

The public is invited to the event, which features eight speakers giving 15-minute presentations on shipwreck research and discoveries from the Pacific Northwest and around the world. The keynote speaker, Oregon State Archaeologist Dennis Griffin, will discuss legal and ethical parameters when researching shipwrecks in Oregon.

Mind the Beeswax

One of the highlights: a panel discussion on the Beeswax Wreck near the Nehalem spit. Dewey and Griffin will sit on the panel, along with Scott Williams, the director of the Beeswax Wreck Project, and Cameron La Follette, a researcher who co-authored four pieces on the wreck for the summer 2018 Oregon Historical Quarterly.

The Manila galleon at the center of the project has tentatively been identified as the Santo Cristo de Burgo, which sailed from Manila in July 1693.

"I am interested in shipwrecks in general, mainly because the tragedy is so stark in a shipwreck," La Follette said. "It's just human beings against the sea."

In the Age of Sail, she said, mariners could do little during disadvantageous weather conditions.

"Fundamentally, if a gale wants to blow you toward the shore, all you can do is stand and watch your fate approach," La Follette said.

What makes the Beeswax Wreck



Chris Dewey/Maritime Archaeological Society photos

The SS Iowa lost on Peacock Spit in 1936.

unique among the approximately 3,000 known wrecks in and around the Graveyard of the Pacific is the date of the wreck — the end of the 17th century during the height of the Spanish empire — and the cargo: an abundance of luxury goods from Asia, including porcelain, silks, spices, lacquered furniture and chunks of beeswax.

"It's the most astounding, glittery array of goods," La Follette said, adding in contrast, most other wrecked ships were military warships or carrying pedestrian cargo. "The galleon is, in every way, in a class of its own."

She and her co-author Dr. Douglas Deur of Portland State University worked with archival researcher Esther González to get information from the Spanish archives regarding the Santo Cristo and its captain, Don Bernardo Iñiguez del Bay, a Basque nobleman. She will present her findings as one of the conference panelists.

'The hunt is always exciting'

A variety of other shipwreck research will be shared at the conference. The presenters and their projects include:

- Ellen Raabe, "1909 Wreck of the

Argo: Pieces of the Puzzle"

- Rick Rogers, "European Influences in Proto-Historic Hawai'i"

- Jim Sharpe, "Tragedy of the SS Iowa"

- Bill Zanke, "Shipwrecks of the Red Sea"

- Tom Beasley, "Search for the Tonquin and Cowichan/Coronado Wrecks"


- Kees Beemster Leverenz, "Global Underwater Explorers Photogrammetry"

- Shawn Murphy, "Gilkey Tugs & the BAHADA'S Final Demise"

Sharpe knew little about shipwrecks before joining the society, but he worked as an archaeologist for about 25 years and found continuity between the types of research required.

"It's actually what you find — and what you don't find — that makes it interesting," Sharpe said. "Every project is different. Sometimes you find a lot of things, sometimes you find nothing. But the hunt is always exciting."

Upon completing a project, society members write reports to augment information in state archives. This research can serve others who have new technology or information that "allows them to go further than even we could," according to Raabe, a former physical scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Coastal and Marine Geology Program.

"You kind of want people to pick it up," she added. "You want your work to be good enough that it could be utilized." 



Maritime Archaeological Society volunteers at the site of the T.J. Potter shipwreck in Astoria in spring 2016.



In the spring of 2017, volunteers from Maritime Archaeological Society surveyed the remains of a small boat in Lewis and Clark National Historical Park at the request of the National Park Service. Several members of the society will be presenting on their various research at the Columbia River Shipwreck Conference 2019, a joint effort of the society and the Columbia River Maritime Museum.