

"I've never seen a cross like this one. The type has been found in the Southeast, the Caribbean and in Canada, but not here -- until now."

Carl D. Halbrit, City Archaeologist, St. Augustine

The Caravaca Cross



In July of 2002, shortly after beginning a dig at the Ximenez-Fatio site, an extraordinary artifact was retrieved from the tens-of-thousands of items in a trash pit. The relic was a small cross with two horizontal bars.

Found with ceramic artifacts made about 1650, this relic dates to a time when the settlement's population was about 500 hearty souls. San Agustín was concentrated south of the Plaza, north of the Convento de San Franciscan (now St. Francis Barracks), and east of Cordova Street. Construction of the Castillo de San Marcos would not begin for nearly 50 years. Metal, especially bronze, was unusual and a sacred article was quite valuable.

Treatment removed a dark patina of encrusted salts to expose the resplendent white bronze material and fine details. Held together with a bail at the top and peg at the bottom are front and back plates with wheat pattern incising. Circular openings may have revealed fabric or amulets originally set between the plates.



Mary Ruffin Hanbury, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Carl Halbrit, City Archaeologist, and volunteers.



Named for a hillside town in southeastern Spain, the Caravaca cross is believed to have become popular in the 17th century to celebrate the end of the plague. This style was then and continues to be used in Spain as a protection against rabies and lightning. One other 17th century Caravaca cross was found at the Santa Catalina mission site along the Georgia coast. A few Caribbean sites and shipwrecks yielded 18th century examples

Unsolved Mystery: *Why was the cross buried in a trash pit?*

Amazing Fact: *If underground utilities were not part of a new construction project at the site, the cross would have remained undiscovered.*

"an absolutely outstanding find. Whoever had this was a person of some means. This is in the top 10 or 20 percent of rarity. You just don't find something that intricately made."

John T. Powell, educator and conservator

City of St. Augustine Archaeology Program



One of the only city-sponsored archaeology efforts in the nation—this program requires excavation, artifact recovery, analysis, conservation and interpretation to ensure that the cultural heritage of the community is preserved. The city archaeologist and dedicated volunteers accomplish these tasks and add valuable information about life in St. Augustine.