Treasure Island
The Untold Story

John Amrhein, Jr.

18° 19" N
64° 37" W
Early Reviews of
TREASURE ISLAND: The Untold Story

“John Amrhein's Treasure Island: The Untold Story is a superlative example of historical fact being well balanced through the use of fictional narrative in order to create a dialogue animating the truth behind Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island. Above and beyond the intensive research that Amrhein conducted to develop the entire story, as well as his uncanny ability to connect events and people through time, this work is also a genuine contribution to the scholarly field of knowledge about maritime history during the 18th century. Ultimately, Amrhein's work serves as a compendium of historical fact and events surrounding a story that has captured the imaginations of both young and old for nearly a century and a half.”

—James Perry, Archivist & Historian, Monterey County Historical Society

“Tales about Ocracoke Island, Hyde Co., North Carolina have always been of interest to us. This one is fascinating. Not only does this story bring Treasure Island alive in an exciting new way but documents Ocracoke's contribution to one of the greatest adventure stories of all time. It is a privilege and a pleasure to recommend this intriguing book.”

—Isabelle Homes, President, Hyde County Historical & Genealogy Society

“Anyone interested in piracy and Stevenson's Treasure Island will enjoy it and find new material and a fresh perspective.”

—Dr. Patrick Scott, Director, Irvin Department of Rare Books & Special Collections (includes the Robert Louis Stevenson Collection) and Distinguished Professor of English, Emeritus, University of South Carolina

“The story would have been known to Stevenson's ancestors who lived in St. Kitts. The narratives that would have entered family oral tradition may have inspired a great deal of the fiction that Stevenson created in Treasure Island. Treasure Island: the Untold Story is another page in the island’s mostly unknown history.”

—Victoria O’Flaherty, Director, The National Archives of St. Kitts
“Treasure Island: The Untold Story is a well written, thoroughly researched, unbiased tale of intrigue, treachery, passion, love, and real-life decisions. The history is well presented and the accompanying photographs, documents, and prints let the reader go back to the past and relive this great sea adventure. I can truly say that this the best book I have ever read about pirates! Read it and you will relive it!”

—Charles George, Wreck Diving Magazine

“What an adventure! The author’s thorough research and meticulous attention to detail is skillfully woven with humanizing snippets of information that bring his historical characters to life. The reader, with any interest in harsh maritime life on the high seas on the Caribbean and Atlantic seabords in the mid 18th century, gets a tantalizing glimpse into how challenging it must have been. The real joy to any St. Christophe is, of course, the fascinating “behind the scenes” tour of the making of Robert Louis Stevenson’s Treasure Island. The links to the Caines Plantation, Dieppe Bay, and downtown Basseterre all bring Mr. Stevenson’s story to life in a way not imagined by the author but much appreciated by anyone with an interest in the history of the island.”

—Daisy Mottram, Honorary Secretary, St. Christopher (St. Kitts) National Trust
Treasure Island
TREASURE ISLAND
The Untold Story

By John Amhrein, Jr.

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For Delphine.

The World owes you for this one.
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For the many sources used in this book, please consult the Notes and Bibliography at the end.
arrived in galleons from the New World to Spain, the Spanish piece of eight was a coin recognized throughout the world in the Colonial Period for its beauty and consistency in silver content. The early versions of the coin were made by cutting pieces off of a flattened bar of silver, weighed, then stamped with the coat of arms of the ruling Spanish monarch. These coins were called cobs, derived from "cut of the bar." The big drawback of this type of coinage was that because of their irregular shape, people would cut or chisel off pieces of the coin and still attempt to pass them off at full value. The term "chiseler" is still used today to describe a cheater or a swindler. Merchants and many individuals had their own money scales during this period to protect themselves from chiseled or counterfeit coins.

In 1732, the problem was solved by manufacturing or milling coins with machinery, producing uniform coins similar in quality to those of today. The coins were perfectly round and had a patterned edge. One side of the coin featured the Spanish Coat of Arms, on the other twin globes flanked by the Pillars of Hercules along with the year of minting. The coins also came to be known as "Pillar Dollars." The peso, piastre, or the piece of eight, would become the model for the American dollar. The term "bits" replaced "reales." Two bits would become the quarter, and four bits a fifty cent piece.
Introduction

It happened in 1750. It was the year that Western civilization started its recovery from a conflict, commonly known as King George's War, between the great powers of England and Spain that had lasted nine years and left many in physical, psychological or financial ruin. It was also in this year that a wealthy Spanish captain named Juan Manuel Bonilla and two Englishmen, Owen Lloyd and his one-legged brother, John, would chance to meet at sea. These former enemies were diverted from their respective courses by a fearful West Indian hurricane. A huge treasure would soon change hands—involuntarily.

The incredible chain of events that began to unfold in the aftermath of this fateful encounter would lead to the burial of Spanish treasure on an uninhabited Caribbean island, and the electrifying aftermath would be remembered for many years to come. The most famous treasure map in the world, dated August 1750, would become the inspiration for a tale that would entertain millions of youngsters and adults alike for the next century. The map would also propel a struggling unknown writer to the limelight, making his name one of the most recognized in literary history: Robert Louis Stevenson.
Part One

TREASURE ISLAND

There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads to fortune.

— William Shakespeare
Chapter One
Owen Lloyd, Privateer

Norfolk, Virginia, June 1746

“Until death do us part,” repeated Owen Lloyd as he gazed into the joyful eyes of his bride, Christian. When Reverend Smith declared them man and wife, applause echoed from the pews of the Borough Church as the newlyweds turned to make their exit. Owen was beaming while Christian smiled tearfully at the friends and family who extended their hands as the couple walked by. In attendance were many merchants and sea captains who were friends of Lloyd, as he too was a ship owner and merchant. Behind them was Charles Caines, Christian’s brother, who had come in from St. Christopher’s, an island in the Caribbean, to give his sister in marriage. Their father had passed away nine years before. Charles was followed by Owen’s best man, his older brother, John, who hobbled along on his wooden leg, an uncomfortable replacement for the one he had recently lost in an engagement with a Spanish ship. At that moment, the American Colonies were at war, often subjected to attacks and ship seizures from French and Spanish privateers who not only patrolled the coast, but also ventured inside the Chesapeake Bay to pillage and terrify the inhabitants. This war that had been waged for the past seven years between England, Spain, France and other European nations would become known as King George’s War. Even in the comfort of a house of God, the parishioners were mindful of this constant threat.

The hazard of the Spanish and French privateers was of little concern to Owen. He not only dodged the enemy ships as he routinely traded between Virginia and St. Christopher’s, more commonly known as St. Kitts, bringing back rum, sugar, and molasses, but he had made a daring capture as a privateer the year before.

Lloyd was captain of the sloop, Elizabeth, owned by Nicholas Gibbons, plantation owner at Dieppe Bay, a small village located on the north end of
St. Kitts. Lloyd began his employment with Gibbons by making trading runs between Boston and Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina, and St. Kitts. In July 1744, he arrived at Boston from St. Kitts to find that war had been declared by England against France. Spain and England had been at war since 1739. With France in the war, the English settlements in the Leeward Islands were at risk because of the neighboring French islands of Martinique, St. Martin’s, and St. Bartholomew’s. Lloyd remained in Boston until late September, having to secure a cargo destined for Gibbons’ plantation. As he idled in Boston, he kept abreast of the news and the actions of the Spanish privateers on the American coast. He also read with great interest the many accounts of Spanish treasure being seized by English and American privateers. In his daydreams, he captured many treasure-laden Spanish galleons.

