

A MYSTERY SOLVED

Legend of unknown ship gives way

The legends and lore of the Oregon Coast's mystery of the Beeswax wreck gave way to a new identity, when researchers positively identified the ship as the Manila Galleon San Cristo de Burgos.

For almost two centuries, beachcombers, treasure hunters and historians have been both baffled and intrigued by the supply of beeswax, porcelain, teak and other objects of the galleon trade washed onto the North Coast.

Oregon's shipwreck stories — and the apocryphal "Beeswax" led the way — were filled with hyperbole and imagination, reported Scott Williams, principal investigator for the Beeswax Wreck Project.

Until science and history converged in the past decade or so, the Beeswax shipwreck was catalogued among those where information was gathered, literally, from fiction — for years a 1939 speculative account by William Lytle Schurz has served as leading source material. A 1990s movie, "The Legend of Tillamook's Gold" imagines those times — "a great movie," Williams commented, "but not a lot of truth."

Past accounts tend to rely on "somebody telling somebody" something, but eluding verification.

This summer, historian Cameron La Follette and a team of researchers — including Williams — provided compelling evidence to identify the vessel as a Manila galleon known as the San Cristo de Burgos.

Researchers pored through local sites, from mountain to sea, archiving past finds and new ones, including international documents chronicling the history of the Manila galleon trade. Traders were so careful and the cargo was so valuable that they kept careful watch on every ship that left harbor, originating in China with a final destination of Acapulco, Mexico, in the New World.

Meticulous records tracked goods and personnel, providing modern historians with compelling links and a startling look at the Age of the Discovery. The Spanish kept detailed records for taxes and insurance, as the cargo could represent the colony's income for a year. Those pieces of information enabled researchers to identify the ship as a Spanish galleon, and from what time.

Ships typically took four months to get across the Pacific from the Philippines; sometimes it took six, and for the most unlucky

CANNON SHOTS
R.J. MARX



VISITORS DISCOVERED SPANISH COINS ON THE BEACH AS RECENTLY AS MEMORIAL DAY 2017 AND SMALL PIECES OF CHINESE BLUE-AND-WHITE PORCELAIN CONTINUE TO WASH ASHORE IN THE NEAHKAHNIE AREA.

a year, when survival was unlikely.

Analysis of cargo provided further details. "In that period, there were only four eastbound galleons that disappeared without a trace," Williams said at the opening lecture for the Cannon Beach History Center's new exhibit, "Oregon Coast Shipwrecks."

Based on porcelain dating, only two of those eastbound galleons fit that period, he said. "That narrowed our search."

Relying on archeological and historic evidence, Williams said he is "99.9 percent certain" researchers have identified the San Cristo de Burgos, built and paid for in 1687 and 1688 at the Royal shipyard on the island of Bagatao at the mouth of Solsogon Bay. After an aborted voyage in 1692, the San Cristo de Burgos faced repairs before setting off July 1, 1693 — departing port later than prudent for avoiding ocean storms. Passengers included seamen, army commanders, carpenters, infantry, soldiers, a surgeon, sail master and about 20 passengers, among them six priests.

According to La Follette and her research team in the Oregon Historical Quarterly, the ship left port hastily, lacking key supplies and crew members. "A fierce storm is the most likely culprit for the wreck, perhaps magnified by the ship's vulnerabilities."

As for the passengers, 30 crew members survived the wreck, but survivors lived only six months before they were all killed in local battles.

Hull, cannon to be found

Meanwhile, the wreckage of the San Cristo de Burgos lays

tantalizingly close to us today — maybe even underneath our feet.

Rigging blocks, teak wheels, holy oil jars, chest handles have all be unearthed in recent years — but where is the lower hull of the ship, 60 to 70 feet long and likely 1,600-2000 tons? Where are the 36 cannons known to be aboard every galleon of this type?

The ship may have hit Neahkahnie Mountain before breaking and scattering, but it could be buried under the sand or picked up by the tsunami and dumped somewhere else. "We may have a debris field or a cannon here, there, a ballast scattered all over," Williams said.

Those are hard to find, especially if under the sand, he added. "But we're going to keep looking."

Visitors discovered Spanish coins on the beach as recently as Memorial Day 2017 and small pieces of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain continue to wash ashore in the Neahkahnie area.

Williams and others will continue the hunt using "offshore archaeology," an occupation replete with its own set of hazards.

