3-1-1997

Flotsam and Jetsam - March-1997

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Recommended Citation
University of South Carolina, "Maritime Research Division, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology - Legacy, Volume 2/Issue 1, p.p. 16-23, March 1997". http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/mrd_sdnl/44/

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The History of the Amistad
By Quentin T. Snediker and Christopher F. Amer

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the last issue of Legacy (Vol. 1, No. 2, November 1996), there was an article on live oaks being saved for historic shipbuilding. The following is a more in-depth account of the history of the Amistad, a historic ship being restored in Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, with live oak from South Carolina. Dr. Snediker is the Director of the Mystic Seaport Museum.

The Amistad's story began in January, 1839, when 53 African natives were kidnapped from the Mendi country near modern-day Sierra Leone and illegally sold into the Spanish slave trade. The captives endured physical abuse, sickness, and death during a horrific journey to Havana, Cuba, and upon arrival were fraudulently classified as native Cuban slaves and sold at auction.

The Africans were purchased by Don Jose' Ruiz and Don Pedro Montez, who planned to transfer them to another part of the island aboard the coasting cargo schooner Amistad, whose name means "friendship" in Spanish. Desperate and frightened, the Africans staged a revolt three days into the journey and seized control of the vessel, killing the captain and cook and driving off the rest of the crew. They were led by a 25-year-old Mendi named Sengbe Pieh, known to the Spanish as Cinque, who used a loose spike to unshackle himself and his companions. Montez and Ruiz were ordered to sail east for Africa, using the sun as their guide. At night, however, the Spaniards would secretly change course, hoping to sail back to Cuba or to the southern United States. After 63 days the bedraggled Amistad arrived at Montauk point, Long Island, where she and her African "cargo" were seized by a Federal survey brig as salvage. Amistad was towed into New London, Connecticut, on August 29, 1839, where the real struggle for freedom—a lengthy legal battle—began.

Charged with murder and piracy and claimed as salvage property, Sengbe and the others were sent to prison in New Haven after a judge in New London ordered the case to be heard at the next session of the U.S. Circuit Court, in Hartford. Groups involved with the growing abolitionist movement organized a legal defense and began to provide for the Africans' physical well-being and educational instruction. The "Amistad Committee," as they came to be known, even located a translator who could speak Mende fluently and thus allowed the captives to tell their own story. Three days into the circuit court trial, the judge referred the case to the U.S. District Court.

The implications of this case were profound. If the Africans were found guilty under American law, they faced death or permanent slavery at best. If they were handed over to Spanish authorities without trial, as Spain pressed President Martin Van Buren to do, the Constitutional separation of powers was openly compromised. If freed after a trial, key pro-slavery forces would be embittered and likely withdraw their support for the 1840 presidential election.

Hoping that the courts would order the Africans returned to Cuba,
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/hunley.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 Committee 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.
Maritime Conference Awards
By Carl Naylor

For licensed hobby divers, rewards come in many forms. Usually this means a collection of artifacts or fossils (all properly reported and conserved, of course). But for Michelle Mantooth and the Pee Dee Recovery Group, reward came in the form of recognition at the 1996 South Carolina Maritime Archaeology Conference held in September, 1996, at Fort Johnson Marine Resource Center near Charleston.

Michelle Mantooth of North Charleston won the award for Best Presentation at the conference for her talk on the Limerick plantation located on the East Branch of the Cooper River. Michelle has been diving the area for some time, and as a result became interested in the East Branch in general, and Limerick plantation in particular. Her presentation included a history of the plantation, its owners and activities, and an analysis of the artifacts that she has collected from the river near the plantation.

The Pee Dee Recovery Group won the award for Best Exhibit at the conference. Their exhibit featured the artifacts they have recovered from the area of the Mars Bluff Confederate Naval Shipyard on the Pee Dee River near Florence, and the work they have done in recording, not only the underwater portion of the shipyard, but the land component as well.

The Pee Dee group consists of Ted Gragg, Connie Gragg, Bob Butler, Deborah Coates, W. L. Clemmons, Amy Clemmons, Ronnie Summersett, James Wasson, Richie Sasser, and Holly Sasser. The group is presently conducting their research of the Civil War site under an Intensive Survey License issued by the Institute.

Other exhibitors included Lee Spence on his Civil War research, Lou Edens from Shem Creek Maritime Museum, Robin Denson on Florida's prehistoric underwater archaeology, Ron Anthony from the Charleston Museum, Michelle Mantooth on Limerick plantation, and Doug Boehme on bottle typology in South Carolina.

The maritime conference was split into three sessions: Avocational Archaeology Research, Special Presentations on South Carolina Maritime History, and Opportunities in Avocational Archaeology.

