The Secret
St Augustine Solution

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About the Treasure Hunters

John and Angie are a married couple who have 4 kids, 3 boys and 1 girl, and have lived in the Jacksonville, Florida area most of their lives. John is an IT Professional and a Computer Science graduate from University of North Florida, Angie is a stay at home mom who attended JU but chose to devote her life to raising her kids instead of a career. Their Daughter, Kaitlyn, is a talented artist attending Savannah College of Art and Design. John and family were enjoying the Josh Gates Expedition Unknown series and became enthralled by the three episodes on The Secret. A realization was made after watching the episode in which the show did a search in the Fountain of Youth park. By working together, they figured that the combination of their knowledge of the area, strong puzzle solving skills and a leg up on art techniques might provide a very strong chance of solving the St. Augustine puzzle.
The Solution Prelude

They had a problem with the internet accepted hypothesis that the casque was in the Fountain of Youth park. Even without looking at any clues we had strong feelings that the FOY park made little sense. It just didn’t make sense for Byron Preiss to bury it in a location that was walled off to the public and required paid entrance. It wouldn’t have made sense for Byron to have entered such an area to bury it, let alone require the public to do the same to extract it. Can you envision walking through the front gate with your shovel as you buy a ticket? If the casque is not in the Fountain of Youth then where could it be? John maximized his time searching by using VR Google Earth to explore St Augustine in a virtual setting. Along with research online from his daughter Kaitlyn, they arrived at a strong plausible theory of just what location it might be. The following weekend Nov 23rd 2019, John, Angie and Kaitlyn visited the park and found even more clues from both the verse and the art to substantiate the location. We noticed that in the three solved puzzles, the exact burial location is shown in the artwork...the fence post in Chicago, the wall in Cleveland, and the home plate in Boston. While walking through the park, Angie found the location which matches the art for the St. Augustine puzzle. It wasn’t just a sort of match it’s an exact match that’s unmistakable. So sit down, buckle up and enjoy the ride as we walk you through the solve for the St Augustine puzzle in its entirety.
The Solution - Step By Step

We were in agreement with the consensus online to use Image 6 and Verse 9 for the solve.
The first chapter
Written in water
Near men
With wind rose
Behind bending branches
And a green picket fence
At the base of a tall tree
You can still hear the honking
Shell, limestone, silver, salt
Stars move by day
Sails pass by night
Even in darkness
Like moonlight in teardrops
Over the tall grass
Years pass, rain falls.

Clues In The Poem - Verse 9

The first chapter

Because of the Spanish conquistador in the painting, we started our search at the statue of
Ponce de Leon in the center of the traffic circle at the base of the Bridge of Lions. The statue
sits in the center of the circle upon a square pedestal base. There is a circle with a square in the
center on the flag held by the conquistador in the art. Across the street from the statue, there is
a park commemorating the First Constitution of the Spanish written in 1812. What could be
more important to an immigrant group than a constitution? Hence the first chapter. This
established our basic location of Plaza de la Constitución. This is also the oldest park in
Florida.

Written in water

The literary definition of “Writ or written in water” means “does not hold”, “Doesn’t last” etc. The
park was built to commemorate the first constitution of the Spanish, which was written in 1812.
The constitution was denounced and repealed by the King of Spain just 2 years later, hence
“Written in Water” this just strengthens the location of the Plaza even more.
Near men

The park is also home to several war memorial monuments with engravings and plaques in the park. Each monument lists men who fought in the various wars. Some of these monuments are newer than the burial but others were there at the time the casque was buried. The Near men simply references one of these lists of men on a monument.

With wind rose

This goes together with the Near Men, that they are With wind Rose. What is a wind rose? A wind rose is technically a compass for sailors or meteorologists to gauge wind direction. In Spanish times it would have been depicted with a Fleur De Lis at the northern point and a Christian cross as the eastern most point. If you read the plaque at the entrance to the Plaza de la Constitucion it states clearly that the park was designed and set out on the points of the compass. Hence the “Near men with wind rose” being the men in the park were laid out to the points of the compass/wind rose.
Behind Bending Branches

There are many trees in the park and after 40+ years many of them are large and have bending branches but there is one oak in particular that is obviously older and larger than the others. It has a twisted and gnarled trunk and its branches droop with age. You can see that some of the larger branches have been removed over the years. It’s not hard to imagine this could have been the behind bending branches Byron saw 40 years ago.

