

BEESWAX, NOT AMBERGRIS



When Frank Miller of Rockaway picked up a 15-pound chunk of something on the Rockaway beach Sunday he hoped he had discovered ambergris worth \$50 an ounce. What he really found was wax, probably beeswax such as the 60-pound specimen held by Frank J. Kumm, curator of the Tillamook museum. The inscription may be a mark if made between consignor and consignee. Wreckage from a Manila galleon, presumably 248 years ago, deposited a large quantity of beeswax on Nehalem peninsula. It has become widely scattered. Capital Journal's historian identifies this galleon as the San Francisco Xavier.

Miller's Beeswax May Date to Wreck Long Ago

By BEN MAXWELL

What Frank Miller of Rockaway hoped was ambergris, when he recovered a 15 pound specimen of wax from tidal wash on Sunday, may be beeswax from wreckage of a Manila galleon lost near Nehalem river 248 years ago appears likely to the Capital Journal historian.

Ambergris, secreted by whales, is used in the manufacture of perfumes and is said to be valued at \$50 an ounce. A deposit of beeswax on the Nehalem peninsula in Tillamook county has been known for at least 139 years and was first mentioned by Alexander Henry, a Pacific Fur company trader at Astoria, who records in his diary for February 28, 1814 that Indians brought the substance to his post for trade. Years later the deposit was excavated by commercial diggers who unearthed seven tons of the wax and sold it at a substantial profit.

For a time beeswax from the Nehalem deposit was identified as ozokerite, a paraffin, and this presumption encouraged a driller for oil who sank a deep well and made nothing more than a geological contribution about earth structure. When a dead bee was discovered in a lump of the Nehalem wax the ozokerite theorists were confounded and accepted the close chemical analysis which demonstrated the wax was beeswax.

Many pieces of the Nehalem wax have been recovered bearing cabalistic markings that may be, according to William Lytle Schurz, an authority on the subject and author of "The Manila Galleon" marks of trade in the obscure commerce between the Philippines and Mexico. This commerce, a monopoly of the Spanish crown, started in 1565 and continued until 1815, the year of Waterloo. It endured 250 years as the most remote, most hazardous and most continuous commercial transport in the history of the world.

In 1697 the galleon cleared Manila and Dr. John Francis Gemelli Careri, an Italian adventurer, was a passenger. He does not mention his ship but the image of St. Francis Xavier was placed aboard and the name of the galleon may be thereby deduced as the San Francisco Xavier.

Francisco Xavier. Before the galleon sailed crown officials came aboard the overlaid ship and ordered ashore a quantity of beeswax consigned to Acapulco, the port of entry in Mexico.

On January 20, 1698, after a voyage of 204 days and five hours (not of unusual duration), the San Francisco Xavier reached Acapulco. Gemelli Careri remarks in his narrative that only a man of steel could endure a passage so long and so full of peril. But those avid for fullsome and lurid details may read the narrative for themselves. It is available in Churchill's Voyage for the year 1732.

Again, in 1705, the San Francisco Xavier departed from Manila. Now she was an aged and tender galleon but richly laden with the wealth of Cathay. That she never reached Acapulco is a matter of official record. What may have happened to the ship is only suggested by Schurz who records that the Espiritu Santo and the Juan Maria, disabled by a series of great tempests off Cape Mendocino in 1604, were scarcely able to make Acapulco with moribund crews.

Such, indeed, was likely the fate of the San Francisco Xavier. Helpless off Cape Mendocino ocean currents would have borne her northward against the Oregon shore in less than ten days time. Grounded upon the Nehalem beach tide and time would soon disintegrate the bulk and beeswax, because it was deck cargo undamaged by exposure, would be first washed ashore.

Wreck of that lost galleon, the San Francisco Xavier, the Capital Journal historian believes, may well be the source of the mysterious beeswax deposit and the wax that Frank Miller of Rockaway believed to be precious ambergris.

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District Attorney William Bennett said Mouser would be committed to a state institution.

He was charged in circuit court with shooting Bill Thompson on the main street here last Nov. 15.

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