

Shiptwrecks, Survivals & Lost History Conference

A Special Maritime Event

New Iberia, Louisiana

October 31, 2026

Guest Speakers *

*** Tentative List - Subject to Change**

E. Anderson “Buzz” Bullock



E. Anderson “Buzz” Bullock - As the child of an antique dealer, my interest in early Americana began when I was very young. Because of my career choice as a CPA, I came to focus on Louisiana’s colorful financial history. I became curious about *El Cazador* over a decade ago, because of its effect on Louisiana’s economy. The more I got into it, the more intriguing the mystery became. For some years now I have researched it with an obsession. Unfortunately, much of what is written about *El Cazador* in the media is somewhat limited. However, while studying New Orleans’ weather history for the possible causes of the *El Cazador* sinking, I have found what I believe to be evidence that the ship ran afoul of one of the strangest phenomena in the last 300 years. An event so rare and unusual, that neither the captain nor the crew could have been prepared for what was to come.

The Spanish brig-of-war *El Cazador* (*The Hunter*), sailed from Vera Cruz destined for New Orleans, with a cargo described in the official manifest as 400,000 silver pieces-of-eight which were minted in Mexico City in 1783 as well as 50,000 other coins of various denominations on January 11. The coins were desperately needed in Spanish Louisiana and New Orleans to redeem discredited Spanish paper currency that was put into circulation after Spain took the Louisiana Territory from France in 1763. Sometime after departing Mexico, the *El Cazador* vanished without a trace.

The shipwreck was accidentally discovered off the coast of Louisiana on August 2, 1993. Its coins have been marketed as “the shipwreck that changed American history” Some historians speculate that had the vessel made it to New Orleans, and its treasure been used to bolster the economy, Spain might not have given the territory back to France in 1801. And, in turn, the United States would not have been able to acquire it for 15 million dollars (60 million francs) from France in 1803.

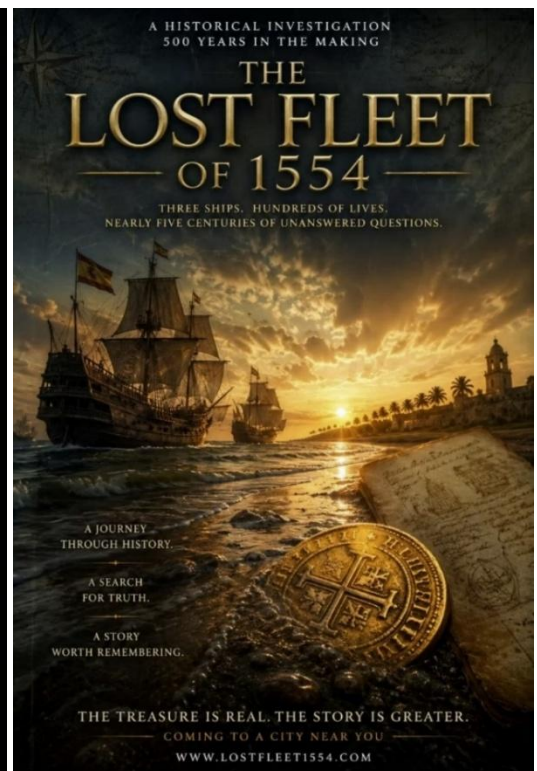


El Cazador – Shipwreck Mystery Solved [✗](#) discusses the shipwreck, the true consequences of its loss and presents an entirely possible theory as to what happened to the ill-fated ship and its phantom crew.