When Lloyd arrived at St. Kitts, he found that a proclamation had been issued at Antigua for privateers to combat the hostilities of the French now being perpetrated on the English in the Leeward Islands. Gibbons and Lloyd planned a cruise, hoping to encounter the enemy and capture a valuable prize. The *Elizabeth* was not a large vessel, only sixty tons, armed with eight cannon and carrying a twelve-man crew. While off the coast of Martinique in April 1745, Lloyd spotted a lone vessel flying French colors. As he approached from the leeward, he recognized the stench of human cargo—it was a French slave ship from Angola. He ordered his crew to stations and fired a broadside at the slaver. Although the Frenchman was a much larger ship and a superior force, they dropped their colors and then their sails. When Captain Lloyd boarded, he found that, besides 362 slaves, she was loaded with gold dust, dry goods, and elephant tusks. She proved to be a very valuable prize.

When he returned to Gibbons’ plantation, he was welcomed as a hero as he had greatly enriched the already prosperous sugar planter. There was great celebration and Lloyd had earned enough from that seizure to buy the *Elizabeth*. Gibbons’ neighbor, Charles Caines, who maintained his own plantation on the opposite side of the village, was there to help celebrate. With him was his recently widowed sister, Christian. Christian was taken with Lloyd from the very beginning. He was thirty at the time and quite handsome. She admired his courage and devoured every word as he related his adventures.

Owen Lloyd was equally attracted to her. He was also attracted to the Caines plantation, where he saw opportunity. The plantation had been run by Christian’s
twenty-year-old brother Charles and their mother Frances since her father died. The Caines family was politically prominent and well known on the island. On the plantation were a great house, servants’ quarters, boiling house, stable, windmill, and a warehouse that stored the sugar, molasses, and rum that would be shipped to the American Colonies. Before long, Owen and Charles had struck a mutually beneficial business relationship. Owen would ship the rum, molasses, and sugar from the plantation to Virginia and return with peas, corn, and other food crops as well as barrel staves, hoops, and heads to be used in the storage and shipment of rum.

Owen transferred his business interests to Norfolk, where his brother John lived, and registered the Elizabeth under Owen Lloyd & Co. of Virginia with the naval officer at Hampton. When Owen returned to St. Kitts in late February of 1746, he found that his status as the local hero had diminished, as another privateer had recently brought in a Spanish snow with 36,000 pieces of eight on board. Before Owen left in June, he witnessed a Spanish galleon brought in by the British warship, HMS Woolwich. She was carrying treasure and other cargo worth over one million pieces of eight.

But Owen Lloyd was forced to put the dangers of privateering behind him as he set out for Virginia with Christian, her brother Charles, their slaves, mahogany furniture, and his remaining share of the French Guineaman. He was now a family man and neither Christian nor her brother Charles would approve of his returning to his dangerous pastime.

Owen and John Lloyd were Welshmen born not far from the coast in the town of Rhuddlan in Flint County in northern Wales. They were fortunate enough to come from a well-to-do family. John, six years older than his brother, entered the British Navy in 1720 at the age of eleven when he volunteered as a servant aboard HMS Adventure where he saw the Caribbean for the first time. He was following in the footsteps of his uncle, James Lloyd, who had entered the Royal Navy at the same age in 1706. Unfortunately, the year after John went to sea his father became ill and it was believed that he did not have long to live. Owen became the man of the house at age six. Besides his mother, Owen had a sister, Elizabeth, a year older than he, and a younger brother, Vincent, born two years behind him, to look after. Before his father died in 1724, two more sisters were born. Owen thought enviously of the adventures that John was experiencing on British warships and longed for the day when he too could go to sea.
John served aboard a number of Royal Navy ships, some of them with his uncle when he was just a second lieutenant. In November, John Lloyd arrived at Jamaica with his uncle, now a first lieutenant, on HMS *Lyon*. The *Lyon* had left Spithead in June and had made port calls at Madeira and Barbados before her arrival. John was promoted to midshipman when he transferred to HMS *Seaford* where he only served a short time. Uncle James had been promoted to captain and took charge of the sloop-of-war, *Happy*, at Port Royal where John joined him as a midshipman. For the next year, John Lloyd and his uncle were on surveying duty around Jamaica, Cuba, and South Carolina. John left his uncle and the *Happy* in Charleston in March of 1731. His last duty was as a midshipman on HMS *Royal Oak*, a third rate man-of-war of seventy-guns on station in Portsmouth, England, where he served until he left the navy in October of 1732.

Earlier that year, Owen decided that it was his turn to join the navy. His family could now fend for themselves. His sister, Elizabeth, was eighteen and his brother, Vincent, was now fifteen. On June 2, 1732, at the age of seventeen, Owen joined his uncle as a midshipman aboard the *Happy* and served until July of 1735. He spent most of his duty in Charleston and then left the *Happy* upon her return to Deptford when he transferred to *HMS Alborough*, serving until his discharge at Whitebooths Bay on the east coast of England in late October of 1735.

Owen and John were serving in the merchant trade when war broke out in 1739. Trading vessels were armed and many captains and ship owners received commissions as privateers to hunt the enemy at will. The Lloyd brothers were not only too old to return to the king’s navy as midshipman but they found running their own sloops to be more profitable. It was during this time that John Lloyd lost his left leg as a result of a Spanish cannonball. John’s physical wounds healed and he was later fitted with a wooden leg, but John’s health, both physical and mental, began to deteriorate.

When Owen arrived in Virginia with his new bride and a promising career as a merchant captain, John was quite envious. It always seemed like his little brother led a charmed life. John was a thirty-eight-year old cripple with no constant companion other than his wooden leg. John and Owen were often at odds with each other.

Owen Lloyd’s financial horizon looked bright at first. He had the *Elizabeth*, guaranteed contracts with St. Kitts, and twenty-four slaves that he could sell or lease out. After the wedding, Owen and Christian settled down to a life as routine
as could be expected during a war. Owen managed to avoid the Spanish and French privateers patrolling the coast and the islands in the West Indies. He felt lucky. On the other hand, he fretted over his brother John. Since losing his leg, John was having trouble finding suitable work.

Owen was well known in Norfolk as well as in Hampton across the river. He frequented the taverns around the waterfront, drank rum, and regaled the other sailors with tales of his high seas adventures, especially his capture of the French Guineaman. He saw himself in some ways equal to Blackbeard and Black Sam Bellamy, who had both captured French slave ships in 1717, making them their flagships. They too had started out as privateersmen, but Lloyd stopped his fantasy short of ever becoming a pirate. Lloyd, however, missed the thrill of hunting enemy prizes. He was regarded by many as somewhat of a rascal, while others held Owen Lloyd in high regard. He had the ability to lead and persuade. Men and women alike found him to be quite charming.

