

## International Journal of Naval History

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August 2007

Volume 6 Number 2

James E. Bruseth and Toni S. Turner, with forward by T.R. Fehrenbach. **From a Watery Grave: The Discovery and Excavation of La Salle's Shipwreck La Belle.** Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas. 176 pp. Foreword, preface, 126 color and 13 b&w images, notes, bib, index.

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The story of Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle's, *barque longue*, *La Belle* did not end in February of 1686 as the doomed vessel smashed into the muddy bottom of present day Matagorda Bay, Texas. Rather, this was only a beginning that has now come to life in a wonderful new book presented by the Texas Historical Commission and Texas A&M University Press. In an effort by the Texas Historical Commission to disseminate information about the historic and archaeological research on *La Belle*, the authors have clearly succeeded, not only in presenting an outstanding book with stunning graphics and illustrations, but they also provide an easy to follow text. This is a primary example of what public outreach should be, providing the reader a book that not only educates but also fosters a quest for more information.

The book follows most historical archaeological works in that it provides a general historical context for the circumstances surrounding La Salle's venture, the wrecking event itself, and subsequent settlement attempts made at Fort St. Louis. The historical context and overview of the site are invaluable as they provide the necessary details for the overall interpretation of the site, the vessel's hull remains, and a context for the artifacts described in following chapters. Historic context also plays an important role as it gives the work an anthropological perspective in that it explains the rationale behind colonization and the need to incorporate Native Americans into the new colony. One such example presented in the volume is the discussion of many different types of trade goods. The description and interpretation of the artifacts leaves the reader with an understanding of the colonization process and the lengths at which these colonists and explorers went to garner Native American support.

The authors also do an outstanding job of explaining the nuances of organizing an archaeological project of this size. Weather conditions, politics, budgets, general problems, and the individual personalities of the project team are brought to life in a clear descriptive manner. Moreover, the logistics involved in this particular project are of interest to the reader who is unfamiliar with archaeological fieldwork. The authors explain the intricacies of underwater archaeological fieldwork from the survey, location, and identification of the vessel's remains to the decision to place a cofferdam over the wreck site and employ a terrestrial archaeological methodology to recover the entire site. The overall discussion presented on the methodology utilized during this project provides the casual reader and the public with an understanding of the nature of

archaeological fieldwork often lacking in other non-archaeological publications that detail activities such as salvage or treasure hunting.

Throughout the work, there are a multitude of inset boxes with descriptions of historical, archaeological, political, or other information germane to the project. The reader is treated to a variety of subjects such as Caribbean pirates, La Salle's other vessel *L'Amble*, life as an archaeologist in Palacios, Texas, and Venetian bead makers. One inset box of particular interest to both archaeologists and the casual reader is the French claim to the remains of *La Belle*. Here, the reader encounters the problem of a foreign flag vessel that is still the property of the nation of France and embedded in state-owned submerged bottomlands. The diplomatic interplay between France and the State of Texas is dutifully explained and the negotiations and agreements are discussed in detail. The authors even explain through example that the book itself is in full compliance with the terms of the overall agreement between France and the State of Texas.

The description of the artifacts and conservation efforts are also excellent. The archaeologist will no doubt recognize the techniques employed while the layman learns in great detail the processes involved in conserving, preserving, and curating the material culture from a site such as this. The artifact analysis is also particularly interesting as it provides glimpses into the past ways of life of the colonists who attempted to establish a colony. For example, a discussion on the diet of the crew on board *La Belle* is presented as well as an examination of the remains of a sailor who perished while nestled in a coil of anchor cable. Finally, the discussion, analysis, and interpretation of the hull remains, gleaned from both historic records and the archaeological research, are fascinating.

The last chapter entitled "*La Belle's* Legacy" might have included future research questions. As is typical with many archaeological assessments, the final chapter discusses at length the goals met and provides a conclusion to the overall book. In addition, while La Salle's failed Fort St. Louis is discussed throughout the volume, the authors might have drawn additional attention to the recent work conducted at this site. Finally, it is the hope of this author that many of the unpublished works and analyses discussed in the book will one day come out in a technical report for peer review and study. Still, every archaeologist and casual reader of maritime history should own this magnificent volume, a true example of scholarly research and public outreach at its best.



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