

## The Flat Top Islands of Silva Bay:

*By Ivan Bulic*

In 1791, Jose Maria Narvaez sailed his schooner *Santa Saturnina* near an archipelago of small islands at the eastern tip of Gabriola. Not realizing the maze of islands sheltered a fine anchorage - today's Silva Bay - the Spanish explorer moved on.

The islands remained uncharted, and unnamed, until 1859 when Capt. George Henry Richards in the steam-powered survey ship HMS *Plumper*, mapped the dozen small islands, islets and reefs, but omitted to name each island. For the next century the islands were still known by a variety of local names.

In 1998, descendants of the Law family of Silva Bay donated a rare hand-made chart to the Gabriola Archives. The chart was drawn in the 1920s by R W Purves, a Ladysmith road builder and keen Royal Vancouver Yacht Club sailor, and shows the *Flat Top Islands and Vicinity*

On Purves' chart the islands and bays bear their early names. Today's Lily Island, is shown as Indian I., apparently to recall a nearby First Nations settlement. Vance I. is marked as Flea I., while Tugboat I., is called Shelter I. Purves shows Sear I. as Passage I. Interestingly, Purves's name for today's Degan Bay is Dingman's Cove.

Further east, Gaviola I. called Hen I. on the Purves chart, while Acorn I. was known as South East I. To the south Bath Islet has apparently retained its original name, but its small neighbour, Saturnina, is called Eagle Island.

It was Henri D Parizeau who, in 1944, changed the names of the Flat Top Islands to those we know today. Parizeau was head of the Hydrographic Survey of Canada's Pacific region. When Canada declared war on Japan on Dec 08, 1941, the navy feared Japanese attacks on the west coast. They needed up-to-date, accurate charts of BC's intricate waterways. It was Parizeau's job to produce those charts; and fast.

Parizeau was indifferent to long-established customs when choosing names for his charts. And he seldom gave reasons for his choices. If local settlers or municipalities were upset by his changes, Parizeau simply invoked the need

for national security and the War Measures Act. It was war-time and charts were considered military secrets.

In naming the Flat Tops, Parizeau did leave a few comments. We know he named Saturnina I. for Narvaez' schooner. He called Gaviola I. after the original Spanish name for Gabriola, while Tugboat I. recalls the time in the 1920s and 30s when tugs and log salvagers tied up at the island. That practice ended after the RVYC bought Tugboat I. in the late 1940s for use as an outstation.

Parizeau presumably named Sear I. after Norman Sear who began the Silva Bay shipyard in the early 1940s and who owned property on Sear Island. Unfortunately Parizeau left little information about Acorn, Lily and Vance Islands. Perhaps the names just struck his fancy. Or he may have been using an alphabetical list.

After the war, boaters once more sailed among the Flat Top Islands, and locals still used the old names. But with the advent of new printed charts bearing Parizeau's names, the original names gradually fell out of use. Today few remember a time when the Flat Top Islands were known by any other names.

