Rolling on the River

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Rolling on the River
By Jonathan M. Leader and Christopher F. Amer

The Brown's Ferry Vessel was moved to the third floor of the Rice Museum, Georgetown, SC, in 1992. The 1740s coastal merchantman had been conserved at the Office of the State Archaeologist Conservation Laboratory for the seven years leading up to the move. The roof of the museum was removed and the vessel was very carefully and precisely hoisted four stories into the sky and placed on the prepared floor exactly toeing the previously arranged marks. Success was achieved and everyone went home to prepare for the next phase.

The reconstruction phase lasted from 1992 through fall of 1998. It too was successful with the vessel being reconstructed by hand with precisely fitted supports and 100s of feet of carefully cut and threaded stainless steel rod. Normally the conclusion of a project spanning two decades would be a clarion call for Miller time; there was just one small problem. Half way through the reconstruction of the vessel and the restoration of the historic building containing the exhibit an architect had decided to unilaterally shift the position of the elevator 90 degrees. This change required that the elevator users be remarkably supple to avoid being impaled on the vessel's futtocks and transom.

The elevator's original intent had been to facilitate the physically challenged visitor's ability to view the exhibit. This was now in jeopardy. Something had to be done, but what? The only solution was to move the six ton reconstructed vessel forward six feet.

Three-inch hard wheel ball bearing supported casters attached to steel plates were the tools of choice. “L” shaped attachment struts were produced from lumber and the casters attached to the struts. The struts were than screwed securely to the 4 x 4 inch under scaffolding of the vessel. Additional 2 x 4’s were attached to the edges of the scaffolding and to the uprights located on the starboard side to ensure that all
portions would move as a single unit. A hand operated come-a-long was bolted to a short length of 4 x 4 and the whole unit was lag bolted to the third floor’s main support beam. Chains were secured to the under scaffolding and the vessel made its way forward inch by inch. Seven hours after the initiation of the move the vessel was in its new position. It was safe, sound, and with plenty of space near the elevator to accommodate wheelchairs or other conveyance.

Large object conservation and exhibit calls for flexibility and creativity. Fortunately, both the staff of the Rice Museum, the volunteers, and the staff at SCIAA are all up to the challenges. We would like to specially acknowledge the sterling work of Mr. Bruce Brown of A and B Construction and his crew. One would be hard pressed to find a more professional and capable group. Funding for the work was provided by a grant by the Save America’s Treasures program.

Harold Fortune, Christopher Amer, and Jonathan Leader reconstruction the Brown’s Ferry Vessel on the third floor of The Rice Museum, Georgetown, SC with director Jim Fitch looking on. (SCIAA photo courtesy of Jonathan Leader)

The upgraded exhibit produced by the staff of the SCIAA will be presented in the next issue of the Legacy.

CLUES FROM THE PAST: SOUTH CAROLINA TEACHER’S GUIDE AVAILABLE SOON!
By Jonathan M. Leader

Several years ago the SCIAA produced a guide for teaching archaeological concepts and philosophy in the public schools. Can You Dig It?: A Guide to Archaeology in the Classroom was an instant success and enjoyed a long run in classrooms throughout the state. As with all publications, eventually Can You Dig It? became dated. Enter Ms. Darwin Ramsey, a graduate student in the University of South Carolina’s Sociology Department and Museum Studies Certificate Program. Ms. Ramsey needed a project to assist in the completion of her course of study and the rewriting of the teacher’s guide was precisely her area of interest.

Working closely with the State Archaeologist, the SCIAA Director for Outreach, and members of the archaeology and education community, Ms. Ramsey completed the project in record time. Divided into four sections, the guide provides teachers with the necessary understanding and hands-on projects to foster an understanding and appreciation of archaeology. The sections are: Fundamental Concepts used in Archaeology, An Overview of South Carolina’s Cultural History, The Process of Archaeology, and Issues in Archaeology. Two appendices, a timeline and an Internet resource guide, are included as well. Well written and researched, this guide should achieve the same level of use and acceptance of the original Can You Dig It?

The guide will be available on CD shortly and a hard copy version will be made available when funding permits. The CD version is in Adobe Acrobat and the software firm provides a free reader for both Macintosh OS and Windows based computers. The reader can be downloaded from the Internet at: http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html, http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html. The CD version will be available to the public at cost, plus mailing. If you are interested in receiving a CD version of the Clues from the Past, or if you wish to donate funds towards the hard copy publication, please send your name, address, telephone and email address to the attention of Nena Powell Rice, Director of Outreach, SCIAA-USC, 1321 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29208, <nrice@sc.edu>, (803) 777-8170.