Jeff Burns

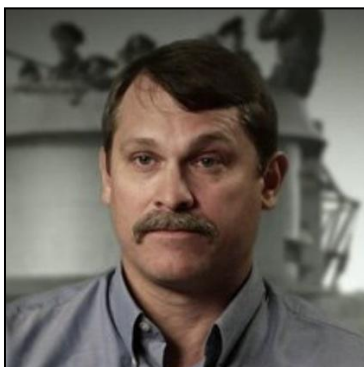


Jeff Burns is a maritime researcher, expedition diver, and president of the 1554 Plate Fleet Research Society. He has extensive experience in underwater research and recovery, including treasure-recovery work on Florida's legendary 1715 Spanish Fleet, Blackwater recovery operations, and research into historic French shipwrecks near Mayaguana in the Bahamas. Jeff is dedicated to uncovering, preserving, and sharing the human stories behind historic shipwrecks. Through detailed research and compelling presentations, he reminds audiences that the greatest treasure is not gold or silver, but the people and their stories.



<https://www.jeffburns-music.com/about-1>

Robert A. Church



Robert Church - Robert Church is a marine archaeologist in the United States. He received a graduate degree in Maritime History and Underwater Archaeology from East Carolina University. The publication *Depletion of the Sylvan Sea* is based on his graduate thesis and is an environmental history that examines changes in seventeenth century English ship construction through the archaeological and historical record. The photograph below is of him working on a late seventeenth century English shipwreck in Bermuda.

He currently specializes in deepwater archaeology and has led several expeditions to deep wrecks in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2004, he was the chief scientist on a Deep-Wrecks Project that conducted a comprehensive artificial reef and archaeology study of six World War II shipwrecks. The depth of the wrecks ranges from 300 feet (90 m) to 6,450 feet (1,965 m). The details of the study are discussed in the co-authored publication "A Study of Living History: Deep WWII Shipwrecks in the Gulf of Mexico," which is also a PAST Foundation publication.

During the summer of 2001, Church and a colleague co-worker Dan Warren, were conducting a routine pipeline survey in the Gulf Coast of Mexico. They had expected they might come across the wreckage of a cargo freighter, the *Alcoa Puritan*, but instead found the remains of lost German *U-boat 166*, the only U-boat lost in the Gulf of Mexico during World War II.



In July of 1942, a cargo ship named the *Robert E. Lee* was attacked and sunk by a torpedo fired from a Nazi submarine. The ship's naval escort, *PC-566*, launched a counterattack. The commanding officer, after observing an oil slick on the water's surface, claimed to have successfully sunk the U-boat. However, instead of being commended, Captain Herbert Claudius was believed to have botched the attack and removed from command. Credit for sinking *U-boat 166* was instead given to a Coast Guard patrol plane in an attack two days later and 140 miles to the west. Yet no U-boat was ever found after the Coast Guard attack.

The whereabouts of the sunken U-boat puzzled historians and remained a mystery over half a century as many shipwreck hunters searched in vain for the elusive shipwreck. The amazing discovery not only solved a 60-year-old maritime mystery but vindicated Captain Herbert Claudius.

Mark Gegenheimer



Mark Gegenheimer is a Louisiana filmmaker, maritime history enthusiast, and expert on the *Empress of Ireland*. He has spent years researching the ship, its interiors, and the stories of those aboard, including working alongside David Saint-Pierre. Through filmmaking, research, and his collection of historic maritime artifacts, Andrew shares the story of the *Empress of Ireland*, along with stories from history, through The Story Hunter.



The wreck of the RMS *Empress of Ireland* lies at the bottom of the St. Lawrence River near Rimouski, Quebec, resting at a depth (130 to 147 feet of water). On May 29, 1914, the Canadian Pacific Ocean liner was rammed midship by the Norwegian coal freighter *SS Storstad* during a dense fog. The ship took on water at a catastrophic rate and sank in just 14 minutes. Of the 1,477 people on board, 1,012 tragically lost their lives, making it the worst peacetime maritime disaster in Canadian history. Despite the massive loss of life, the tragedy was quickly overshadowed by the outbreak of World War I a few weeks later.

