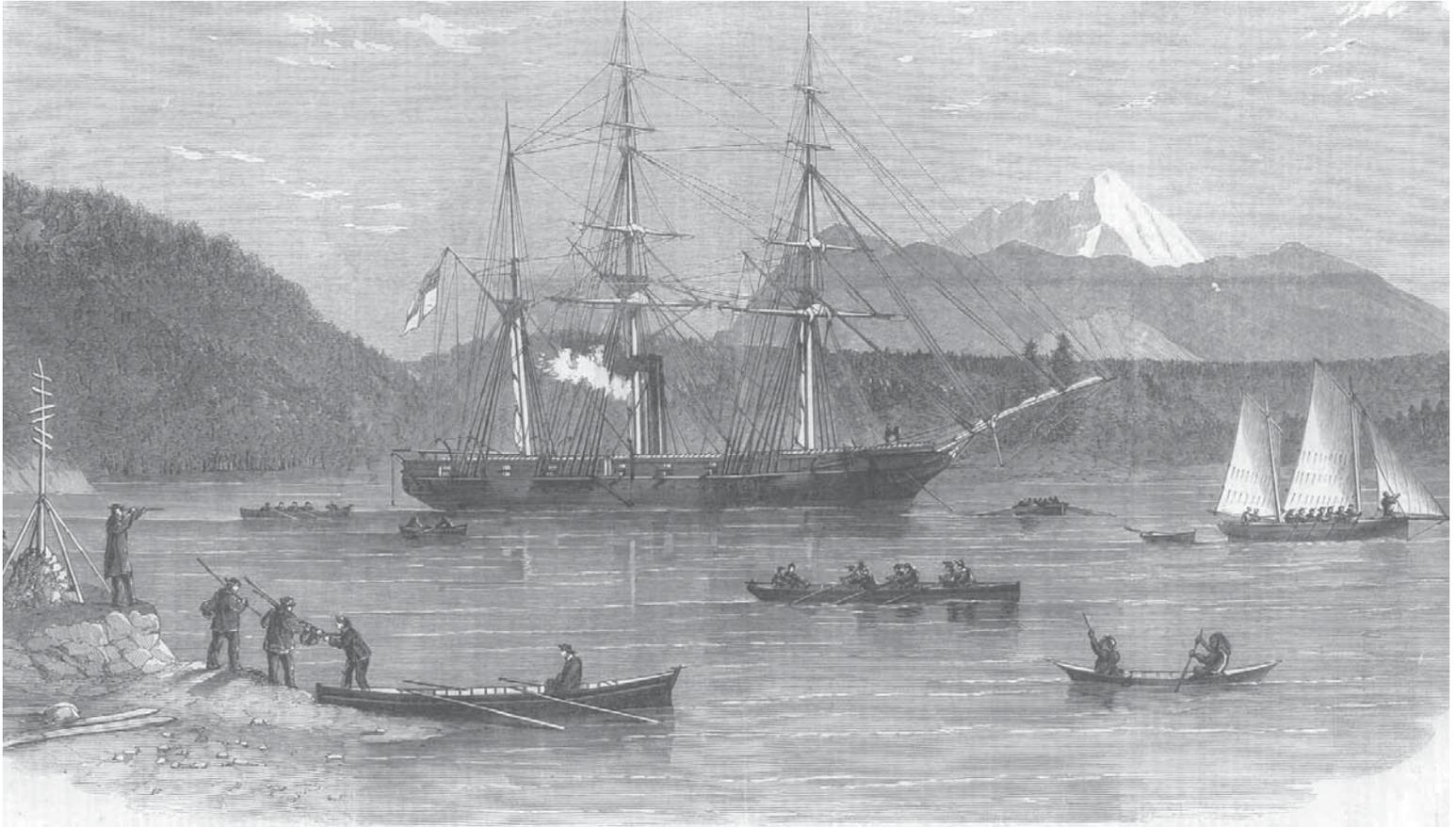


Captain George Henry Richards: 150th anniversary of the Sunshine



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This illustration depicting surveying boats setting out from the *HMS Plumper* in Port Harvey, Johnstone Strait appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on March 1, 1862.

by Gary Little

Captain George Henry Richards of the British Royal Navy played a prominent role in the charting of the south coast of British Columbia (including the Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island) in the early years of European settlement of the area.

As a result of his careful work, coastal navigation became much safer, leading to the rapid expansion of mari-

time commerce in the colonies.

But despite his accomplishments, he is generally unknown to British Columbians who seem to remember only a few prominent politicians of the day.

Richards was born on Jan. 13, 1820 in Antony, Cornwall, England and entered the navy as a young boy in 1832.

He began to develop surveying skills from the very start of his career.

From 1835 to 1840, as midshipman

of the *Sulphur*, he helped survey portions of the west coasts of North and South America, some Pacific islands, New Guinea, and the Moluccas.

In 1842 he was assigned to the navy's survey of the Falkland Islands and then, from 1848 to 1852, to the survey of the New Zealand coasts.

From 1852 to 1854 he participated in the ongoing search for lost Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin and distinguished himself by leading several sledging expe-

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Coast survey

ditions covering over 2,000 miles while mapping unknown coasts in the vicinity of Northumberland Sound.

In 1854 Richards was promoted to the rank of captain and his first commission brought him to the west coast of North America aboard the surveying ship *HMS Plumper*, a 21-gun screw sloop.

He reached the colony of Vancouver Island on Nov. 9, 1857 following an eight-month westward voyage from England via the Straits of Magellan.

Richards had been named the Second British Commissioner for the San Juan Islands Boundary Commission.