Magnetometers — considered essential to find the wreck — are expensive and sensitive at best.

Getting boats is an issue, with the only option to set out from Garibaldi, 25 miles away.

"To get out in the ocean we need the perfect combination of no wind, no swell, no fog and the right tide — and we need to have both boat owners available and all the volunteers available. Getting those six things together on the same day is incredibly difficult."

Williams figures it will cost about \$100,000 for gear and research equipment.

"I think what it will take is for us to get really lucky or a big storm."

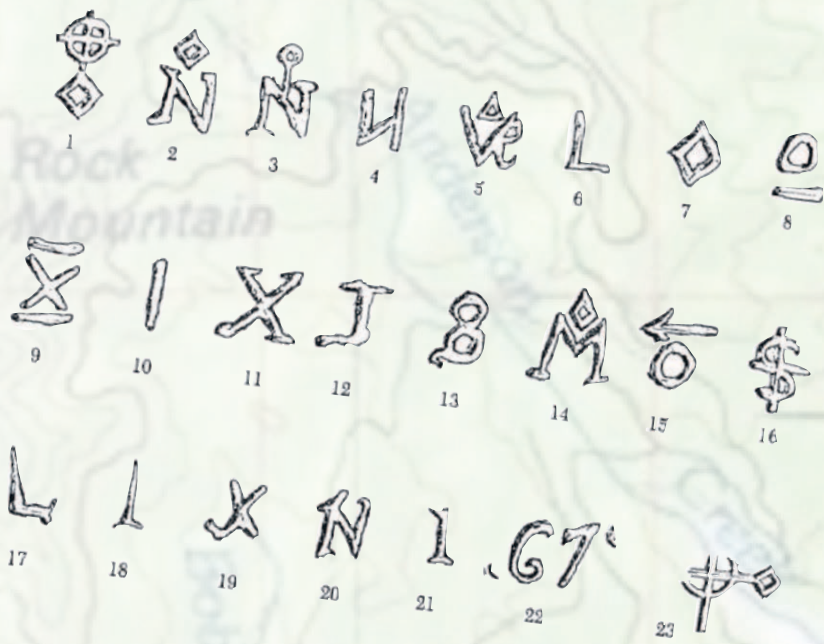
While the hunt continues, for treasure hunters, it will be a bit of "catch and release."

The ships are archaeological and historical sites, protected by state law.

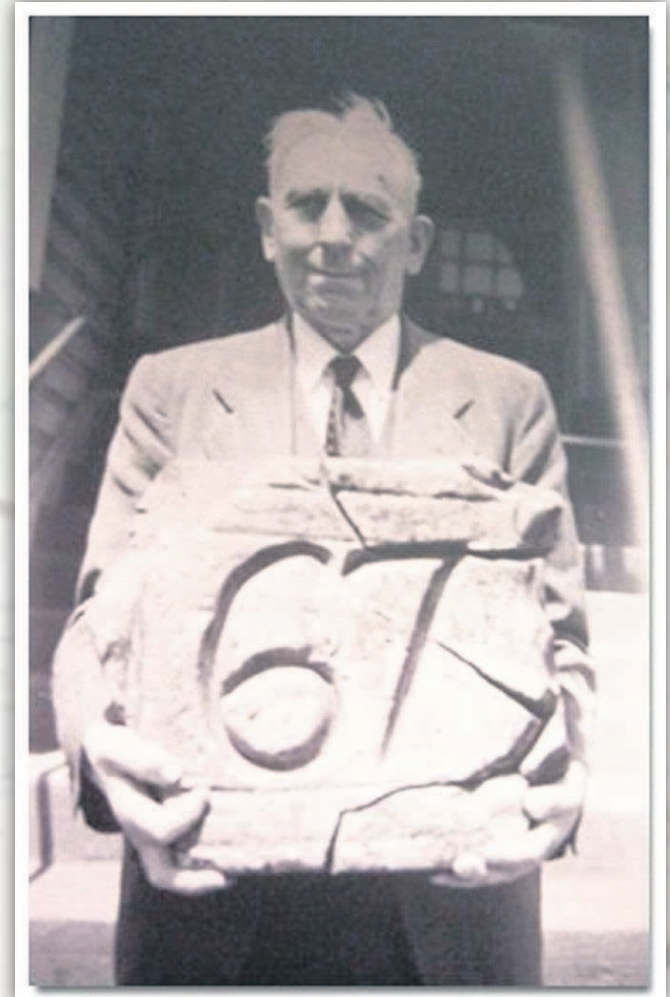
"Even if it had gold, we wouldn't get to keep it," Williams said.

