

WF-SHIPWRECKS

Re Q1.M. S. Winchester
1695

September 12, 1994

Dear Gail,

Enclosed is the commentary of Wade Stiles upon how I understood the conversation we had last spring about the salvage of *The TMS Winchester*. It arrived at my house about a week ago.

This commentary adds some bits of information, particularly about Sammy Fales who did some, if not all, of the diving at the wreck site.

I hope you find this of interest; I doubt that more will be forthcoming from Stiles. I trust you received a copy of Love Dean's book on Florida Lighthouses; I mailed it about five days ago. I thought it was a book that belonged in your home library.

Sincerely,

Bill

William M. Straight

THE FIRST IRON ARROW TREASURE SALVOR

BY RANDOLPH FEMMER



Former Iron Arrow Chief Wade Stiles was one of the first Floridians to dive for the sunken treasures that practically carpet the shallow inshore waters along the Florida coast.

On July 30, 1715, eleven ships of the combined Spanish treasure armada were sailing northward along the Florida coast carrying cargo of gold and silver valued at \$86,000,000. By the morning of July 31, the mighty flotilla was gone... and so was the treasure.

Had Iron Arrow existed in those days, tappees could have watched the giant, ornate, gilded galleons as they lumbered homeward each year laden with the wealth of the Indies. For over 300 years, the "galleones espanoles" sailed north from Havana until they came to the Florida Keys. Then they followed the Gulf Stream as it carried them northeastward as far as Cape Canaveral then turned eastward toward Europe and home. They called their route "La Carrera de las Indias"---the highway of the Indies.

The terrible storms for which UM's athletic teams are named wreaked havoc on fleet after fleet. On the morning of September 5, 1622 a convoy of twenty-eight sails watched in horror as their fleet disintegrated before their eyes. In that storm the shallow Florida reefs claimed the galleons Santa Margarita and Nuestra Senora de Atocha...both rich with bullion and treasure.

In the last five years, seven of the Atocha's solid bronze cannons have been recovered, along with 5 silver bars weighing 69 pounds each and valued at \$50,000 apiece. Researchers in the ancient Spanish archives have discovered that the Atocha carried 901 of these silver bars. Key West salvor Mel Fisher has found the first five. The other 896 still lie on the ocean floor--somewhere close by.

Many of these wrecks lie so close to shore that a person standing on the beach could throw an arrowhead far enough to land on one. I know of a wreck within ten minutes of where I now sit that lies less than 50 feet offshore in five to six feet of water.

Those members of the tribe who attended the Iron Arrow outing last Spring on Key Largo will be interested to know that another fleet lies scattered southward from Pennekamp Park...this one the 1733 Armada. I took a class of my summer school students down there this past July 14 to dive on the shallow remains of the El Infante, a 60 gun galleon whose ballast mound today is nearly as long as UM's athletic building.

When Wade Stiles was elected Chief of Iron Arrow in 1932, Jacques Cousteau had not yet invented the aqua-lung, and even though hundreds of Florida beachcombers had found Spanish coins of ancient date washed up onto the beaches, little opportunity existed for methodical search or salvage.

By 1939, however, Stiles, while diving on Carysfort Reef in the upper Keys, came across the cannons of the HMS Winchester which had foundered there in 1695 while enroute from Jamaica to England. He successfully raised the rusty pair of artifacts and made a gift of them to the University.

A friend of Wade's, Art McKee, Jr., has gone on to salvage many wrecks---especially those of the 1733 fleet. McKee's success in the 1950's won him international fame and he has since become known as the "Father of Marine Archaeology" in Florida. It is fact, however, that one of McKee's earliest friends and co-workers was Iron Arrow's old Wade Stiles.

Street, Florida
August 3rd 1994

W. M. Straight MD, -

This is being sent you from Street as I have not been back to Green Turtle Cay since speaking you from there.

I have made some 'harsh' comments across your nicely spaced letter asking confirmation of your understanding of our phone conversation relative to my participation and knowledge gleaned on the site of the Auburn 'Whistleblower'.

To tell the happenings, both comic and serious, on our salvage venture would be book-length to describe. I would, however, like to see some of these historical tid-bits preserved at the Historical Association of Southern Florida. I should be able to help find such an exhibit, or preserve.

I am enclosing a copy of my random notes relative to the obituary notice about Sammy Gales taken from the Miami Herald. I don't mean to be an irritating 'purist' in my assest for the preservation of truth, but I find my own irritation running high when the written word presumes inaccuracy, and the writing lies to the facts, on considered, former. This highly flawed procedure has caused a degrading of the Fumero Society since the beginning of time, and currently, the procedure has increased many fold.

