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Summer 2018

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Citation Details

Cameron La Follette, Douglas Deur, Dennis Griffin, & Scott S. Williams. (2018). Oregon's Manila Galleon. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 119(2), 150-159.

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Oregon's Manila Galleon

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AMPLE EVIDENCE OF A VAST SHIPWRECK on Oregon's north coast appeared from the very beginnings of the state's written historical record. John Ordway of the Lewis and Clark Expedition mentioned trade with the Clatsop people of "bears wax," a misspelling for "beeswax."¹ Later chroniclers — fur trappers, explorers, and early historians — echoed Ordway's account, verifying that a large ship carrying tons of cargo had wrecked on or near Nehalem Spit long before the time of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Nehalem-Tillamook residents of the coast provided firsthand observations, incorporating their eyewitness accounts into oral traditions that were subsequently shared with non-Native listeners. Those Native residents also utilized and traded from the cargo, especially large beeswax blocks and delicate blue-and-white chinaware. In their raw form, or fashioned into traditional crafts, these distinctive items still sometimes appear in Native archaeological sites. Even now, storms, waves, and shifting sands occasionally cause pieces of beeswax and wooden debris to resurface. This much has been well known for most of Oregon's recorded history. The rest of the story has been shrouded by time, speculation, and a surprisingly rich and often contradictory Euro-American folklore. When the wreck occurred, where the unfortunate ship sailed from, where it was going, what happened to its crew, and how the wreck affected coastal Native communities have been questions of a premier Oregon mystery for two hundred years.

Citing the early date, signature cargo, and many other lines of evidence, partial consensus had developed around the likelihood that the shipwreck was a Spanish galleon — specifically, a Manila galleon that, having left the Philippines and crossed the Pacific Ocean, was trying to reach Acapulco with Asian trade goods. Based especially on published lists of missing galleons, the earlier consensus settled on the *San Francisco Xavier* of 1705 as the likeliest candidate for the Oregon "Beeswax Wreck," so-called from the vast quantities of beeswax it evidently carried. The *San Francisco Xavier* was lost without a trace. No official cargo manifest has ever been located, but a contemporary

tions, popular literatures, amateur research, unfounded discovery claims, and treasure seekers' fantasies. Scholars have often avoided research into this challenging topic because it seems so inextricably non-historical, without fact-checking opportunities, or because of a dearth of primary source materials in the United States. Recently, this has changed. The exact identity of the ship can only be fully determined by locating and analyzing its remains. Nevertheless, for the first time in the long history of the Beeswax Wreck, and largely thanks to the pioneering and innovative work of the archaeological team that has explored this issue for several years, Oregon scholars are — for the first time ever — approaching a solid consensus on the ship's identity. An interdisciplinary team, led by archaeologists, has tentatively identified it as the *Santo Cristo de Burgos*, which sailed from Manila in July 1693, headed for Acapulco. The ship disappeared and is presumed to have wrecked in the fall or winter of 1693–1694. As shown in the pages that follow, Spanish colonial records provide tantalizing clues as to why the *Santo Cristo* was in peril from the moment it left the Philippines on its final and fateful journey into the Pacific.

We owe the key archaeological findings and related deductions to the “Beeswax Wreck Project,” a multidisciplinary team of archaeologists and other specialists led by Scott Williams, that has been investigating the evidence for many years. Thanks to the team's meticulous research, the identity of the wrecked ship seems nearly settled. The archaeological and geophysical evidence has become so compelling that, any remaining uncertainty aside, it justifies telling the fullest available history of the lost ship, of its passengers and crew, and of those who were affected in myriad ways by its presumed wreck on Nehalem Spit. Thanks to the careful analysis by the archaeologists, records of earlier speculation from the available clues, and recent archival research, we can now reconstruct and present in the pages that follow a considerably clearer picture: not only identifying which ship is most likely to have wrecked on the northern Oregon coast but also the names and some information about the captain, officers, and passengers, and many details about the ship and the events that led to, or likely contributed to, its demise.

This newly incorporated evidence aligns with what is known of the shipwreck from the only eyewitnesses: the Nehalem-Tillamook people, whose large villages of cedar-plank houses lined the shoreline at the time. Although Native trade networks were already vast, this wreck was their first direct encounter with a social network and trade system that had been expanding around the world and linking the people and goods of different continents for over a century. With the presumed wreck of the *Santo Cristo de Burgos*, new peoples, new goods, and new ideas washed ashore on the last temperate coastline unexplored by Europeans. Although the effects

were in some ways fleeting, the wreck left a lasting imprint on the Native societies, popular lore, archaeological heritage, and legal history of the state.