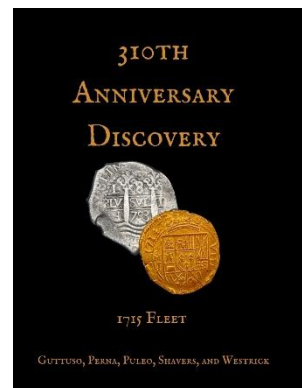
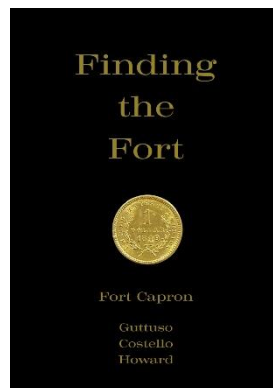
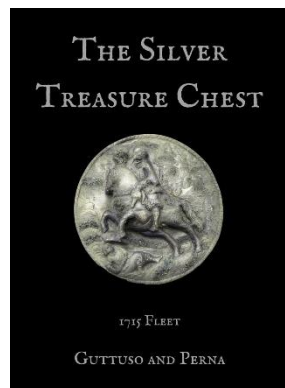
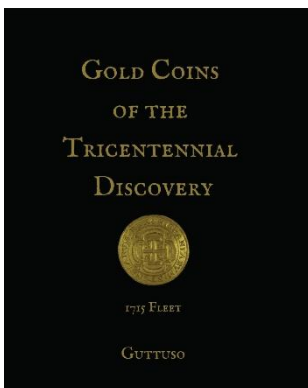
Andrew will also be speaking on the CSS *Arrow*. The *Arrow* was a wooden coastal side-wheel steamboat converted into a Confederate gunboat during the American Civil War. Built around 1856, the *Arrow* initially operated as a commercial trade vessel between Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf Coast. In 1861, it was seized by the Governor of Louisiana Thomas Overton Moore, turned over to the Confederate Army, and fitted out as a gunboat to protect vital water routes between New Orleans and Mobile. To prevent the ship from falling into Union hands when the Confederacy evacuated New Orleans, the Confederates sailed the *Arrow* up the West Pearl River and intentionally burned the vessel on June 4, 1862.

Sal Guttuso



Sal Guttuso - Sal is a successful entrepreneur, auctioneer and Realtor. His previous experiences include over a decade in the pharmaceutical industry with roles spanning from primary care sales representative to district sales manager. In addition to running his own company, Sal is currently Operations Director for 1715 Fleet - Queens Jewels, LLC, an auctioneer for a large numismatic auction house and a real estate agent.

Sal owns and operates History Hunts, LLC, an adventure tourism company. He founded History Hunts in 1997, after several years in the corporate world, trying to squeeze in time for his love of history and his passion of metal detecting. He changed his lifestyle and committed himself to sharing his hobby with others. Guttuso takes small groups metal detecting enthusiasts to England, throughout rural Virginia, the Deep South, Texas, and the American West.



Mr. Guttuso has more than 20 years' experience of metal detecting as a professional. History Hunts conducted three separate metal detector surveys of the Jo Blanche Mitigation Bank property (December 2021; December 2022 and January 2023) in southern Louisiana. Each of these surveys included between 6 and 20 volunteers and lasted from two to three days. The results were beyond anyone's wildest expectations. Altogether nearly 4,000 individual artifacts were located and documented. Many of the artifacts could be directly linked to the Battle of Lafourche Crossing. Over 750 Civil War bullets were recorded along with Civil War uniform buttons, silver coins, brass trigger guards and lock plates, cartridge box plates, J hooks, bayonet scabbard tips, heel plates, grapeshot, etc. The survey also documented the recovery of two rare and highly prized Louisiana Militia "Pelican Buttons."

He operates his own subcontract vessel on the 1715 Fleet shipwrecks during the summer and has recovered gold each of the last three seasons. He has also authored or co-authored three books. *Gold Coins of the Tricentennial Discovery* (2025); *The Silver Treasure Chest* (with Mike Perna); and *Finding the Fort* (with Ben Costello and Terry Howard). A fourth book, *310th Anniversary Discovery* (with Mike Perna, Matthew Puleo, Levin Shavers and Robert Westrick) is due to be released soon.