Owen tended to embellish his stories, even though it usually wasn’t necessary and he seemed to always find himself in the middle of some drama. He was known not only as a storyteller but also as a competent mariner. Captain John Hutchings, ship owner, former mayor and councilman for the Borough of Norfolk, was a very successful merchant. He also owned a number of houses and stores on Main Street near the wharf. He hired Owen to captain his ship, the Rawleigh, to trade with the West Indies importing rum and sugar from Jamaica and Barbados. This arrangement freed up the Elizabeth so that Owen could get John working again. Owen contracted with Alexander MacKenzie, a merchant of Hampton, to send the Elizabeth to the Portuguese island of Madeira with a load of wheat in return for a cargo of Madeira wine. John would captain the sloop. MacKenzie insisted that the voyage be as profitable as possible and take on as much of the highly prized wine as the Elizabeth could hold. To allow for the extra weight, it was decided to remove the guns from the Elizabeth. This was a risky move in the time of war. On March 4, 1747, John Lloyd and the Elizabeth cleared customs and arrived weeks later at Madeira, where he traded his cargo for a sloop full of wine. John Lloyd soon departed for his return to Virginia.

The Elizabeth traversed the Atlantic without incident, but when she arrived off the Virginia coast, John Lloyd was captured by the notorious Spanish privateer, Don Pedro de Garaicochea. From April to November 1747, over thirty-five English vessels had been captured and carried into Havana. Garaicochea was credited
with eleven, which included the *Elizabeth*. John Lloyd was taken to Havana and thrown in the damp dungeon in the coral stone cellars of the Governor's Castle or the Royal Fuerza. The *Elizabeth* was condemned as spoils of war.

Back in Norfolk, Owen Lloyd found out that, not only was his brother not coming home, but his sloop was gone for good. Faced with financial ruin, Owen cooked up a plan. He would try to ransom John out of his Havana prison. To scrape together the needed money, he and Christian mortgaged his slaves to his boss, Captain Hutchings. Soon enough, Owen set sail for Jamaica on the *Rawleigh*.

From Jamaica, Owen sailed with a flag of truce to Havana along with the cash. Governor Francisco Cagigal de la Vega found the money more desirable than a one-legged cripple unfit for physical labor. John was released from prison, leaving behind healthier but less fortunate Englishmen who would labor in mines or crew Spain's shorthanded galleons. Owen Lloyd saw the notorious Garaicochea at work refitting his fleet of privateers, planning his next foray off the Virginia Capes.

In mid-November, Owen departed Kingston, Jamaica, but did not make for Norfolk as planned. Instead, he went to St. Kitts to get medical care for John, who had been ill fed and was weak from his prison stay. Leaving his brother behind, Owen returned to Norfolk in February of 1748. He informed the other captains in Hampton that Garaicochea was planning another attack on English shipping off the Virginia coast.

Without a vessel of his own, Owen Lloyd had to seek positions on other vessels, and there weren't many openings. Hutchings had other vessels in his merchant fleet but there were few vacancies. The *Rawleigh* was sold, leaving Lloyd unemployed. Jobless at the young age of thirty-two, Owen languished in Norfolk. Christian, pampered most of her life at the family plantation on St. Kitts, was forced to mortgage her treasured mahogany furniture to John Hutchings and take up seamstress work. It was a matter of survival.

Life in Virginia was hard on Christian. She still loved Owen, but the promise of a comfortable life had evaporated. The winters were harsh. The Spanish and French privateers still menaced the trade, boldly entering the Chesapeake Bay. British warships had been ordered to the Virginia station as a deterrent, but the privateers continued their harassments nearly at will. The warships HMS *Hector* and HMS *Otter* were now patrolling the Virginia Capes and the Chesapeake Bay and were successful in capturing some of the privateers. The townspeople
of Hampton saw hundreds of Spanish prisoners landed and then shipped out to Havana in exchange for Englishmen.

Owen was off to the West Indies that summer in a sloop belonging to Hutchings to bring back rum and sugar. On his return, almost within sight of Hampton, he was captured by a Spanish privateer, along with another vessel belonging to Hutchings. On July 26, while they were at anchor inside Cape Henry, the Otter, which had just captured two French privateers and was returning to Hampton with them, came upon the Spanish schooner with the two vessels, which included Owen Lloyd, and fired a broadside. The schooner weighed anchor and fled. Outside the capes, Captain Sam Maisterson, on board HMS Hector, heard the cannon firing, which lasted until sunup. He went in pursuit of the schooner and made the capture. Lloyd was free to proceed home.

By August of 1748 word was reaching America about a cessation of hostilities between England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. There was a lot of celebration on both sides of the Atlantic, but it changed little for the inhabitants of Norfolk and Hampton. Spanish privateers were still threatening their coastal trade. But gradually the cessation was generally honored and the peace treaty at Aix-La-Chapelle was signed on October 18, 1748. Everyone’s future looked brighter.

Meanwhile at St. Kitts, John Lloyd regained his strength and was hired to captain the snow, Polly, from St. Eustatius, a Dutch island nine miles away from the Caines plantation. He arrived in Philadelphia on the Polly on October 31 and then found passage back to Hampton.

In Norfolk, the two brothers got into trouble often, carousing and brawling around the boisterous waterfront taverns. John still resented his younger brother. Despite all of Owen’s setbacks, John knew that Owen would overcome and come out on top of things as usual.

That May, Owen scraped together enough money to purchase a house in Hampton. This was a logical location as it was the designated port for customs and ship registration for the lower James River and included the town of Norfolk across Hampton Roads. Hampton was established in 1610 on the site of a former Indian fort. It bordered Hampton River and was laid out on two principle streets. Queen Street ran from the town gate east to the river and ferry landing that would take people, including their horses and carriages, across Hampton Roads to the borough of Norfolk six miles away. King Street ran north to south, intersecting
Queen Street in the center of town where the community well was located. King Street ended at the county wharf at its south end, and along this street were numerous inns and taverns that catered to the mariners, merchants, and common seadogs who arrived from Europe, the West Indies, and other American ports.

The new home of the Lloyd family was located on the north side of Queen Street about a hundred yards from the parish church and the town gate. Christian liked the location because it was removed from the taverns on King Street and was a short walk to the Sunday services of Reverend William Fyfe. Their neighbors were other mariners, merchants, and harbor pilots. It was a peaceful existence, but they were still struggling from financial setbacks heaped on them from the war. On October 19, 1749, they suffered more misfortune. A devastating hurricane struck Virginia and much of the eastern seaboard. In Hampton, houses, warehouses, and piers floated away. Whole trees were ripped out by the roots. Scores of people drowned. The streets of Hampton merged with the river, covered with four feet of water. Dead animals floated amongst the storm debris. In some places, small craft were found a mile from shore. Christian found herself nearly swimming inside their house as the flood waters set to ruining the rest of her possessions. It was the worst storm in the memory of Hampton’s oldest residents.

The floodwaters receded and soon Hampton returned to normal. Owen tried once again to persuade his wife that things would get better, but he had no vessel and no meaningful employment. The bills mounted.

In May of 1750, Owen was charged with petty larceny, arrested, and put into the Hampton jail located across the courthouse lawn from his back yard. There were other writs against him and he was sued by Mary Brodie, the daughter of a prominent physician. As a defense, or possibly a bargaining chip, Owen filed his own suit against the doctor’s son for trespass and battery.