This series of articles explores the entire saga of Oregon's Manila galleon. The initial article, "Views Across the Pacific: The Galleon Trade and Its Traces in Oregon," sets the context for the articles to follow. Here, we provide an overview of the Spanish Empire's 250-year Manila galleon trade and its unique characteristics. We then review the oral traditions of the Nehalem-Tillamook and neighboring Clatsop peoples, who encountered the castaway men and goods from this global trade network and shared their recollections in an oral tradition that comes to us in fragmentary but illuminating forms. Finally, we survey the Euro-American tradition, which is based in the Native recollections, visible pieces of the galleon wreck, and the buried beeswax blocks. These legends and popular literatures range from pirate tales and battles at sea to romances and frequently center on mesmerizing fables of hidden treasure.

In the subsequent article, "The Beeswax Wreck of Nehalem: A Lost Manila Galleon," Scott Williams and his team describe the archaeological survey and testing, geomorphological analysis, and careful investigation that allowed the Beeswax Wreck Project's multidisciplinary team to narrow down the identity of the wreck to a Spanish galleon, establish its chronology and, using this information, all but pinpoint which galleon met its fate on the Oregon coast.

The next two articles present the results of world-spanning archival research into the details of the currently favored candidate, the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* of 1693, and what is known of the former one, the *San Francisco Xavier* of 1705. In "The Galleon's Final Journey: Accounts of Ship, Crew and Passengers in the Colonial Archives," La Follette and Deur, with archival researcher González, draw from Spanish and other colonial archives to survey the slight information available on the *San Francisco Xavier*, address the longstanding mystery of the *Santo Cristo*'s purported fate, and then describe the galleon's journeys and the fateful decisions that contributed to its final disaster — probably on the coast of Oregon. They also present the archival information on the *Santo Cristo*'s officers, crew, and passengers, which gives glimpses of the lives of the men who likely ended up as castaways on a foreign shore.

In "The Galleon Cargo: Accounts in the Colonial Archives," La Follette and Deur, with archival researcher González, present the cargo information, including, where available, actual cargo manifests found in colonial archives, for both the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* and the *San Francisco Xavier*. These documents provide some matches for known shippers' marks on Nehalem beeswax as well as a surprising amount of tantalizing detail on some of the cargo carried by the *Santo Cristo* on the ship's last voyage.

The final article in this series explores the galleon's aftermath: a legacy of treasure-hunting in the Neahkahnie Mountain area, including the nearby beaches on Nehalem Spit. La Follette, Griffin, and Deur's "The Mountain of a Thousand Holes: Shipwreck Traditions and Treasure Hunting on Oregon's North Coast" describes historical treasure-hunting, which stretches back into the mid nineteenth century, with early fur traders and explorers. The article then chronicles the history of often feverish twentieth-century treasure-seeking, which led directly to passage, and then repeal thirty years later, of Oregon's influential Treasure Trove law.³

Although the exact identity of the lost galleon will be fully settled only if and when its wreckage is recovered, the information presented in the pages that follow provides a clear picture of the galleon most likely to have been wrecked on our coast, of the context of its journey, and of its crew and cargo. The richness and veracity of these findings contrast sharply with the vague, highly colored fables about one or another imagined Spanish ship and the flamboyant tales of buried treasure that have held sway in Oregon for two centuries.

Much additional archaeological investigation lies in the future, especially to locate the wreck's remains on land and sea. This investigation will undoubtedly be followed by further archival research to corroborate or expand on archaeological results. Nevertheless, with the archaeological data and archival documentation now available, the story of how the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* became the most likely candidate for the Beeswax Wreck, of the archival findings about the ship, its crew, passengers, and cargo, and of the wreck's ever-widening aftermath, is as riveting a tale as perhaps was ever told of the galleon. And yet, the tale we present here is verifiably true, and has never before been fully told.

METHODOLOGIES

This suite of articles relies on a varied mix of research modalities, comprising fieldwork, artifact analysis, oral history, and archival research into repositories in several countries. That work is described here, with specific citations located in the articles to follow.

