

Preserving History Through Archaeology



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GWINNETT ARCHAEOLOGY BULLETIN

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Student Archaeologists May Have Discovered the Remnants of a Centuries-Old Spanish Ship

Excerpt from an August 12, 2025 article written by Christian Thorsberg on the [Smithsonian Magazine Web site](#)

Nearly 300 years after a Spanish ship was destroyed along the southern coast of what is now North Carolina, a team of marine archaeologists may have finally discovered the ship's remains. During a summer maritime studies program, graduate students and marine archeologists from East Carolina University spent several weeks at the site of the former Brunswick Town, once a well-populated British colonial city and North Carolina's largest pre-Revolutionary War port. About 12 miles south of modern-day Wilmington, the team unearthed evidence of four separate shipwrecks, including 40 pieces of timber that experts believe may

have come from the vessel known as *La Fortuna*, a privately owned Spanish warship that preyed on British vessels in the 18th century and exploded after colonial forces repelled an attack.



The discovery was serendipitous. Two students were diving to measure the width and northern extent of the Cape Fear River when they became disoriented in murky conditions. "I came across several wooden frames barely sticking out of the clay mud with evidence of planking just barely visible on the surface," Cory van Hees, a maritime studies graduate student who was part of the discovery, said.

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Archaeology Camp at GHEC

Written by Josh Herrin, GARS Vice President

Back in June I spoke to the campers at the STEM Archaeology Camp at the Gwinnett Heritage and Environmental Center (GHEC). Every year the GHEC hosts this camp to encourage kids (roughly elementary school age) to pursue STEM careers and to introduce them to fields like paleontology and, most importantly, archaeology. I talked about the beginnings of archaeology as a science, how archaeology is done in 3 phases (I,II,II), the different types of excavation styles including shovel tests and excavation units, as well as what tools we use.

The campers learned about how archaeologists performed CRM (Cultural Resource Management) projects as a service that was vital to the businesses and organizations in the US. I discussed what I did as a historical archaeologist (focusing on my background of British Colonial archaeology and a ceramic identification specialist) and showed them some of the artifacts and sites I had worked on. Additionally, they learned about archaeology in Georgia, specifically the Ocmulgee Mounds in Macon and the Mississippian culture that is associated with the mounds. I wrapped up by showing them some actual artifacts from the 18th century, and they had tons of questions. This is the 3rd year I have spoken, and they invited me back as long as the camp exists! ■ JH



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The discovery was confirmed as ship wreckage later that day. Samples of the discovered wooden timbers reveal they are made of either Monterey cypress or Mexican cypress, species whose respective ranges are limited to southern California and central America. This suggests, the researchers say, that shipbuilders used materials from Spanish colonies in the 18th century. That the timbers were found in proximity to where a cannon, likely from *La Fortuna*, was recovered by a diver in 1985, further links the newest find to the Spanish ship.

In early September 1748, after persistent Spanish raids on the British-controlled Brunswick port, privateers descended from their ships, including *La Fortuna*, and mounted a ground attack in town. However, a local militia turned them back, and the crew retreated to their ship. Amidst an exchange of cannon fire, a gunpowder magazine likely ignited onboard that resulted in an explosion killing most of the crew of the *La Fortuna*. Bounty taken from the shipwreck helped fund the construction of two local churches: St. Phillips Church in Brunswick and St. James Church in Wilmington.

Time is not on the archaeologists' side. Erosion near Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson area caused by dredging, strong waves, and storms continue to threaten the shoreline ecosystems and unprotected estuarine marshland where the wreckage is buried. The possible remains of *La Fortuna* were excavated from a degraded section of marsh as part of an emergency effort. ■ SM

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE:

If you would like to join or renew your GARS membership, please contact Delana Gilmore; and for FDF membership please contact Cindy Horsley.



More Diggin's

- **Fall Fest at the Atlanta History Center:** Celebrate the season with a day of harvests, history, and hands-on fun! Enjoy historic demonstrations, seasonal garden activities, interactive programs from Georgia 4-H Extension, fall-themed games, delicious food, and more. All activities are included with general admission—bring the whole family for a festive celebration as autumn begins! For more information visit the [Atlanta History Center Web site](#).
- **Elisha Winn Fair:** The 46th Annual Elisha Winn Fair will be on Saturday, October 4 and Sunday, October 6. This annual festival allows guests to travel back in time. History buffs will have the chance to tour the Winn House which was built more than 200 years ago and played a significant role in the early days of Gwinnett County. In addition to touring the historic home, guests will be able to hear live music; watch 1812 militia reenactments; browse craft and food vendors; and watch demonstrations that range from blacksmithing to butter churning. Admission is free. For more information visit the [Gwinnett Historical Society Web site](#).
- **Frontier Faire:** The 17th Annual Fort Daniel Frontier Faire will be on Saturday, October 18. For more information see Page 5.