J. Avery Munson



J. Avery Munson It's hard to say when Avery Munson became a treasure hunter. It's much easier to say where it happened. Right in New Iberia in the bayou with his bare feet and a heart for exploration, which isn't waning with age. Avery Munson discovered his passion for shipwrecks early in life while growing up along the Bayou Teche in New Iberia, Louisiana. As a young explorer, he spent countless hours searching for remains of Civil War vessels such as the Hart. At age thirteen, an unexpected family move to Guam became a defining moment—two years of diving in Guam, Saipan, and Truk Lagoon cemented his lifelong dedication to researching and locating historic wrecks.

In 1981, Avery attended the East Carolina University Field School in New Bern, North Carolina, where he studied maritime history under Dr. William Still and maritime archaeology under Gordon Watts. This formal academic training broadened his understanding of underwater cultural heritage and strengthened the foundation for his future work in wreck discovery and documentation.

Avery later studied at Louisiana State University (General Studies, '83), where family stories from his mother about German U-boats sinking ships in the Gulf of Mexico during World War II sparked deeper investigation. Initially convinced these accounts were wartime exaggerations, he set out to disprove them – only to uncover compelling evidence of U-boat victims from the summer of 1942. The research not only validated his mother's memories but also deepened his respect for her insight. During this period, he collaborated with noted U-boat expert C. J. Christ of Houma, Louisiana.

Munson wondered whether there might be any historical accounts of shipwrecks lost with treasure aboard. For several years he combed through old newspapers and other accounts. Finally, he found the telltale account of the loss of the S.S. *New York* in the *Daily Picayune* from September 10, 1846. The steamer bound from Galveston to New Orleans carrying \$30,000 to \$40,000 in gold and silver coins when she sank during a hurricane.

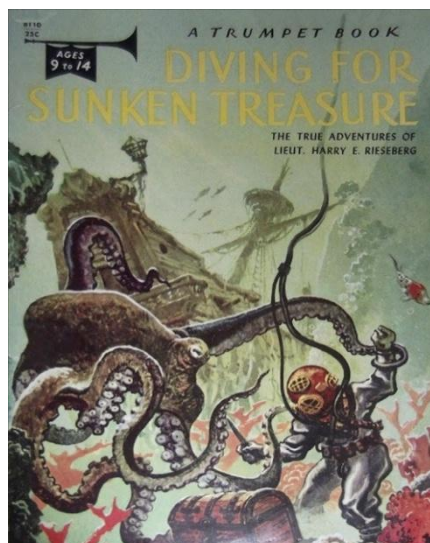
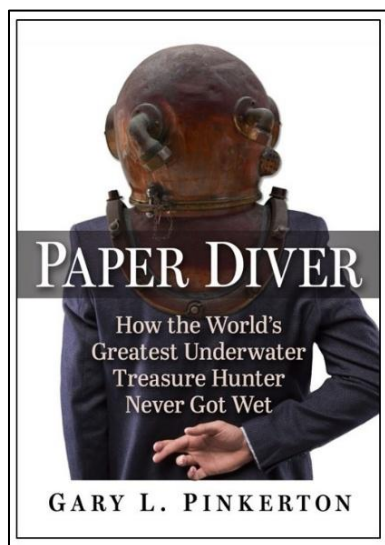
In 1986, Munson enlisted the help of his friends Craig DeRouen, Guy Hebert and Renée Hebert. The group undertook the process of seeking out and salvaging the steam packet S.S. *New York*. Based on the characters that found the treasure in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* the partners named themselves the "Gentlemen of Fortune." After sixteen years of exploration, they found the shipwreck!

He later served as Commercial Manager for Mammoet Salvage Americas, gaining extensive experience in the legal, insurance, and operational aspects of modern salvage and wreck removal. This work took him to locations ranging from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, to the Galápagos Islands.