His mission was to conduct surveys to help resolve the boundary dispute with the United States relating to the path of the international border through the San Juan and Gulf Islands between the mainland and Juan de Fuca Strait.

The other British commissioner was Capt. James Charles Prevost of the *HMS Satellite*.

Britain eventually lost this dispute — in 1872 arbitrator Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany established the current international boundary through Haro Strait, making the San Juan archipelago American territory.

Richards and his crew — which included officers Lieut. Richard Charles Mayne and Masters Bull, Pender, and Bedwell — were later asked to survey the south coast of the new colony of British Columbia which had been created in 1858 (almost a year to the day after their arrival).

In the summer of 1860, they surveyed the Sunshine Coast, Howe Sound, Jervis Inlet and Sechelt Inlet in considerable detail.

This was the first formal reconnaissance of the area since George Vancouver's famous survey in 1792.

Richards prepared several manuscript charts of the Sunshine Coast and vicinity for the admiralty.

These included three small-scale charts of Howe Sound, Sechelt Inlet, and the entire coast from Gower Point to Jervis Inlet, as well as large-scale charts of Port Graves Bay (now usually called East Bay) at Gambier Island, Shoal Channel and Plumper Cove off Keats Island,



Gary Little collection

This 1860 map of the Sunshine Coast was the result of that summer's survey by Capt. Richards aboard the *HMS Plumper*.

and Pender Harbour.

The Sechelt Inlet chart was the first to depict this important body of water which also includes Salmon Arm and Narrows Arm (both now called inlets).

George Vancouver missed the entrance to Sechelt Inlet while he was exploring Jervis Inlet to its northernmost reach in 1792.

Today, the town of Sechelt is located

at the southern end of Sechelt Inlet on a narrow isthmus separating it from the Strait of Georgia.

Richards was responsible for naming several landmarks on the Sunshine Coast.

Names which appear for the first time on his 1860 manuscript charts

(continued next page)

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Captain George Henry Richards (cont.)



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Richards' hand-drawn 1860 chart of Sechart Inlet was the first to identify the body of water missed by Captain George Vancouver and his crew during their survey in 1792.

(continued from p. 17)

include Pender Harbour (named after Daniel Pender, the master of the *HMS Plumper*), Francis Point, Agamemnon Channel, Pearson Island, Thormanby Island, Welcome Pass, Merry Island, Trail Islands, White Island, Narrows Arm, Salmon Arm, Shoal Channel, Keats Island, Gambier Island, Bowen Island, Pasley Island, Bowyer Island, and Plumper Cove.

His three primary naming themes were the Battle of The Glorious First of June in 1794 (in Howe Sound), horseracing (in Welcome Pass), and the Battle of Cape St. Vincent in 1797 (in Jervis Inlet).

The names Howe Sound and Jervis Inlet themselves came from George Vancouver.

See *The Romance of Historic Names* by S.C. Heal (Cordillera Books, 2006) for a concise summary of the stories behind many of the names used in these areas.

The admiralty's Hydrographic Office published a printed chart based on these surveys and copies sold for one and a half shillings when the chart first appeared in 1863.

The full title is: "North America - West Coast/Strait of Georgia - Sheet I / Between Vancouver I. and British Columbia / Fraser R., to N.E. Pt. of Texada I. / including / Howe Sound & Jervis Inlet."

The first edition includes an inset chart showing a close-up view of Bucca- neer Bay at Thormanby Island.

The chart was revised many times over the next several decades until it was finally retired in the 1950s.

The survey of the Sunshine Coast was the one of the last ones performed from the *HMS Plumper*.

She was decommissioned in late 1860 and relieved by the larger and more powerful *HMS Hecate*.

Richards surveyed British Columbia and Vancouver Island coastlines until December 1862 when he sailed home to England in the *HMS Hecate* having spent five years in the colonies.

His surveying duties were assumed by Daniel Pender who continued charting the area in the *SS Beaver* until 1870.

He then served as hydrographer of the navy from 1864 until his retirement

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from the service in 1874.

For 20 years afterwards he was first the managing director, then the chairman of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company (Telcon) where he was able to advance global telegraphic communication by laying 76,000 miles of submarine cables.

During this period of his life he was knighted (1877) and promoted to the rank of admiral (1884).

Admiral Sir George Henry Richards died in Bath, England on November 14, 1896 at the age of 76.

His Royal Society obituary observed that he was a man of great ability, of sound common sense, and of untiring activity, and his unfailing good humour, general shrewdness, and kindness to younger members of his profession caused him to be universally beloved and respected.

Local fame seems to have eluded Richards.

Although he generously named dozens of landmarks after his officers, his peers, his ship and even a favourite race-horse (Thormanby, winner of the 1860 Epsom Derby), the only coastal feature today in British Columbia that has been named after him (and this did not happen until 1948) is the nondescript Richards Channel off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island.

Richards Street in downtown Vancouver was named after Lt. Gov. Albert Norton Richards. (Another Richards Street in Vancouver was named after Capt. Richards but the street was renamed Balaclava in 1907.)

Perhaps this oversight can be rectified on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his Sunshine Coast survey so that we finally properly recognize Capt. Richards for his important contributions to the early economic development of British Columbia.

Gary Little is a real estate agent with Royal LePage Sunshine Coast in Sechelt and frequently writes and lectures on the history of the area.

He is well known for his interactive real estate map of the Sunshine Coast (map.garylittle.ca).



Gary Little collection

Those living on the Sunshine Coast owe a debt of gratitude to Captain George Henry Richards for producing the first tourist map of our area.

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