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NEWS RELEASE

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Local Scholars Solve Centuries-Old Mystery of the “Beeswax Wreck” on the Oregon Coast

A special issue of the Oregon Historical Society’s Oregon Historical Quarterly is dedicated to the research findings

Portland, OR – June 21, 2018 – For centuries, beeswax and Chinese porcelain have washed ashore on Nehalem Spit, on the north Oregon Coast. Now, archival and archaeological evidence point to the *Santo Cristo de Burgos*, a seventeenth-century Manila galleon owned by the kingdom of Spain, as the mysterious vessel commonly known today as the “[Beeswax Wreck](#).”

Stories of a very large shipwreck began circulating during the earliest days of Euro-American presence in the Pacific Northwest, as fur traders and explorers learned from Native people that a large ship had long ago wrecked on Nehalem Spit, with survivors and cargo that included beeswax. The stories, shrouded by speculation and often contradictory Euro-American folklore, captivated treasure-hunters who searched for a century and a half on nearby [Neahkahnie Mountain](#) and the adjacent beaches.

But which ship was it? The archaeologist-led team of the Beeswax Wreck Project used geology, archaeology, and porcelain analysis, combined with documentation from Spanish archives, to pinpoint the ship’s likely identity. Beeswax stamped with Spanish shippers’ marks confirmed the wreck’s origin, and patterns on Chinese porcelain sherds allowed researchers to narrow the date range.

The Spanish Manila galleon trade was the first global network, and close to 300 galleons left the Philippines for Acapulco carrying Asian goods during its 250-year span. The Project determined that the Beeswax wreck was one of two galleons that vanished

without a trace: the *Santo Cristo de Burgos*, which sailed in 1693, or the *San Francisco Xavier*, which left Manila in 1705. Mapping the location of beeswax deposits allowed Project members to assert with confidence that the ship almost certainly wrecked before the 1700 Cascadia earthquake and tsunami.

Cameron La Follette and her team of archivists then undertook wide-ranging research in the archives of Spain, the Philippines, and Mexico to locate all available information about the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* of 1693. They discovered the history of the ship's Captain, Don Bernardo Lñiguez del Bayo; a complete crew and passenger list; and highly important facts about the cargo. Researchers now know that the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* was carrying 2.5 tons of liquid mercury. If the wreck is located, testing for mercury will provide confirmation of the ship's identity.

After many years of work to solve this multi-century mystery, La Follette's research team and the Beeswax Wreck Project group have recently published their findings in a special issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. The *Oregon Historical Quarterly (OHQ)* is a peer-reviewed public history journal published by the Oregon Historical Society that brings history about Oregon and the Pacific Northwest to both scholars and general readers. *OHQ* is one of the largest state historical society journals in the United States and is a recognized and respected source for the history of the Pacific Northwest region.

The Summer 2018 issue of the [Oregon Historical Quarterly](#) is now available for purchase in the Oregon Historical Society's Museum Store for \$10, and a subscription to *OHQ* is a benefit of Oregon Historical Society membership. Abstracts for the articles featured in this special issue are [available online](#).

Cameron La Follette will also be giving a free presentation on the Beeswax wreck at the Oregon Historical Society's [monthly Second Sunday program](#) on July 8 at 2pm. Cameron La Follette is the lead researcher and author on almost all of the articles presented in the *OHQ* special issue "Oregon's Manila Galleon." She is lead author of *Sustainability and the Rights of Nature: An Introduction*; Executive Director of Oregon Coast Alliance, a coastal conservation organization; and an independent researcher.

About the Oregon Historical Society

For more than a century, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state's collective memory, preserving a vast collection of artifacts, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms & website (www.ohs.org), educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon's history open and accessible to all. We exist because

history is powerful, and because a history as deep and rich as Oregon's cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.