

THE SANTA SATURNINA SYMPOSIUM

December 12, 13, 2008



Saturna Island, in the southern Gulf Islands of British Columbia, derives its name from the small Spanish schooner *Santa Saturnina*, which carried the first European explorers past her shores on June 15, 1791. The Spaniards named the eastern point of the island “Punta Bayo de Santa Saturnina” and the adjacent islands “Patos” and “Sucia”. The names have survived. Over time, “Saturnina” became “Saturna” and is applied to the whole island. The Royal Navy surveyors permanently fixed most of these names one hundred fifty years ago.



Santa Saturnina — Steve Mayo painting



Santa Saturnina and San Carlos – Gordon Miller painting

Many of Saturna Island’s 350-strong community know their island name originates from a Spanish exploration ship. Most do not know what an interesting and controversial little vessel it was and still is.

Historians debate this story. Some say the vessel started life as pre-fabricated pieces in Macao, China and was subsequently shipped to Nootka on the West Coast of Vancouver Island in the spring of 1788. There it was completed and launched as the *Northwest America* to become the first European vessel built on this coast. It sailed the inlets collecting fur seal pelts for the mother ship. That autumn, the small 45’ vessel was sailed to the Sandwich Islands for the winter. Returning in the spring of 1789, it was embroiled in the famous “Nootka Incident”, confiscated by the Spanish and renamed the *Santa Gertrudis*. It was sent to explore the southern coast inlets and later sailed south to the Spanish naval base in San Blas, Mexico.

Two years later the *Santa Saturnina* appears at Nootka and begins explorations in the Gulf of Juan de Fuca and the inner waters. Some historians say *Santa Saturnina* was an enlarged and modified *Santa Gertrudis* (*Northwest America*). Others suggest that they are distinct vessels. They suggest the Spanish brought another vessel in pieces to Nootka and assembled it during the winter of 1790-91. The facts are buried in contemporary journals and letters of the key personalities involved.



18th Century Sketch of 1788 launching of *Northwest America*....and Gordon Miller painting of the same launching at Nootka.

Saturna Islanders and others would like to know:

How did we become named after a little Spanish Schooner?

Was the *Santa Saturnina* really the *Northwest America* and the first European vessel built on this coast?

If not, what was she and what was the vessel really like?

Who were some of the key personalities associated with the vessel?

What happened to her?

therefore, we propose to celebrate our unique history by hosting a community symposium on Saturna Island.

Objectives – to involve islanders in celebrating and better understanding our unique local history.

We have invited selected learned historians, authors, marine artists and nautical history enthusiasts to join local islanders for an illuminating and entertaining weekend of historical exploration and speculation as Saturna Island celebrates its namesake of more than 150 years. An additional bonus will be the creation of historical presentations that can be incorporated into displays and resources in our new Saturna Heritage Centre. (This project is currently underway in the rehabilitated Fog Alarm Building at East Point in cooperation with the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve.



11/20/2008

Confirmed Speakers

Dr. Barry Gough has been called the foremost exponent of Northwest Coast maritime history. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, Fellow of Kings College London and Life Member of the Association of Canadian Historians. His many critically-acclaimed books, include; *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of America, 1810-1914*; *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-90*; *First Across the Continent: Sir Alexander Mackenzie* and *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay*, and *Fortune's a River: The Collision of Empires in Northwest America* (Harbour Publishing, 2007) He has been writing about the history of the Pacific Coast for almost four decades and is known for the authenticity of his work, which has received international recognition.

Robin Inglis is a former Director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum and the North Vancouver Museum and Archives. In 1991 he curated a major bicentennial exhibition at the Maritime Museum on the Malaspina Expedition. Since that time, as President of the Vancouver Spanish Pacific Historical Society, he has written and lectured extensively about the Spanish presence in the Pacific Northwest, British Columbia and Alaska and has been involved in a number of projects to promote a better understanding of Spain's role in our early history. He recently published the *Historical Dictionary of the Exploration and Discovery of the Northwest Coast of America*.