Owen gained his release through the assistance of his former boss, Captain Hutchings. Hutchings had grown weary of Lloyd but still found him a captivating fellow. Hutchings posted bail and intervened with Sheriff Armstead, who didn’t care much for Lloyd in spite of his popularity among the other mariners.

After Owen arrived home from jail, Christian declared that she had had enough. What were once endearing qualities seen in his bravado and charm, she now saw as restlessness and irresponsibility.

She left for St. Kitts on May 23, 1750, aboard the schooner *Peggy*, which was owned by Norfolk’s mayor, Durham Hall. She also carried her Negro slave,
Arabella, and her children, and returned to the comfort of the family plantation. Owen was devastated. On the surface, he appeared to be a very independent person, but Christian was, in the language of his trade, the stabilizing ballast in his life. He realized that it was time to leave Virginia and go to St. Kitts and start over there. It was his affection for John that had brought him to Virginia.

Owen tried to persuade John to go with him and start a new business venture, but John was quite hesitant to leave his new bride. In early March of 1750, he had married Elizabeth Hall of Norfolk, where they resided in a tenement on the west side of Church Street not far from the Borough Church. John’s marriage brought new happiness, easing his depression and lessening his dependence on Owen. Looking toward his future as a merchant captain, John bought 150 acres of land on a point on the east side of the Pasquotank River in northeastern North Carolina, about forty-five miles away. This region was beginning to prosper and offered a new opportunity for trade.

On August 14, the *Peggy* returned from St. Kitts. Lloyd learned from Captain Ivy that Christian had been delivered safe. Owen began his plans to get to St. Kitts and plead his case with her. He also needed to get out of town because of the pending lawsuit and because he was out of money. He suggested to John that now was the time to get out of Hampton and head for St. Kitts. Despite John’s newfound happiness from his recent marriage, he succumbed to Owen’s persuasions. He would not take his wife as she and Christian had nothing in common. Christian was educated while Elizabeth could not even sign her own name. John figured he could return soon enough to Norfolk to be with her, so he bought into his brother’s schemes one more time.

*September 3, 1750*

It was hot and the air was heavy with humidity. John and Owen had just left the tavern and headed south for the docks at the end of King Street in the hopes of catching a breeze wafting off the Chesapeake Bay. However, the air was uncommonly still. Even the ever-chattering sea gulls had disappeared. To the south, dark clouds were billowing. The brothers watched. Perhaps a little rain would cool things down. It looked like a thunderstorm, but what was headed their way was a wind that would change their lives forever.
Chapter Two

Pieces of Eight

Vera Cruz, Mexico, May 29, 1750

The tired mule strained at the overloaded wagon, his quivering flanks lathered with sweat as he struggled to pull the load of heavy chests filled with silver coins, popularly called pieces of eight. There were other wagons in front as well as behind him that had been arriving from the mint at Mexico City and from the surrounding regions. Whips cracked and shouts rose above the din as drivers vied for the easiest spot to unload. Goods and supplies of all kinds were being shipped to the galleons moored in the harbor of Vera Cruz. Once again, the treasure train that stretched a half-mile back through town towards the gate in the rear of the city came to a halt. Then, the black muleteer in the lead wagon urged the donkeys forward to position his load of silver for transfer to the waiting treasure ships tied to the stone wharf, known as the mole. Vera Cruz was alive with activity; ships were loading and unloading, others rode at anchor or were moored to the bronze rings embedded in the fortress wall across the harbor. On the merchant galleons and warships of King Ferdinand VI, sailors attended to long overdue repairs to the towering masts, yardarms, and rigging that overshadowed the ships’ crowded decks.

Work was slow. The midday sun bore down on the mostly black and shirtless slaves and on the galleon crew as they guided each 200-pound chest into the ship’s steamy cargo hold. Grim-faced treasury officials carefully inspected the chests as they were loaded aboard to guarantee that there was no smuggling to avoid the king’s taxes. Captains and crews looked for the opportunity to ship cargo that was not registered. Sometimes they took advantage when the officials were distracted or were paid to look the other way. This scene had been played out for centuries. The greedy Spaniards routinely extracted thousands of tons of treasure from the mines manned by overworked Indian and African slaves.
About the streets of Vera Cruz roamed Spanish aristocrats and soldiers, Italian, French, and Irish opportunists, and brown-skinned Indians, remnant of a nearly forgotten Aztec civilization. This city, the gateway to New Spain, or Mexico, as it was now known, was the oldest and richest city on the continent of North America. It had been the major hub of commerce since it was founded by Hernando Cortes in 1519. Through Vera Cruz a steady stream of European goods and slaves flowed and as did nearly all of the mercury needed for the refining of silver. In contrast to these secular excesses, thousands of priests and nuns destined for the churches and monasteries across Mexico began their journey at the docks of Vera Cruz in their mission to convert a heathen population. From this treasure-laden city, not only was all of the gold and silver production of Mexico sent, but also silks, spices, and porcelain ware; and other Far Eastern curiosities from the Philippines were shipped twice a year to Acapulco on the west coast of Mexico and carted over land to Vera Cruz. There was another product that equaled silver in value and was unique to Mexico: a valuable red dye known as cochineal, derived from dried insects that thrived on cactus plants. It was produced in the Oaxaca region west of Vera Cruz. Among its other uses, this popular export gave the British army their brilliant “redcoats.”

The approach to Vera Cruz was guarded by La Gallega, a coral reef that lay a half-mile offshore. But the reef was insufficient on its own to protect the valuable treasures stockpiled for shipment to Spain. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the conquistadors realized the need for more armed fortifications. In 1565, tens of thousands of slaves cut huge blocks of brain coral and laid them upon the western edge of the reef. More stone, brick, and coral were added to build what became a fort named San Juan de Ulúa. From this fort, guns were trained seaward as well as back toward the city across the harbor, thus discouraging any direct attack on Vera Cruz by enemy ships. Attached to the base of the exterior walls were large bronze mooring rings for the galleons to moor. It was from here that the largest shipments of treasure left the New World for Spain.

In 1683, the Dutch pirate, Lorencilo, with 800 desperate men, landed and took the city, plundering and terrorizing the inhabitants while locking them inside the churches. He left with valuables worth nearly seven million pieces of eight. Later that year, construction began on a stone wall around the city. The treasure shipments continued.
One galleon now lying at the mole, or wharf, was the Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Her owner was a Spanish merchant named Juan Manuel Bonilla, who had been waiting for his cargo of treasure and other goods to arrive at the docks since he had entered the harbor the previous December. Bonilla had now been in Vera Cruz months longer than he had anticipated.

At fifty-one years of age, Bonilla was pudgy and had a ruddy complexion influenced by rich food and excessive alcohol consumption. He dressed the part as an aristocratic and prosperous merchant wearing velvet coats over lacy blouses and shiny black leather shoes. His arrogance and elitism made him unpopular with his new crew. Bonilla had hired an able boatswain named Pedro Rodriguez to oversee the men and manage the ship. Rodriguez was dark complected and of Moorish descent, as were most of the crew. It was easy for him to gain the respect of these men as they were of his class—lowly, dark-skinned Moors that were shunned by the fair-skinned Castilians who ruled Spain and monopolized trade.