Gary L. Pinkerton



Gary L. Pinkerton - author *Paper Diver: How the World's Greatest Underwater Treasure Hunter Never Got Wet*. *Paper Diver* is the biography of Harry E. Rieseberg. Between 1935 and 1970, Rieseberg told fantastic stories of underwater adventure in search of treasure. He wrote of killing sharks by hand, being attacked by giant octopus, and breaking his leg at sea during a hurricane. None of which was true, yet his tales inspired a generation of early treasure hunters and marine archaeologists alike.



Gary's passion for research and writing about the history of East Texas has resulted in the publication of several books. He earned a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree from the University of Houston and a bachelor's degree in social work and psychology from Texas A&M University-Commerce. As an independent researcher he contributes to diverse projects, and is a web designer focusing on non-profit organizations. He is a member of the Board of Directors and a Fellow of the East Texas Historical Association. His work also appears in the online *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, the online *Handbook of Texas*, *The Texas Historic Sites Atlas* of the Texas Historical Commission, and *The Portal to Texas History*. He has published book reviews for both the *East Texas Historical Journal*, and the *Southwest Historical Quarterly*.

His *Bridles and Biscuits: Contraband Culture in Spanish East Texas* (2025) focused on a period between 1770 and 1813 that has been called "the last Spanish episode of the Texas drama." The book was awarded the Presidio La Bahia Book Award by the Sons of the Republic of Texas. His other books include *True Believers: The Treasure Legend of Hendricks Lake* (2017) and *Trammel's Trace: The First Road to Texas from the North* (2016).

Sean Rich



Sean Rich – Tortugas Trading, Inc., Chairman and CEO = Mr. Rich is California-based professional archaeologist with both terrestrial and nautical experience and historian, and television personality with over 30 years experience in rare antiques, armory and treasure hunting. He earned a degree in Anthropology from Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. He is a PADI certified Advanced Search, Rescue and Recovery diver.

Mr. Rich owns and operates Tortugas Trading Company. The company's mission is to explore, educate and expose history to people from all walks of life. His career mirrors that mission and is characterized by a passion to keep history alive and to tell the stories of the past from the artifacts we now have in the present.

Mr. Rich is a well-respected historian, classical numismatist, jeweler, master antique gunsmith, arms and armor expert. Perhaps best known for his frequent appearances on History Channel's *"Pawn Stars"* as their antique arms and armor specialist (Seasons 1-6) and History Channel's *Gettysburg*. In 2012/2013 – filmed and starred in the First Season of National Geographic Channel's new television series *"Lords of War."* He has served as a historic weapons consultant and supplied movie props for many films including Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, *Jungle Cruise* and others.

In 2013, he formed Tortuga Productions, LLC, to create television shows. He is currently working on some very exciting projects. He served as the executive producer for "Forgotten, Galleon Quest" in 2016-2017 (TBD). That project documented a treasure salvage operation off the coast of Florida. He currently has over thirty television projects on the board in various stages of development including three potential shows for the Outdoor Channel.



<https://tortugatrading.com>

Christian B. Roper



Christian B. Roper is an American explorer, television personality, filmmaker, and investigator of history's enduring mysteries. A grandson of an Antarctic explorer, Roper was also inspired by his uncle's discovery of cannons at the mouth of Panama's Chagres River, potentially connected to the lost ships of privateer Henry Morgan. The discovery sparked a lifelong fascination with pirate history and maritime legends, eventually leading him to devote extensive research to the mysteries surrounding Colombia's Isla Providencia.

At 23, Roper was recruited by Rick and Marty Lagina as the first featured treasure hunter on HISTORY's *Beyond Oak Island*. His television work has made him particularly known for pirate research and expeditions into Gulf piracy legends, especially those surrounding Jean Laffite, though his investigations have ranged from missing-person cases in the Pacific Northwest and Central America to cryptozoology and unexplained phenomena at Utah's Skinwalker Ranch.

