

CANADA'S FIRST SURVEYORS

BY ANDREW GIBSON

FORWARD

Civilization advances only by metes and bounds. In the beginning everybody owned everything. The people were consumed by apathy. Then some sailors, wishing to stay home with their wives, stole some anchor chains and began to measure the land. It was slow going, but when it was done they pointed out to the king that he could get a fee for it from the simple. This was called original sin, but the results were spectacular. Fences were built and fought over. The arms trade boomed. The life savings of those who died in battle were overtaken by undertakers.

Yet the surveyors, who had started all this progress, were often reviled, and persecuted, and shot at by arrows and later, bullets. This has continued into modern times. I have scars myself, which I will show upon request to qualified persons of the same sex. No triflers, please.

Indignant at this lack of appreciation for my profession, I am researching the stories of the earliest Canadian surveys, beginning with the British Columbia Gulf Islands.

Gabriola, Galiano and Valdez - there is a legend about these beautiful islands, believed by the credulous, saying that they were named for certain humdrum Spanish sailors. But the truth, I have discovered, is far more romantic. Not only were they all land surveyors, but Gabriola and Galiano were lovers whose story compares with those of Orpheus and Eurydice, Romeo and Juliet, even Bal-lard and Yolanda. Allow me to reconstruct it for you.

The beautiful Gabriola Cabeza de Vaca was the descendress of a noble Castilian family of a lineage so ancient that it included the first Barbary apes to emigrate to Spain. They had helped to blot every page of its glorious history - a De Vaca had been the marriage broker for Ferdinand and Isabella, another had supplied the charts with which Columbus avoided falling off the edge, and yet

another had been the strategist for the Spanish Armada. Of recent years they had spearheaded such good works as the conversion to Christianity of the Indians of Peru, and the De Vaca galleons had been kept busy in the missionary work of relieving the natives of the curse of wealth.

Our story begins in the early 1700's. The incumbent duke, Gabriola's father, had been a rebellious youth, and had even been hailed before the Inquisition because of a pamphlet claiming that, contrary to Holy Writ, the earth revolves around the moon. But he decanted this blasphemy, settled down, and after negotiations lasting for years, won the hand and other appendages of the lovely Dolores de Ginebra y Angostura. After a decent interval she presented him with a daughter, although she didn't say where she got her.

The marriage was not a success. Before long little Gabriola was virtually motherless, for the Duchess, unable to stand the tedium of life on the hacienda, had fled to Madrid. She was frequently seen in her box at the Plaza de Toros, graciously accepting the bull's ears from a certain celebrated matador with whom, it was rumoured, she interfaced on a regular basis. The fact that his nombre de toro, or bull name, was Gabriola, had been noted by idle gossips.

The devoted Duke, not yet dotty but in his dotage, doted on his daughter, carefully shielding her from masculine company other than that of Father Valdez, an ancient priest who was teaching her the rudiments of land surveying, including log rhythms but omitting vulgar fractions.

The Duke had applied for a charter to develop a tract of land at a pueblo called Los Angeles in California. Gabriola, who was fully developed mentally, was to be the

chief land surveyor; she had also blossomed physically, and would soon be a blooming woman, with the strikingly asymmetrical features later immortalized by Picasso. Indeed, her beauty was so ethereal that it seemed impossible that she had any natural functions whatsoever.

Yet deep within her breast, up against the backbone, emotions raged. The cause was Galiano, the handsome young groom who had the task of assisting her with her riding lessons. When he hoisted her into the saddle and lashed her to the pommel by her jodhpurs she noticed that her breathing came in short pants. She wondered why.

Galiano was allowed to be in her presence only because he was so far below her in rank that gender didn't matter. He was not only a commoner, but a foundling. He had been left on the hacienda doorstep without a forwarding address, and the Duke, a compassionate man, had given him to one of his shepherds to rear. An intelligent lad, he quickly learned to rustle sheep from the neighbours, but tiring of being a shepherd's crook, he had applied for the post of groom to her young ladyship. The result, as we have seen, was that she became decomposed when they were together. Unknown to her, so did he, and unknown to both of them when the Duke saw Galiano he would swallow his Havana cigar, smite his brow, and mutter "Mea maxima culpa!"

What mystery was here?

One day the Duke summoned Gabriola. "My child", he said, "I have bad news and good news. The bad news is that those heretic English pirates have captured all but one of my galleons. The good news is that I have the land development charter at Los Angeles. We sail from Cadiz in a week, but don't worry - Father Valdes can come along too, for your surveying lessons."

"But father", she croaked, "can Galiano come too, to hoist me aboard?"

CANADA'S FIRST cont'd

"Yes, yes - he can make himself useful as an officers' mess, and later he can be your chainman."

Soon the S.S. (Sailing Ship) Santa Delila was halfway to the horizon, her hold full of chains and links and such colonizing materials as woollen skirts and trousers to civilize the natives, bells to summon them to work and prayers, and strong boxes to receive their donations of gold and silver to his Spanish Majesty. For a month they carefully tallied the meridians until the vessel was stopped by Panama, was taken apart, carried over to the Pacific, reassembled, re-caulked, re-barnacled, reloaded, re-launched, and the voyage resumed.

During this time did Gabriola's heart beat faster when, looking up from her surveying lessons, she saw Galiano's lithe figure spread-eagled on the upper topgallant skysail, darning a hole, or later, when he was carrying her over the isthmus on his back? And, in spite of the vigilance of the Duke and Father Valdes, did they, on moonlit nights, when the ship, all sails beating in unison, was speeding through the tropical seas, sometimes climb hand in hand to the pinnacle of the binnacle, there to gaze wordlessly into each other's eyes?