Bonilla was pacing at the waterfront while observing the final loading of his galleon. He knew that he was running out of time. He still had to stop in Havana, Cuba, before he could begin his journey home. The hurricane season was now upon them, putting his ship and treasure at even greater risk. Frustrated and hot, Bonilla wiped his brow and tucked his handkerchief into his lace-trimmed sleeve. He nodded to Tomás Andrinos y Carriedo, his supercargo and brother-in-law, and walked through the main gate of the city in search of some shade and the company of someone of equal pedigree.

Cádiz, Spain, The Year Before

It was February 1749. There was a great deal of excitement at the docks opposite the plaza of San Juan de Dios, the central plaza of this ancient port city. Juan Manuel Bonilla had recently purchased from Jacob Westerman, a German merchant residing in Cádiz, the frigate called the Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, alias La Augusta Celi, for 28,000 pesos. She carried twenty-eight iron cannon on a single deck and was nearly 102 feet long and twenty-six feet wide. At her bow was the figurehead of the mythical nymph. Bonilla was standing with his brother-
in-law, Tomás Carriedo, admiring his new ship. They were making plans to load cargo for Vera Cruz.

Bonilla’s “new” ship was not new at all, however. She had to undergo an extensive overhaul. The hull, sides, and decks needed caulking, and repairs were required in the masts and rigging. Even the launch that came with the ship needed to be careened. As required by the Crown, an inspection was performed by Ciprian Autran, a high-ranking official in the Real Armada. Autran was charged with determining the vessel’s size and dimensions to compute her cargo capacity so that the proper taxes could be levied and to safeguard against the smuggling of undeclared cargo that was rampant among the Spanish merchants. Autran was accompanied by a lawyer and a notary who made the final determination that, including the steerage area, the Guadalupe could carry a little over 342 toneladas, a measurement of space or volume. With this calculation duly recorded, Carlos Valenciano, the Contador Mayor with the House of Trade in Seville, imposed taxes of 55,134 pesos against the ship to be paid into the government bank, the Depositaria de Indias.

As if this was not enough, the multi-layered Spanish bureaucracy ordered an additional 685 pesos for the almirantazgo tax to be paid. The Spanish king had his heavy hand in every transaction.

Bonilla’s voyage to Vera Cruz and subsequent return to Spain with treasure and merchandise was to be his financial salvation. For the past thirty years, Bonilla had traded European goods for treasure in this heavily guarded city. But it had been four years since he had last been to Vera Cruz. His last voyage, in 1747, ended days after his departure from Cádiz, when he was intercepted by English privateers. His current treasure voyage was being undertaken to replenish his bank account and reinstate him into the good graces of his partner in the lost galleon venture. Her name was Angela de Prado y Sarmiento of Seville, Spain; she was Bonilla’s mother-in-law.

In spite of the ongoing war between Spain and England, Bonilla and his mother-in-law planned a bold voyage to Vera Cruz loaded with 110 tons of mercury for the silver mines in Mexico on behalf of the Royal Treasury. Their ship was the thirty-six gun Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, more commonly know by her alias, La Ninfa.

Bonilla and four other merchants were ready to sail in February 1747, but got wind that English privateers, salivating over the rich galleons, were lying in
wait for them. Bonilla and the other merchants retired to their homes, or those of friends in and around Cádiz, to wait it out. Commodore George Walker of the *Prince Edward*, informed by a spy in Spain, was aware of their moves. Walker hatched a clever plan. He took his fleet of five privateers, the so-called *Royal Family* of privateers, to Lisbon, Portugal. Each vessel was named after an English prince. Here he pretended to refit and repair his ships by striking his top masts and lowering their yards. He knew that news of this would soon reach Cádiz by way of the Spanish ambassador or merchants in Lisbon with interests in Cádiz. Bonilla took the bait. On February 14, 1747, *La Ninfa*, crewed with 260 men, raised anchor and set sail for Vera Cruz with the four other ships. Bonilla was not in command of his ship, but rather Bernardo del Alamo, who had been hired by Bonilla’s mother-in-law on previous voyages to Vera Cruz.

Back in Lisbon, Walker had carefully calculated the time for the news of his pretended refit to reach Cádiz. On the same morning that he estimated the return of Bonilla and the others to their anchored ships in the harbor of Cádiz, he ordered the *Royal Family* to get underway.

On the evening of February 20, Bonilla found Walker’s fleet sailing toward them and they were quickly surrounded. Walker fitted out a tender and a barge from the *Prince Edward* and rowed after *La Ninfa*. Bonilla saw no other choice but to surrender. Not a shot was fired.

Bonilla’s ship was quickly taken and English guards were placed on board. The captain, crew, and ship were then escorted to Lisbon and the ship’s officers interrogated. When news of the capture reached Cádiz, rumors circulated that two prominent English merchants in Cádiz, William Mauman and Anthony Butler, were suspected as the informants to Commodore Walker.

Some of Walker’s officers observed that several of the Spanish gentlemen and their ladies traveling as passengers had been aboard another Spanish merchant captured only weeks before. One of the Spaniards remarked to his captor, “O good Señor Englishman! It is very comical indeed. You make as much haste to take us as we make haste to be taken!”

On March 2, *La Ninfa* entered the harbor of Lisbon escorted by her English captors. Lisbon was a neutral port, welcoming both Spanish and English alike. Once there, the Spanish were free to go but many lingered and held a “musick and a ball,” inviting the English privateersmen as guests. Dressed in their finest clothes and jewels, they sent a flaunting message to Commodore Walker still out
on cruise: their private jewels had escaped him.

On March 25, 1747, Bonilla and Tomás Carredo left for Cádiz. Bonilla was now in a dilemma. Though his life was not in danger, his future was. He was caught between the merchants who had shipped with him, his English captors with whom he was trying to negotiate a ransom payment for the ship and her cargo, the King of Spain’s minister, the Marqués de Ensenada, and his mother-in-law. Bonilla offered 380,000 pieces of eight for the cargo and 20,000 for his ship, which was rejected by the English who had seen his register that listed cargo valued at over one million pesos. After much give and take, the English agreed to return the ship and cargo, exclusive of the king’s mercury, for 450,000 pieces of eight. Bonilla failed to close the deal and left Lisbon much to the frustration of the king and some of the merchants. The merchants in Lisbon wanted to buy the cargo directly from the English but they saw the opportunity to squeeze Bonilla into a more lucrative settlement. Bonilla was now telling the Consulado in Cádiz that he was about to settle the deal for 300,000 pieces of eight.

Months later, HMS Bedford, Captain Townsend, was escorting La Ninfá and two other prizes, Mountfort and Agatha, to Portsmouth, England, when on December 10, they encountered a great storm that cast Bonilla’s ship onto the rocks at Beachy Head on the south coast of England. Many of the locals in the area flocked to the wreck. Most of her valuables were saved, but the ship was lost. Bonilla, who was insured, later recovered some of his losses but his profiteering ventures with Vera Cruz were postponed. He did, however, manage to ship goods on other merchant ships in return for chests of silver sent home on Spanish warships.

