

DISCOVERY FIVE HUNDRED

1492-1992 NEWSLETTER OF THE
INTERNATIONAL • COLUMBIAN • QUINCENTENARY • ALLIANCE • LTD.
—BOX 1492 • COLUMBUS • NEW JERSEY • 08022—

Volume V, Number 4

October 12, 1990

"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.

COLUMBUS ON THE MOVE... AGAIN!

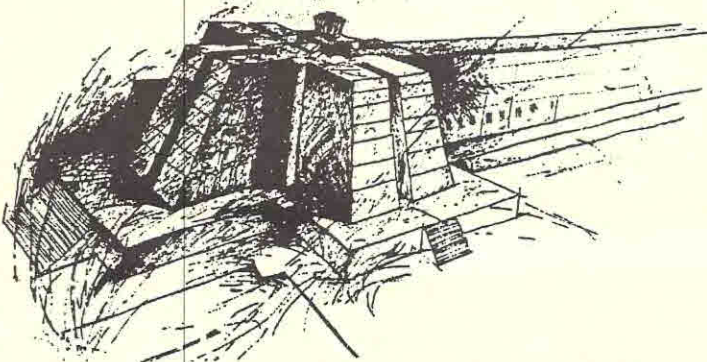
by Joseph M. Laufer

A research grant in Puerto Rico gave me an opportunity for which I had been longing for a number of years. I had visited most of the places throughout the world associated in some way with Christopher Columbus, but I had never been to Santo Domingo. I decided to do a same day fly-in, fly-out from San Juan to Santo Domingo. However, my timing wasn't all that good, because the only time I could interrupt my work in Puerto Rico was the final Saturday in July, the weekend of the popular "Merengue Festival" in Santo Domingo, which attracts many Puerto Ricans. Most of the flights were booked solid. A travel agent finally found a single seat on a Saturday flight which would help me fill in the missing piece in my Columbus collage.

While there are many historic shrines in Santo Domingo, the focal point of my visit was to be the tomb of Christopher Columbus in the Cathedral. Never mind that the tomb is shrouded in controversy. I had pretty well settled things in my own mind through research in Puerto Rico. The library at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico has an excellent Columbus collection and I was able to learn enough to be convinced that the remains in Santo Domingo were truly those of Christopher Columbus. An excellent book on the subject was written in 1953 by Frederick Benton. It is in Spanish, entitled, *La Ultima Sepultura de Colon* (The final burial place of Columbus). This is not the place to detail the story. I have opted to follow this article with a reprint of an article written by Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, a Puerto Rican, which was published in 1934 in *Mission Fields at Home*. This article provides an excellent overview of the "comedy of errors" surrounding the alleged multiple transferrals of the remains of Columbus. Frederick Benton's work is well-documented and concludes that the remains of Christopher Columbus now rest in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo and that the Spaniards, in error, transferred the remains of Columbus' son, Diego, in 1795. No fraud or deceit was intended -- it was simply an error, because of the way the remains were originally placed in the Cathedral. This work is recommended for those who wish to see the

convincing and detailed documentation supporting these conclusions.

Having had my intellectual curiosity satisfied by the research, it was natural that the first place I wanted to visit in Santo Domingo, camera in hand, was the tomb of Columbus in the Cathedral. I had a vivid mental picture of the ornate marble tomb of Columbus -- I show and describe it repeatedly in my illustrated lectures. My taxi driver took me directly from the airport to the Plaza de Colon in front of the Cathedral, dropping me off near the famous statue of the pointing Columbus, erected there 100 years ago.



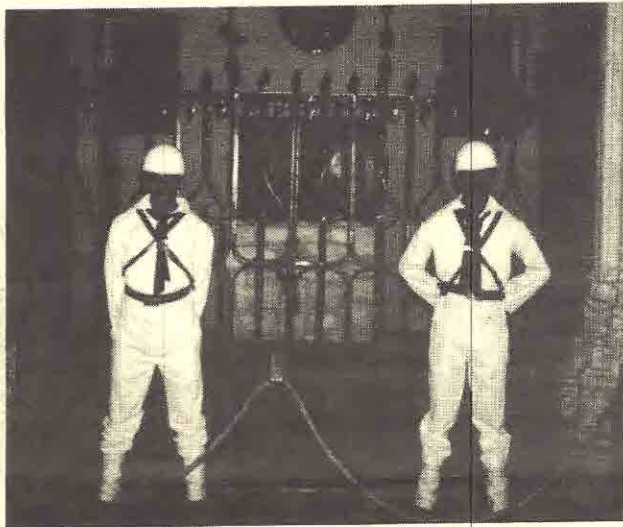
The Columbus Lighthouse, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Upon entering the Cathedral I immediately encountered scaffolding and a large construction barrier at the rear of the edifice. My objective, the tomb of Columbus, was obscured -- cut off from public view. There were two helmeted military men in white uniforms, rifles in hand, standing at attention to my immediate right, just this side of the temporary barrier. They were guarding something at the side altar. An iron grate stood between them and the item they were protecting in a niche on a side altar in the Cathedral. I recognized the black iron engraving from the original Columbus tomb and the Aladan's-lamp-like eternal flame hanging to the side. I asked the soldiers if this were the tomb of Colon. They responded in the affirmative.