The Avocational Archaeology Research session featured presentations by Doug Boehme on a sub-merged prehistoric site in the West Branch of the Cooper River (reported herein on page 20), Ted Gragg and Bob Butler on the Mars Bluff Naval Shipyard, and Michelle Mantooth on Limerick plantation.

The Special Presentations on South Carolina Maritime History session featured author Rusty Fleetwood discussing tidecraft of the Southeastern United States, historian Stephen Wise on blockade runners, and Christopher Amer and Gunter Weber on the H.L. Hunley project.

The Opportunities in Avocational Archaeology session included Lynn Harris on South Carolina's Sport Diver Archaeology Management Program, dive instructor Steve Kelsay on incorporating underwater archaeology principles into sport diving certification courses, Dee Boehme on opportunities for non-divers to become involved in maritime archaeology, Jim Radz on Florida's underwater avocational archaeology opportunities, and Kara Bridgeman on the Allendale Chert Quarry project.

The Maritime Archaeology Conference was held in conjunction with the 5th Annual South Carolina Archaeology Week and was sponsored by the Sport Diver Archaeology Management Program of the Underwater Archaeology Division at the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology.
Wooden Rudder Displayed at Museum

By David Quick, Reporter for The Post and Courier

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above article ran in the “This Week in East Cooper” section of The (Charleston) Post and Courier for Thursday, November 28, 1996. (Printed by permission from the Post and Courier.)

A nearly whole rudder—from a ship circa late 1700s to 1850—has been preserved in a sugar-and-Lysol concoction for two months and is now on display at the Shem Creek Maritime Museum. The effort took cooperation from a variety of individuals, businesses, and the S. C. Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Last August, after two shrimp boat nets had been torn by the rudder, Shem Creek shrimp boat Capt. Junior Magwood vowed to pull in the pesky artifact, located at Dynamite Hole on the south side of the jetties off the Morris Island beach. Magwood pulled the 3,000-pound rudder onto his shrimp boat and hauled it to Salmon’s Dredging Corporation in Charleston, where the rudder was hoisted over to land. Magwood called Jamie Edens, whose mother owns the Shem Creek Maritime Museum, and told him he “caught a schooner rudder and asked if his mother would like it for the museum.”

Eden’s mother, Lou, was vacationing in the Cayman Islands at the time, but Jamie knew he would be interested in the find. Jay Devenny, a boat builder with his workshop at the maritime museum, told Jamie Edens he remembered seeing a PBS program on preserving old wooden artifacts found underwater but could not recall the formula. They called Lynn Harris, an underwater archaeologist with the state’s archaeology institute, who told them about two methods to preserve the wood: the expensive method uses a polyethylene glycol solution and the cheaper method uses a solution of sugar, Lysol disinfectant and Dursban insecticide. They chose the cheaper method.

“Thank the Lord,” Lou Edens chimed in as the story was recalled last week. Jamie Edens and Jay Devenny bought the ingredients—which raised some eyebrows at a local Piggly Wiggly. Edens recalled when they bought all the available bags of sugar at the store, some employees were “convinced we were starting up a sour mash still.” But they needed so much sugar—860 pounds in all—that they eventually ended up calling a sugar distributor to deliver a truckload. Shortly thereafter, Lou Edens returned from vacation, got her bill for sugar, and what Jamie called “her birthday present . . . all wrapped up.” Archaeologist Harris kept tabs on the rudder preservation effort, making periodic visits to make sure it was progressing.

After eight weeks of soaking in sugar, Lysol and Dursban, the rudder was put in a water and bleach formula, and after that, kept under plastic and allowed to dry slowly. Last week, the rudder was declared preserved and moved underneath the museum by employees of the Shem Creek Marina.

Based on clues from the materials used for the rudder, Harris said it was from a ship built sometime after the Revolutionary War to the 1850s. Sheathing on the rudder indicated that it was post-Revolutionary War, whereas the use of copper shows that it probably was prior to the 1850s, when a cheaper, muntz metal alloy became widely used. Harris said finding a rudder intact is unusual and that she was delighted in the cooperative effort to save it. Because the state has a limited budget as well as limited storage facilities for such artifacts, Harris said, private individuals can help preserve South Carolina’s heritage by taking on efforts such as this.

Harris has written a research paper called “Archaeological Resources in Mt. Pleasant,” in which she documents significant underwater archaeological resources such as ships lost during the Revolutionary War and Civil War naval battles in and near Charleston Harbor.

While hobby divers are required by state law to report artifacts found underwater, Harris said, she encourages anybody who finds something of suspected significance to call the local office at 762-6105. Lou Edens commends Capt. Magwood for taking time to save the rudder, which remains his property—technically on loan to the museum. “He went to a lot of trouble to save it. Not only did he put it on his boat, but he spent a good part of his day getting it, and bringing it to land,” she said.
I discovered a prehistoric underwater site, known as 38BK1766, in the West Branch of the Cooper River, Berkeley County, in the summer of 1994, while sport diving. The site consisted of a rich scatter of tools and other artifacts ranging in age from the Paleoindian to the Woodland Period, and included a more diverse assemblage than just projectile points normally discovered in the local rivers. The site appeared not to have been heavily collected by divers in the past and represented an excellent opportunity to document an interesting site.

