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Research on CSS Alabama

The wreck of the Confederate States Navy raider Alabama was discovered by French navy divers off Cherbourg, France in 1984. This was the most famous and successful sea raider in modern history, capturing or destroying more than sixty ships during her two year history. In May-June, 1988, a French team under Captain Max Guerout made the first systematic examination of the wreck. Because of the severe tide (four knots), diving was limited. Nevertheless, significant documentation was accomplished, including photographs, video, and line measurements. Also a number of artifacts were recovered.

Gordon Watts and William Still, Co-directors of the E.C.U. Program in Maritime History, were the only non-French invited to participate in this summer's project. They have since then been elected to the Board of Directors of the CSS Alabama Association, a private organization created in France to sponsor projects on the American Civil War Ship.

Conservation Continues

1988 has been an exciting year for conservation in the Program. After a month of good experience at the Bermuda Maritime Museum's conservation lab second year students were given an opportunity to further develop practical conservation skills by working in the Maritime Program's facility alongside staff archaeologist Brad Rodgers. The major project this year was the continued work towards final treatment of the 2.5 inch cannon undergoing conservation since 1984.

In finishing the piece students gained valuable hands on experience impossible to teach in the classroom. The first assignment was to unload the gun, a proposition much easier said than done. To this end a pipe was driven into the cannon's muzzle in order to remove the stubborn remnants of a charge which was partially removed last year. To our surprise a solid iron shot was removed along with cotton wading and gun powder. The gun, therefore, contained a double charge of anti-personnel shot (described in Vol. 3 Stem to Stern) and solid shot.

In conjunction with the final treatment of the great gun an experiment was conducted to develop an easy, cheap, and non-toxic method of testing for chloride ion content in the electrolytic solution of the cannon. Early results of this experiment seem promising and the preliminary results will be presented in "Conservation of the Chesapeake Mystery Gun" to be given at the Conference on Underwater Archaeology in January.

Further conservation experience combined with Museum experience will begin next semester when students create and build a display for the cannon in the second half of the Public History course under direction of Professor John Tilley. In this manner students will gain the practical museological experience of artifact acquisition from excavation to display.

Preparations will soon be underway to move our conservation lab to new facilities under construction. This move will occur in January or February of 1989 and will constitute a welcome upgrade of our laboratory.
Shipwreck Survey in South Africa

During November and December of 1987, ECU graduate student Lynn Harris conducted a preliminary historical and archaeological survey in the vicinity of Cape Town city, South Africa. The Cape seaport played an important historical role as a shipping station for the Dutch East India Company (1652-1795), a British base to suppress the slave trade, and as a stopping point for captured prisoners of war during the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Other uses of the Cape seaport included a stopover point for nineteenth-century passenger ships and twentieth-century troopships of World Wars I and II. Shipwrecks in the treacherous Table Bay anchorage caused financial loss to many nations, particularly the Dutch.

Salvage, urban development, and heavy surf have depleted or buried many seventeenth and eighteenth century shipwreck sites. The only material evidence of these sites comes from divers, collections donated to the South African Cultural History Museum and the tinners of the vessel, Nieuwe Rhoon (1776), excavated during a city building project. A magnetometer survey to locate and identify any remaining sites in the near shore area of Table Bay was undertaken. The survey located five sites; three dating to the nineteenth century and two to an earlier time period. Mapping the site of the Huis de Crayenstein (1698) provided data about cannons and anchors carried aboard Dutch East Indiamen.

Porcelain from Dutch East Indiaman in Table Bay

ECU Begins Public Education

To the public, treasure hunters are often folk heroes, going for the gold. They do not see the destruction of important cultural resources. As underwater archaeology is a relatively new field, it has some catching up to do in the public relations department. Movies and TV documentaries on treasure hunting abound but only recently have archaeologists been reaching out to the public which is ultimately responsible for supporting research. ECU recently began to speak directly with an important segment of the public, the children.

