



Minerals Management Service

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News Release

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Minerals Management Service Donates 200-year old Shipwreck Artifacts to State of Louisiana

Protecting and preserving the nation's historic treasures

NEW ORLEANS – The Department Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) donated a large collection of historic artifacts to the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism's Division of Archaeology today at the Louisiana State Museum, the Cabildo.

“The Minerals Management Service is committed to preserving significant cultural resources found on the Outer Continental Shelf,” said MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Director Lars Herbst. “We want to protect these items so that future generations can better understand their heritage.”

The artifacts, scattered in the wreckage of a small wooden-hulled ship lying in 4,000 feet of water 40 miles off the coast of Louisiana, were discovered near the site of an Okeanos Gas Gathering Company (OGGC) pipeline, as a result of the permitting process required by MMS for laying pipelines. The collection was brought up from the seafloor in 2007 by archaeologists from Texas A&M University working under a contract funded by OGGC as part of an agreement reached with MMS to preserve this historic site.

Archaeologists researching the shipwreck concluded that the ship was most likely a two-masted schooner that sank sometime around the War of 1812. Artifacts recovered from the seafloor date the wreck from after 1808 and before 1820. The small vessel was heavily armed with a six-pounder cannon, muskets, pistols, and swords either to protect itself from the countless pirates that infested Louisiana waters during this era, or because it was one itself. Even after years of rigorous research, the actual name of the ship remains a mystery and it has been dubbed the “Mardi Gras Wreck” after OGGC's Mardi Gras Pipeline. Historical research to try to identify the ship will likely continue for years.

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“The artifacts were recovered from the seafloor using a robotic Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) and immediately underwent cleaning and chemical treatment at Texas A&M’s Conservation Research Lab at College Station,” explained Dr. Jack Irion, MMS marine archaeologist. “After completing the painstaking process to stabilize and catalog the artifacts that can take anywhere from months to years, the material can now begin to be transferred to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology,” he added. The Louisiana State Museum will bring this discovery to the public in a series of exhibits.

An informative report on the shipwreck, written by Texas A&M staff, has been published as MMS Report 2008-037 on the MMS web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/index.html>. Additional information on the Mardi Gras Wreck can be found at the project web site <http://www.flpublicarchaeology.org/mardigras/> and at A&M’s Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation website <http://nautarch.tamu.edu/mardigras/>.

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