Columbus has been moved again! His remains disturbed for the third or fourth -- or fifth time -- since his death in 1506! This temporary resting place is in preparation for his ceremonial transfer to his final (?) resting place in the colossal *Faro de Colon* (Columbus Lighthouse) across the Ozama river in time for the 1992 Quincentenary. I quickly recovered from my disappointment, chagrin, and surprise and spent some moments in meditative silence before the tomb of the man I had traveled miles to see. The presence of the guards was distracting, yet it contributed a sense of

dignity to the occasion. Columbus' remains just weren't relegated to a side altar -- they were honored by a military guard all day and every day!

I asked the soldiers if I could take some pictures, and they obliged. I then asked them if I could go behind the barrier to the original location of the monument-tomb. They gave permission -- and there, in the place where the magnificent white marble tomb once stood was a huge rectangular hole in the ground. Some pieces of the monument were in crates off to the side -- and I could see through the door that most of the parts were in the outer courtyard. I assumed that they were being packed for transferral to the lighthouse -- but there was no one there in authority to verify my suspicions.



Dominican military men guard the temporary tomb of Columbus while finishing touches are made on the Columbus Lighthouse.

I took several snapshots of the scene for posterity. Despite my disappointment, I consoled myself by affirming that I was here at a significant moment in history -- I was an actual witness to the transition. I would be one of the last tourists to visit the remains of Columbus in the Cathedral. From now on, his body would rest in a new location, and all future tourists would visit it there. Indeed, I was privileged.

I completed my visit to the Cathedral in the presence of the remains of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea. I spent the rest of the day visiting other places connected with the life of Columbus and his family, chief among them, the *Alcazar de Colon*, or Columbus Palace, home of Diego Columbus, who governed the New World after his father. I saw the many preparations underway for 1992, when the historic colonial area of Santo Domingo will become a mecca for tourists in search of a connection with Columbus.

I had the opportunity to get a glimpse of the colossal Columbus Memorial Lighthouse. It was much further along than I had anticipated, and it looks impressive in the distance when it is viewed from the shore of the Ozama River. According to the recently re-elected (sixth term at age 83!) president of the Dominican Republic, Dr. Joaquin Balaguer, the lighthouse commemorating Columbus will be the "greatest tourist attraction in the Caribbean." President

Balaguer's government began the six-year construction project in 1986 and a year later, in Madrid, received unanimous support from the 85-member World Tourism Organization to feature the inauguration of the Lighthouse and monument during the worldwide celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Discovery of the Americas. The monument will contain a chapel with Columbus' tomb, as well as six large museums housing unique historical treasures.

The first museum will illustrate the history of the lighthouse itself. Among the objects displayed will be the photos, models and drawings utilized in the original projects submitted for the architectural contest which dates back to the 1940's and the Trujillo regime. A column was erected on March 19, 1944 to commemorate the laying of the first stone for the lighthouse, in conjunction with the centenary of the founding of the Dominican Republic. A ceremony was conducted on April 14, 1948 to initiate the work on the lighthouse, which was designed by Architect Joseph Lea Gleave. It is designed in the form a giant cross and rests in the center of an International Park, some 2,500 acres in extent.

A library of catalogued publications relating to Columbus' voyages will be featured in the second museum. Texts on the conquest of new lands, settlements in the New Republic, and biographies of voyagers will be on display.

Dedicated to cartography, the third museum will consist of maps of America. the collection will include the cartography of navigators and will showcase the first map of an American territory drawn by Columbus.

A fourth museum will honor Columbus himself. Coins, stamps, gold and silver medals will be exhibited in addition to a collection of iconography in bronze, lithographs, and on canvas.

In the fifth museum, underwater archaeology and discoveries will be featured in an effort to illustrate the dangers of marine travel. This collection is the most complete in existence.

The sixth and final museum will showcase historic ceramic pieces from the 15th to the 20th centuries. The country's extensive collection of archaeological ceramics is the result of digs in Santo Domingo and other parts of the country.

According to the architect, J. L. Gleave, "the geographic location of the Memorial is such that it is destined to become a great crossroad of the world's travel, both by sea and air. The lighthouse thus becomes an air beacon which may well be one of the first sights of the New World by many travelers." The design in the form of a tremendous cross carved in the ground, is meant to be an enduring reflection of the wooden crosses set up by Columbus when he first arrived in the New World. It becomes pyramidal in structure, a massive structure of marble and canyons.

In the heart of the monument stands the chapel, with the tomb containing the bones of Columbus at its center. Each night, at dusk, through the ages, an organ will play a Columbus requiem in a sevenfold phrase, opening as a faint whisper through the chapel and canyons, and repeated louder and louder as lights of the Columbus cross reach up to the heavens.

The cross is laid out from east to west, the way Columbus traveled and European civilization has moved. The arms of

