

The Atlantic Ship Historical Society Inc.

Baltimore Maritime Museum

DONALD F. STEWART, PRES.

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LIGHTSHIP FIVE FATHOM
PRATT STREET - INNER HARBOR
BALTIMORE, MD. 21202

6 February, 1978

Mr. Albert D. Alberi
Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney
City of Norfolk- Suite 600
800 East City Hall Avenue
Norfolk, Virginia-23510

Dear Mr. Alberi:

I received your letter of February 1st, this noon; it was probably late because of the snow.

I can assure you that the Atlantic Ship Historical Society, Inc. a non-profit scientific and educational institution, founded at Cape May, N.J. in 1905, will fully document such shipwreck sites before ever putting a diver over the side. We intend to check over such wrecks with a mini-sub and underwater television and we have already filmed the wreck sites with infrared-water penetrating film.

I obtained the original documents on the 1750 fleet in 1949 and verified the journals of the Irish master of the LaGalga with the records in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and in Seccion de Contractacion, which were moved from Cadiz to Seville after the Spanish Civil War. I had completed the research by June, 1951 and of the seven ships of the fleet, three survived and were repairing their masting and sails at Norfolk, when the master of LaGalga arrived from Snow Hill in two sloops with his three chests of silver coins, jewels and 257 soldiers and sailors from the LaGalga. If you really dig, I think you will find that the testimony of Captain Andrew Connel of the schooner "Mosquito" was a hoax. An investigation into his allegations which can be found both in Spain and at the London Record Office seem to indicate that no British ships were seized by Spain in 1750. The two nations were not at war and the testimony of the captain were not acted upon by an admiralty court; they were, in fact, "not considered as factual" by either government. In answer to Captain Connel's claim, several shipwreckers and officials at Worcester Co., Md. and at Accomac, Virginia that no one had communicated with a Captain Andrew Connel, nor had other than Spaniards departed from the beached ship. More work should be done on Captain Connel to determine just who he was and what he based his claim upon. Even the records of the Governor General of Cuba do not mention a prize ship, known as the "Mosquito" or prisoners of war taken by LaGalga or any other Spanish ship or frigata, between 1749 and December, 1751.

Some twenty seven years of intensive research into the shipwrecks of DELMARVA have given me some 6,300 plus, shipwreck locations and enough accurate tales of piracy, war and storms to fill a number of volumes. I have cataloged only 139 of this number as being of historic interest and these are the wreck sites the museum intends to investigate over the

next ten years. I think you will find that the four ships lost of the 1750 Veracruz Fleet include:

El Salvador de Padua- 800 tons
Cargo- 240,000 registered 8 real pieces, 127,000 contract minted reals
374- 69.7 bars of silver, balsam wood, cocoa and cochineal.
Location- Topsail Inlet, N.C.

(FLAGSHIP) -Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe--1,500 tons
Cargo- 422,557 registered 8 real pieces and 236,000 contract minted reals, mahogany, blue dye, santa maria-hard wood, distilled spirits and iron-wood.

Location- Abandoned at the bottom of Acracoke Inlet, N.C.

Nuestra Senora de la Soledad-1,390 tons
Cargo 3,550 pieces of eight-8 reals, 100,000 contracted real pieces belonging to Don Jose de Respral Deza, distilled spirits, registered bar silver (amount listed but eaten by silver fish on original manifest), and ----emeralds for Cardinal-----.

Location- Core Bank or Caya Lucotta, N.C.

LaGalga, Frigata- 1,500 tons
Cargo- 80,000- 8 real pieces registered and salvaged by the master. 2,300 contracted reals -also salvaged, 25-69.7lb. bars of silver- also salvaged 23 tons of mahogany for the Royal Palaca at Madrid- salvaged by shipwreckers -restitution made to the master by a merchant of Snow Hill. The ship was totally stripped of all goods for a period of one month before being swept five miles up the Maryland Coast in the storm of October 3, 1750.

Location- 3/4 mi/ off Assateague Island- ballast pile and iron 16 and 24 cannon located by Donald F. Stewart, April 5, 1967- Salvage Contract with Spain for 20% (King's Share-Maryland-30% and the Atlantic Ship Historical Society- 50%.

I believe you will find that the ship lost off Virginia Beach was originally swept ashore at Currituck Inlet, she too broke free on October 3, 1750 and was swept up the coast. She was lost in the same hurricane but was not a part of the 1750 New Spain Armada sailing from Veracruz and Habana. The Portugese lost a 650 ton ship, registered at Lisbon as the Santo Paulo off Virginia in early September, 1750; she was under contract by the Consejo Real to deliver a shipment of coin silver from the port of Habama. Santa Paulo sailed from Habana on August 9, 1750.