If it had not been for Bonilla’s mother-in-law, with her money and influence, and the help of some investors in Cádiz, Bonilla would not have had the Guadalupe for his current voyage to Mexico. He did not let his previous loss discourage him, but he did have difficulty getting merchants to ship with him and finding competent crew. It would be almost a month before anyone took the risk of consigning goods onto the Guadalupe. His plan was to get to Vera Cruz as soon as possible so as to return under the guard of the returning Spanish warships. He also wanted to avoid the West Indian hurricanes that posed the greatest threat to his ship now that the war was over.

Bonilla turned the present chore of supervising the loading of cargo over to Carredo. All that was available at the moment was the cargo of Bonilla’s mother-
in-law. She registered 60,000 pounds of iron stored in 1,141 barrels on her own account. This dense and heavy cargo made the Guadalupe settle too low in the water. He had room for a great deal more cargo so he needed to lighten the ship. Bonilla ordered eight cannon removed, which left him with eight six-pound and twelve four-pound iron cannon to defend his ship. Though his decreased armament was of some concern, the war that raged nine years had finally ended.

Cargo consignments trickled in from March through August: iron manufactures, spices, textiles, wine and spirits, paper, olive oil, vinegar, and other European commodities packed in bales, barrels, and chests, were loaded. Besides the cargo, Bonilla was to carry twenty Franciscan priests destined for the missions of Mexico. The Guadalupe was nearly ready to sail.

On August 31, 1749, Bonilla bid farewell to Maria, his wife of fifteen years, and his five children. His youngest and namesake was only fifteen months old. Bonilla owned part of a building in Cádiz where he centered his business interests, but Maria resided in their home in Puerto de Santa María across the Bay of Cádiz. After a teary goodbye, he ferried across to his waiting ship. Here he found Carriedo sharing his last moments with his wife Juana, Bonilla's sister.

Bonilla was anxious to get underway and urged Carriedo to finish his goodbyes. Visions of treasure to be loaded at Vera Cruz had already displaced those of the family he had just left. The Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe was towed clear of the wharf, hoisted sails, and passed the fort of Santa Catalina, which guarded the harbor mouth of Cádiz. The ship buzzed with excitement. The Franciscan priests, dressed in sandals and full-length habits of brown cloth cinched at the waist with double-knotted ropes, chatted excitedly as they pointed out landmarks and marveled at the sailors as they scampered effortlessly up and down the rigging. Most had never before been to sea. The reality of their voyage began to set in. The Guadalupe crew were dressed more comfortably on this summer day. Many were shirtless and barefoot, scurrying about the deck tightening rigging as the sails filled with the Mediterranean breeze. Bonilla strode the quarterdeck in anticipation. It had been two long and difficult years. Everyone on board shared the same vision that lay far away over the blue horizon. They were destined for the Vera Cruz, the oldest and richest city in the New World.

The Guadalupe sailed past the Canary Islands that lie 150 miles west of Cape Cantin on the west coast of Africa to pick up the trade winds that would propel them across the Atlantic. Despite some bad weather, they succeeded in crossing
the ocean, and on October 18 made a scheduled stop at San Juan, Puerto Rico, to take on water and supplies. On the 31st they departed for Vera Cruz.

Thirty-six days later, on December 1, 1749, the Guadalupe was lumbering before the wind when the lookout spotted the mountain behind Vera Cruz, then smoke from the lime kilns south of the city. Hearing the lookout’s cry, those not already on deck rushed to get their first glimpse of the fabled city. Soon, the spires of the cathedral and the Convent of San Francisco came into view, followed by the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa and the stone walls that fortified the city. Suddenly, a storm blew in from the north forcing Bonilla to fall off the wind and head for Campeche. Before reaching the safety of that port, the Guadalupe was caught in yet another storm on December 3. For two days, the ship was dashed about by towering waves. It was so horrific that, on the following day, the crew mutinied and demanded that Bonilla run the ship ashore to save themselves. The pumps could no longer keep up with the water and everyone despaired except one thirty-six-year-old, short, swarthy priest with black eyes and a scarce beard named Father Junípero Serra. He had remained calm throughout the storms. The priests decided to pick a patron saint to ask for deliverance. It being December 4, they chose St. Barbara, as it was her feast day. In unison they prayed, “Long live Santa Barbara.” The storm ceased immediately, the winds and seas calmed, and two days later, the Guadalupe arrived safely in the harbor of Vera Cruz.

With great relief, Bonilla ordered Rodriguez to signal the fort and prepare for a mooring. The ship’s boat was readied while the crew began to furl the sails, bringing the ship into the lee of the fort. From the rampart, the Guadalupe’s signal was acknowledged and men poured from the gate onto the landing to receive the cables from the bow of the Guadalupe. The boat was lowered and the cable ends were placed on board, the men rowed to the landing, handed the cable end to fortress personnel, who then fed the lines through the bronze mooring rings anchored in the stone walls. This done, the cables were passed back to the bow of the galleon and secured.

Bonilla entered the fort and informed the officials of his intention to unload. Then he was rowed across the harbor to the mole. Alongside was the seventy-gun warship, La Reyna, loading supplies, cargo, and treasure. After disembarking from the launch, the confident captain strode through the gate opposite the mole and entered the aduana, or customs house. Here he made arrangements to bring the Guadalupe over to unload.
Once secured to the mole, the long-awaited cargo was quickly unloaded and distributed to eager merchants who would, in turn, convert their shipments into tidy profits. The Guadalupe’s passengers, which included the Franciscan priests, entered the gated city.

The priests walked to the Convento de San Francisco just inside the gate across the street from the customs house where they would rest before their overland journey to Mexico City. In order to fulfill their vows to St. Barbara made days before, Father Serra held a solemn celebration in her honor. He preached and gave everyone a detailed account of the voyage and their miraculous deliverance.

Departure day marked the beginning of a historic journey for Father Serra. He shunned the use of a horse for his travel. He instead chose to walk the 180 miles with another priest to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This was the start of the journey for Father Serra who, in 1769, would establish the Spanish mission churches along the California coast, which included San Diego and San Francisco.

After meeting with the treasury officials, Bonilla walked to the plaza, the center of city life. Situated two blocks from the mole, it was bordered by the governor’s house on the east, on the south by the cathedral, also known as the Iglesia Mayor, and on the other two sides by arcaded shops, markets, boardinghouses, and a new hotel that was about to begin construction. The spire of the cathedral stood above all of the other rooftops. The governor’s house was a two-story baroque-style building that covered an entire block and shared space with the cabildo, the town council. The governor’s house had its own courtyard and watchtower, which enabled the governor to keep an eye on the galleons in the harbor. It had a flat roof and whitewashed stone and stucco exterior, as did most buildings in Vera Cruz. The roof provided a clear view of the harbor and often a refreshing breeze. Like the shops, it was fashioned with archways and covered porches on both floors surrounding the entire building. This allowed for cooling in the tropical sun and kept the rain from the doors and windows.

Vera Cruz had as many hospitals as churches because of the ever-present tropical diseases. There was the Hospital Real, called San Juan de Montesclaros, run by the priests of San Hipolito, and hospitals run by the Bethlemites and the Order of San Juan de Dios.

Vera Cruz’s new governor, Don Diego de Peñalosa, had taken office only months before, on August 13, 1749. Bonilla was intent on meeting him and
purchasing a few favors.

