

Before the Golden Gate Bridge was completed in 1939, Northern California's Marin County was a sparsely inhabited grassland used by local ranchers to graze their cattle. During the summer months, it was also a popular area for the citizens of San Francisco to escape the damp cold of the city's summer fog, and enjoy warm weather amid unparalleled views of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay.

According to the transcript I read of a tape that had been recorded in October 1956, it was just such a day in mid-1936, when a man named Beryl Shinn was driving on Highway 101 and got a flat tire. He decided that before changing it, he'd treat himself to a picnic, and headed uphill to Greenbrae Ridge where he could enjoy an unobstructed view of San Francisco Bay. After having some food and taking in the natural beauty of the area, he decided to look more closely at a large pile of rocks not far from the edge of the hillside. While he was examining them, sunlight reflecting off something caught his eye, so he reached down to retrieve an object trapped beneath the rocks. It was a small, odd-looking, flat, rectangular piece of metal, encrusted with grime and covered with some kind of markings, which he needed to clean in order to decipher. Curious what it might be, he took it home with him and scrubbed it clean. When friends came to visit, many admired it, finding it as unusual and intriguing as he did. Then one day, someone suggested that he show it to Dr. Herbert E. Bolton, a former President of the American Historical Association and director of the Bancroft Library. Dr. Bolton was also a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, a historian of international fame, and an expert at evaluating historical documents and artifacts.

In February 1937, Shinn took the item to Dr. Bolton, who felt that it warranted further investigation. He asked Shinn to leave it with him so he could figure out exactly what it was and what historical value it might have.

Two months later on April 5, Dr. Bolton called Beryl Shinn to share some great news. In his opinion the object appeared to be Sir Francis Drake's original "Plate of Brass." He called a meeting of the California Historical Society (CHS) for the following day, during which he formally announced the discovery and proudly proclaimed, "*One of the world's long-lost historical treasures has apparently been found.*"

On April 7, 1937 both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Oakland Tribune* carried full accounts of the meeting with pictures of the Plate. Shinn sold the artifact to the California Historical Society for \$3,500, a considerable sum at that time. Then CHS presented it to the University of California, and also furnished a sum of money to be used "*for such test or tests to determine the genuineness of the Plate as might seem desirable.*"

Within five days of the newspaper accounts of that announcement, a man named William Caldera contacted the President of the California Historical Society, stating that he had found the same object several years before, in 1939 near Drake's Bay while he was employed as a chauffeur for Bank of America's Board Chairman. Caldera also claimed to have disposed of the object a few weeks later by throwing it out of a car window while he was traveling by himself on the road between San Quentin and San Anselmo. Because he could not prove his story, it was ignored as something Caldera had simply invented in hopes of gaining remuneration by piggybacking on Shinn's discovery.

The testing of the Plate was performed by three of America's top scientists: Dr. Colin G. Fink, Head of Electrochemistry at Columbia; Dr. E.P. Polushkin, a consulting metallurgical engineer for New York City; and Dr. Harold R. Harrison of MIT. The examination was conducted using the most advanced scientific tests available at the time and required more than seven months to complete.