Although Roper has participated in physical searches and recoveries, he is equally fascinated by the stories behind the legends, tracing folklore through generations to uncover the historical events at their roots.



Behind the camera, Roper is an award-winning documentary filmmaker who has directed conservation and activism films, including *Wild Majesty: Africa's Circle of Life*. He now devotes much of his filmmaking to exposing wrongful convictions on Texas Death Row, inspired by his cousin's decades-long wrongful imprisonment and eventual release and exoneration.

<https://christianbroper.com/>

Robert F. Westrick



Robert Westrick - Holds a Master's degree in Maritime History & Nautical Archaeology from East Carolina University. He is a registered professional archeologist. Mr. Westrick has worked on numerous shipwreck projects over the past twenty-eight years ranging from remote sensing surveys to complete excavation and mapping investigations. In 1997 he secured the necessary permits from the United States Navy, obtained funding from the Institute for International Maritime Research, and completed the first archaeological survey of the U.S.S. *Peterhoff*, a Civil War steamship lost off the coast of North Carolina. The *Peterhoff* was the first shipwreck ever to be placed on the National Register Historic Places, despite that distinction, no prior detailed archaeological survey had ever been conducted on the site. In addition to his work on various Civil War shipwrecks in North Carolina and Virginia, Westrick has worked on projects ranging from 17th century Spanish merchant ships off Bermuda to 19th century schooners in Lake Erie.

Mr. Westrick served as a senior marine archaeologist for C & C Technologies, one of the world's leading companies specializing in the field of deep-water marine exploration and archaeological survey work from 2008-2018. He served as an archaeologist on the "Deep Wrecks" Project. The project, a four-year study in conjunction with NOAA and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) of the U.S. Department of the Interior, utilized the latest in ROV technology to study six shipwreck sites located in the Gulf of Mexico. He was the principal investigator on a site dubbed "The 7,000-Foot Wreck" which was at the time of its discovery the deepest historic shipwreck ever found in the Gulf of Mexico.

In addition to his work on various Civil War shipwrecks in North Carolina, and Virginia, Mr. Westrick has participated on projects ranging from "the Stonewall Wreck" a 17th century Spanish merchant vessel wrecked off Bermuda, to the Captain Lawrence, a 19th century schooner sunk in Lake Michigan. Some of the other notable projects he has been involved with include Blackbeard's Queen Anne's Revenge (1717) off the coast of North Carolina, the 1715 Fleet off the coast of Florida and multiple scientific studies of the U-166, the only WWII German U-boat sunk in the Gulf of Mexico.

His publications include his Master's thesis, *The U.S.S. Peterhoff: An Historical and Archaeological Investigation of A Civil War Shipwreck* (2001), *An Investigation and Assessment of Civil War Shipwrecks off Fort Fisher*, North Carolina (contributing author, 2001), *The 1715 Fleet Bibliography*, with Dave Crooks (2014); *Finding the Fleet* (2015); *The 1733 Fleet Bibliography* (2017); *Oak Island: The Mysterious Money Pit* (2020) and the *Atocha – Santa Margarita – 1622 Fleet Bibliography*, with Dave Crooks and Gail Swanson (2022) and *El Nuevo Constante and Corazón de Jesus y Santa Bárbara: A Tale of Two Shipwrecks*, with Charles E. Pearson (2025). In addition, he has written numerous articles in various publications. Mr. Westrick has also been the primary author on more than 400 archaeological reports submitted to various institutions and state and Federal government agencies. Mr. Westrick edited *The Marigalera of the 1715 Fleet* by Laura Strolia (2010) and *The Tension Over Tinian* by Edwin Sherman (revised 2019 edition). He recently finished writing *U-Boat Tales: Mysteries, Myths & Mayhem Along the American Shores* (in pre-publication).

Mr. Westrick is often sought out as an expert in the specialized field of marine archaeology and recently appeared on several episodes of the History Channel's *Beyond Oak Island*.