



## War & Peace

**A Soldier's Story**, an exhibit currently on display at the Mandarin Museum, commemorates Marion Joseph Losco, a Mandarin local who fought in World War I. On June 5, 1917, he signed up for the draft. It wasn't long before he was sent to fight in France—perishing on the battlefield the next year at just 25 years old. The exhibit includes Losco's wartime letters to his mother, other personal items and general World War I artifacts. *A Soldier's Story* is on display until November 11. \*

—ANDY MOSER



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

# Castaway

*A centuries-old shipwreck captured the interest of researchers and spectators alike*

BY ASHLEY WILLIAMS

**IT BEGAN WITH A CHANCE SPOTTING** of a mysterious object that had washed ashore on Guana-Tolomato-Matanzas Research Reserve in Ponte Vedra Beach. A Vilano Beach woman and her 8-year-old son caught glimpse of it one March morning from a home they'd rented with her parents visiting from Georgia. Her son reportedly solved the mystery right away—it was an old shipwreck, delivered to Florida's shores by Mother Nature.

"Before it appeared, there was really stormy weather," says Chuck Meide, the St. Augustine

Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program's (LAMP) director of maritime research. "The seas were churning, the winds were blowing and the waves were crazy, so it must've gotten unburied offshore and then moved along the bottom by these waves until it came up out of the ocean."

The random discovery sparked national news coverage, drawing thousands of intrigued tourists and locals to the site of this fascinating piece of history. Researchers from LAMP, the University of South Florida (USF) and the Florida Public Archaeology Network have col-



# 123

That's the number of lightbulbs illuminating **The Lightner Museum's** Ballroom Gallery in Downtown St. Augustine. Naturally, the lightbulbs factor into the museum's hefty electric bill, which adds up to nearly \$6,000 a month. So just how many people does it take to screw in 123 lightbulbs? According to the museum, that duty mostly falls to one person—custodian James Gibbs (pictured left), who can often be found on a ladder, replacing burnt bulbs throughout the museum.

laborated on uncovering clues to where the wreck originated. LAMP hopes to raise funds for further study, including archaeological analysis, wood species identification and 3D model generation of the wreck, according to Meide.

"I heard people out there saying it looked like an old pirate ship," says USF research associate professor Dr. Lori Collins. "These things conjure up a lot of cool imagery and ideas of discovery and childhood, which I think are positive things."

USF researchers utilized 3D mapping to digitally archive and reconstruct the ship, helping to preserve it long after the wreck's physical hints at the past have deteriorated. "There were some pieces that had broken off on the beach that we're able to put back together digitally," Collins says. "We're also able to project what the boat might have looked like based on what we're seeing and what we're able to capture and model that's actually still there."

Within the first few weeks, archaeologists, anthropologists and maritime historians concluded that the ship likely dates to between the 1830s and 1860s, based on its construction features and comparisons with other discovered shipwrecks. "We've seen saw marks on planks that came from a circular saw, and also what appears to be a band saw," says Meide. The use of these steam-powered sawmills meant that the

ship was probably not constructed prior to the 1830s, according to Meide. "It's not likely that this technology would've been very widespread before then," he says.

Additional clues, including a lack of obvious repair pieces, have led researchers to believe that the ship wrecked relatively early in its existence. Older vessels, by comparison, typically feature spots where rotten wood was replaced and repaired, Meide explains. The wood also reveals the ship's likely southern United States origins.

"When we first saw the ship, we noticed that the wood choice for the frames was a deliberate pattern," Meide says. "We'd see hardwood next to a softwood, next to a hardwood next to a softwood." Meide says that if the ship were built in the northern U.S., it would probably be constructed of mostly or all hardwoods, which are more common in New England.

Flagler College anthropology professor Dr. Lee Newsom collected and identified wood samples in the initial weeks following the shipwreck's discovery. "It has the southern pine, like longleaf pine, and it has a white pine and American beech, as well," says Newsom, who has worked on more than 240 shipwrecks in her career.

Newsom believes that the ship may have been constructed somewhere on the eastern U.S. seaboard. "[Maybe this wreck] represents the Jacksonville/St. Augustine

area and our local shipbuilding tradition," she says. Examining modern forestry maps to see where the tree species overlap suggests that the ship could have been built between Florida's Gulf Coast and Texas, or even in Georgia/Carolinas area, says Meide.

Researchers are rushing against the clock to collect and record as much information as they can as the shipwreck's wood continues to deteriorate from sun and air exposure. As soon as the waterlogged shipwreck washed ashore, fully exposed to air, the damage and deterioration began, says Meide. The tool marks, graffiti and Roman numerals left behind by shipbuilders have already started to fade as the wood bakes in the Florida heat, he says.

It's difficult to prepare for the unexpected scenario of 10,000 pounds of wood suddenly appearing on a beach, and it would cost a fortune to attempt to preserve the entirety of it, according to Meide. "The ship has dried out, cracked and split, and that's going to cause some amount of permanent damage; there's no getting around that," he adds.

With the added threat of high tides, and curious onlookers touching or stealing pieces of this valuable hunk of Florida's history, researchers have worked quickly to determine how, when and where to relocate the wreck. "With that thing being out there sunbaked, it's not going to hold up forever," Newsom says. ✨

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