

Museum to get haunting relics of wrecked slave ship

BY MICHAEL E. RUANE
THE WASHINGTON POST

The Portuguese slave ship had left Mozambique Island four weeks earlier and headed along the East African coast with its cargo of 500 captives, bound for the rice and cotton plantations of northern Brazil.

Now, two days after Christmas in 1794, the Sao Jose Paquete de Africa had been blown into treacherous waters near the Dutch settlement of Cape Town in southern Africa, and was impaled on rocks.

It was 2 a.m. And as the ship, weighed down with cast iron ballast bars and human beings, was torn apart in the swells, the captain, crew and many slaves reached shore with a rescue line.

But 212 slaves drowned in the frigid water, their bodies probably washing up on shore later. Eleven more died in the next few days.

On Wednesday morning, four of those ballast bars — sacred relics of the slave trade, as one historian put it — arrived at a storage site in Maryland for the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

They arrived from the airport at 10:55 a.m. in a wooden packing crate stamped with "fragile" in red. Oblong in shape, they were dark brown and chipped with age. Each weighed 88 pounds, perhaps the weight of some of the slaves on board.

"These blocks were with the slaves," said Jaco Boshoff, the South African marine archaeologist from Cape Town's Iziko Museums who brought them to the surface.

"Although we haven't found human remains — [and] there's an expectation that we might do that — we will find them trapped under something like a ballast block," he said Wednesday.



Connie Beninghove, assistant registrar, inspects iron ballast bars recovered from a shipwrecked slave ship and destined for the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture facility in Hyattsville, Maryland, on Thursday.

The bars constitute some of the remnants of the first known slave ship to sink with Africans on board that has been identified, studied and excavated, the Smithsonian said.

A wooden pulley block from the ship's rigging and a piece of mangrove timber from the Sao Jose's hull will be delivered later.

They are modest but haunting reminders of the 400-year global commerce in slaves that transformed 12.5 million Africans into a commodity and shipped them like cargo to the Western Hemisphere in bondage.

Tens of thousands of men, women and children died on ships like the Sao Jose during the "Middle Passage" across the ocean.

The artifacts will be displayed in the new museum — set to open on the National Mall on Sept. 24 — along with hundreds of other objects that tell the story of African Americans.

The remnants recall the beginning of the slave ship saga.

They are on a 10-year loan from the Iziko Museums, near where the wreck was discovered.

"I spent years looking around the world trying to find slave ship pieces ... as almost like a religious relic," said Lonnie G. Bunch III, the museum's founding director. They "are really the only tangible evidence that these people existed."

The wreck of the Sao Jose was discovered in the 1980s in about 30 feet of water, 400 feet off shore, near the community of Clifton, according to experts at the Smithsonian, George Washington University and the international Slave Wrecks Project.

But it was long thought to be an older Dutch vessel. And it was not until 2010-11 that maritime archaeologists in South Africa found the captain's account of the sinking in local archives, as well as the telltale ballast



Paul Gardullo (left) museum curator, and maritime archeologist Jaco Boshoff unpack iron ballast bars recovered from a shipwrecked slave ship and destined for the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

bars on the bottom.

When researchers in Portugal found the Sao Jose's manifest, the document said the ship had originally sailed from Lisbon with more than 1,000 iron ballast bars, said Stephen C. Lubkemann, an associate professor at George Washington University, who is part of the Slave Wrecks Project.

Such ballast was often used on slave ships to compensate for the relatively light weight of human cargo.

The Sao Jose set sail on April 27, 1794, with the ballast and trade goods, including containers of wine, gun powder, olive oil and dry goods.

Its destination was East Africa's Mozambique Island, where the Portuguese had built an imposing fortress a century earlier and where slaves would be gathered for the Brazil market.

The ship was owned by Antonio Perreira, and his brother, Manuel Joao Perreira, was the skipper.

Scholars are not sure what the ship looked like.

But many "slavers" were distinguished by netting that was stretched out from the hull to catch slaves who jumped overboard, and a deck barricade built to guard against uprisings.

A slave ship could hold as few as 30 captives or as many as 700, according to historian Marcus Rediker's study of the vessels.

The Sao Jose had headed to East Africa for its cargo because British anti-slaving patrols were trying to suppress the traditional trade from West Africa.

So established had that trade been that a slave ship was commonly called a

"Guineaman," for the Gulf of Guinea on the West African coast.

Typically, a slave ship would sail to Africa from a home port such as Lisbon, or Liverpool in Britain, or a city on the East Coast of the United States.

