

The 1559 Luna Anchorage?

A Search off Bayou Chico in Pensacola Bay, Florida

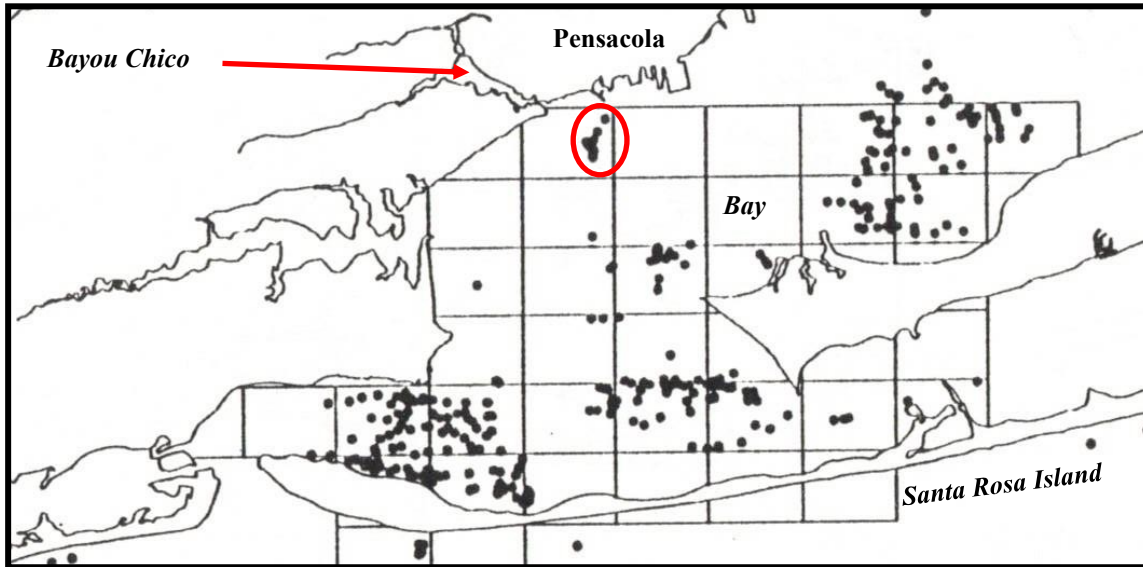
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August, 2021

Wesley Odom, a Pensacola historian, was instrumental in arranging for the U.S. Navy to conduct a training exercise using remote sensing in portions of the lower reaches of Pensacola Bay in 1998. The goal was to identify underwater anomalies, some of which might be historic shipwrecks. The navy did not ground truth the anomalies, that is, send divers down to identify the objects revealed by the remote sensing devices. The University of West Florida later chose a few of the navy anomalies to dive upon, discovering several historic shipwrecks in the bay. They did not dive the anomalies off Bayou Chico.

Interestingly, the Bayou Chico area was a major focus of Spanish military forces during the 1780s led by Bernardo de Galvez and later in the early 1800s by American forces led by Andrew Jackson. Three factors led to the focus on Bayou Chico. There was deep water close to shore for the anchorage of the ships. There was abundant fresh water from springs on the bayou for the soldiers and animals and the bayou was close to the mouth of Pensacola Bay allowing for a defensive posture as well as easy access for resupply ships.

Might these desirable attributes have been an attraction to the 1559 Luna Expedition as well? A possible clue to this being possible is a French map of 1718 that indicates the “ruins of an old fort” near the mouth of Bayou Chico. Could these ruins be the remains of the Luna Colony? Could anchors in the silt at the bottom of Pensacola Bay off Chico reveal the anchorage of the Luna Fleet? We won’t know unless we look.

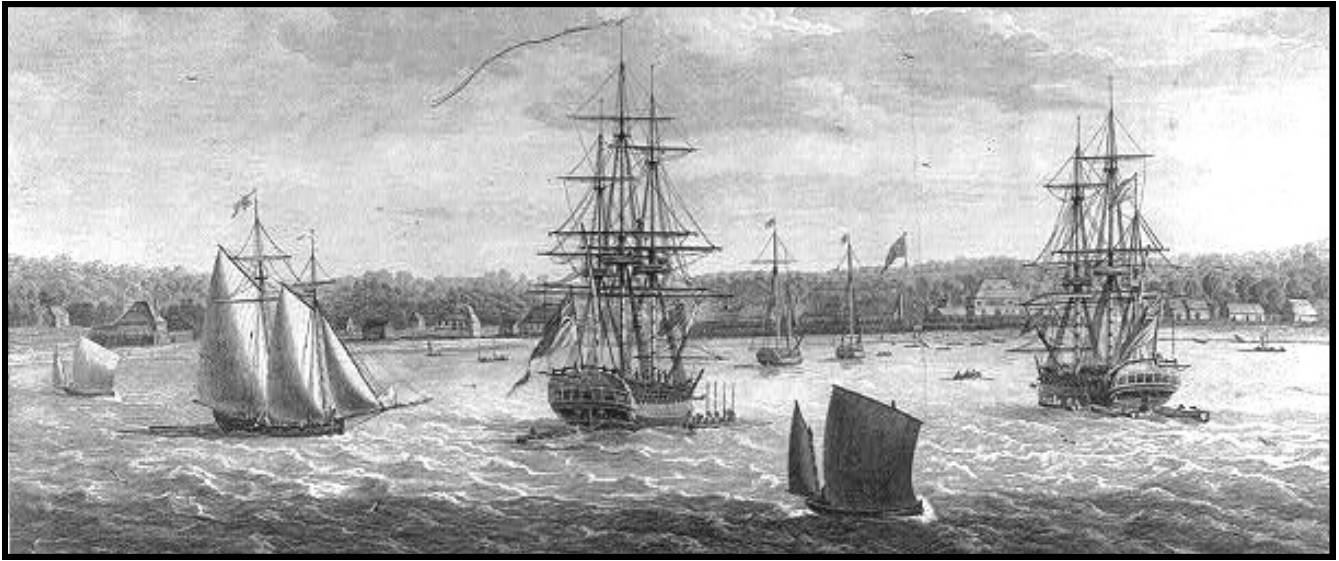
Contact Archeology Inc. (CAI) is conducting a side scan sonar survey off the mouth of Bayou Chico to search for the anchorage of the Luna Fleet with the idea that the Luna Colony is adjacent to the anchorage. Find the anchorage, find the colony. The anchorage of the Luna Fleet has not been found nor has the Luna Colony been proven despite the proclamations of the University of West Florida. The three 16th-Century shipwrecks found at the mouth of Bayou Texar were not anchored there. They were wrecked by a storm after having their anchor lines broken at their anchorage somewhere in Pensacola Bay. Perhaps that anchorage was off the mouth of Bayou Chico.



Above: Underwater anomalies discovered by the U.S. Navy with side scan sonar in 1998. The anomalies off Bayou Chico have not been ground proofed (see red circle). They may or may not prove to be the anchorage of the 1559 Luna Fleet.

Below: U.S. Navy ship equipped with side scan sonar.





*Sailing ships anchored in Pensacola Bay during the 1700s.
Drawing by George Gauld and Dominic Serres.*



Recovering a 16th-Century Spanish Anchor off Mexico.