

Shipwrecks and Anchors:

The 1559 Anchorage of the Spanish Luna Fleet in Pensacola Bay, Florida

by: Caleb Curren
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A fleet of Spanish ships sailed into Pensacola Bay, Florida, and anchored in the summer of 1559. They came from Mexico. There were about eleven ships of many sizes in the fleet. The ships carried men, women, and children. They were the first multi-year settlement of Europeans on the North American Continent ... an astonishing accomplishment of courage, investment of money, and lives.

Three ships of that fleet have been found by the State of Florida in Pensacola Bay. Remarkable artifacts have been found on the three shipwrecks. Interestingly, the shipwrecks were not anchored where they sank. They were washed upon a shallow sand shelf in the bay during the hurricane that decimated the Spanish fleet. We do not know where these three ships were originally anchored. Ironically, the shipwrecks are a seductive distraction from the real clues of the location of the Luna Colony. The anchors of the fleet are the actual solid evidence of the location of the Luna Colony.

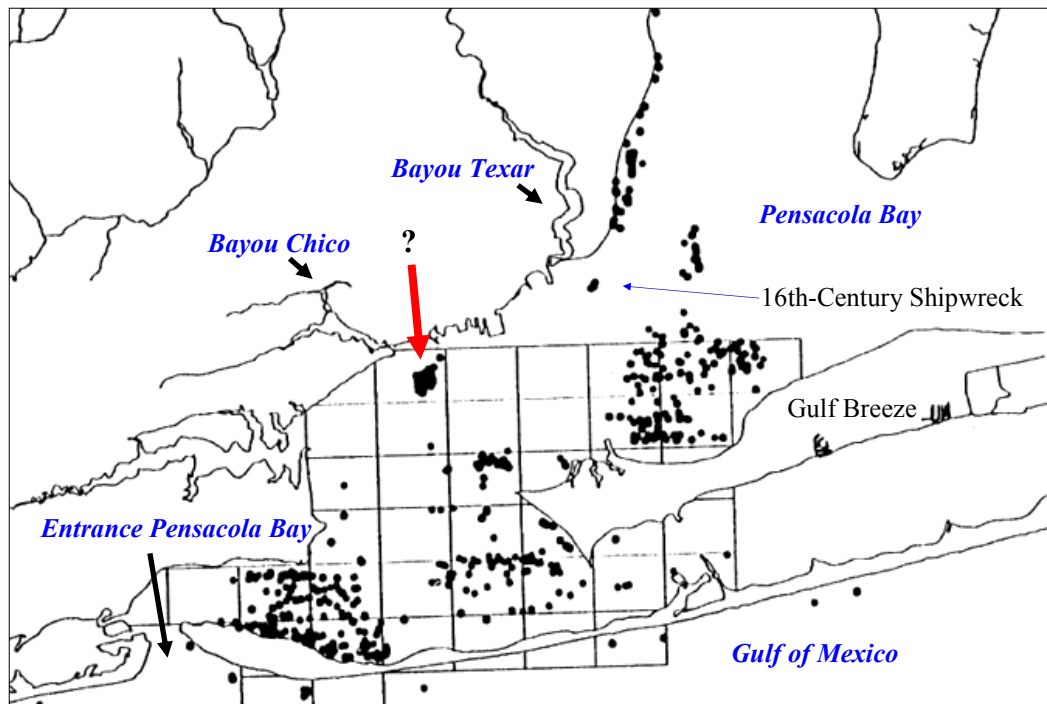
A massive hurricane severed the anchor lines of the ships of the Luna fleet (Priestley 1928: Vol. II, pg. 245). The anchors stayed in place. The Spanish Viceroy of Mexico instructed Tristan de Luna to recover the anchors of the decimated fleet and tie lines to them as moorage for the surviving ships (Priestly 1928: Vol. I, pg. 78). That was an improbable if not impossible task. The colonists were facing starvation. Recovering anchors and tying lines to them was very low on their priority list. Likely, the Luna fleet anchors are still buried in the sediment of the bottom of Pensacola Bay. The Spanish wrote that they established their colony adjacent to the anchorage of the fleet (Priestly 1928: Vol. II, pg. 211). Find the anchors ... the land colony is adjacent to them.

Historian Wesley Odom was instrumental in arranging for the U.S. Navy to conduct remote sensing surveys of Pensacola Bay in the late 1990s. A dense concentration of anomalies was found by the Navy near the mouth of Bayou Chico. Those anomalies have not been “ground proofed.” Simply stated, divers have not put their hands on the objects detected by the Navy instrumentation. Contact Archeology Inc. is arranging for state permits to put divers on the underwater anomalies off Bayou Chico. It is not an easy task. The visibility is poor and the mud and muck in this portion of the bay is predominant. Any anchors would likely be buried beneath the sediment on the bottom of the bay.

Typically, 16th-Century Spanish shipwrecks carried about eight anchors on board ... *four common anchors or bower anchors that served as the general anchors, one mooring anchor, one kedge anchor and two 'proper grapnels.'* (Smith et al. 1998:76 from Palacio 1944:137). Historic records report that eleven to thirteen ships were in the Luna Expedition fleet. Several of the ships survived the hurricane. That still leaves numerous anchors embedded in the bottom of Pensacola Bay at the anchorage site.

The photo to the right is of an anchor from one of the 16th-Century shipwrecks found in Pensacola Bay. The anchor was not used to hold a ship. It was damaged during the Spanish expedition to Pensacola Bay. It was lashed to the gunnel of one of the Spanish shipwrecks (Smith et al. 1995:54; 1998:76).





The map illustrated here is the result of an underwater remote sensing survey conducted in 1998 by the United States Navy (Bratten et al. 1998).

The survey was highly successful, producing numerous underwater anomalies found with side scan sonar and magnetometers. All of the anomalies were not confirmed with dive teams including those off the mouth of Bayou Chico. We do not know what the anomalies off Bayou Chico represent. They could be modern debris or they could be anchors and/or shipwrecks from the 1559 fleet of ships of the Luna Expedition. Contact Archeology Inc. is making arrangements to identify the anomalies off Bayou Chico.

We know that the armies of Andrew Jackson (early 1800s) and Bernardo de Galvez (1770s) camped on Bayou Chico due, in part, to the plentiful supply of freshwater springs located there. The major question is did the Luna Expedition also establish their colony on Bayou Chico for the same reason?

The University of West Florida has claimed that they have found the Luna Colony at the mouth of Bayou Texar on the site of an aboriginal village. The site may or may not turn out to be the Luna Colony. Nonetheless, the UWF claim came much too early — before enough hard archeological data was obtained. Contact Archeology Inc. is moving slowly and methodically in search of the Luna Colony.

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