Nick Doe is a retired engineer, local history and Gulf Island geology enthusiast, and editor of, and major contributor to, *SHALE*, the Journal of the Gabriola Museum and Historical Society. He has published several articles on the late-18th century explorations of the coast of BC by the British and Spanish navies based on material gleaned from Spanish, Mexican, Alaskan, British, and Canadian archives. He has completed a definitive analysis, based on contemporary charts and journals, of how Saturna and Gabriola Islands got their names, which is not how most references would have us believe.

Mr. Gordon Miller has had a distinguished career in graphic design for television, commercial and exhibit design, as well as Chief Designer with the Vancouver Museum and the Vancouver Maritime Museum. He turned to freelance illustration, graphic and residential design in 1977. He has completed major contracts for the UBC Museum of Anthropology, Royal British Columbia Museum, and National Film Board, and has produced illustrations for UBC Press, Canadian Geographic, Readers Digest, Historical Atlas of Canada, Parks Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Among his beautiful coastal history works are images of both the *Northwest America* and the *Santa Saturnina*.

Capt. Steve Mayo is a respected Pacific Northwest marine artist who has had a lifetime interest in maritime art and history. One-man shows and paintings featured in the Kirsten's Gallery including their biennial marine show have established him as a premier marine artist including a first place award at the Mystic Seaport International Marine Art Exhibition. A professional commercial captain and sailor as well as a highly trained artist, he brings this practical experience into his portrayals of historic events including his interpretation of the *Santa Saturnina*.

NOTE: The Saturna Heritage Committee will consider additional proposals from qualified participants who would like to present at the symposium. Interested persons, please contact us.

FOR REGISTRATION INFORMATION CONTACT:

Richard Blagborne, Saturna Heritage Committee,
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Tel 250 539 3217 Email: richard@richardblagborne.com

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM (as of Nov 19th)

DECEMBER 12, 2008, Friday evening,

CAPTAIN'S DINNER - slightly formal

Maximum fifty persons

Head table of Guests of Honour, Key speakers, local Heritage Committee and 25-35 local enthusiasts and mood set for the weekend.

DECEMBER 13, Saturday,

SYMPOSIUM - Saturna Community Hall or Saturna Recreation Centre

(Location depends on response) Hall can be set up for 60-90 or Rec Centre 100-120+ attendees

MARINE ART DISPLAY in the lounge. It could include historical interpretive paintings of well known marine artists such as Gordon Miller and Steve Mayo,

9:00AM SYMPOSIUM REGISTRATION

9:30AM WELCOME

Welcomes, Preamble, Introductions

10:00AM OPENING PRESENTATIONS (two speakers and panel questions)

Period History:

Context such as Spanish and English activities, the Fur Trade, aboriginal roles, etc.

The Key Events and Players of the Time:

Stories of the key events and personalities of the moment Captains Meares, Colnett, Martinez, Eliza, the pilots Narvaez, Pantoja etc...entertaining stories from their journals and reports.

12:30 LUNCH - Saturna Lighthouse Pub or Buffet

2:00 PM – 5:30 AFTERNOON SESSIONS (two speakers and panel questions)

Exploration, charts and naming of features:

A more focused presentation on expeditions, ships, boats and their roles at the time.

Santa Saturnina and the Northwest America:

A more focused presentation on the specific known history of these two vessels and on the research techniques used by artists to produce interpretive illustrations.

5:30PM CLOSURE

6:30 PM PILOTS POTLUCK – casual, buffet style

Bar and nautical entertainment

Artists Comments on paintings in the lounge.

Sunday, Dec 14th

Free to explore Saturna Island, and an excursion to East Point and Fog Alarm Building project.

SYMPOSIUM FEES

Registration by email, Fee \$20 payable at the door. Captains Dinner (Friday evening) \$35.00. Sailor's Mess (Saturday evening) \$25. Pre-registration booking by email required. Please contact us ASAP



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