In the Spring of '88 Brad Rodgers, Mary Miller, Dr. William Still and Kurt Knoel created a lecture program which travels to elementary schools and colleges. This program has been designed so that any of the graduate students can give this presentation with little prior notice. The actual content of the program varies with the age group being addressed. Basically it consists of a demonstration of diving equipment, a slide show discussing research from archives through conservation, and finally a chance for a hands-on experience with artifact analysis which challenges the children to make observations about an artifact's physical and cultural properties. Kurt Knoel conducted 16 of these lectures in two states and found teacher response to be very positive. The students found it fascinating and generally come away with a very different attitude about treasure hunting when they see what can be done by archaeologists.

In the fall of 1988 graduate student Jim Allan will bring the program to California. It is hoped that because of the wide geographic background of the students in the Maritime History program, that many areas of the US and other countries can be covered.

In a further attempt to reach more people with information about Maritime History and Underwater Research, a video is scheduled to be produced during the Spring of 1989 by Dr. Chip Cox of ECU's TV and Broadcasting department and Graduate student Kurt Knoel. The video should be completed by summer of 1989. For more information about the above programs write to the editor in care of the history department.
ECU Completes Third Year at Yorktown Shipwreck Archaeological Project

The Yorktown Shipwreck Archaeological Project is a large-scale, long-term research project of the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology, a part of the Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks, Department of Conservation and Historic Resources. In 1978, remote sensing located and identified nine shipwrecks in the York River to be part of Lord Charles Cornwallis’ fleet. These vessels were lost by the British in 1781 at the Battle of Yorktown.

From 1983 to 1988, the best preserved of these vessels was excavated and disassembled. Designated site 44YO88, the excavation was carried out within a steel cofferdam. The use of the cofferdam and its associated filtration system created a protected environment around the shipwreck free from the strong currents, low visibility and stingy jellyfish that had hampered previous archaeological investigations in the York River. This situation also offered an excellent teaching opportunity for students of nautical archaeology.

The Program in Maritime History and Underwater Research at East Carolina University has participated in the project since its inception. Summer field schools and fall research semesters have enabled ECU’s students to participate in excavation, recording, site maintenance, dive support and conservation. This cooperative effort has provided the project with skilled and enthusiastic personnel. It is worth noting that the professional staff for the project had three members who had been through ECU’s program.

During ECU’s 1988 summer field school, the lines of the hull were taken off enabling the staff to recreate the vessel and analyze her sailing characteristics. By disassembling the vessel underwater, the construction details were recorded with a high degree of accuracy. The excavation had revealed the well-preserved vessel to be a British collier hired by the Admiralty to serve as a transport supporting British forces in the colonies. With so little documentation available on merchant ship construction, the Yorktown project has made significant contributions to the limited existing body of knowledge on 18th century merchant naval architecture. The project has also further defined the details of shipboard life and the contribution

[Image: Working platform at the cofferdam]

Tom Adams and David Whipple discuss the day's work.

[Image: Tom Adams and David Whipple discuss the day's work]
Bermuda combined with favorable working conditions, gave the students the broad practical experience so necessary for their chosen field.

ECU at Death's Door

As part of their summer field school, a team of ECU researchers participated in a subaergered cultural resource survey project with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin from July 25 to August 5. In a jointly funded project staff archaeologist Brad Rodgers and graduate students Lynn Harris and Kurt Knoert worked with state underwater archaeologist and ECU graduate, David Cooper to identify and evaluate selected sites in the northern Door County region of Wisconsin, located where Green Bay meets Lake Michigan. Work was conducted offshore of Hog Island and North Bay. Inshore work was conducted in the vicinity of Plum Island and Europe Bay. The reconnaissance level survey produced preliminary documentation of five sites, including the 1871 stranding of the schooner Winfield Scott, the 1872 beaching of the bark Cherubusca, the 1909 beaching of the schooner B.0.2, and the scattered wreckage of two or more unidentified lake vessels.