Governor Peñalosa delivered some dire news: during the previous summer there had been an epidemic of the vomito negro, or yellow fever, that had ravaged the city, killing many. Buzzards could still be seen perched on rooftops standing vigil, hoping to capture the smell of death. Foreigners were particularly susceptible to this disease as evidenced by the devastation aboard the warship Reyna under the Conde de la Gomera that had been in the harbor since July 29. The epidemic had invaded the city, so the horrified crew remained aboard waiting for the anticipated treasure shipments. In spite of their best precautions, some of the men became infected, spewing black vomit that spread the disease throughout the crew and they were forced ashore into crowded and understaffed hospitals. By the time the epidemic ended in September, nearly all of the crew had died. The Reyna had to remain in port waiting for crew replacements and treasure shipments.

The treasure storerooms in Vera Cruz had been emptied just prior to the arrival of the Reyna by the warships La Galga and El Fuerte, under the command of Don Daniel Huony, and other ships that had arrived earlier with Admiral Don Juan de Eques’ mercury fleet. Nearly six million in silver pieces of eight and other valuables had already been shipped out, roughly half of 1749’s output of the mint at Mexico City.

In late December, La Reyna set sail with cargo valued at nearly four million pieces of eight. Some last items put on board were two gifts for the Queen in Madrid. One was a portrait of the Our Lady of Guadalupe in a gold frame with emeralds and rubies. The other was a figure in the shape of a pelican with gold incrustations. It was only after La Reyna had sailed that Bonilla could make arrangements to receive any treasure on the Guadalupe.

The departure of La Reyna did little to alleviate the demand for silver. There were other ships at Vera Cruz, and more on their way. The Nuestra Señora de los Godos, Captain Pedro Pumarejo, arrived shortly after La Reyna’s departure. Bonilla had last seen him in Cádiz just before he left. Don Joseph de Respaldiza was originally to sail back to Spain on his ship the San Antonio de Padua y Nuestra Señora del Rosario alias La Bella Sara. This ship sank in a storm on January 19, 1750, at the lime kilns just south of Vera Cruz, and Respaldiza was forced to buy another ship for the return journey. He purchased the brig, Nuestra Señora de Soledad y San Francisco Javier, which had arrived in Mexico from Maracaibo, Venezuela, with a cargo of cacao. Respaldiza was also in line for treasure. With
the competition for silver heating up, Bonilla was grateful that he had left Spain ahead of the others.

Governor Peñałosa went on to tell Bonilla that he should expect delays loading his return cargo of silver and cochineal because there had been a drought earlier in the year, followed by storms and hurricanes and then an earthquake in Guadalajara. Peñałosa also complained that smuggling was still rampant and hard to control, but he had his port officials watching the coast. Smuggling was not just a game for small-time harbor rats. Galleon captains tested the king’s tax collectors as well. When unregistered cargo was discovered, a weak excuse would be made, the taxes collected, and the captain was free to go. But if the captain was successful in concealing his booty, he would reap the financial reward of some fifteen percent in avoided taxes.

Juan Manuel Bonilla soon found himself in the same situation as the Reyna crew. In January, he fell ill and was confined to bed in town. He delegated authority to his brother-in-law. He would occasionally look from his window to glimpse the activity of the city where he would often see a vulture or two wheeling overhead. He prayed to St. Francis for the return of his health and tried to blot from memory the vision of the hungry raptors.

Winter turned to spring, bringing the tropical heat and humidity, which would not only jeopardize the health of his crew but also his cargo of cochineal. Before long, it would rot in the sacks that were stored in the damp hold of the Guadalupe. The dye alone was worth nearly a quarter million pieces of eight.

By the end of May, the Guadalupe was loaded and ready to depart, riding at her moor at the fort. Bonilla, still weak and on the mend, was rowed back across the harbor to the mole where he disembarked and passed through the gate. Two blocks away, he approached the guard at the entrance to the governor’s house and after being granted an audience, he learned from Governor Peñałosa that the treasury officials had released his ship and that he could leave in the morning, assuming a favorable wind. Bonilla thanked him for his hospitality during his extended stay. Peñałosa was glad to see the pompous merchant go.

After an uneventful voyage, Bonilla entered the harbor at Havana in early June. Other ships were arriving from Mexico and the Spanish Main. One was El Salvador, Captain Don Juan Cruañes, loaded with cocoa, sixteen chests of silver and four chests of gold coins valued at 140,000 pesos. Another ship, San Pedro, a Portuguese vessel licensed to sail with the Spanish under Captain John Kelly, had
also arrived carrying silver coins, doubloons, silverware, jewelry, two gold bars and thirteen silver bars. Both had come from Cartagena, Columbia. The Nuestra Señora de los Godos arrived from Vera Cruz with nearly 600,000 pieces of eight.

Havana was a city that prospered from the galleon trade and tobacco grown in the surrounding countryside. By 1750, there were nearly 4,000 houses within its stone walls. Leprosy and other diseases were rampant and the harbor waters smelled of human and animal waste.

As soon as Bonilla had arrived, he called on his good friend, Governor Francisco Cagigal de la Vega. Many years before, he witnessed Bonilla’s marriage to María Agustina de Utrera in Cádiz.

In the harbor, Bonilla noticed the warship La Galga making ready to sail for Spain. Bonilla’s original plan had been to load at Vera Cruz in time to return with a well-armed man-of-war, but his delays in Mexico cost him that opportunity. He saw the protection he needed in the fifty-six gun La Galga. She had been left behind the previous November when the treasure fleet of General Benito Spinola cleared for Spain. Bonilla made his wishes known to the other captains destined for Spain, and together they made a direct request to Don Daniel Huony, captain of La Galga, and Lorenzo Montalvo, the port minister, to have La Galga and the Nuestra Señora de Mercedes, a schooner belonging to King Ferdinand, to escort them back to Spain. It was agreed that since the readiness of La Galga and the Mercedes coincided with their departure they would act as escort.

La Galga’s departure had been delayed because Captain Huony had orders to ship various tobacco products, some of which had not arrived at the warehouse of the Real Compañía. Bonilla loaded an additional cargo during the wait: 329 chests of sugar, 240 hides, and 26 sacks of cacao. Other shippers registered additional sugar and vanilla.

On July 30, Captain Huony wrote to Lorenzo Montalvo, the port minister, complaining about the crown’s request to load tons of astilla on his ship. The astilla consisted of lightweight tobacco stems and leftovers packed loosely in bags. Huony pointed out that this bulky lightweight cargo was dangerous for him to carry, as he did not have much in the way of heavy cargo to ballast his ship. The mahogany planks he was carrying were his heaviest freight. Montalvo agreed and advised Governor Cajigal de la Vega on August 2 to hold the astilla for another ship. Having no immediate answer from Bonilla’s old friend, the governor, Huony pleaded his case directly to him on August 5. His departure date was moved back.
Bonilla became extremely impatient. He was growing more and more concerned about hurricanes. His brush with death in the storms off of Vera Cruz the previous December was still vivid in his mind. Huony was equally concerned and was contemplating shortening his masts to accommodate the unsafe load.