For your information, Hilda Weiss, Membership

Coordinator, of the Historical Association wrote me that John Hylton, PhD. a professor at the University of Miami asked her if she could have me contact him relative to the 'Whistleblower'. I informed him, he is a Maine Archaeologist. I thought it would be of your interest to contact him if you have not heard from him. You could reach him through the University phone number. He has his own office and Secretary. I told him I would send him my comment on the Herald obituary of Sammy Gales. I also asked him to contact you.

Sincerely,
Wade Stiles

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COMMENT - SAMUEL FALES OBITUARY

1.

I feel I must take the time to comment on the obituary of Samuel Fales which was sent me from the Miami Herald notice. Sammy and I being about the same age, and liking the same things, used to meet frequently in Coconut Grove for lunch and the discussion of boats and adventure. This was at the time when I had the agreement with Sam Sprue and Jack Monroe, regarding the Cannon, and no one else was involved. When I told Sammy about the Cannon he said he would like to do the diving. He did not offer to share in any of the preparation expenses. His contribution would be his diving ability. It was decided that we would meet Monroe and Jack on the reef and have them be the spot spot where the Cannon laid. Sammy would dive down to see if the Cannon were there, as the colored men claimed they were. We met the fishermen on the reef at the break of day. As the day wore on and the Cannon spot could not be immediately found we also discovered that the day was one of two that boatmen used to call 'a glass eye slick'. This was a sea condition that had no waves, no ripples, and no bottom movement in expected surroundings. Visibility through the clear water was the best you would ever find. When this condition exists the sun is usually not bright. This day was a misty, dull, and a rather scary day. Given today don't seem to have been about scary days but it must be remembered that this was before Canadian and American like made diving free of oxygen from the surface. In those days we didn't even know there were sharks gliding around the dives site were supposed to

be so friendly, and we weren't sure that the gathering of 5 foot crocoders turning their heads to watch us didn't have some idea that were not to our advantage. And all of this beyond the sight of land!

2.

With the above background we anchored over the re-found canon. Sammy went down in about 30-40 feet of water which was in a deep depression sealed by coral and with sand on the bottom. The depression was about 30-40 feet deep, and the walls of the depression came to 8-10 feet of the surface, and was about 40 feet across. There were a large number of canons, quite visible, on the sandy bottom.

3.

I had acquired a Miller-Dunn helmet and a hand operated oxygen pump from Billy Dunn, who owned the Dunn Boat Yard on the Miami River. Sammy, using the helmet made a quick dive and only touched our canon, his action was quite visible through the clear water. On his return to the surface he regurgitated. This is usually caused by gas. We wrapped him in a blanket and gave him some hot thermos coffee to sip. And while he was resting and putting himself back together I tied a line to a spare propeller, which was in the boat, and lowered it down along side one of the canons. Then placing my Saica camera inside a glass bottom bucket I photographed the canon and propeller to ascertain the canon's size. Later, I was amazed to see what the canon, projecting through the glass bottom bucket, captured.

4.

After a rest Sammy was convinced to go down again. This time I gave him a flashlight, with the instructions to cut into the coral growth on a gun. This he did, and brought up a piece of the chopped off coral.

The case showed evidence of rust which was proof the cannon were not forged.

5.

When a number of the guns were

eventually brought to the surface, and divided among us, Samuel Jales was given one because of his previous 'salvage efforts' as I have randomly decided. The statement in the Miami Herald by Maria Camacho states: - "Diving for treasure in the late 1930's Samuel Jales happened upon the TMS Winchester off the Florida Keys. He retrieved a cannon that he would later donate to his local alma mater". The pictures the Florida Adirondack School for Boys has are possibly those I took of Sammy while he was trying on the helmet when I first acquired it, and we had not yet gone to the cannon site.

6.

Samuel Jales was my friend and we corresponded for a long time after the 'Winchester' incident, I never knew him to take credit for something he didn't do. His senses and thoughts were deep in the environment. He was an adventurer, and if he had a fault it was because he was a bit over-venturesome. I still have, somewhere, a good nugget he sent me

from Venezuela.

Until the discovery and salvaging of the 'Ottocke' and the 'Margarita' I believe the 'Winchester' was considered the oldest identified wreck in the North American Continent. It is possibly still the oldest identified British ship. Charlie Brookfield was the one who revealed this information through the British Admiralty. At this time I was associated with the development of an instrument for locating metals buried in the ground. I owned one, made in Taiwan and cement and used it for underwater exploration. I never heard of another under-water instrument in existence. This could possibly be the first time that an under-water, or under sea wreck was mapped by the use of an electronic instrument.

