

# DISCOVERY FIVE HUNDRED

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"PUBLIC AWARENESS THROUGH LIVING HISTORY" is the theme of the International Columbian Quincentenary Alliance, Ltd. Through its newsletter, information center, lecture bureau, educational materials, educational travel and public events, the ICQA contributes to the public awareness of the life and times of Christopher Columbus and the 500th anniversary of his Atlantic crossings. Through an informal alliance of the local, national and international groups organized to celebrate the Quincentenary, the ICQA promotes a unified effort in the commemoration of this major historic event.

## SPECIAL COLUMBUS LANDFALL ISSUE

### Another Landfall Approach

By Joseph M. Laufer

This issue of *Discovery Five Hundred* was intended to be the first "theme" issue since we began publication in 1986. The theme was to be the **Columbus Landfall Theories**, and my objective was to simply summarize all of the theories so that the average layperson might be able to make sense out of them. As I gathered material for the project, it became apparent that I had taken on more than I could handle. I decided that to do the project properly, I would need at least a full year's sabbatical, funding for extensive travel and research, and the ability to be totally objective in dealing with a number of very dedicated landfall experts.

I attended two major landfall symposia, was invited to a third (the Grand Turk Symposium), but because of primary job responsibilities had to turn it down. I reviewed all of the major publications concerning the landfall and conducted interviews with some of the key landfall proponents. Private correspondence was received from some of the experts, and before I realized it, I had enough material for a Doctoral Thesis -- yet only enough space and time to do a synopsis.

It was decided that instead of doing what I had set out to do, I would avoid re-inventing the wheel and refer my readers to the appropriate sources for the detailed papers, articles and treatises. Thus, I have put together a brief annotated bibliography of the landfall.

In deciding what unique contribution I might be able to make to the discussion and the research, I decided to reprint some of the original correspondence I've received from Arne Molander -- a scholarly proponent of the Northern Route, (Egg Island) whose views are often overlooked. I also decided to print a post-debate memorandum from Joseph Judge on the Samana Cay theory (*This will appear in the Summer issue - Ed.*)

Because of my respect for the proponents of each of the theories, I decided to write an editorial response to Arne Molander's questioning of my description of my visit to San Salvador (see *Discovery Five Hundred - Vol. IV, No. 1, Jan.-Feb., 1990*). In addition, in my research I came across a ninety-seven year old book by Frederick Ober, who was appointed by the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition as Special Commissioner to determine once and for all where Columbus actually landed as a

major contribution of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the landfall. I found it amusing how, almost one hundred years after his "definitive work", we are even more confused than they were then! I decided to reprint the chapter on the landfall for the amusement of all. Will someone do the same in 2092 for the sixth centenary?

With the inclusion of a few comparative charts on landfall theories, I had more than enough for this edition, which I feel, after all, makes a positive contribution to the field and will, hopefully, inspire someone to get that sabbatical and that research grant to take it all to the next step. Perhaps that way we won't have to anticipate someone writing in 2092 that it is amusing how after another 100 years nothing new has happened to resolve the landfall controversy.

### A Landfall Bibliography

*Ober, Frederick A. In the Wake of Columbus. Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1893. 515 p. plus index; illus.*

Not to be confused with a 1985 publication by the same name, this book is subtitled: "Adventures of the Special Commissioner sent by the World's Columbian Exposition to the West Indies". Frederick A. Ober was an adventurer and author who had sailed through the Bahamas and the Caribbean for almost two decades. He was commissioned by the Officials of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition to complete the definitive study of the initial route of Christopher Columbus and his passage through the islands, and for the fourth centenary of the voyage of discovery to dispell once and for all the controversy over the first landfall. Starting in Palos, he paints a vivid picture of the scenes familiar to Columbus. In 24 chapters he takes us on all four voyages of Columbus and describes the places as they were 400 years later. Chapter III is entitled "*In Guanahani with Columbus*" and Chapter IV is entitled "*Where was the Admiral's Landfall?*". Ober chooses Watling's as the landfall, a theory which was first proposed in 1793 by Munoz of Spain and then again in 1856 by Beecher and had gained increasing respectability through endorsements by Major (1870), Murdock (1884), Thacher and a recently conducted *Chicago Herald* expedition in 1891. Prior to this, the prevailing theories were Cat Island (Catesby, Knox, and Irving) or Grand Turk (Navarrete, Kettell, Gibbs). In reading this work, it is interesting to note how little has changed since 1892 with regard to the

questions concerning the landfall. (*This chapter is reprinted elsewhere in this Newsletter - ed.*)

*DeVorse, Jr., Louis and John Parker, Ed. In the Wake of Columbus - Islands of Controversy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985. 232 p., illus.*

