South Carolina Live Oaks Saved for Historic Shipbuilding

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accommodate the different needs of students in underwater archaeology, either as an avocational activity or professional sideline. It allows the participants to become involved according to their own time schedule and interest level. To date, we have had a very interesting assortment of students including museum curators, lawyers, judges, environmentalists, firefighters, boaters, sea scouts, law enforcement officers, scuba diving instructors, historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, executives, technicians, engineers, school teachers, high school students, and many others with an interest in maritime preservation. The courses will not make you an "instant" archaeologist or provide university credits. This requires full-time commitment at a graduate program in underwater archaeology, such as those offered by East Carolina University in North Carolina or at Texas A & M University.

The Historic Ships Supply Program was started in 1993 by the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at USC when researchers learned of the need for live oak timbers for the restoration of the USS Constitution. A partnership was developed with the South Carolina Department of Transportation with the result that large live oak trees slated for unavoidable destruction as a result of bridge and road construction were saved for use in the USS Constitution restoration project. With the major assistance of the U.S. Marine Corps at Beaufort, more than nine tons of live oak lumber were shipped to the Charlestown Navy Yard near Boston.

Since 1993, the program has been expanded to gather live oak from private residences and commercial development projects. The wood is also made available to other historic ship projects in addition to the USS Constitution.

Southern live oak has been used in ship construction since the 18th century. Carolina-built vessels were famed for their strength and durability, which were qualities derived from the use of live oak for internal timbers used in the framework of the ships—called knees, floors, and frames.

The most recent project involves live oak trees being removed from Hilton Head Island, for a new highway on the island. The oak timbers are being used to reconstruct the historical schooner, Amistad, at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, the nation's leading maritime museum. Amistad Director, Quentin T. Snediker, is very grateful for the contribution of live oak timber for this historic project.

The coastal ship earned a place in history after a slave revolt off Cuba. The dramatic Amistad story begins in 1839 when 53 Africans—49 men, 3 girls, and 1 boy—were kidnapped from their homes in Western Africa to
be smuggled into Cuba and sold as slaves. Forced aboard the cargo ship, *Amistad*, the Africans were bound for a plantation in eastern Cuba when they revolted and attempted to sail for their homeland.

After drifting in the Atlantic Ocean for two months, the ship was discovered by the US Navy off Montauk Point, New York, and towed to New London, Connecticut. A federal trial followed, drawing international attention to the slaves' plight. Federal District Judge Andrew T. Judson declared the Africans "free people," but President Martin Van Buren quickly ordered an appeal of the decision.

For preservation shipbuilding, live oak is ideal. Approximately 25 trees from Hilton Head Island, estimated to be 100-200 years old, will be used to reconstruct the *Amistad*. Construction of the vessel, scheduled to begin in the summer of 1997 at Mystic Seaport's Henry B. DuPont Preservation Shipyard, is expected to cost $2.5 million. Now, more than 150 years later, the *Amistad* will sail again. The ship will be used to foster cooperation and leadership among America's youth.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** An update of the *Amistad* project will continue in the next issue of Legacy.