

# A Skeleton, a Catholic Relic, and a Mystery About American Origins

*The Atlantic* headline on July 28, 2015 summed up the issue: "A Skeleton, a Catholic Relic and a Mystery About American Origins."



*Randall Kremer, director of public affairs at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, stands next to an image showing the contents of a well-preserved silver box believed to be a Catholic reliquary, during a news conference in Washington, on July 28. The box was found resting on top of the coffin of Capt. Gabriel Archer at the site of the 1608 Anglican Church at the historic Jamestown*

*colony site in Virginia. **It is believed that the box contains seven bone fragments and two pieces of a lead ampulla, a container used to hold holy water.***

A newly discovered artifact buried with one of Jamestown's most prominent leaders suggests he could have been a crypto-Catholic.

After 400 years in the Virginia dirt, the box came out of the ground looking like it had been plucked from the ocean. A tiny silver brick, now encrusted with a green patina and rough as sandpaper. Buried beneath it was a human skeleton. The remains would later be identified as those of Captain Gabriel Archer, one of the most prominent leaders at Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in America. But it was the box, which appeared to be an ancient Catholic reliquary, that had archaeologists bewildered and astonished.

"One of the major surprises was the discovery of this mysterious small silver box," said James Horn, the president of the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation. **"I have to say, we're still trying to figure this out. You have the very strange situation of a Catholic reliquary being found with the leader of the first Protestant church in the country."**

The finding is a historical bombshell, unearthed in a grave on the site of what was once the first church built at Jamestown. Which means researchers may have just discovered proof of an underground community of Catholics—including Archer and perhaps the person who buried him with the relic—who pretended to be Protestants.