Of special interest was the unusual double-centerboard configuration of the B.0.2 (most lake schooners of this size carried a single centerboard); as well as the offset centerboard arrangement in the Winfield Scott. The Scott construction reflects some of the early efforts to modify vessel construction to accommodate centerboards (ca. 1840-1850) on the Great Lakes. New archaeological information is helping nautical archaeologists and historians to better understand the many adaptations and innovations which contributed to the unique nature of Great Lakes maritime traditions and technology.

Projects such as this one give students a unique opportunity to work in varied geographic areas, exposing them to variations in ship construction and working conditions. It also affords students the chance to gain experience in survey techniques and equipment which has been discussed in the classroom.
Nine papers will be presented at the First Joint Archaeological Congress being held in Baltimore, Maryland January 5-9, 1989.

Beard, David V., "HMS Debraak: An Architectural Study of an 18th Century British Brig."

Morris, Kaea J., "The Eugou Canoes of Lake Phoah: Results of the 1986 and 1987 field seasons."

Delgado, James P. and Larry Murphy, "Bleached and Scattered Bones: Implications of Natural Site Formation Processes with Beached Shipwreck."

Harris, Lynn, "Survey of Shipwreck Sites in the Vicinity of Cape Town, South Africa."

Cooper, David J., "Underwater Archaeology in Wisconsin: Past, Present, and Future."


Rodgers, Bradley A., "Conservation of the Chesapeake Mystery Gun."

Still, William N., Jr., "The Historical Importance of the CSS Alabama."

Morris, John William II, John Broadwater, "Yorktown Shipwreck Archaeological Project: An Interim Hull Analysis of Site 44YO88."


The following is a list of theses completed within the last year by students in the Program or the Department of History, on maritime and naval topics. They may be ordered through Inter-Library Loan at your local university or public library from Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.


Graduate Student Research

The following is a list of students currently enrolled in the program and their areas of research.

James Allan. An investigation into the maritime history of Fort Ross, California.

David Baumer. A history of welled fishing vessels of the East and Gulf coast of the United States.

Diane Cooper. The shipbuilding industry in the San Francisco Bay area, 1847-1883.

Marianne Federale. Classical Greece and underwater archeology in the Mediterranean.

Robert Finegold. Elizabethan Privateering under Sir Francis Drake.

Cris Gober. A history of the USS Kearsege.

John Jensen. A history of the naval sloop of war the USS Jamestown.

T. Kurt Kneerl. An archaeological investigation of the cove area of Old Port Niagara.

Roderick Meher. Advice boats of the Royal Navy.

Betty Mathews. A study of the construction and design of the six masted schooner George Wells.


Steve Schmidt. An examination of the Potomac Flotilla operations and the loss of the USS Talip.

Heidi Tobias-Oliver. The impact of the Yankee Whalers in the Pacific on the port town of Lahaina, Hawaii.

Rusty Willingham. The Development of the destroyer escorts.

Briefs

In the spring of 1990, the program in Maritime History and Underwater Research will be co-sponsoring "The South Atlantic Regional Maritime Heritage Conference" with the East Carolina University Division of Continuing Education and the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort.
A limited number of the following publications are now available through the Maritime History department. Requests should be directed to Mary Miller in care of the Department of History, East Carolina University. Checks should be made payable to East Carolina University.


Watts, Gordon P., Jr. *An Investigation of Blossom's Ferry on the Northern Cape Fear River*. ECU Research Report No. 1, Program in Maritime History and Underwater Research. East Carolina University. 1986. $5.00


1989 Summer Field School

This year, East Carolina University will again offer a *Summer Field School in Maritime History and Underwater Archaeology*. It is open to both graduate and advanced undergraduate students. Students receive a basic introduction to American maritime history, ship construction, underwater research techniques, and related subjects. During the first two weeks students stay on campus for classroom lecture and pool training sessions on the *Sinkentine*. The remainder of the field school will be spent working on a project in the field. For more information and applications write to: Summer Field School, Program in Maritime History and Underwater Research, ECU, Greenville, North Carolina 27858. Applications must be received by April 1, 1989.