

Asheville Civitan Club, Inc.
PO Box 1755, Asheville, NC 28802

Asheville Civitan Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 1755, Asheville, NC 28802

Mountain Musings

Asheville Civitan Club
Officers and Directors, 2002-2003
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Pres. Elect. - Julia Reeves
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Treasurer - Frank Holby

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Sgts-at-Arms: Don Fox, Lawrence
Wilson, Robert Potter, Larry Knees

Mountain Musings Editor: Roger Hill
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Asheville Civitan Club,
Inc.
Builders of Good Citizenship
83rd Year of Service
Mountain Musings is the
official weekly bulletin of
The Asheville Civitan Club
and
The Asheville Civitan

Asheville Civitan Foundation
Officers and Board Members,
2002-2003

Officers:
President - Ahmad Amara
Vice President - Mark D. Mathews
Secretary - Gary Hannah
Treasurer - Robert Welch

Directors:
Richard Smith, John Gile,
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Larry Knees
Ex officio: Frank Holby, Richard
Richards

Past Governor NC District West:
William M. Pomeroy, Jr.

Past Lt. Governors NC District West:
Robert Gray, 1998-1999
Ralph Scarritt, 1995-1996
Fred Rutledge, 1994-1995

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Foundation



www.ashevillecivitan.org

TODAY'S PROGRAM

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2003

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 12:00 NOON

BLACK MOUNTAIN CENTER

LYNDA CARROLL, speaking on the role of the foundation, and **JENNY PUGH**, Assistant Director, will be the presenters for a power point lecture about the **Black Mountain Center**.

JOHN GILE will give the invocation.

MARYALICE CHUTTER will be the greeter.

MENU FOR TUESDAY: Artichoke Pasta * Salad * Fruit Bowl * Bread
Assorted Desserts * Coffee * Tea * Milk

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS REVISIONS

The **Club Board of Directors** approved revisions to the Constitution and By-laws of the **Club** on April 19, 2003 that were submitted by a task force headed by **RALPH SCARRITT**. Other members of the group were **GORDON BECKER**, **ROY BURCHFIELD**, **TED BUSSEY** and

HY CODY. Ratification by the membership will be asked for in the near future.

RECRUITING NEWS

NORMA MESSER'S “core” recruiting team met prior to the April 19th **Club** meeting to discuss further ways to reach potential members. Hopefully, some of the information packets that were picked up by **Club** members will bear fruit. The campaign is over at the end of September so a special push should be given to these last few weeks. Call in all markers!

TREASURE OF THE *CONCEPTION*

BILL MATHERS, with the help of an extensive series of slides, presented a fascinating picture of the complexities and excitement of hunting for sunken treasure. **Mr. MATHERS'** “addiction” to this kind of adventure began as a fifteen year old but only was realized after an eight-year stint in the US Navy as an engineering and salvage officer. A business career with a firm that built commercial docks, oil platforms and other related projects around the world only whetted his appetite for a culminating experience. Long a student of maritime history, he began to focus on the extensive trade that existed between Spain and Asia that began in 1521 and lasted for 250 years.

The particular round trips that finally produced the shipwreck explored by the expedition were those from Acapulco in Mexico to Manila in the Philippines. In 1638 a Spanish galleon wrecked on a reef off the coast of Saipan, now the headquarters of the Commonwealth of North Marianas. Called the *Conception*, she was on a return trip from Manila bound for Acapulco laden with art treasures, many crated from 22 carat gold, to eventually be sold in European markets. Silks, spices and other exotica from the Orient were on board, but none of these kinds of goods would survive a long immersion. The ship was galleon sized, about 810 tons, 150' by 45'. She likely carried as many as 350 persons aboard for a trip that might have lasted as long as six or seven months.

A tremendous amount of research and planning was undertaken before the expedition could get underway. Archival searches took place in a number of venues, but the actual site of the wreck was pinpointed through research in Rome, Italy. Legal experts were hired to iron out the technicalities and a contract was finally negotiated with the US government: twenty-five percent to go to Saipan and seventy-five percent to the expedition backers. Finally a crew of about 30 was assembled, representing seven nationalities and a wide range of education from native Filipinos with no education to Ivy League PhDs. A support base was established in Singapore, 2200 miles from Saipan.

In spite of the diversity of the crew and a ten-month stay on site, morale was maintained by treating everyone alike: all were taught to dive, various national holidays were observed, and strict adherence to daily routine was practiced. Although much of the cleaning of artifacts was done aboard ship, some of the more delicate work restoring *objet d'art* was sent to Singapore. As to the diving, scuba gear could be used down to a 50' depth, but hard hat gear was needed for depths to 150 or 200 feet. Indeed, since the bow of the ship had broken off and was a considerable distance from the main part of the wreck, an underwater drone was used for exploration.

Some of the first things spotted were one of the ship's anchors—some 13' long—ballast stones, and lots of WW II debris, bullets and beer cans, for example. Using metal detectors, the real treasures began to appear covered by anywhere from 6" to 10' of sand. Interestingly, gold objects were not uncovered until a psychic in London told them where to search. Every find was logged and photographed. Many of the badly encrusted pieces had to be x-rayed. Among the myriad pieces found, rings and other ornamental objects, often with diamonds or rubies in them, were 20 gold chains, all about 40' long, apparently used as a kind of currency, lopping off whatever length was needed for a purchase. One-hundred fifty storage jars were found at a depth of 260', all of which had marking on them, thought to indicate the owners.

All in all, the treasure hunt was a successful one, in spite of the fact that some material from the wreck had been looted by islanders over the years. The entire haul was sold to the Saipan government for five million dollars and is displayed in a museum on the island built with its share of the proceeds. The expedition was thoroughly documented in an extensive government volume and popularized in a coffee table book, “*Treasure of the Conception*,” and in a 1990 article in the *National Geographic Magazine*. A wonderful adventure, well planned, well executed and a credit to all involved. **Mr. MATHERS**, however, insists that he is not finished pursuing hidden treasure. He is looking for the legendary Fountain of Youth in the area, and intends to bottle it for sale!