The archaeological team, led by Scott Williams, honed a methodology to determine which missing galleon was most likely the Beeswax Wreck. The team used geomorphology, geoarchaeology, and artifact analysis, supplemented by archival fact-checking. Archival research had long established that only four Manila galleons had been lost, with wreckage sites never located.⁴ Based on previous researchers' dating of artifacts known to be associated with the wreck, it was clear two of the four known missing galleons were lost too early and could not be the Beeswax Wreck. Knowing that

the Beeswax Wreck must be one of the two later missing galleons, lost in 1693-1694 and 1705, and knowing that the Cascadia earthquake and tsunami of 1700 occurred between the losses of those two ships, the Williams team focused on geoarchaeology and geomorphology in areas where artifacts had been abundant as the primary means of identifying where the wreckage would most likely be found.

Large subduction zone earthquakes and large tsunamis like those of 1700 leave telltale geological features on the landscape. These features include erosion scarps, former land surfaces subsided and buried under tsunami or later deposits, tsunami-deposited sands capping buried surfaces, and river materials (cobbles and sands) left behind as drape deposits on coastal sandspits. By mapping these features, the Williams team could predict where shipwreck materials were likely to be deposited before or after the tsunami, depending on whether the vessel wrecked onto the eroded beach after the tsunami or prior to the tsunami, and then, scattered and redeposited by its waves. The juxtaposition of these features with the reported locations of shipwreck debris made it clear that the Beeswax ship wrecked prior to, and was redistributed by, the monumental tsunami of 1700: shipwreck debris was associated with tsunami deposits, and at elevations too high on the spit to be the result of storm wave deposition even after the tsunami eroded the spit.

At the same time that the team was conducting geoarchaeology research, members analyzed a large collection of porcelain artifacts known to be associated with the wreck. This analysis resulted in a better understanding of the porcelains' manufacturing dates, confirming that they originated between 1680 and 1700. No styles of porcelain were noted that could be definitely dated after 1700, supporting the geoarchaeological findings.

These findings seem supported, and much expanded, by new archival research, reported in the pages that follow. The archival research integral to the articles on the *San Francisco Xavier* and *Santo Cristo de Burgos* crew, passengers, and cargo took place over roughly two years, led by Cameron La Follette, with the assistance of Douglas Deur and other researchers identified below. The research focused on the recovery of all available records of the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* and the *San Francisco Xavier*. The Archivo General de Indias (AGI), located in Seville, Spain, is the principal repository of records of the Spanish Empire. La Follette therefore focused the primary research on documents held at the AGI, working with professional archival researcher Esther González Pérez, an expert in locating, understanding, and contextualizing the archive's exhaustive collection of colonial records. González has served as the lead archivist, frequently collaborating on publications, for a number of research endeavors relating to colonial Spain, in concert with university researchers from the United States, Canada, and



THE ARCHIVO GENERAL DE INDIAS (General Archive of the Indies), located in Seville, Spain, houses all the records of Spain's overseas empire, as decreed by King Charles III in 1785. The Archive building, designed by architect Juan de Herrera in the sixteenth century, contains more than 43,000 documents of extremely valuable historical information about the Americas and the Philippines under Spanish rule, comprising some 80 million pages of original papers.

beyond, and has worked with museums preparing exhibitions on Spain and Spanish culture.

González transliterated all relevant seventeenth-century Spanish handwritten documents on the two galleons into modern Spanish and summarized the findings in her research reports, written in Spanish. La Follette initially employed Victoria Stapells, a Canadian resident in Seville, for translations of transliterated documents and all the González reports. She subsequently switched to Trágora Traducciones of Granada, Spain, when Stapells became unavailable. La Follette requested scans of original documents as needed, which González obtained from AGI via procedures that allow for creation of copies while protecting fragile originals. La Follette did not request copies of all documents González researched, as they amounted to many hundreds of pages.

As La Follette and Deur slowly learned more about the galleons' crews, passengers, cargos, histories, and related materials, they requested González to investigate new lines of inquiry or follow up on initial findings

Bernardo Iñiguez del Bayo; he also helped La Follette make contact with his colleague María Isabel Monroy Castillo of San Luis de Potosí, where del Bayo was mayor from 1687 to August 1690. Monroy is the one-time director of the Archivo General del Estado de San Luis Potosí (1979–1995), currently a professor and researcher at El Colegio de San Luis A.C., and the chronicler of the city of San Luis de Potosí. She was invaluable in helping to obtain additional biographical information and archival documentation of del Bayo's activities as mayor.