And a Green Picket Fence

There is no green picket fence in the park, and for that matter there are no picket fences at all of any color. The fact that there are no fences was seen right away perusing the park in VR. Kaitlyn and John scoured the internet archives looking for historic photos of the park and Kaitlyn stumbled on a picture and description in the St Augustine online archives that the park did indeed have a picket fence surrounding it at one time. The photo was not in color and what we consider a picket fence vs a split rail is a question. While it’s obviously gone now it could have been there at the time the casque was buried. This one simple missing fact alone is probably what throws most people off from even considering this park. Considering the strength of the other evidence, the lack of the fence is not a huge concern.
At the base of a tall tree

This is the spot to dig, the one line in the poem that matter of factly states where the casque is buried...at the base of a tall tree. There are a lot of trees in the park and many of them are large and tall. The hypothesis we used was that you were more likely to describe a monstrous oak tree as large, giant or big, but not tall. A palm tree however could be described as a tall tree. Interestingly enough there is a palm tree in the painting bottom right and that is no coincidence. However, there are several palm trees in the park.
You can still hear the honking

Everything in the poem from this line down is used to substantiate that you are in the right location. When you are standing in the spot to dig then these verses can be substantiated. In this case it was not clear what the honking was specifically. It could be the cars on the road or the bridge, boats honking horns to request the bridge to open, or, even the horn sound the bridge master issues when opening the bridge to let boats pass. Which of these Byron alluded to we will never know.

Shell, Limestone, Silver, Salt

Coquina is a common building material in St. Augustine. It consists of shell and limestone. This is a key piece of the puzzle as the object from the painting which indicates the exact location is actually made from Coquina. Silver could indicate a couple of things. In the early 80’s, there was a Wells fargo bank on one side of the park housed in a building called The Treasury. Today there is a fine jewelry store on the other side of the park. It is possible that there was a similar store in the 80’s. Both of these are visible from the burial location. The park is alongside the Matanzas River and salt is likely a reference to the salt water nearby.
Stars Move by Day

Across the street from the statue of Ponce de Leon, there is an American flag monument. The flag is visible from the burial spot. The base of the monument has bronze eagles. The possible relevance of the eagles is explained later. Stars on the flag move as the wind blows.
Sails pass by Night

Because the park is alongside the Matanzas River, sailboats are seen regularly in this area. The Bridge of Lions is a drawbridge. It raises and lowers to allow tall ships to pass. You can see the masts of sailboats parked in the marina from the location as well.

Even in Darkness

The park is listed as open 24 hours a day. It is lit by lamp posts which line the outside edges of the park, with some also inside.
Like Moonlight in Teardrops

The park has some pretty iconic lamp posts with teardrop shaped glass covering the white light bulbs. It’s likely Byron visited the park at night or even buried the treasure at night and the look of these lamps at night would have given the appearance of moonlight in teardrops.

Over the tall grass

Most of the lamp posts have ornamental grasses at their bases. This line probably went with the moonlight verse.
Years pass, rain falls

Not sure of any relevance to the location here other than it’s been a very long time since 1812 and the fact that anyone who lives in Fl knows, it rains often.

Poem Clue Summary

From the poem alone, you can verify that the park is the general location. It provides strong evidence that the park fits all the lines of the poem. We know from the poem that the exact casque location is at the base of a tall tree, behind bending branches and a green picket fence. We also know that you should be able to see the stars move, the sails pass, hear the honking and see the moonlight in tear drops. In addition, we should be able to see the Coquina, silver and salt. To find the exact spot to dig, we need to look for additional clues in the painting.
The State of Florida

The basic shape of the peninsula of Florida can be seen in the clouds in the upper right of the painting. It can also be seen in the ‘white space’ on the right side of the painting.

