

# THE ART OF THE HUNT

A unique treasure map documents a Seaford artist's search  
for shipwrecks and buried riches.

**By Annette C. Silva**  
Special to the News Journal

Buried treasures move Seaford artist Ellen H. Rice. She says the idea of them reclaims part of her own past and stirs her interest in history and the sea's mysteries.

"I've always loved combing the beaches for coins and relics – but didn't really know . . . what I was looking for," says Rice, 44. She couldn't find a map showing where shipwrecks lie along the Delmarva Coast.

So Rice created a map, "Treasure Beaches of the Mid-Atlantic." She recently released offset lithographic reproductions of the map to galleries and shops throughout the region.

"Delmarva is one of the most productive treasure areas of the world," says Rice. Notorious pirates she says operated from hideaways along downstate Delaware's creeks and small rivers included Edward "Blackbeard"

Localities on early maps often bore the names of pirates – Rice says Blackbird in lower New Castle County was formerly known as Blackbeard.

Prints of the watercolor-and-ink historical rendering, mapping the area from mid-New Jersey to North Carolina and west to the Chesapeake Bay, are available in two sizes: 24 by 36 inches and 22 by 30 inches.

Illustrated on the map are shipwrecks from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the DeBraak at Cape Henlopen, the China Wreck near Lewes, and La Galga, a 50-gun Spanish frigate that ran aground on Assateague Island in 1750.

Rice worked from a 1719 chart and (eight) other period maps, combed national and state archives, and consulted with Dale Clifton, founder and director of the Delmarva Shipwreck and Treasure Museum.

Clifton gave Rice names, latitudes and longitudes of known shipwrecks, and told her what artifacts might be found near them.

"What impresses me about Ellen is that she started this for all the right reasons – she has a real love for the history of it," says Clifton. Her map is "one of the nicest pieces done

in this area,” he says. “I’m hoping the map will stimulate public awareness of our maritime history.”

Dudley Willis, a Wilmington engineering consultant for whom mapmaking is a hobby, drove to Seaford to visit Rice. “I think it’s a wonderful map she made,” he says.

Willis became interested in shipwreck treasures about 30 years ago, after “I did a lot of work along the coast and found some timbers with large spikes.” When he learned the spikes came from an old Spanish ship, he began studying the history and location of area shipwrecks; in 1976 he made a pen-and-ink copy of a rare 1673 Augustine Hermann map.

Rice – known for 25 years on the Eastern Shore as a portrait, historical and wildlife artist – says the map idea came along soon after she met two half brothers and a half sister for the first time three years ago.

“My brother Blake is a songwriter, photographer, and gold miner – he’s always open to new adventures. His openness and courage provided the spark for me to do this project,” Rice says.

She has long sought for truth in her own past, and “unearthing these relationships has been the best treasure of all,” she says.

The map, printed on museum quality paper, shows original names and spellings of towns and waterways; it has colorful drawings of local treasures such as a lighthouse, pirate ships, coins and coin beaches, and the famous Assateague ponies.

Along with the maps now available in galleries and shops, the artist is offering a special “Captain’s Edition.” This limited edition contains 300 signed and numbered prints with replicas of a gold coin and certificates of authenticity.

“Nothing like this with illustrations has ever been done before,” Rice said. A companion piece to the treasure map, *Treasure Legends of the Mid-Atlantic*, is available as a frameable, illustrated parchment “newspaper” page detailing the history of the map’s illustrations, with information on how to find and identify artifacts.

Treasure hunters, take note: In Delaware, it’s illegal to dig in the dunes. You can collect from the water line to the dune line.

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