You bet they did.

Then - disaster. A typhoon roared out of the west so suddenly that there was no time to even get the laundry in. Faster and faster the vessel spun, hurling off everything not tied down. When the storm passed, the ship was a mess, although the decks had been swept clean. The Duke, Gabriola, Galiano and Father Valdes, the only survivors, unlashd themselves from the masts and considered their situation. Gabriola was the one who rose to the occasion.

"Let us look on the bright side," she laughed, "Every cloud has a silver lining."

"That's true," said the Duke, "It's always darkest before the dawn."

"And every dog has his day," added Galiano.

"But the dog was washed overboard," observed Father Valdes gloomily.



"Yes, with most of the stores," said Gabriola, "but so was the crew, so we'll have enough to eat. We have no sails, But Galiano can reef the masts. I have my theodolite, so I can be navigator. And we have Father Valdes, who can lead us in prayers to Jehovah, and also to Allah, just in case."

Heartened by the brave girl's words, they swung the lead and sailed on.

But soon it became apparent that the Duke's health, undermined by the rations of hard tack, weevils and salt water, was failing. He called Gabriola to his side.

"Daughter," he whispered, "my heart has been stopped for ten minutes. I sense that I am dying. You must lead the expedition now."

Gabriola's face disintegrated. "Father," she sobbed, "under the circumstances, will you let me marry Galiano, even if he is a commoner? We are in love."

"It cannot be," gasped the nobleman. "There was a youthful indiscretion. I am Galiano's father. You can only be a sister to him."

"Does he know this?" she blurted.

"No - you must promise to never tell him. He can be your groom, but never your bridegroom. Now bring me a bucket, while I still have strength in my foot."

Reduced to three, or really 2.5, since Father Valdes was too feeble to do more than fillet the weevils, they continued north. Galiano was mystified by the change in his beloved - she no longer returned his ardent glances, and he waited for her in vain atop the binnacle. Desperate, he confided in Father Valdes.

"My son," said the priest gently, "it is time you knew the truth. You are not a peon, but a peer. The Duke was your father. As Gabriola's brother, you must put thoughts of matrimony out of your mind, or face eternal damnation."

CANADA'S FIRST cont'd

Galiano's jaw dropped. "Does she know?", he asked, after replacing it.

"No, and you must not tell her." Had the young man seen the priest's cunning smile he would have known that skulduggery was afoot.

Every day Gabriola was hoisted to the masthead with her theodolite and an hour glass, and when it was exactly noon she measured the altitude of the sun, a difficult task with the ship rolling 45 degrees. From this she calculated the latitude, and when it was the same as Los Angeles, she ordered a right turn. Soon they entered a strait. But something was wrong - instead of the holly woods and palms only cedars, firs and arbuti lined the shore. She checked her calculations. She had failed to notice the minus sign in the sun's declension! They were 15 degrees north of Los Angeles. But they couldn't turn back their supply of food, and even salt water, was dwindling.

They passed island after island, until they found one that seemed to have everything they needed. Flocks of oysters crawled on the beach, safe from the marauding salmon, and the air was full of the plaintive calls of mating dimwits. They beached the vessel, and soon had built a stockade and a fort, where they could shelter while refitting with sailfish skins, firing and weevilling new hardtack, and carving a new anchor from the abundant cedar.

The young people welcomed the hard work, for it helped each to forget for a while the inexplicable coolness of the other.

But Father Valdes was sinking. When he reached the horizontal he called them to his side.

"Children", he said, "I face eternity, or even longer, in purgatory, so I must tell you the truth. I didn't exactly lie, but to protect my comfortable position as Gabriola's tutor, I didn't tell all. Both of you know that Galiano is the son of the Duke, but now I know that both of you must know what I know which is that each knows what the other knows. But you must be made to know what neither knows, but which I know." He fell back, exhausted.

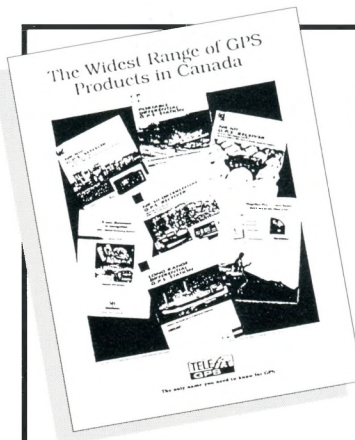
"But my sin", he whispered when he had recovered his breath, "was in not telling you, Gabriola, that you are not the Duke's daughter. Your father is really Gabriola, the matador. The Duchess confessed this to me when I noticed the similarity of the names, although the Duke never suspected. So you are not related. I can marry you - to each other, I mean."

As soon as the simple ceremony was over, the happy couple left on their honeymoon, thoughtfully leaving Father Valdes a bucket within reach.

They never did leave the island. They were too happy, and anyway, the Santa Delila shivered her timbers in a gale and sank. Not being blessed with children, they happily occupied their days in subdividing the island

on which they had landed, and its adjacent islands, which they named Gabriola, Galiano, and Valdes. When Englishmen came, a century later, little remained except some signs in Spanish, which, translated, warned that there would be 7 years of imprisonment as the penalty for removing a monument. Other than that, there was only a cairn marking the spot where, to avoid littering, they had buried themselves.

No threats will make me reveal how their diaries came into my possession. But that is not to say that large denomination currency will not do the trick.



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