

Who First Navigated Burrard Inlet?

By George Green, *Vancouver Province*, January 9th, 1937.

When was Burrard Inlet really discovered? Many of us would say on [Wednesday] June 13th, 1792, when Captain Vancouver sailed and rowed up almost to Port Moody, but in some quarters there has been considerable doubt on this. Agnes C. Laut maintains that it was at least discovered, if not explored, almost a year before this. In her work entitled "Pioneers of the Pacific Coast", she says:

"It was the spring of 1792 [*sic* 1791]. The Spaniard Elisa of Nootka had for a year kept his pilot, [José María] Narváez, in a crazy little schooner crowded with thirty sailors charting northeast past the harbour of Victoria through Haro Strait. East of a high island where holiday folk now have their summer camps, Pilot Narváez came on the estuary of a great river which he called *Boca de Florida Blanca*. The river swept down behind a deep harbour with forested heights to the river mouth and roadstead, as if nature had interposed to guard the harbour against the deposit of silt borne down by the mighty stream. Where the rock projects like a hand into the turbid waters stands a crowded city built on what is almost an island. The ragged, starveling crew of Pilot Narváez had found what are known as Burrard Inlet, Vancouver City, Point Grey and the Fraser River. The crew were presently all ill with scurvy, possibly because of the unsanitary crowding, and the schooner almost falling to pieces, came crawling back to Nootka." – Agnes C. Laut

It was as a result of the report of Narváez, who had been invalided back to Mexico, the home base of the Spaniards, that the *Sutil* and *Mexicana*, with Galiano and Valdés in command, were dispatched the following year [1792]. On [Friday] June 22nd, about a week after Vancouver's exploration of the Inlet, the three met at Spanish Banks.

To whom, then, must we give the honour of the first sailing the waters of the inlet? At Vancouver's request the Spanish agreed to sail in through the Lions Gate [First Narrows] and explore the North Arm [Indian Arm], which he himself had seen and which he had not thought of sufficient importance to warrant further exploration. The map of Narváez showed only the First Narrows, and indicated no exploratory work eastward beyond that point.

After the meeting of the three at the Spanish Banks on Friday morning [June 22nd] Vancouver sailed onward to his ships at Birch Bay and the Spaniards proceeded to explore the North Arm up the head of the Arm at Indian River. On the following Sunday afternoon about 2 o'clock the three again met off the mouth of the Fraser River, and, writes Vancouver, "we pursued our way up the Gulf together. Señor Galiano, who could speak a little English, informed me they had examined the small branch [Indian Arm] I had passed by in Burrard's Channel, and they favoured me with a copy of their sketch of it."

From this, and the Narváez map, it appears clear that Vancouver was really the first [European] to sail up Burrard Inlet, at least inside the First Narrows, Miss Laut to the contrary notwithstanding. Burrard Inlet, in the understanding of these explorers, extended all the way to Spanish Banks and Point Atkinson.