

Way We Were

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Park City's Porcupines

Mahala Ruddell, Research Coordinator

Barney Riley was appointed to a brand new Park City night watch along with two others in the fall of 1881. The idea of a committee of night watchmen was devised in July of the same year, its purpose to better protect the city against fire. Eight years later, in September 1889, perhaps on the job watching for suspicious activity, Riley discovered a trespasser on his property. In something of an extreme overreaction, the man “put an end to the trespasser’s career by beating it to death,” as the *Park Record* reported. And just who was this nighttime prowler? One unlikely to have started any fires, in hindsight, as it was just a simple porcupine.<sup>1</sup>

Porcupines have never been an uncommon sight in the area, what with Park City’s location in a rural, mountainous landscape. The *Park Record* occasionally reported on encounters with the prickly little beasts. In 1899, the newspaper’s pages contained a story of a dog which came out “second best” after a fight with a porcupine near the Anchor tunnel.<sup>2</sup> In 1921, a hunter reported a peculiar “animal partnership” he’d discovered after tracking a fox to its refuge in a hollow log: a porcupine was serving as mediator between the fox and a raccoon, curled between the two while all three rested in the log.<sup>3</sup>

The happiest of stories, however, came in 1923, when a porcupine took upon itself to visit R.E. Squires at his home. Squires, was a well-known Park City carpenter who had first moved to the area in 1879.<sup>4</sup> Night policemen, the newspaper reported, knocked on Squires’ door one July evening to report the animal’s activities around his carpentry shop, and asked Squires if he wanted the “critter” dead or alive. “Being a lover of animals,” the *Park Record* said, Squires “gave orders not ‘to kill,’” and together, the policemen and Squires captured the porcupine. It was subsequently adopted into the Squires family. The paper further speculated that this could be the same porcupine that had been “petted” and “cared for” by Squires not four years earlier, when it came from the hills seeking shelter in Squires’ basement. That first porcupine had eventually “tired of its new home” and returned to “its native haunts.” Perhaps it had returned “for a friendly ‘visit’ ...because of former good treatment and kindness.”<sup>5</sup>

Maybe Barney Riley should have enticed his intruder to Squires’ house instead of beating it. At least the porcupine had some revenge in the end: “After the battle,” the *Park Record* reported, “Barney felt quite uncomfortable because he was completely decorated with the porcupine quills.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Park Record*, Sept 14, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> *Park Record*, June 10, 1899.

<sup>3</sup> *Park Record*, Nov 18, 1921.

<sup>4</sup> *Park Record*, Mar 27, 1931.

<sup>5</sup> *Park Record*, July 27, 1923.



Image: 2007.11.13B

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Caption: R.E. Squires Carpentry, on Main Street, July 1888. Squires' porcupine visitor was found prowling around his store.