

# Submarine used in the recovery of California Gold Rush artifacts from the S.S. Central America to be auctioned March 4-5

*The specially created 12,000-pound robot submarine that now-jailed treasure hunter Tommy Thompson used three decades ago, nicknamed "Nemo", will be auctioned.*

RENO, NV, UNITED STATES, February 24, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The specially created 12,000-pound robot submarine nicknamed "Nemo" that now-jailed treasure hunter Tommy Thompson used three decades ago to locate a fortune in California Gold Rush sunken treasure is for sale.

The remotely-operated underwater vehicle is one of the highlights featured in an auction with other never-before-offered historic artifacts recovered from the legendary "Ship of Gold," the S.S. Central America. The auction will be conducted in Reno, Nevada and online by Holabird Western Americana Collections LLC ([www.HolabirdAmericana.com](http://www.HolabirdAmericana.com)) on March 4 and 5, 2023.

"Nemo's ingenuity is so exceptional that it could have been made for James Bond. It is such a sophisticated device that its precision robotic arms and suction tubes could carefully pick up a quarter-million-dollar rare gold coin from the ocean floor without damaging it," said Dwight Manley, Managing Partner of the California Gold Marketing Group which owns the six-ton sub and the recovered treasures.

"The skilled scientist and engineers who built it even developed a silicone injection system that could retrieve entire groupings of coins or other objects from this fabulous time capsule of the



Bob Evans, chief scientist on the missions to find and recover the sunken treasures of the S.S. Central America, is seen preparing an exhibit at the 2022 World's Fair of Money of "Nemo," the 12,000-pound, remotely-operated submarine used between 1988 and

California Gold Rush, and then meticulously clean up any remaining residue to protect the underwater environment," added Manley.

The S.S. Central America was carrying tons of Gold Rush treasure from San Francisco and the northern California area when she sank 7,200 feet deep in the Atlantic off the North Carolina coast in a hurricane while on a voyage from Panama to New York City in September 1857.

"Nemo was named in honor of the great fictional ship captain imagined by author Jules Verne. It was deliberately designed to handle both heavy and delicate tasks, excavating and dismantling the collapsed pile of the shipwreck, as well as gently picking up coins where a single scratch could cause enormous loss of value," explained said Bob Evans, Chief Scientist of the S.S. Central America Project who was on each of the recovery missions.

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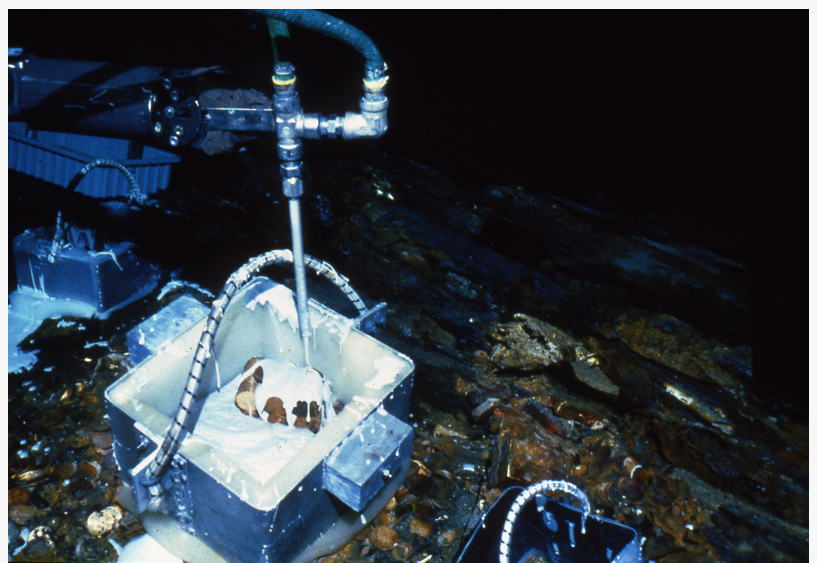
*Dwight Manley*

"In certain situations, we employed a technique borrowed from paleontology, block lifting. Piles and stacks of coins were injected with a liquid silicone rubber compound, which then would congeal over a 48-hour period. Blocks containing over 300 coins could then be recovered as a single piece and then surgically extracted from the clump in a lab aboard ship or on shore," he noted.

"It was invented and built with the express purpose of recovering the gold from the S.S. Central America shipwreck. Working with the leader of the expedition,

Tommy Thompson, we found the sunken ship in 1988 and began recovering its treasure as well as documenting previously unseen marine life that we observed with Nemo's 3D underwater cameras. It is a remarkable, historic, scientific invention for exploring another world, akin to a space capsule or satellite probe, and it was used for the first truly deep-sea exploration and recovery from a shipwreck by private enterprise," stated Evans.

Thompson of Columbus, Ohio founded the search project and creation of Nemo in the mid-



Nemo's silicone injection system filling a foam rubber-lined mold that was placed around a group of over 300 U.S. \$20 denomination gold coins ("Double Eagles") in preparation for the two-hour journey from the seabed to the surface. (Photo credit: Bob Evan

1980s but has not been involved with the treasure for two decades. He has been in federal custody since his arrest in 2015 on charges of criminal contempt.

Insurance claims for the ship's loss were paid in the 1850s and the company that discovered and retrieved the treasure starting in 1988 settled with the insurers and their successors in 1995. With court approval, Manley and California Gold Marketing Group acquired clear title to all of that remaining treasure in 1999 as well as all the items recovered in 2014.

"Nemo has amazing features and was able to handle gold ingots and coins as well as a human. It's the size of a minivan, able to operate under tons of underwater pressure, and it is the deep seas equivalent of the Mars lander. With tens of thousands of hours invested in it, Nemo was literally the first interaction in 1988 with the untouched S.S. Central America and its historic cargo," said Manley.

In addition to Nemo, the March 4 and 5 public auction features exquisite Gold Rush jewelry including a large 18-karat gold quartz engraved brooch that prominent San Francisco businessman Samuel Brannan -- California's first millionaire -- was sending to his son in Geneva, Switzerland, as a gift to the son's teacher.

There also are vintage clothing items including an early Brooks Brothers shirt; ship's objects such as cabin and dining plates, bowls, and bottles; a recovered porthole; the only still-intact Gold Rush treasure shipment box; and an intriguing 1850s photograph of an unknown young woman now nicknamed "Mona Lisa of the Deep" that was found in a pile of coal on the seabed.

"There also 37 Cuban cigars apparently brought on board when the ship stopped in Havana on the voyage to New York. The cigars were discovered in 1991 in the recovered trunk of first-class passenger John Dement, a merchant, miner, and military veteran from Oregon City, Oregon, packed next to the oldest known Gold Rush miner's work pants that sold for a record \$114,000 in the first auction of S.S. Central America artifacts this past December," said Fred Holabird, president Holabird Western Americana Collections.

Holabird Western Americana Collections, LLC has prepared an extensive catalog with many illustrations of the S.S. Central America recovery operations in 3-D. Copies of the March 2023 auction catalog are available for \$100 each with the price refundable with any purchase from the



Some of the gold coins after their recovery from the S. S. Central America and prior to expert conservation to remove calcium carbonate ocean residue to reveal their brilliant, mint state condition. (Photo credit: Bob Evans.)

auction.

All items in the auction are being offered unreserved. For additional information, visit Holabird Western Americana Collections of Reno, Nevada at [www.HolabirdAmericana.com](http://www.HolabirdAmericana.com), call 775-851-1859, or email [info@holabirdamericana.com](mailto:info@holabirdamericana.com).

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