Bonilla, seeking to expedite the matter, agreed to take on twenty-nine tons of the astilla, thus settling the dispute between Huony and the *Real Compañía*. On August 13, the governor advised the crown that the tobacco had been loaded, although the *Real Compañía* had exceeded its authority in the matter. *La Galga* had not finished packing her holds. By August 16, the register for the *Guadalupe* was closed. Bonilla was ready for departure, but Huony was not. Huony had other problems, as he had been trying to find suitable crew. To supplement his Mexican recruits, nearly fifty English prisoners were hauled out of the Havana dungeons and put on board.

An English prisoner named Captain Thomas Wright, who routinely traded with the Spanish, had been charged with the theft of some tobacco and was taken on board the *Guadalupe* to face a court back in Spain.

The next day, *La Galga*’s register was closed. Bonilla began to relax. Four more ships had now joined Bonilla: the *Nuestra Señora de los Godos*, the *San Pedro*, *El Salvador*, and the *Nuestra Señora de Soledad*. The fleet would be getting underway in the morning.

On August 18, the fleet cleared the harbor entrance at Morro Castle and with little difficulty entered the Straits of Florida, known as the Bahama Channel to the Spanish. The *Guadalupe* and the other ships in the convoy were experiencing a northerly headwind. Unbeknownst to them, that northerly breeze came from the western edges of a severe storm system and it was headed straight for them.

At dawn on August 25, the fleet was northeast of Cape Canaveral, Florida: the northerly winds increased, signaling an approaching storm. As the skies darkened, Bonilla ordered his topsails taken in, his main reefed, and shrouds tightened in preparation for what was coming. By 4 p.m., the wind abruptly changed from north to west and then from the south and by 9 p.m., the southeast. He now realized that they were in a full hurricane. The fleet struggled to stay together and as they fell off the wind, the distance between them increased. The eye of the storm having passed north of them, the fleet was now locked in place on the northeastern edge of the storm, driving with the wind and the northbound currents.
Bonilla’s tormented face mirrored the angry sea. This was an important voyage. It was his first shipment of treasure that he was able to transport since he lost *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* to the English privateers in 1747. But then if he was dead, losing his treasure would be of no consequence. He prayed to St. Francis and the Virgin Mary for deliverance, reminded of St. Barbara’s intervention on her feast day when he was blown off Vera Cruz the year before. On this trip, however, he wasn’t carrying a flock of Franciscan priests.

As the southeast winds and Gulf Stream currents continued propelling them north toward the Carolina coast, the distance between the ships increased.

Bonilla huddled in his cabin and barked out orders to his boatswain, Pedro Rodriguez. The pumps were constantly manned. As great waves washed over the decks, several crewmen were swept away.

*La Galga* and the *Mercedes* were now north and east of him. The *Guadalupe’s* mizen mast broke on the 26th, which allowed her to ride easier in the following seas.

The wind had already ripped away all of her topmasts. She continued in this state until the 28th, when Bonilla sighted a ship northwest of him. He recognized her as *Los Godos*. Bonilla signaled a change in course and the two ships turned southwest as he knew he was being driven towards the shoals of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. *Los Godos* soon vanished in the darkness.

As the eye of the storm passed close by, the winds increased and shifted easterly, pushing the wallowing galleon closer to land. To slow the ship down, Bonilla ordered the main top mast cut down. No sooner was that done, than a huge following sea slammed her stern and broke the rudder. She was now totally out of control. Soundings were taken to measure the approach of the coastline. Bonilla’s only hope was to get some anchors over in shallower water, but the timing of this maneuver was critical. If anything went wrong now, his ship was guaranteed to be driven into the deadly shoals of Cape Hatteras and all would be lost.

Miraculously, *La Galga*, *Los Godos*, the *Mercedes*, and the *San Pedro* cleared Cape Hatteras Shoals and continued northward. But the fate of the *Nuestra Señora de Soledad* and *El Salvador* was sealed. The night before, on August 29, they were both thrown against Cape Lookout.

At dawn, August 30, Bonilla sounded twenty brazas of water and realized that the coast was nearby. He was unaware of the fate of the *Soledad* and *El Salvador*. All day, the winds continued to drive him toward shore. At 6 p.m., Bonilla dropped
his two largest anchors three miles off the shore of Core Banks, south of Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina. The pilot estimated that they were at latitude 35°. He knew that he was in the vicinity of Cape Hatteras and in English territory.

The Guadalupe was in a shattered condition; the only timber standing was the base of her fore and main masts. The men were at all four pumps desperately trying to keep her afloat. The ship strained at her anchor cables; they were all that kept them between safety and disaster.

During this time, Los Godos and San Pedro met up with each other off Cape Henry, Virginia, and encountered a third vessel, La Marianna, a Spanish sloop sailing from Campeche to Santo Domingo that had been swept out of the Caribbean. The three of them arrived safely at Hampton, Virginia, and anchored off the mouth of Hampton River on September 5. That same day, La Galga, which had missed the entrance to Chesapeake Bay, drove ashore on Assateague Island at the border between Maryland and Virginia. The Mercedes ran aground six leagues north of Cape Charles, Virginia, the northern cape at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay.

The crew of the Guadalupe had endured five days of terror as they were driven from their intended course. Although Bonilla had lost several men overboard in the storm, his ship and treasure were safe for the moment.

With no rudder and no masts, the Guadalupe rode hard at her two anchors and waited for the wind to die down. Bonilla retired to his cabin with Carriedo and Pedro Manuel de Ortega, his pilot.

Meanwhile, in Hampton, Virginia, a sloop was preparing to depart for the West Indies. On board would be two brothers who would soon be welcomed as saviors by Bonilla. That warm welcome would become a gesture he would later regret.
In August 18, 1750, six Spanish ships and one Portuguese cleared Havana harbor for Cadiz, Spain. This little fleet had been assembled from ships that had been delayed in their arrival at Havana after having missed the treasure convoy which had departed earlier that year. The fleet’s sailing day was met with additional fateful delays because of weather, cargos, crews, and administrative decisions that would synchronize the fleet’s ultimate departure with the approach of a West Indian hurricane. That cyclone was aimed at their intended course up the Straits of Florida. A change in departure by only hours would have totally changed the projected outcome. Unlike other treasure fleets before and after them that had met their end at the hand of Mother Nature, impaled on tropical reefs to be salvaged later by modern man, two of these ships were carrying a cargo of not only doubloons and pieces of eight but history that only now can be weighed and understood.

From this fateful encounter with the hurricane at the precise intersection needed to effect the intended outcome, two classics in children’s literature owe their existence to this incredible rendezvous. The first, *Misty of Chincoteague*, is a story for girls about a wild horse which legend says descended from those that swam ashore from the shipwreck of *La Galga*, the warship that was acting as escort for the fleet. *Misty* was written in 1947 by Marguerite Henry and was made into a movie in 1961. Millions of people visit Assateague Island each year to see the horses which still run wild there today.

*Treasure Island*, a story for boys, owes its genesis to the fate of the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, a ship that should have perished the year before her historic voyage. She survived and arrived the following year at Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina, her appointed destination. Days later, a sloop left Hampton, Virginia, bound for the Caribbean on a course that would take her well off the coast of
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North Carolina. As if on cue, the sloop sprung a leak and diverted for Ocracoke. On board was a man named Owen Lloyd whose own vicissitudes had prepared him for the fateful meeting that was about to take place. Then, a fabulous treasure was stolen and buried on a deserted Caribbean island.

The rest is history.