarding house and saloon; and she was a performer at the Theatre Royal. It was perfect."

Meanwhile in Vancouver Anne Clark and Arthur Ross were house cleaning. Arthur says, a photo "has been kicking around our basement for 5 or 6 years after moving Anne's mom out of her apartment. We did not have any idea who the woman in the picture was and frankly came to the point of lost curiosity, thinking that anyone who would have known who she is was long since gone. So it was rather neglected, to the point that in cleaning up the basement in the spring, I put it outside where it was exposed to the elements. The next stop was the garbage dump. "

Fortunately someone came by for a garage sale and wanted to buy the frame. Clark declined but decided to take it inside, and then noticed faint writing on the back of the photo. "My grandmother Catherine Parker – Jeanne Clark." Jeanne is the mother of Anne. They knew of a Barkerville connection so did some Internet searching and were

soon in touch with Richard Wright and Amy Newman of Barkerville's Theatre Royal, who were presenting part of Catherine's story in this year's play.

The newly found and identified photo now hangs in a prominent position in the Theatre Royal for the rest of the season as Clark and Ross offered to loan the photo. "It really is the circle of history," says Wright. "It shows why we have chosen to represent real people on the Theatre Royal stage, and why it is important to remember these folks. Here is a woman who was a mainstay of the Williams Creek community whose family include a Governor General Award winning playwright, a Brig-General who fought at Vimy Ridge, an NHL hockey player, a Nobel Peace prize winner, several lawyers, a doctor and so on. Catherine Parker left quite a legacy. It really is the circle of history," says Wright.