The Spanish Conquistador

The Spanish Conquistador on the horse represents Ponce de Leon. There is a statue of Ponce de Leon at the foot of the Bridge of Lions and across from Plaza de la Constitución.
The Pennant Flag

The conquistador is holding a pennant flag that looks like the shape of the San Sebastian River. The end of the flag coincides with the river at King Street. King Street is on the south side of the park.
The Eagle

The Flag monument across the street from the statue of Ponce de Leon has an ornate base with bronze eagles. This resembles the eagle in the painting.
The 24

There are several areas in the painting that one might construe as letters or numbers cryptically woven in the painting but none is more striking that the 24, with a 2 and 4 that share lines. There is not really an address for the dig location in the park but if you were to line it up with a specific side of the park that does have an address, it would be “24 Cathedral Place”. This was considered a very significant clue and one that played in very strongly to the actual dig location.
The Flowers

The flowers at the bottom of the picture are cryptic for sure. On one hand you can easily pick out the 9 flowers which probably implies September and Verse 9 but there seems to be more going on. Stems don’t line up with flowers and seem to give hidden meaning or cryptic letters. Angie realized the Cathedral on 24 Cathedral street has a sundial on the side of it that looks eerily like the stems in the picture when turned upside down. Not completely sure on this but highly suspicious.
The Rock & Tree

As stated earlier, John Jude Palencar put the actual unmistakable image of the casque location in each painting...the home plate in Boston, the fence in Chicago and the art deco wall in Cleveland. In similar fashion he put the same unmistakable image in the St Augustine painting. The plaque designating the Plaza monument as a Historic Landmark is attached to a coquina rock in the park. When viewed from a precise angle, this rock matches the shape of the rock in the bottom right of the painting. Even the smooth, dark plaque on top can be differentiated from the rough coquina in the painting. The notches on the right side of the rock can be seen on the rock both in person and on the painting when standing in the correct spot.

It is important to note that the rock matches the painting when standing in the proper location. That location just happens to be a tall palm tree. When you view the rock from the opposite side, you can see that the palm tree aligns with the rock as it does in the painting. However, from that side, the rock is flipped. We feel the reflection, which doesn't include the tree, is meant to convey that. Behind this tree is the large oak with bending branches. It also aligns with 24 Cathedral Place. The casque is buried at the base of the tall palm tree near the rock.

This is a close up from an ultra high resolution 91GB tiff of the painting, look carefully you can see the dark plaque on top left angle, rough left matching coquina on bottom left, smooth top left of the plaque, and the large and small notches on the right side in the coquina.
This profile shot was taken from what we think is the x marks the spot location. From the x marks the spot location you can see the points of interest on both sides of the rock which include the rough coquina left side, the edge of the bronze plaque on the top left and the 2 smaller notches and large notch on the right side. If you move to the left or right even a few
inches from the x marks the spot you lose the points of interest on one side or another. The image below was at night and just a few inches to the right. You can see you start to lose the plaque but the right side notches are quite a bit more noticeable.
X Marks the Spot

John Jude Palencar placed a clue in the painting that shows the exact location to dig. At the top of the hill in the painting, you can see a fat T with an X above it. The sidewalk between the rock and the tree has the T line between concrete slabs. The X indicates the only position where the features of the rock exactly match the painting. Although you could technically move farther back, the tree would then block the view of the rock. This X is where we believe the casque is buried and it is the only place you can see the features on both sides of the monument profile from as shown above.
The Dilemma

So far we have been unsuccessful in our attempts to obtain legal permission to dig. It is our understanding that anything in St Augustine that is excavated in public land in St. Augustine becomes the sole property of the city. We are a family that respects laws but are deeply saddened by this. We are working with George from the 12Treasures site to see if we can get proper permissions but if that doesn't pan out then it's our hope that Josh Gates with his celebrity status and connections might be able to open doors in terms of obtaining needed permissions. Hopefully he remembers us if and when he does.