



The Saint Behind St. Catherines Island...

GiNESSA MAHAR

American Museum of Natural History

North American Archaeology

Do you ever wonder where St. Catherines Island got its name?

Recent research on artifacts recovered at Mission Santa Catalina de Guale, located on St. Catherines Island, has provided some insight into this very question. Ironically, the information regarding the name source comes to us from an object recovered on Amelia Island (Florida).



Photo: Kenneth Hardin, The Santa Maria Mission Project, *The Florida Anthropologist* 39 (1-2): 75-83



There are actually four Santa Catalina de Guale missions in Spanish Florida. The earliest (Santa Catalina de Guale I), built on St. Catherines Island, was attacked in 1680 by British troops and Indian allies, probably in a slave raid. After the attack, the residents relocated to nearby Sapelo Island, establishing the second location of Mission Santa Catalina (II, 1680–1683). Raided again by the British, the mission community retreated once more, establishing Santa Catalina de Guale III on Amelia Island in 1683 (until 1702). A fourth Mission Santa Catalina de Guale (IV, 1702–1763) was eventually established in St. Augustine, the capital of Spanish Florida.

During their 1986 excavations at Santa Catalina III on Amelia Island, archaeologists from Williams College recovered a stamp (or seal) featuring an image of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Stamp seals like this one were popular in Europe after the 12th century. Used to endorse official documents, such seals are individually produced and meant to be unique. Finding this unusual artifact

helped the researchers pinpoint their site as the third incarnation of Mission Santa Catalina.

The stamp shows St. Catherine of Alexandria, identified by the sword and wheel that typically accompany her portrayal. The contracted inscription, “STA CATLNA MRT,” literally translates to “Santa Catalina Martyr.” St. Catherine (d. A.D. 310), saint and virgin martyr, is believed to have been born to nobility in Alexandria, Egypt. Despite her status, she was denounced and imprisoned by the Emperor Maxentius for the offense of converting to Christianity. After imprisonment, she was additionally charged with converting over 200 fellow prisoners, including the Emperor’s wife—all of whom were put to death shortly thereafter. As punishment, St. Catherine was condemned to death by being strapped to a spiked wheel, which according to legend, was destroyed by angels. So instead, she was beheaded via a sword. The agents of her death, the wheel and sword, are the primary identifiers of the saint in religious art and devotional items. As with many devotional medals recovered on St. Catherines, and elsewhere in Spanish Florida, the scene is encircled by a Franciscan cord with four knots. The first three knots symbolize the Franciscan vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The fourth knot is thought to perhaps symbolize the friar’s adherence to the belief in the Immaculate Conception.

The Exhibition staff of the Florida Museum of Natural History created copies of the stamp found on Amelia Island. Jerry Milanich (then a curator at FMNH) generously gave one to David Hurst Thomas (featured here) in recognition of the ongoing archaeological research at the first Santa Catalina de Guale on St. Catherines Island.



We think the stamp recovered on Amelia Island was used in official correspondence sent by the Franciscan friars stationed at the various missions named Santa Catalina de Guale. The status of St. Catherine as a martyr and her actions to convert the souls of non-Christians make her an appropriate figure to symbolize the works of proselytizing friars who converted souls on St. Catherines Island. What better name for an island so deeply entrenched in the spiritual struggles of colonial Spanish America?

2012 Good Year for Bald Eagles

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) yearly surveys show that Bald Eagle populations are soaring in Georgia. Every year the GA DNR performs aerial surveys in January and March to look for eagle nests, and count eggs and fledglings. The 2012 flights documented 163 occupied nesting territories, 121 successful nests and 198 eaglets fledged. The totals are up from last year's 142 nesting territories, 111 successful nests and 175 eaglets.

The number of bald eagle nests in Georgia is steadily climbing, underscoring the rebound of our national bird from near-extinction through much of its range 40

years ago. Nests numbered in the single digits in Georgia when survey leader Jim Ozier started searching for them more than two decades ago. "They're now in places I never would have thought they'd show up" said Ozier (a Nongame Conservation Section program manager with the DNR's Wildlife Resources Division).

The number of young eagles fell this year just shy of 2010, when the survey counted 194 eaglets. Ozier said warmer than usual weather might have resulted in eagles nesting and raising their young earlier, with some eaglets fledging before the survey was taken.

The survey tallies nests in counties throughout Georgia. Chatham County leads with 17 nests, and Liberty & McIntosh counties come in second with 11 nests each. St. Catherines Island and surrounds is home to 5 of the 10 Liberty County active eagle nests, each fledging chicks this year.

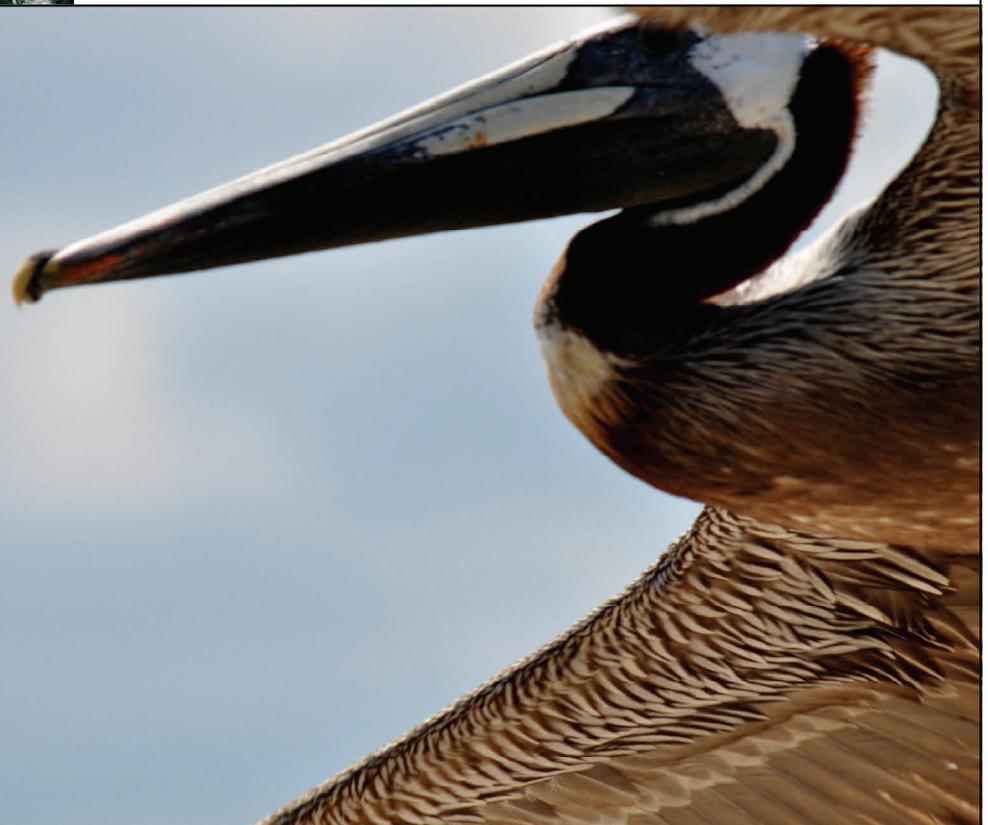


St. Catherines Island Eagle Nests



Georgia Survey in a Snapshot

- 163 Occupied nesting territories
- 121 Successful nests
- 198 Young fledged
- 57 Counties with active nests
- Chatham, McIntosh, Camden & Liberty counties are leading in nests counted.
- St. Catherines Island is home to 5 of 11 nests found in Liberty County



Brown Pelican in Flight