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Christopher F. Amer
amerc@mailbox.sc.edu

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Historic period sailing canoe, the Accommodation stored at Dill Sanctuary, owned by The Charleston Museum. (SCIAA photo)

Hunley Update
By Christopher F. Amer

"Moving forward on the Hunley" read the lead editorial in the November 3 edition of Charleston’s Post and Courier newspaper. The South Carolina Hunley Commission met on October 30, 1997 in Charleston. The main item on the agenda was to establish an eleemosynary corporation called “Friends of the Hunley” that will oversee the raising of some $10 million to fund and endow the project. Plans at present are to raise, conserve, and curate/exhibit the submarine. The Commission also discussed various possible locations for a permanent home for the Hunley. Experts agree that the vessel, when raised, should not be subjected to excessive transportation that may damage the hull and its contents. To date, both the Patriot’s Point Maritime Museum, located in Mt. Pleasant, and the Charleston Museum have expressed interest in taking on the project. Once the Commission and US. Naval Historical Center agree on a site, the recommendation will be sent to the SC General Assembly for final approval.

Senator Glenn McConnell, Chairman of the Hunley Commission, anticipates raising the Hunley at the turn of the millennium. Many factors will come into play to determine when the raising will be undertaken, not the least of which is having the necessary funding available and a conservation facility built and operational prior to the hull being removed from its protected location.

Top view of snorkel box and stub of the port snorkel. (Photo by Christopher F. Amer)
The Institute has been working with a naval architect to anticipate necessary requirements to safely lift the hull without sustaining damage to either the structure or interior of the boat. Calculations of the combined weight of hull and contents, including the wet sand, range from approximately 21.25 long tons. The low number is based on a 1/4-inch hull plate thickness traditionally used in descriptions of the Hunley. The 25 ton figure takes into account a 5/8th-inch thickness of plate. After the Civil War, James McClintock wrote to captains in Surf, or Whale Boats, placed one on 5/8 inch thick, 40 feet long top and bottom, 42 inches wide in the middle, & 48 inches high, fitted with Cranks Geared to her Propeller, and turned by 8 persons inside of her. And although she was a beautiful Model Boat, and worked to perfection. Yet like her Predecessors, the Power was too uncertain to admit of her Venturing far from Shore. This Boat was taken to Charleston, SC, and destroyed the Sloop-of-war Housatonic, Myself nor the Sub Marine’s Gallant Commander, who lost his life in demonstrating... considered there was any danger in going out and destroying any vessel. But the danger was in having sufficient Power to bring the Boat Back. I would here state I do not believe the Sub Marine Boat was lost in the operation of destroying the Housatonic, But was lost in a storm which occurred a few hours after. I am aware the Federals has made diligent Search for her, And have made three different reports of having found her. Yet no descriptions that I have ever read are correct." [brackets added]

(ADM 1/ 6236, Public Records Office, British Admiralty, Surrey, England)

Note—A transcription of the complete text of McClintock's letter will appear in a later update.