

# The Man in the Middle

## Barkerville's Thomas Robson Pattullo

Don Bourdon

### Memorial Album: Views in British Columbia

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My research began when I came across a black leather-bound photograph album entitled *Memorial Album: Views in British Columbia* in the BC Archives. The title is in gold leaf lettering, the binding has gold decorative tooling, the pages are gilt-edged and the endpapers are beautifully marbled. Although a handsome volume, it has suffered through age and handling—the cover is scuffed and the pages are brittle and cracked. Yet the faded photographs are striking individually and compelling as a set.

There are twenty-seven albumen print photographs in various sizes and each is mounted on its own page. All the photographs are the work of Frederick Dally (1838–1914), a photographer who had a studio in Victoria between 1866 and 1870 and journeyed to Barkerville during the gold rush for two seasons. The photographs in the book may have been assembled by Dally or more likely by the man featured in many of the photographs, Thomas Robson Pattullo.



Miners from Heron Claim, Heronville and Governor Seymour seated outside building, 1867. Thomas Pattullo seated in the centre. Frederick Dally photograph; BC Archives F-08565.

### Digging Deeper

Photography was young at this time, and done by professionals. Pattullo would have hired Dally to photograph claims and groups of friends in the goldfields. The album would have helped Pattullo and his family far away to remember and to tell the story of the role he played in the gold rush.

The days of the miner with pick, shovel, and pan were coming to an end and instead miners were working in groups on larger claims. By digging deeper, I discovered that Pattullo entered many partnerships and achieved financial success but lived large and made some poor investments. Although he was an investor he fancied himself as a miner, as seen by his appearance in the photographs.

## Who was Thomas Robson Pattullo

For over seventeen years, Pattullo was a larger-than-life figure in the Cariboo. He was one of Barkerville's most identifiable figures through the 1860s and 1870s and frequently mentioned in the press, in public records and private accounts.

Born in Woodstock, Ontario, Pattullo left for California and then up to British Columbia at the height of the Fraser Gold Rush. He was active on Williams Creek in the fall of 1861 when he registered claims and a building lot. Though a resident of Barkerville and nearby Stanley, Pattullo wintered in New Westminster and Victoria where he was a popular member of society. He served on fundraising and management committees and seems to have been involved in harmonizing the efforts of the competing communities of Barkerville and Stanley.

He died suddenly in 1879 at the age of forty-one and his memorial album of Dally photographs serves as a springboard for discovering more about him and the community he called home.

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Read the entire article “Barkerville’s Thomas Robson Pattullo In Life and Death: the Memorial Album as Aide-Mémoire” by Don Bourdon in BC Studies, no. 185, Spring 2015 [here](#).