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Hunley Update

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President Van Buren requested and received a concurring opinion from U.S. Attorney General Felix Grundy and the Cabinet. Secretary of State John Forsyth had a ship ready to sail for Cuba immediately after the trial, to prevent an appeal.

The Africans' defense centered around the fact that the importation of slaves from Africa was illegal under Spanish law. During the district court trial, Sengbe and the others described how they had been kidnapped, mistreated, and sold into slavery. The district court judge agreed, ruling that the Africans were legally free and should be transported home. (The murder and conspiracy charges were dropped in the circuit court trial, the judge having found the United States had no jurisdiction in those incidents.) Dismayed, the President ordered an immediate appeal, and the case went to the U. S. Supreme Court.

Here, Sengbe and the other Africans, were defended by former President John Quincy Adams, who, though elderly and nearly blind, had been persuaded by the *Amistad* Committee to take the case. In February, 1840 he argued passionately in defense of the Africans' right to freedom, decrying President Van Buren's illegal attempts to influence the judicial system and circumvent the Constitution. In March, 1841 the Supreme Court issued its final verdict: the *Amistad* Africans were free people and should be repatriated.

The *Amistad* Committee spent the rest of 1841, educating the Africans and raising money for their return voyage. Toward the end of the year, the 35 survivors of the *Amistad* affair and five American missionaries sailed for Sierra Leone and established a mission colony, which formed the basis for the eventual independence of Sierra Leone from Great Britain by

encouraging schooling and political reform.

In the United States, the *Amistad* affair unified and advanced the abolitionist movement. Civil libertarians increasingly used the judicial system to press their case, inflaming political passions throughout the country and laying the groundwork for the abolition of slavery and eventually the modern civil rights movement. A key legacy of the *Amistad* affair is the network of schools and colleges founded by the American Missionary Association for the purpose of educating black Americans and giving them the means to pursue their rights, a practice which began

during the *Amistad* trials and continues to this day.

Amistad America Inc. is a new, not-for-profit, educational organization. The consortium consists of the Mystic Seaport Museum, the *Amistad* Committee, *Amistad* Affiliates, the Connecticut African-American Historical Society, and other interested individuals as a partnership to promote the project to build the *Amistad* replica. Almost 150 years after the incident, Mystic Seaport will build a reproduction of the schooner. The *Amistad* will sail again as a floating classroom and be used as an educational tool designed to foster cooperation and leadership in America's youth.

HUNLEY UPDATE

By Christopher F. Amer, Jonathan M. Leader, and Steven D. Smith

The year 1997 begins with renewed resolve by the Naval Historical Center and the South Carolina *Hunley* Commission to move ahead with planning the future of the *H.L. Hunley* submarine. Institute archaeologists, Jonathan Leader and Christopher Amer, met in December, 1996 with both groups to discuss criteria to ensure that the archaeological recovery, conservation, curation, and exhibition of the submarine will meet acceptable professional standards. A working draft of requirements pertaining to the siting and construction of a facility to conduct the work was delivered to the Commission and the Navy last month. We anticipate that a request for proposals to conduct the work will be announced later this year.

Research continues on the submarine. Scientists are still analyzing the data from the corrosion tests conducted on the hull of the *Hunley* but are optimistic that the hull can be recovered. The results of the joint South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA)/National Park Service (NPS/Naval Historical Center (NHC) 1996 assessment of the site were presented at the Society for Historical Archaeology Conference in Corpus Christi, Texas, on January 10, 1997, in a session on American Naval Archaeology. Recent research involves the explosive charge and delivery system used on the vessel. No evidence of a spar was found during the assessment. However, an 1899 drawing by Simon Lake and a drawing of Singer's Torpedo, of the type believed to have been used in the attack on the *Housatonic*, provide clues as to the appearance and possible configuration of the device, and a web discussion group is currently devoted to answering the question as to how the torpedo attached to the *Hunley*.

For the second time since its inception the *Hunley* Update Web site (<http://www.cla.sc.edu/sciaa/hunley1.html>) has been presented an award. The Web Site Excellence-Anthropology award was presented by Wayne Neighbors, CEO of Vee Ring Ltd., to SCIAA for its continued "excellence in public service" through the *Hunley* web site.

The South Carolina *Hunley* Commission has formed a not-for-profit organization to handle donations for recovering, conserving, and exhibiting the vessel. Donations can be made to "Fund To Save the *Hunley*," P.O. Box 12444, Columbia, SC 29211.