I currently know of two Spanish ships in Chesapeake Bay and we have four in Maryland waters, the most famous of which is the San Lorenzo de Escorial. Many of the records from Spain were delivered to anyone who would give them food, between 1937-39 and this is how we have knowledge of many of the better wreck sites that the average "treasure hunter" will never be able to find. We are currently moving with federal legislation that would permit only federal agencies, museums and educational institutions to salvage such wreck sites. It is a crime that so many archaeological sites have been destroyed and artifacts flaked away, because the proper treatment and methods of preservation were not known by the recovery team of amateur salvors. I personally will never profit from artifacts raised from shipwrecks- under current UN Laws the nation which owned the lost ship is entitled to 20% of the recovered artifacts (that is the old - King's Share). The new legislation in Maryland will prevent plundering of local wreck sites until federal legislation is exacted which will place

All historic shipwrecks under federal jurisdiction. It is our opinion that like Maryland- the federal government should impose the following penalty on individuals or non-permit holders who attack historic underwater sites:

\$10,000.00 fine-each individual or five years
or both
confiscation of all boats, vehicles and equipment
used in connection with the violation

As a youngster I was one of those plunder types. I worked the 1715 Plata Flota and I personally collected everything from cannon to pewter from many of the wrecks in the James, York and in the lower Chesapeake Bay. This whole collection has been donated to various museums and at the time I was one of the few that treated and preserved all of the artifacts that I recovered.

Another good example of treasure hunter who turned into a good professional underwater archaeologist is Bob Marx. Bob and such people as Mendel Peterson all realize that only the federal government should be responsible for the shipwrecks that are more than 100 years underwater. There are plenty of shipwrecks dating from 1878 to date for the sport diver and amateur salvor to play with and these do not include those wrecks which through scientific and historical interpretation, will trace the development of seaborne colonization and commerce to a particular area.

Wreck site artifacts should never be placed on the auction block- by rights these objects belong to the people of the individual states and to the national government, in whose waters the wreck sites are contained.

If we are successful in raising good contemporary artifacts, and I believe that those objects sealed in tombs of mud and sand in Chesapeake Bay will be in an excellent state of preservation, we intend to loan or donate them to such institutions as the Mariner's Museum, Maryland Academy of Science and to the Smithsonian Institution. As an individual I only wish that the States of Maryland and Virginia would closely supervise all salvage efforts in their subaqueous areas. I realize that is costly and because Maryland has the largest marine police force on the East Coast of the United States, their job will be easier in the future.

I believe the Coast Guard and the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior should enforce the permit system and salvage of all wrecks sunk before the year 1878.

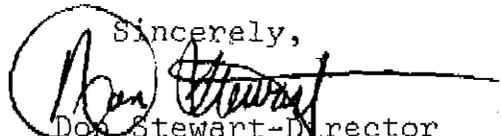
Well you caught me at the right time to write a long letter; the snow has stopped our continuing research and our survey at Assateague. I am snow bound aboard the lightship in drifts of 3 feet and that is the reason I have had the time to write such a long letter. We have four file drawers of research on the shipwrecks of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia and they will be used only by the museum, at least, until Project "SEA" has ended. We do plan to publish and because we have so much material that is documented we know that we will make some enemies, especially of authors who have written books on sunken ships, that contain many pipe dreams. The problem seems to be that research stops when only one or two documents are found as evidence. In the case of LaGalga, the Maryland-Virginia line has been reset four times since 1750 and that wreck was swept even further north by another storm. At the time of her des-

action even the local residents did not know if she were in Maryland or Virginia. One said she was two ship lengths in Maryland, another said two miles. When the report on the wreck was sent to the admiralty, and Governor Ogle signed himself Vice Admiral of the colony, which he was in all matters of admiralty, the ship was actually surveyed by Mr. Lloyd George at being 2.6 miles north of the line of Accomac Co. This was even before the storm which carried the ship more than 7 miles into Maryland. I can tell you that her ballast pile and cannon are exactly where the storm placed them and at that time only the lower keel at the forefoot of the stem had been dislodged and when she floated free she did not sink until she reached that position (none of her upper structure was waterlogged and it is my opinion that only the weight of her fifty great guns and six swivel guns sunk her. From the position of the wreck it is evident that she capsized when she hit bottom-all of her great guns shifted to one side.

You do have some very early wreck sites very near you, around Norfolk and around Lynnhaven Roads, especially.

If the weather breaks I have no idea when I will be around the museum as we are all trying to get back to Assateague as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Don Stewart-Director
Wreckmaster- Project "SEA"

PS- Even some of the facts related to the Maryland Governor were later corrected in the journal of Capt. Daniel Houney of the La Galga. He was informed by a Snow Hill Merchant that the mahogany, purchased from a Accomac Co. Shipwrecker had not come ashore after the LaGalga broke lose during the next hurricane. It was, in fact, embezzled by the seller, a John Truitt, from the ship by his ten slaves soon after the captain crossed to the mainland on his way to Snow Hill. It took a sloop and fifteen of hard work to remove the mahogany from the shi during the month of September.

Do you have a departure date for the three repaired and remasted ships from Norfolk? This is the only piece of information that I lack in the files. They arrived at Cadiz on December 23, 1750.