11 Most Endangered Historic Places 2025 List

Each year the National Trust of Historic Preservation raises awareness about the threats to some of the nation's greatest treasures. In its 38th year, the list has identified over 350 places, and it has been so effective in rallying preservation efforts that only a handful of sites have been lost. The 11 Most Endangered initiative inspires and catalyzes community-led preservation efforts through a high-impact public awareness campaign, resulting in increased visibility, public attention, and fresh resources to save and revitalize historic sites for the public good.

Preservation has a reputation for saying “no”, as the movement that keeps things the same, the movement that asks people to maintain. Its reputation is undeserved; therefore, it is critical to highlight historical sites that allow us to reconnect with the past. The history and accomplishments of every American should be reflected in what is preserved. The *power of place* transforms the public’s perception in the ways it creates experiences of joy, awe, curiosity, and a sense of belonging. This year's list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places demonstrates how preservation involves producing something new, highlighting efforts to repurpose old structures and reactivate them to serve their communities in new ways. The list of places also demonstrates how resilience and recovery are linked to preservation, as well as the economic benefits of rehabilitation. This year’s listings are:



- ⇒ Cedar Key, Florida
- ⇒ French Broad and Swannanoa River Corridors, Western North Carolina (*pictured right*)
- ⇒ Hotel Casa Blanca, Idlewild, Michigan
- ⇒ May Hicks Curtis House, Flagstaff, Arizona
- ⇒ Mystery Castle, Phoenix, Arizona
- ⇒ Oregon Caves Chateau, Cave Junction, Oregon
- ⇒ Pamunkey Indian Reservation, King William, Virginia
- ⇒ San Juan Hotel, San Juan, Texas
- ⇒ Terminal Island Japanese American Tuna Street Buildings, Los Angeles, California
- ⇒ The Turtle, Niagara Falls, New York
- ⇒ The Wellington, Pine Hill, New York

Today all 11 listings are at a turning point—a critical moment when we as a nation either recognize their significance and fight to protect them, tell their full stories, and harness their ongoing relevance, or watch them disappear from our cultural landscape and fade into memory. Through the 11 Most list, there is an opportunity to bolster these places’ recognition, preservation, interpretation, and funding, and in doing so help protect them for generations to come.

Just as the tireless work of the National Trust, its partners, and local preservationists across the country have saved dozens of previously listed sites and set many more on a path to a positive solution, so now we can work together on behalf of these endangered places. For more information on this year’s list of historic places visit the [NTHP Web site](#). ■ NTHP



Defending the Frontier

17th Annual Frontier Faire

Saturday, October 18, 2025

Rain Date: Saturday October 25, 2025

10AM–4PM

Fort Daniel Historic Site

(2505 Braselton Highway/GA 124, Buford)

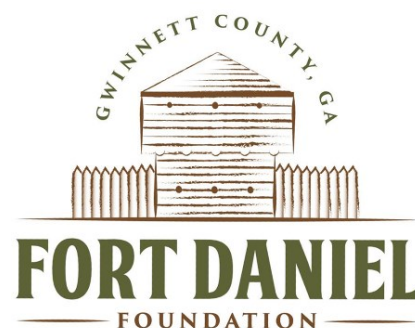
FREE Admission

★ Historic Interpretations ★ Fort Daniel Museum

★ Frontier Demonstrations ★ Public Archaeology

For information visit Fort Daniel Foundation's Web site: fortdaniel.com

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Using X-rays to Distinguish Iron from Different Periods

Excerpt from an August 13, 2025 article written by Jerald Pinson on the [Florida Museum Web site](#)

Spanish expeditions like the one led by Hernando de Soto from present-day Florida up through South Carolina and west to Arkansas, have left behind detailed records of their exploits in the Americas, but because they only had a vague sense of where they were at any given time, the exact routes they took remains unclear. Archaeologists have sidestepped this issue by looking for things the Spanish left behind, especially iron, which they brought with them in great quantities. However, the various expeditions, which often overlapped, makes things complicated.

Nails account for more than half of all metal artifacts found in North America. This, of itself, is no small problem, said Lindsay Bloch, a courtesy faculty member at the Florida Museum and principal investigator at Tempered Archaeological Services. "Archaeologists find lots and lots of rusty nails and other rusty iron objects. We often can't even tell what they are, so they get weighed, counted and put back in their bag. And usually, no one ever

looks at them again," she said.

The Spanish had more than just nails. They used iron to make axe blades, horseshoes, breastplates, helmets, spokes, spears, knives, guns and more. They even brought along blacksmiths and farriers on their expeditions to repair and repurpose things on the go. However, these objects, like nails, are typically indistinguishable through time. From the moment Christopher Columbus laid anchor in the Bahamas through the conquest of Florida, there were too few changes in the style of metalworking for there to be readily observable diagnostic differences between iron objects made by the Spanish.

A new study has demonstrated that microscopic differences in iron from time periods can be spotted using X-ray fluorescence spectrometry. They made this discovery by analyzing objects of unknown affinity, which they now think may have come from the de Soto expedition. To read more about the study, visit the [Florida Museum Web site](#). ■ FM



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To keep up with the latest digs and activities from GARS follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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