The ship would linger off the African coast, often for months, until it was "slaved," or filled up. It would then take its cargo to South America, the Caribbean or the United States for sale.

The ocean crossing was often horrific.

Slaves were jammed on board and given a number. Sometimes they were branded.

"When stowed, there was not room to put down the point of stick between one and another," one crewman recalled later, Rediker said.

Disease, death and cruelty were constants.

The hold below decks, where slaves were packed, came "nearer to the resemblance of a slaughterhouse than anything I can compare it to," a British doctor reported.

Mortality rates were high. The dead were thrown into the sea, and sharks grew accustomed to following the ships.

On Dec. 5, 1801, a Spanish slave ship left Charleston, South Carolina, for Mozambique, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. It gathered 200 slaves, but by the time it reached Montevideo, Uruguay, only 66 were still alive.

On Oct. 15, 1791, the American slave ship Ascension left Newport, Rhode Island, for Mozambique. It collected 276 slaves, 30 percent of whom were children.

Upon arrival in Havana, 62 of the slaves were dead.

The Ascension made similar runs from Rhode Island to Mozambique in 1795 and 1798, losing scores of slaves en route and delivering hundreds of Africans into bondage in Cuba and South America, according to the database.

Slaves resisted however they could, although they often were shackled or chained.

Many jumped overboard to try to escape or commit suicide. Some refused to eat. But slave ships had a cruel device called the speculum oris that was used to wedge open the mouth for force-feeding.

Slaves revolted often. The Liverpool slave ship, Unity, had four insurrections in one voyage, Rediker found. In such cases, the crew would retreat behind the deck barricade and fire on the slaves with muskets and deck guns loaded with grape shot.

By early December 1794, the Sao Jose had a full load of humans.

Many of those on board were probably members of the Makua ethnic group, said Kamau Sadiki, of the diving organization Diving With a Purpose, who also worked on the project.

He and Bunch, who visited Mozambique recently, said the long, rugged slave ramp along which captives were marched from the mainland down to the shoreline still exists.

"It was so uneven," Bunch said Tuesday. "I remember thinking, 'I'm struggling, walking down it now, what would it be like if I was in shackles.'"

The Sao Jose's slaves probably were processed on

shore or on Mozambique Island, where the Portuguese had the fortress of Sao Sebastiao and the ancient Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte, built in 1522.

And the ship may have undergone repairs while waiting for its cargo, because a piece of ship timber that divers found in the wreck was local Mangrove wood.

On Dec. 3, 1794, the ship set sail for Maranhao, Brazil. It sailed south along the coast in the summer heat, which Lubkemann said can be intense, aiming to stop in Cape Town to resupply.

But the captain had never sailed in the area before, and as the ship approached Cape Town on Dec. 27, it ran into strong winds out of the southeast that prevented its entrance to the harbor. He dropped anchor just off the coast.

By this time the slaves had been in the stifling hold for three weeks. "These are people who have been in the bottom of the ship, throwing up," Lubkemann said. "They have no strength." Few knew how to swim.

Meanwhile, the wind had blown the ship — dragging its anchor — up onto the rocks, the captain later recounted. He tried to haul the vessel off using another anchor, but its rope broke.

He sent a small boat toward shore carrying a rescue line, but the boat was wrecked in the sea.

Then, with the help of rescuers from Cape Town, a rope with a basket was extended from shore to the ship, and evacuations began. Lubkemann said the water was rough and probably littered with debris.

It also was freezing, because of the Antarctic current, he said. The captain, crew and scores of slaves made it to safety. The others died as the ship was smashed apart.

Afterward, the surviving captives were sold to local buyers, their stories at an end until now.

"These are remnants," museum curator Paul Gardullo said of the ship's artifacts. "They're fragments. ... But ... they become the building blocks of how we can tell these very human and very real stories."

"The middle passage is often thought of ... as unknowable," he said.

"What we're trying to do is say, 'Is that really true? ... Can we begin to know something about this? Can we begin to bring some of these stories back into memory?'"

"The story of the Sao Jose is our first real instance of this," he said. "It's profoundly important."

Painkiller abuse epidemic awaits place on US party platforms

BY ANGELA GREILING KEANE
BLOOMBERG NEWS

WASHINGTON — Mike Smith's sister died after an overdose of prescription painkillers, and the drugs derailed his brother's future. Now he's trying to thrust the issue of America's opioid epidemic into a presidential campaign that is already one of the most divisive in U.S. history.