I quickly realized that this might be a significant discovery and contacted Lynn Harris, Head of the Sport Diver Archaeology Management Program of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology. After visiting the site, Lynn concluded that the distribution pattern was consistent with deposition patterns of the river, rather than the material being in situ. She encouraged me to maintain careful records on the site and enter it into the state’s site file system.

I subsequently made numerous visits to the site over the next two years, collecting under the provisions of the South Carolina Underwater Antiquities Act of 1991, cataloging materials recovered, and finally submitting a site file report. The help of professionals such as Dr. Al Goodyear, Tommy Charles, and Dr. Ken Sassaman was invaluable in identifying and cataloging these artifacts.

No in situ material was determined to be present. No stratigraphic information was available, which limits the scope of this investigation primarily to artifact analysis. Dozens of hours of diving on the site confirmed the initial conclusion that artifacts had been redeposited from their original positions by the action of the river. Almost all artifacts were found in gravel deposited by the river in narrow strips running across the river channel, providing information about fluvial and depositional processes.

I discovered one exception to this in a small, fairly dense, scatter of artifacts near the bank. This scatter contained a number of heavier objects such as bannerstones, baked clay objects, and a full-grooved axe. This material indicated that there may be an in situ site on the bank. Until this area can be investigated, the bulk of information about this site must be gleaned from analysis of the raw material and typology of the artifacts discovered.

The timeframe of occupation was a relatively easy question to answer. The projectile points recovered were rather accurately dated by their shape and manufacture. Occupation of the site was from the Paleoindian to the Woodland Period. The Middle Archaic Period was represented by the heaviest concentration. There were no Mississippian Period tools found. My personal diving experience, and communication with other divers, indicated that Mississippian stone tools were somewhat uncommon in the Cooper River. This contrasts with the Mattassee Lake project which took place 20 to 25 miles from this site. A number of triangular Mississippian points were recovered during the Mattassee Lake project. Paleoindian artifacts were the most lightly represented, with only one specimen; however, considering that only 400 Clovis points have been registered in the state, this is a significant representation.

The raw materials used to make
these tools have the potential to provide information about trading patterns of the inhabitants. Materials come as far away as North Carolina. The materials include orthoquartzite, Coastal Plain chert, quartz, Black Mingo chert, and rhyolite.

Artifacts recovered from the site include a Clovis projectile point approximately 10,000 to 11,500 years old. This small Paleoindian Clovis is a thin lanceolate point made from orthoquartzite. The fluting on both sides, and grinding of the base and lateral sides near the base (presumably to prevent the sharp edge from cutting the binding material) is characteristic of Paleoindian technology (Figure 1).

Dalton points have many similarities to Clovis, but lack fluting and lateral grinding. Note the serrated edges of the specimen in Figure 2. The Dalton point dates to the Late Paleoindian Period from 9,500 to 10,000 years ago.

The flake knife or prismatic blade found on the site are of the same timeframe as Dalton, although they have been found in both Paleoindian and Early Archaic assemblages. The blade shown in Figure 3 was made from a single flake off a prepared core. The timeframe for Early Archaic is from 8,000 to 9,000 years ago.

The Middle Archaic assemblage shows more diversity in form. The Morrow Mountain points are thick blades with a heavy ridge down the middle on one side. They have a weak, rounded stem.

The Guilford point found is a large, heavy, rather crudely made lanceolate blade. A smaller version with a concave base and small "ears" on the base (termed Santee Lanceolate by Tommy Charles) is a common point type for this site. The Middle Archaic Period is from 5,000 to 8,000 years ago.

The Late Archaic was associated with a reversion to stemmed points such as the Savannah River and Broad River points. These are robust, often crudely, made blades with a straight stem and broad blades. They range in age from 3,000 to 5,000 years old.

Woodland points show many similarities to the better made Savannah River points with corner notching. The Woodland Period ranges from 1,500 to 3,000 years ago.

A full-grooved axe from the Late Archaic Period reflects the variety of artifactual material found on the site (Figure 5).

The bannerstone evolved from a weight used on an atlatl throwing stick, to an elaborate tool of unknown, presumably ceremonial, function. Figure 6 shows a Southern Notched Ovate bannerstone. Many similar bannerstones were found in Warren County, Georgia. This specimen represents one of the more elaborate forms dating to about 3,800 to 4,200 years ago. Five other bannerstone halves or fragments were found in four different styles ranging from 4,200 to 8,000 years ago.

