

## The Story of “*Palencia’s*” Figurehead

By Dr. Pierre J. Fisher, Historiographer

In 1996, the Conquistadors built the *Palencia* and selected a replica of the Nereid Galatea as the figurehead for their new ship.

Galatea was one of fifty Nereids (sea nymphs), daughters of the mythical, benevolent sea god, Nereus). She and her sisters lived with their father in a silvery cave in the depth of the Aegean Sea.

The Greek’s believed that Galatea was loved by an ugly, cannibalistic, giant with one eye, the Cyclops Polyphemus, son of Poseidon and Thoosa. Galatea mocked, teased, ridiculed and rejected Polyphemus. She was in love with the handsome young prince, Acis. Polyphemus came upon Acis and Galatea in a meadow near the sea. He became enraged and killed Acis with a large rock. Galatea escaped to the sea. The blood flowing from Acis became a red stream that flowed out to sea to where Galatea was hiding. He then chased after Galatea. Not able to swim, his pursuit was fruitless.

Nereids were always friendly and helpful to sailors fighting the perils of the sea. As related in Homer’s *Iliad*, Odysseus, king of Ithaca became ship wrecked aboard the *Argos*. The ship was sinking and Galatea and her sisters lifted it up and playfully tossed it about, teasing Odysseus and his men. The men encountered favorable winds, escaped the nereids and headed straight for home.

The legendary King of Cyprus, Pygmalion, sculptured a marble statue of the maiden Galatea. The likeness of her in this sculpture was used by Herbert Gleason to make a wooden figurehead for the clipper sailing ship, *HMS Galatea*. This figurehead is that of a beautiful nymph who leads the ship’s crew on a merry chase with her garments flowing in the wind and exposing one beautiful breast.

The Conquistadors engaged Verna Finly of Punta Gorda to make a copy of the *HMS Galatea* figurehead. She wrote: “This ‘statue’ is made on a base of foam and is coated with numerous coats of varnish substances. The last coat is plastic varnish, which should make it completely waterproof. **It will keep its shape forever, provided the figure is not made to lean against anything that will depress the foam.**” (*Conquistadors, take note of this advice.*) “The outside coating will harden some more, given time. After the plastic coating is completely cured, it can be painted with any water based enamel, should you so desire. Please note: **Store in a dry and cool a place as possible.**”



Galatea, figurehead of the *HMS Galatea*



Verna Finly’s Galatea Figurehead

### Invoice for figurehead

1 Gal “Sculpt-or-coat	\$45.02
Sealer	7.00
Gold Leaf, base coat, adhesive sealer, antiquing	57.50
Wooden bracket	5.25
Labor, cloth and foam	<u>0.00</u>
	\$114.77

VERNA B. FINLY  
1750 JAMAICA WAY, #113  
PUNTA GORDA, FL 33950

11-21-1996

THE CONQUISTADORS  
PUNTA GORDA

INVOICE FOR FIGUREHEAD.

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LABOR ,CLOTH & FOAM .....	0.00

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\$114.77  
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THIS "STATUE" IS MADE ON A BASE OF FOAM AND IS COATED WITH NUMEROUS COATS OF VARIOUS SUBSTANCES. THE LAST COAT IS PLASTIC VARNISH, WHICH SHOULD MAKE IT COMPLETELY WATERPROOF. IT WILL KEEP IT'S SHAPE FOREVER, PROVIDED THE FIGURE IS NOT MADE TO LEAN AGAINST ANYTHING THAT WILL DEPRESS THE FOAM. THE OUTSIDE COATING WILL HARDEN SOME MORE, GIVEN TIME. AFTER THE PLASTIC COATING IS COMPLETELY CURED, IT CAN BE PAINTED WITH ANY WATERBASED ENANEL, SHOULD YOU SO DESIRE.

  
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SIGNATURE

Note: Please store in as dry and cool a place as possible.

The original invoice submitted by Vera Finley is shoen on the next page.