The Lumber Boom of Coastal South Carolina: Nineteenth-Century Shipbuilding & the Devastation of Lowcounty Virgin Forests by Robert McAlister

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Abstract
Marianne Cawley of the Charleston County Public Library reviews Robert McAlister’s The Lumber Boom of Coastal South Carolina: Nineteenth-Century Shipbuilding & the Devastation of Lowcounty Virgin Forests.

Keywords
book reviews, South Carolina, lumber

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In contrast with rice or cotton, there have been relatively few books on the lumber industry in South Carolina’s history. Much of this slender book deals with Henry Buck of Bucksport, Maine, who built the first steam-powered sawmill in South Carolina around 1828. He started a lumber mill near the Waccamaw River south of Conway to supply Maine shipbuilders with the superior lumber from the Lowcountry’s virgin forests. His company would grow and thrive under his direction and later his sons’ right up to the early 1900’s, becoming the largest lumbering operation in coastal South Carolina from 1840 to 1885, according to McAlister. McAlister traces the rise and fall of the company and the two small communities, Bucksville and Bucksport, which developed with it. There is also a chapter on the construction and subsequent history of the Henrietta, the largest wooden ship ever built in South Carolina. The two-hundred-foot-long, 1,200 ton, square-rigged ship of a type called a Downeaster was built at Bucksville around 1874-75, by the father-in-law of William Buck, using workers brought down from his Maine shipyard. Though the experiment produced an excellent vessel, it was never repeated. Later chapters deal with the Atlantic Coast Lumber Company and International Paper Company, both of Georgetown. The Atlantic Coast Lumber Company was organized in 1898 by a wealthy New York financier, just one of his many business ventures. It was the largest lumber mill east of the Mississippi River, employing over 1,500 workers and processing 2,500 logs per day. Unlike the family business of the Bucks, the profits of the Atlantic Coast Lumber Company went out of the state. McAlister claims the company clear cut the forest of trees to feed the mill with no thought of damage to the countryside or replanting. Once the supply of trees was depleted, the company closed, devastating the Georgetown economy. The author brings his history up to current times with the International Paper Company, which expanded into South Carolina in 1935, building a pulp and paper mill in Georgetown a year later. McAlister, a sixty year resident of the Georgetown area, closes with an amusing recollection of a 1954 summer job with International Paper working on a survey crew. Retired construction manager Robert McAlister is also the author of The Life and Times of Georgetown Sea Captain Abram Jones Slocum, 1861-1914 and Wooden Ships on Winyah Bay, both published by History Press. He is involved with the South Carolina Maritime Museum in Georgetown and has written Cruising Through Life, a memoir of his family’s sailing adventures. The book is clearly written, well-
illustrated and includes some quotes from contemporary newspaper accounts, though none are cited in the bibliography. Local history collections in Georgetown and Horry County will want this book and it will appeal to those who are interested in this rarely discussed aspect of Lowcountry history and forest conservation in the state. McAlister clearly mourns the loss of acres of long leaf pines and cypress that once filled this state. Public libraries who collect in South Carolina history and industry should consider this title. Though not written for an academic audience, WorldCat lists copies at Duke, College of Charleston, University of Georgia, and UNC at Chapel Hill.

Marianne Cawley is the South Carolina Room Manager at Charleston County Public Library.