Sharing Experiences On Improving Public Access To Shipwrecks

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Sharing Experiences On Improving Public Access To Shipwrecks

By James D. Spirek

This past January a former co-worker, Della Scott-Ireton of the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research, and I co-organized a symposium titled “Preserves, Parks, and Trails: Interpreting our Sunken Maritime Heritage” for the 2000 Society for Historical and Underwater Archaeology Conference in Québec City, Canada.

The concept under discussion at the symposium was the ways in which managers, avocationals, and preservation-minded organizations have joined forces to improve public access to interpreted underwater archaeological preserves, parks, and trails.

The interpretation of these underwater attractions typically seeks to inform the visitor about the cultural significance, structural elements, and environmental setting of a historical shipwreck or other types of sites using illustrative guides, brochures, and ancillary land-based exhibits.

Important goals of this submerged cultural resource management concept are to foster in the visitor a sense of preservation through stewardship, as well as to provide economic benefits to the host community through historical, educational, and recreational tourism. The session brought together fifteen graduate students, professionals, and avocational archaeologists from the US, Canada, and Australia to present their work on improving public access to shipwrecks and other intertidal and submerged archaeological sites.

Our session discussant was Dr. Roger Smith, Florida state underwater archaeologist, who with more than years of experience creating preserves in Florida was an ideal candidate to provide a summation of the session’s presentations. Plus, Della and I learned the ropes under Roger during our stints creating the USS Massachusetts and SS Copenhagen Underwater Archaeological Preserves in Florida in the early nineties.

The first three papers focused on ways to more fully interpret and to expand relationships with other preservation-oriented organizations.

The following nine papers provided practical examples from the United States that included state, federal, avocational, and private initiatives.

Another outcome of the session is that we plan on compiling the papers into a book. This monograph should prove useful as an example of the benefits of creating these types of underwater museums for the public and for historic preservation of these unique and non-renewable cultural resources.

We are also creating a webpage that will feature the papers, as well as links to the respective organizations of each presenter. For those who want to learn more about these underwater attractions in other states, perhaps to plan a vacation, should find this webpage useful. In the interim during the website construction, I would encourage you to conduct a search on the Internet using the keywords underwater archaeological preserves or institutional affiliation of the speaker for more information.

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**BookLocker**

**Willtown—An Archaeological and Historical Perspective**

review by Drew Ruddy

The first book on my reading list at the turn of the millennium was the latest archaeological publication by the Charleston Museum, *Willtown—An Archaeological And Historical Perspective.*

Authored by Martha Zierden, Suzanne Linder, and Ron Anthony, the book contains a flowing account of the development of the early South Carolina southern frontier. Willtown (also called New London) saw its zenith as an Edisto River community in the first half of the eighteenth century and then slowly died as the land evolved into successful rice plantations.

Excavations conducted by the Charleston Museum and anthropology students at the College of Charleston from 1997 through 1999 are described in an absorbing account of discovery. Sites investigated include two building foundations on lots 41, 42, and 45 of the original Willtown plat. Also located was the mid-eighteenth century location of the Presbyterian Church, cemetery, and parsonage. The prime site of the excavation was the James Stobo House, a study of a home of an inland rice planter with a possible occupation between c. 1700 to 1820.

Additional contributors included chapters on African American Slaves And Rice Dike Construction and Animal Use On The Eighteenth Century Frontier.

Beautifully illustrated with photographs and computer graphics, this book documents an important eighteenth century site and chronicles the continued professionalism of the Charleston Museum staff and associates. *(Drew Ruddy is a SCIAA research associate and hobby diver. His upcoming publication, Willtown Bluff—An Avocational Underwater Archaeological Report, describes his underwater survey off Willtown.)*