The Washington public relations strategist is one of many ordinary Americans seeking to shape the Democratic and Republican Party platforms, documents that amount to a governing agenda for the next president.

"It's setting precedent. It's codifying a position. And it's the opportunity to be heard," said Smith, the chief executive officer of GreenSmith Public Affairs. "This is three lines in a health-care policy platform statement. That's what I'm looking for: three sentences."

His quest opens a window into the process of developing the platforms, documents that are little noticed by most voters but represent the closest thing to a promise the electorate can expect. The platforms don't bind the candidates to act but they've still taken on outsized importance this year as both parties try to come together after divisive primaries.

"For the party, they matter because they bring consensus," said Gayle Alberda,

an assistant professor of political science at Fairfield University in Connecticut, said of platforms. "It's a time when activists and the political elite can come together and create a document that tells the public what they stand for."

Winning a mention of the opioid epidemic, which killed about 28,000 Americans in 2014, might not be too tough a goal were it not for the thousands of other people who want a few sentences of their own in the platforms on subjects from health care to criminal justice.

Smith, 57, made his pitch directly to Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz and other party officials at a Washington hotel one day this spring.

After submitting his proposal online, Smith spent a long afternoon listening to testimony from Democratic luminaries including former U.S. attorney general Eric Holder, who wanted language on overhauling U.S. criminal sentences. At the meeting, Smith was able to talk with a staff member for the panel.

Behind the scenes, members of the committee appointed by the presumptive Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, were in a dispute with those appointed by her primary challenger Bernie Sanders, who wanted language opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership

trade deal and endorsing an expansion of Medicare, the health program for the elderly and disabled.

Smith's brother became addicted to opioids after a doctor prescribed them after a high school baseball injury. He was subsequently convicted twice of felony prescription-drug fraud before breaking his addiction. Smith's sister died five years ago at age 50 of pancreatic cancer, hastened by an overdose of a prescription opioid painkiller, he said. Smith's language, if included in the platforms, would mean both major political parties would for the first time acknowledge doctor's prescriptions as a major contributor to the epidemic.

Four years ago, the word "opioids" appeared nowhere in either platform. But by 2014, about 2.5 million in the U.S. suffered from opioid addiction, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, and 1.9 million of them depended on prescription painkillers such as oxycodone, fentanyl or codeine. Worldwide, as many as 36 million people abuse opioids, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse.

While opioid prescription volume has fallen 18 percent since its peak in 2012, revenue for branded opioid drugs may not peak until 2020 at \$3.2 billion, compared with \$608 million in 2015, according to Bloom-



A sign for a Baltimore overdose reversal program. Activists are trying to thrust the issue of America's opioid epidemic into the presidential campaign.

berg Intelligence research.

The epidemic has emerged as the focus of yet another political battle between congressional Republicans and President Barack Obama, who has sought \$1.1 billion to combat opioid addiction. On July 5 he announced that doctors who treat addiction with prescription medicine would be allowed to accept more patients and that the government would conduct more than a dozen new scientific studies on opioid abuse and pain treatment.

Much of a political party's platform carries over from election to election. Democrats, for example, are unlikely to ever remove support for abortion rights from their platform. Nor are Republicans likely to ever remove opposition to the procedure. Issues are added as they rise in the public consciousness, or

removed as they're settled. Gay rights, a plank in the 2012 Democratic platform, is mentioned only in passing in the 2016 draft document after the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage across the nation in 2015.

The platforms are officially adopted by delegates to the party conventions, which begin July 17 when the Republicans meet in Cleveland. Democrats will convene in Philadelphia the following week.

"We've been pleasantly surprised that we got over 1,000 comments," Leah Daughtry, Democratic National Convention chief executive officer, said in an interview. People have sought Democratic platform language supporting restrictions on political donations, the restoration of voting rights for recently released criminals, and yes, acknowledging the role of prescrip-

tion painkillers in the opioid epidemic, she said.

Republicans are holding public meetings on their platform this week. They received input from about half a million people over the last three years, said Audrey Scagnelli, national press secretary for the convention. It's too early to know whether opioid abuse will get a mention, she said before this week's meetings.

But Smith can chalk up at least one win. Democratic Party leaders approved their party's draft platform on July 9, which for the first time includes language on the epidemic.

"We must confront the epidemic of drug and alcohol addiction, specifically the opioid crisis, by vastly expanding access to treatment, supporting recovery, helping community organizations," the document reads, "and promoting better practices by prescribers."