

José Narváez, The Forgotten Explorer, Including His Narrative of a Voyage on the Northwest Coast in 1788

Jim McDowell

Spokane: Clark, 1998. 189 pp. Illus., maps. US\$32.50 cloth.

A Voyage to the North Pacific and a Journey through Siberia More than Half a Century Ago

Captain John D'Wolf

Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon reprint, 1998.

132 pp. US\$19.95 cloth, US\$14.95 paper.

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THESE TWO BOOKS will interest scholars and researchers of early Pacific Northwest maritime history. One a translated Spanish log and the other a voyage narrative, they both retain the authorial voice essential to those examining the context of the time.

Jim McDowell's *José Narváez, The Forgotten Explorer*, goes beyond a simple log. This highly readable book is divided into several sections, each appealing to different interests. The first section, which provides considerable detail about the life of Narváez from his birth in Cadiz in 1768 to his death in Guadalajara in 1840, takes the reader through the Russian threat, the consequent clash at Nootka, the waning of the Spanish influence, and Narváez's involvement in activities in revolutionary Mexico. Next, McDowell plays detective, trying to trace the mysterious disappearance of the all important 1790-01 journal, a good read for any archival student. This missing journal chronicles Narváez's exploration and mapping of the southern Strait of Georgia and Burrard Inlet a full eleven months before Captain

Vancouver arrived. The translated log is that of the 1788 voyage to Alaska to challenge Russian hegemony. The full text of the 1788 voyage, in its first translation into English, is, not unexpectedly, filled with geographic and climatic observations that occasionally lapse into extended observations of Native and Russian activities. McDowell embellishes this occasionally dry log with contemporary and historical explanatory notes as well as detailed footnotes.

For those focusing on ships, the appendices provide the reader with a chronology of the Meares ship, *Northwest America*, its rechristening as the *Santa Gertrudis La Magna*, and, finally, its reconstruction as the *Santa Saturnina*. Also provided are the dimensions and manifest of the *Saturnina*. A bibliography of related information is valuable for the researcher or scholar focusing on this period. *José Narváez: The Forgotten Explorer*, adds to the body of work on the Spanish era by such people as Tomas Bartroli, Henry R. Wagner, and J.S. Matthews, not to mention F.W. Howay, Warren Cook, Christon Archer, and others.

Originally printed on a small run of a hundred copies in 1861, John D'Wolf's *Voyage to the North Pacific* was reprinted in 1917 by Princeton University Press as part of a book, *Tales of an Old Sea Port*. In 1968, Ye Galleon Press ran a limited number of an enlarged facsimile reprint. The latest 1998 edition, a reset version of a BC Archives copy, follows the spirit of the original, which offered a retelling of the voyage from memory and was meant to be as much an adventure story as an accurate history. Thus, footnotes (there is only one in the reset version) are negligible, as the narrative itself takes care of any need for them.

Background information on John D'Wolf (1779-1872) takes up three and a half pages, followed by one page of details of his vessel, *Juno*. A hand-drawn map plus a page of explanatory notes takes the reader from Sitka, Russian America, to Ochotsk, where D'Wolf began his overland journey. The remainder of the book is the narrative.

The story begins 14 August 1804 in Bristol, Rhode Island, and ends in the same seaport over three years later, on 1 April 1808. After a quick voyage around Cape Horn and a stop at Newitti, D'Wolf begins his adventure in Norfolk Sound in Russian America, where he sells off part of his cargo to the Russians. After returning to Newitti, D'Wolf goes back to Norfolk

Sound for repairs and the continuation of his adventure. When, in a conversation with Russian American Company German physician, Dr. Grigorii Ivanovich Lansdorff (Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, 1774-1852), D'Wolf indicates that he would rather sell his boat than repair it, Langsdorff offers to buy it. In a complicated deal, D'Wolf gets the smaller *Yermerk*, which he sends, along with his crew and furs, to Canton under his first officer. After a long winter at the Russian settlement, D'Wolf sails for Ochotsk in the *Russisloff*. The rest of the narrative is taken up with his journey to St. Petersburg and then back to Boston and Bristol.

This account, similar to the John Nicol and Samuel Patterson narratives, is valuable for its frank reporting, no doubt tempered by wisdom gathered over the years. In the case of the Ye Galleon reset reprint of the D'Wolf narrative, some footnotes might have helped flesh out some of the characters encountered during the voyage. Also, the biographical sketch fails to mention that, through D'Wolf's wife Mary Melville, her nephew Herman was no doubt influenced by his uncle John's voyage to the coast when he wrote his epic work, *Moby Dick*. Nonetheless, D'Wolf's narrative, like that of Narváez, is valuable as yet another view of life on the coast of the Pacific Northwest.