About 4:50 P.M. on 4/11/94, I received an overseas telephone call from Wade Stiles in Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas. He was responding to my letter of March 27th. We talked for almost one hour. *Don knew Hare's, as yet received my phone bill.*

He stated the two negro fisherman who first brought news of the cannon lying on the bottom off Key Largo to Charles Brookfield were Jacob Monroe and Sam Lynch. Brookfield brought them to the home of Wade Stiles, on the Fairhaven Canal at 17th *Fairham Place* *Stiles, at first had no interest in the, or* Avenue and Bayshore Dr. *Stiles interested Hugh Matheson and* *adventurers, other than Monroe, Lynch, and himself.*

Charles Baker in sharing in the financing of salvage of the cannon. Subsequently, Stiles drew up a legally binding contract between Stiles, Matheson, Baker and Brookfield to finance and carry out the salvage and Monroe and Lynch as discoverers,

specifying how many shares each would get. All hoped they had found a treasure ship. *The phrase 'treasure ship' was never mentioned, Monroe and Lynch had some thoughts of money to be found, but the agreement I drafted stated: "We plan a salvage search solely for the preservation of historical pieces and the loss of adventure" (Federal laws were never considered) U.S. Customs received us of bringing into the U.S. antiquies without clearing and paying duty, and that brought an IRS representative from Jacksonville. The Chief of the 7th house Office told them they were both mistaken, and that seemed to settle the matter.*

Matheson initially furnished a barge mounted with a crane
though Matheson made all the arrangements for the barge, I did not
know the details,
but the rig was not strong enough for the task. They then

I believe the salvage company was Webster Hethelstein. Webster Bros. had been
employed a salvage barge from Weston's Salvage, a company
salvaging brass, lead, anchors, and anything of value on the reef,
established on the Miami River.

Especially that part of the reef known as the 'Elbow'.

The cannon were divided according to the contract everyone
we all shared equally in the division of the guns (Morris and Smith have
paid separately) I am not certain how many guns were salvaged, as I had to go
got one or more. I did not get an exact accounting of the
back to my business in Mexico. Yes, I believe Brookfield got the same number
of guns as there rest of us,
cannon. Stiles says Brookfield got some altho Brookfield never

mentioned this to me. Will comment on Florida Adirondack School Cannon
on separate page. He believes the Florida Adirondack School

in Coconut Grove was given one. Matheson gave one to the Fort

I believe, yes.

Ticonderoga Reconstruction in New York, and one to Mystic

I believe, yes
Seaport, Mystic, Conn. Stiles gave two to the University of

Miami (Stiles is a member of the Iron Arrow Fraternity) of which
Sam Brown has located another unidentified gun on campus. It must be the one
I gave to the University for the Retains of the Railroad College. It was mounted
only the one near the Richter Library can now be accounted for
there for years, and had a bronze dedication plaque attached, I was told,
by the University, that the cannon was moved from the Retains,
he believes. Stiles also had one cannon on a fruit grove on

I have no trace knowledge of this fabled Cannon. It used to be, that thing
Sunset Dr. which he gave to a boy, Billy Chamberlin, with
like cannon didn't wander far from Range. But that is not true today.
There is a good chance, however, that this cannon might still be in the Miami area,
leukemia and which has disappeared. He has also given two cannon

Yes, I gave 2 Cannon to the Association. One was for mounting at the Association's
to the Historical Association of Southern Florida when their
North Bay-shore house, I funded the construction of a carriage (similar to
Biscayne Bay yacht Club) and a bronze identification plaque. The other
cannon I delivered to David O'Shea (or O'Shea) an Audubon officer
and a keen observer of historical happenings,

museum was on the bayshore near the present Omni complex. Only

one of these cannon remain in HASF possession at this time, I

think.

He didn't mention the one Donald Gaby says is on the
I am not aware of the cannon on the North bank of the Miami
River. I believe Hugh Matheson was a Mason,
north bank of the Miami River, land formerly belonging to the

No cannon, but a lot of memories.

Shrine. Stiles has no cannon in his possession now. Stiles

*Jim, I guess, is good 'tag flipping' for the war, like collecting aluminum
believes the story about some being melted down for scrap iron
pots and pans.*

and sent to England is correct but thinks they were not "sold" to
it might be that Charlie B. 'sold' his share of the cannon and that
could be the reason he never mentioned as having any,
England.

*Information was from Charlie B. after his correspondence with the
British Admiralty (National Geographic Mag.)*

Stiles says the Winchester's guns were foundered by Thomas

TW I believe these initials were shown
Western and the initials "T.M." appeared just below the British
by the 'Touch Hole'.

Crown and broad arrow insignia on the cannon when the guns were
a crown and the British 'broad arrow' were on top of the
cannon by the furnishing,
brought up.

Art McKee told me he had gone to the 'Winchester' site many
times, and taking others, after our departure. It was my understanding

Finally, Stiles tells me that Charles Brookfield and Art
that Art and Charlie put the museum together in the 1930's. There were
'Winchester' cannon in the museum together with other artifacts -
McKee dived on the Winchester site some time after the cannon
appeared from the 'Winchester' site

were salvaged and obtained a few more artifacts.