The importance of these materials to Oregon's history and to future scholarly research is so great that La Follette has committed to donating annotated copies of all the González Reports and related archival materials, notes, and correspondence to the Oregon Historical Society Research Library. A digital appendix of the *San Francisco Xavier's* full cargo list will also be made available.⁵

The research on topics other than the galleon, its people, and its cargo followed roughly similar lines. For Native American accounts of the galleon wreck, La Follette and Deur utilized documents Deur retrieved from the Melville Jacobs Collection in the University of Washington (UW) Special Collections, including accounts recorded by both Elizabeth Derr Jacobs and copies of recordings by May Mandelbaum Edel, provided by Laurence and M. Terry Thompson and now residing partially within the UW collections. Deur also relied on oral history interviews found in the collections of the Tillamook Pioneer Museum and in Deur's personal collection. These oral history interviews and other documentation were provided by members of the Quinault Indian Nation, Clatsop Nehalem Confederated Tribes, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and others, and provide details about crew and cargo that corroborate other lines of investigation. The Nehalem Valley Historical Society also provided access to relevant local literatures.

In support of the research on twentieth-century treasure seekers, La Follette carried out archival research in the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department office in Salem, searching through every file in their two boxes of "Treasure Trove" materials. The boxes include applications, permits, agency memos, news articles, hearings transcripts, draft Attorney General opinions, transcripts of agency meetings, and other materials relating to the treasure-seekers who operated under Oregon's Treasure Trove law from 1967 to its repeal in 1999. These state records showcase the front-line difficulties of archaeological site protection in the face of legislatively allowed treasure hunting on public lands and at the site seekers most desired to excavate, due to the old rumors of a Spanish shipwreck: on and at the base of Neahkahnie Mountain, in Oswald West State Park.

La Follette made copies of all materials germane to the galleon itself and to searches for it as well as the many documents showing that the Neahkahnie area was Oregon's premier treasure-hunting site. This material was augmented, clarified, and placed in its historical context by Oregon's State Archaeologist, Dennis Griffin, who serves as coauthor for the article on this subject.

Together, the evidence provided by each of these sources tells a stunning tale of ambition, struggle, and loss. In addition to archaeological and geological fieldwork, the materials in the articles that follow are drawn from many archival collections, around the region and around the world — Seville, Madrid, Manila, Mexico City, San Luis de Potosí, Basqueland, Seattle, Salem, Astoria, Tillamook, and Nehalem. Some documents were written only decades ago, while others used in this research have probably not been viewed much, or at all, since they were written some 325 years ago. Taken together, all the pieces fit remarkably well. What follows is the story that they tell us. It is a long awaited, and long overdue, contribution to Oregon's historical record.

NOTES

The authors wish to thank the Oregon Historical Society for its help and support in bringing this special issue to completion. We are profoundly grateful to the staff and volunteers of *Oregon Historical Quarterly* for their professional work and dedication to production of this special issue, especially Eliza Canty-Jones, Editor; Erin Brasell, Editorial, Design, and Production Manager; and Kirsten Straus, Rose Tucker Fellow.

1. John Ordway, March 9, 1806, entry in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Gary Moulton (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries-Electronic Text Center, 2005), <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-03-09#lc.jrn.1806-03-09.03> (accessed May 2, 2018).

2. Warren Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543–1819* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 34–35. See also E.W. Geisecke, *Beeswax, Teak and Castaways: Searching for Oregon's Lost*

Protohistoric Asian Ship, (Nehalem, Ore.: Nehalem Valley Historical Society, 2007) for correspondence with Cook over cargo and other details of the *San Francisco Xavier* of 1705.

3. Before repeal in 1999, the Treasure Trove law was found at ORS 273.718–273.742.

4. See Eric W. Dahlgren, *The Discovery of the Hawaiian Islands*, (New York: AMS Press, 1977, reprint of Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1916), for an early complete list, based on archival research and compilations of original documents, of the fates of all Manila galleons during the entire trade, 1565–1815. For a more recent annotated list, see Shirley Fish, *The Manila-Acapulco Galleons: The Treasure Ships of the Pacific* (Central Milton Keynes, UK: AuthorHouseUK, 2011), 492–523.

5. The digital appendix of the *San Francisco Xavier's* cargo list is available for download on the Oregon Historical Society website, <http://ohs.org/beeswaxwreck> or via JSTOR with the digital version of the Summer 2018 issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*.