The Storm Wreck is the Museum name for an American Revolutionary War shipwreck excavated by Museum archaeologists and students from 2009-2014. It was determined that the wreck carried loyalists or Tories evacuating Charles Town, SC and fleeing to British, East Florida which was still loyal to the crown. As many as 16 ships from Charleston (the name of Charles Town today) wrecked on the St. Augustine sandbar on New Year's Eve, December 1782. As British loyalists ran in fear of the victorious Americans, many lost everything they had to the sea.

Excavation recovered hundreds of artifacts but we do not always know what they are right away. Archaeologists use x-ray analysis to gain a clearer picture of objects locked inside odd, lumpy rocks retrieved from the seabed. These "rocks," called concretions, form from chemical reactions between metal objects lost at sea such as spoons or nails, and the surrounding seawater. As the concretion grows, it wraps around other objects lying close-by fusing them together. Using an x-ray allows conservators to plan for object care. Following the development of a conservation plan, precise physical cleaning removes all salt ions that will cause the artifact to deteriorate when exposed to air.
Museum conservators have preserved numerous artifacts from large cannons to small buttons, from the uniforms of the 63rd Regiment of Foot and the Royal Provincials, a British, loyalist militia. These artifacts show us that both soldiers and private citizens were aboard. Their weapons, such Brown Bess rifles, were loaded. Moreover, the ship met a sudden and abrupt end, as sailors struggled to free her from the sand bar by dumping massive artifacts such as cannon and a lead deck pump overboard. They lost this battle as the team of students and scientists at work also found the ships navigational equipment, something that would have been saved if at all possible.

Among the rare artifacts discovered were a gentleman's pocket pistol marketed as made in London, but really made in Birmingham, England. In addition, an archaeologist found the ship's bell, which was devoid of any markings. The lack of the Royal Navy motifs, such as the broad arrow, provides a clue that this ship may have been privately owned. Also, archaeologists recovered a very early carronade (small, deck-mounted cannon) made in 1780 in the Carron Ironworks in Scotland.

Currently, some of the fascinating artifacts in the lab include a British Navy sea service pistol, a cobbler's hammer and nail kit, and even a lice comb. On your visit to the Museum, check out "Wrecked!" in the Keepers' House. Then visit the PGA Viewing Room in the Maritime Center to talk to conservators and volunteers at work on precious objects from under the sea.

The Museum conserved many of the recovered artifacts, which are now on display in the WRECKED exhibit at the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum.

Dive Deeper! Follow the links below to learn more about the research of this shipwreck.

Historical Background: St. Augustine, the American Revolution and the Loyalist Influx

Raising the Cannons: http://www.staugustinelighthouse.org/LAMP/Research/Storm%20Wreck/raising-cannons

Video Library: http://www.blogstaugustinelighthouse.org/storm-wreck-videos/