The Society for the History of Discoveries took up the question of the Columbus landfall at its 1980 annual meeting when P.H.G. Verhoog's views on the South Caicos Island landfall theory were presented. This event was followed by a renewed wave of research during the 1980's. John Parker provides an excellent introductory historical overview of the landfall controversy dating back to 1731 when the seeds of controversy were sewn by Mark Catesby who casually referred to Cat Island as the Guanahani of the Indians and the San Salvador of Columbus. After we learn the early history of the controversy, we are provided with five papers on the subject by Verhoog, Dunn, Fuson, Molander and Power. Excellent maps illustrate the various theories and the book closes with a new Spanish language transcription of the Las Casas manuscript of the *Diario* (the Journal of Columbus' first voyage for the period October 10 through December 6, 1492. The material was first published as Volume XV of *Terrae Incognitae*, the official publication of the Society for the History of Discoveries.

*Gerace, Donald T., compiler. Proceedings of the First San Salvador Conference: Columbus and His World. Fort Lauderdale: College of the Finger Lakes, Bahamian Field Station (San Salvador), 1987. 359 p., illus.*

A compendium of thoroughly researched papers dealing with Columbus the man, the navigator, the ships he sailed and the lands and people he encountered. There are twenty papers of varying length and depth of scholarship prepared by anthropologists, archeologists, archivists, curators, geographers, historians and institute directors. At least half of the papers deal with the various landfall theories, with the preponderance of evidence favorable to the Watling's-San Salvador theory. There is a paper by Arne Molander on the Northern Route, one by Robert Fuson on the Turks and Caicos theory, and defenses of Watling's by Obregon, Taviani, Gerace and Hoffman.

*Morison, Samuel Eliot. Admiral of the Ocean Sea - A Life of Christopher Columbus. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942. 680 p. illus.*

Because of Morison's reputation as a scholar and a sailor, and because this book is considered the definitive biography of Columbus in the English language, his endorsement of the Watling-San Salvador theory in 1942 gave it unparalleled credibility among the landfall theories. Chapters 16 and 17 of *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* deal with this subject at length and are essential reading for anyone interested in the landfall controversy.

*Fuson, Robert H. The Log of Christopher Columbus. Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing Company, 1987. 252 p., illus.*

This is a translation of Columbus' own account of his first voyage (as preserved by Bartolome de las Casas) by a Columbus scholar who experienced the need for an accurate and readable translation of the log or *diario* after struggling with earlier versions while doing research on the Columbus landfall. In an appendix, Fuson summarizes the various landfall theories. He has shifted his position on the landfall three times in his career, currently agreeing with the *National Geographic* study which concludes that Samana Cay was Columbus' San Salvador. To this end, he includes a full text of Gustavus Fox's 1880 paper on Samana Cay.

*Judge, Joseph, "Our Search for the True Columbus Landfall." National Geographic, V. 170, No. 5, November, 1986: 564-605.*

This is a special issue containing three separate articles and a map-insert dedicated to Columbus-related research. The material provides an update on the various theories relative to the Columbus landfall "problem", with very convincing evidence that nearby Samana Cay, and not San Salvador (Watling), was the island of discovery. Judge's article is well-illustrated and contains appropriate maps to show how, with the help of modern technology, the *National Geographic* research team came to its conclusion. An article by Luis Marden, "The First Landfall of Columbus" shows how the author, by re-running the courses of Columbus, came to the conclusion that Samana Cay was the appropriate landfall. The new element in this study is the inclusion of computer-generated information dealing with ocean current and leeway in the calculation. Just as Morison's reputation gave his Watling-San Salvador theory an extra degree of credibility, so the prestige of the *National Geographic* has given Judge's Samana Cay theory a definitiveness which may be undeserved and possibly misinterpreted by the general public.

*Schanche, Don A.. "Where in the World was Christopher Columbus". Los Angeles Times Magazine, January 28, 1990: 17-23; 37. Also, Letters to the Editor, March 18, 1990: 8a-8d.*

The author, Don Schanche, was present at the landfall debate sponsored by the Phileas Society in Fort Lauderdale on November 10 to 12, 1989. The article summarizes the positions of Joseph Judge (Samana Cay), Robert Power (Grand Turk) and Mauricio Obregon (Watling-San Salvador). Unfortunately, the chief proponent of the northern route, Arne Molander, was not invited to the debate, so he was only able to get a few words in by way of a letter to the editor in a subsequent issue of the magazine. The article presents a good overview for the layman concerning the history and significance of the landfall controversy and provides a good summary of three of the four prevailing theories.