This investigation can be of value to archaeologists in a number of ways. It can provide a baseline of data to compare this site with other sites. It may suggest that a site on land exists in close proximity to this site, which could provide a wealth of information on the peoples inhabiting this area. Researchers on this terrestrial project would have an idea on what to expect, providing comparative information about the assemblage likely to be found on land. Analysis of the raw materials on both sites provide information on trading and procurement patterns of different time periods. Several of the more unusual artifacts, such as the Southern Notched Ovate bannerstone and the Clovis point, have already been of use to SCIAA researchers in their various research specialties.

It may also serve to encourage sport divers who encounter rich archaeological sites to go beyond normal quarterly reports and thoroughly document the sites they find.
Fossil Workshop at Charleston Museum (Saturday, April 5, 9-12 AM)
Learn about South Carolina's paleontological history and how to identify fossils with Dr. Albert Saunders from Charleston. Cost is $10. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA, P.O. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. The remainder of the fee should be paid to the museum on arrival. For more information contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

Waterlogged Artifact Conservation Workshop at the Charleston Museum (Saturday, April 5, 2-5 PM)
Techniques to conserve and preserve artifacts recovered from an underwater environment will be discussed by Ron Anthony from the Charleston Museum. This is also an opportunity to view the museum’s conservation laboratory and treatments in progress. Cost is $10. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA, P.O. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. The remainder of the fee should be paid to the museum on arrival. For more information contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

Underwater Archaeology Workshop (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC, Monday, April 14)
The goal of this workshop is to encourage participation and cooperation between amateur and professional archaeologists. This is a great opportunity to interact with our neighboring state. Any sport diver or maritime enthusiast wishing to attend or to present a 10-minute paper should contact Lynn Harris at (803) 762-6105. We would really like to have a good representation from our state. There is no charge for the workshop, but there will be a lunch cost.

23rd Annual Conference on South Carolina Archaeology, Sponsored by the Archaeological Society of South Carolina in Columbia on USC Campus (Saturday, April 19)
There is a call for papers from sport divers, who have participated in projects or wish to speak about any other theoretical or methodological subject related to their experiences in South Carolina. Anybody interested in giving a paper should contact Carl Steen, Program Chair, at (803) 929-0294.

Offshore Shipwreck Mapping Course (Saturday, July 12)
This one-day workshop will be conducted in cooperation with Charleston Scuba on the wreck of the Frederick W. Day built in 1901. The maximum depth is 54 feet. Mapping techniques taught in the Field Training Course Part I will be utilized to map the hull structure and cargo of the wreck. For more information, contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105. Cost is still to be determined.

“Sight on This” Workshop at Old Dorchester State Park in Summerville (Saturday, July 19)
Learn how to use a transit, lay survey lines, dig test pits, and excavate archaeological units. This workshop will require active participation. The integral historical link between the land and the water will be a significant
theme. The importance of combining terrestrial and underwater fieldwork and survey methodologies will be explained in the context of Fort Dorchester’s location on the Ashley River. Cost is $10. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA, P.O. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. The remainder of the fee should be paid to the state park on arrival. Contact Monica Beck at (803) 873-1740 or 873-7475 for further information.

Ashley River Canoeing and Kayaking Shipwreck Trail (Saturday, July 26)

Paddle the Ashley River and learn about the maritime history of the area represented by shipwrecks embedded in the riverbanks. Tour guides will discuss a variety of diverse topics such as the vernacular boat construction techniques, shipwreck disposal patterns, trade, industry, and settlements along the river. Total cost to be determined based upon availability of canoes. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA, PO. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. For more information, contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor. For further information, please call Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

South Carolina Archaeology Week (September 27 to October 4)

Archaeology events will be held statewide. The theme this year for the poster is prehistoric with a focus on shell rings. Contact Nena Rice for further information and a Calendar of Events (in July, 1997) at (803) 777-8170.

“Going all the Way, the Right Way: Official Methods for Reporting a New Shipwreck Site,” Workshop in Charleston (Saturday, October 11)

Spend a few hours in the morning discussing the procedures and requirements for reporting a shipwreck site to the SCIAA Information Management Division. This will be followed by a boat trip out to some old wrecks lying on the beach at Snake Island on the Stono River to practice these methods. Divers and non-divers are welcome. Cost is $10. Send a $5 deposit to SCIAA, PO. Box 12448, Charleston, SC 29422. For more information contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.

Conference in Underwater Archaeology in Atlanta (January 7-10, 1998)

This annual conference will feature presentations and workshops offered by underwater archaeologists from all around the US and many other nations. We are considering a session on public participation in underwater archaeology and would like a few advanced FTC (Field Training Course) students to consider giving 10-minute papers. For more information contact Lynn Harris or Carl Naylor at (803) 762-6105.