First it would be offered to the government of Spain, then the state of Oregon. "They would probably work it out," Williams said. "We don't get to keep any of it."

The Oregon Coast Shipwrecks exhibit will be on display at the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum through November 2019.



At one point, these Spanish shipping symbols were erroneously identified as mysterious in origin, spurring myths about the wreck of the Beeswax.



BEESWAX WRECK PROJECT GROUP

In an undated photo, a man holds a largish block of beeswax collected near the site of the Beeswax Wreck at Neahalem.



R.J. MARX

Lead beeswax wreck investigator Scott Williams.

"Tillamook's Treasure," also released as "The Legend of Tillamook's Treasure," in 2006.

Consider holiday shopping close to home

Thanksgiving is over and the fever to holiday shop has begun. It's been my policy for decades to only give what I love myself, so here is an abbreviated list of gifts I would love to give others and definitely would love receiving myself. Being a "shop local" person, all gifts are available in our neighborhood realm.

Winter dry skin being a thing, I can't stock up enough unguents by the company Tokyo Milk. I'm addicted to their shea butter crème that comes in a squeezable metal tube. It's perfect for sliding into my capacious handbag for instant moisturizing anywhere, anytime and the tube never leaks. Right now I'm head over heels with No. 60, Kabuki, a lychee, sugared grapefruit, sweet jasmine and warm vanilla blend. My husband finds it for me at Sesame and Lilies.

Were someone to gift me with a small, almost fit in your hand, bronze wolf from the Bronze Coast Gallery, I would treasure it for the rest of



YULETIDES CHRISTMAS SHOP

Consider holiday shopping in Cannon Beach. Yuletides Christmas Shop offers ornaments, figurines and more.

my life. This is a rather spendy gift, however, albeit well worth it. If your budget is more in the hundreds than the thousands, check out the bronze-based jewelry, in particular the necklaces and earrings. Each piece is a work of art, guaranteed.

It's hard to go wrong in the Cannon Beach Book Company where

they have the best selection of new books, as well as art supplies and cards. Lately I've taken to carrying a tiny sketchbook around in my bag to wean me off my obsession with Instagram. Both to jot down important notes as well as to sketch, the store also carries my favorite brand of pen, the Uni-ball Vision Elite.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



If you have a friend who has a pen fetish, trust me, this is a great pen.

Last year a week or so before Christmas I darted into Dena's Shop on the Corner and grabbed a pair of Liverpool brand jeans. They were on sale; I didn't even try them on. I swear, they are my most comfortable jeans.

Both my dogs are a bit mad for the scoop-your-own treats at Dogs Allowed where they carry everything you'll ever need to camp or hike with your canine. Being of the wimpy toy variety, my own dogs prefer relaxing by the fire. That said, they love Puppy Love by the Sea which carries pet food, pet beds, pet beds and possibly the most adorable selection of dog clothing in Cannon Beach. We never forget our

fur family on the holidays and you shouldn't either.

The Wine Shack is anything but a shack but they do have very nice wine and a good selection of it. Supplies are limited, but if you can get your hands on a bottle of their Puffin Oregon Pinot Noir, that is a splendid gift. Is there a leather lover on your holiday shopping list? The belts, jackets, and handbags at Cannon Beach Leather are of the best quality. Thirty-six years in business, they have all the best brands including Andrew Marc, Brighton, and Remy.

No doubt due to all the stress in the world, not the least of it being holiday shopping, more people have turned to knitting. Give your favorite knitter a nice big fat gift certificate to Coastal Yarns where not only do they have premier wool but are also offer a relaxing respite from holiday clamor. On Dec. 5, 7, and 12 the shop is offering afternoon and evening knitting groups. Log on to coastalyarns.com for details.

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CANNON BEACH GAZETTE
The Cannon Beach Gazette is published every other week by EO Media Group.
1555 N. Roosevelt, Seaside, Oregon 97138
503-738-5561 • Fax 503-738-9285
www.cannonbeachgazette.com • email: editor@cannonbeachgazette.com
SUBSCRIPTION RATES:
Annually: \$40.50 in county, \$58.00 in and out of county.
Postage Paid at: Cannon Beach, OR 97110

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to Cannon Beach Gazette, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103
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CANNON BEACH GAZETTE