ANTH318
Nautical Archaeology of the Americas

Class 2

Introduction
2. The importance of ships
3. "Taxonomies"
4. History, ethnography, archaeology
5. Management of the cultural heritage

The object of this course is to follow the history of the American continent through its watercraft. In order to understand American ships and boats, we must focus on the reasons why they were built, the qualities required for each purpose, and the materials and technologies available at the time of their creation, development, and demise.

2. The importance of ships
Ships were the most complex and sophisticated machines built by men for a long time. It is therefore interesting to study their evolution in relation to the political and economical environments in which they were created and developed, the creativity that characterized most periods of rapid evolution, and the ways in which people improved their water craft.

3. "Taxonomies: there are many different ways to look at ships"
   J. Richard Steffy: Cargo carriers, warships, fishing craft, utility craft.
   Eric Rieth: Floats, Rafts, Boats (dugouts, extended dugouts, assembled craft);
   Lucien Bash / Fred Hocker: Shell-first, skeleton-first, bottom based;
   Basil Greenhill (Roots): rafts, skin boats, bark boats, dugouts.
4. History, ethnography, archaeology

How do we know what was there, how it evolved, how was it influenced by other factors (economic, cultural, environmental, functional), and how it influenced the other factors in societal change?

Shipwrecks and all the other artifacts archaeologists deal with are echoes of human past activity. We try to reconstruct and understand past activity by interpreting artifacts and contexts.

Why do we bother to dig slowly and carefully? Because we are curious? Because we have an innate love of the truth? Because we need a grid of references in order to develop and grow as a society?

5. Management of the cultural heritage

Why don’t we raise, conserve, and display all the wrecks we find? Three case-studies: The Alvin Clark (1864), the Cairo (1862), and the Philadelphia (1776).

The Alvin Clark, 1864

A sturdy two-masted schooner sunk in 1864 in Lake Michigan, during a trip from Chicago to Oconto to load lumber.

Found in 1967 by a sports diver named Frank Hoffman, a saloon and motel keeper interested in old wrecks.

After getting the salvage rights from the Army Corps of Engineers he decided to raise it. Since he had no money for the conservation the ship dried, rotted, and was finally discarded.

The Cairo, 1862

Built in 1862 the USS Cairo was one of seven ironclad river gunboats, known as the “Pook Turtles” after their designer, Samuel Pook.

With 14 guns, this floating fortress was launched in January 1862 to operate on the Mississippi River. Later it moved to the Tennessee River, taking part in the occupation of Clarksville and Nashville.

In June the Cairo fought in Memphis, helping to destroy the Confederate river defense fleet. Finally, in December, it was on the Yazoo River with the forces of General Sherman preparing to participate in the attack on Vicksburg.

At the Yazoo River it was sunk by a Confederate mine, being the first vessel ever to be sunk by an electrically detonated mine.

The USS Cairo was found in 1956 and raised in 1960. During the salvage operation the ship was badly damaged. Too few cables and a bad estimation of the weight of the vessel
led to disaster, as the cables cut the hull through and almost completely destroyed each of the sections raised.

After its salvage the USS Cairo was badly broken and no proper conservation measures had been taken in advance. In 1977 a state funded project allowed the reconstruction and display of the remains of the USS Cairo in the Vicksburg Battlefield Park. An accurate reconstruction was planned and executed. What was left of the Cairo was conserved and reconstructed. The extensive collection of artifacts recovered from the Cairo site was also treated and displayed in the Park’s museum. The total cost of the Cairo project is estimated around $4,740,000. The park and museum are located in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The Philadelphia, 1776

Late in 1775 Benedict Arnold led an attack on Quebec, hoping to break the English forces in two along the Champlain Lake.

In the Spring of 1776 General Arnold was attacked by the British army near Plattsburg, at Valcor Island. During the engagement the American troops resisted the British force for 6 hours. With a total of 17 vessels, mostly gunboats and a few schooners, the American forces resisted an English fleet of 25 vessels.

General Arnold lost the schooner Royal Savage and the gunboat Philadelphia.

Found in 1932 the Royal Savage was raised in 1934 by Lorenzo Hagglund, a salvage engineer interested in old shipwrecks. As it was too damaged, after drying it was abandoned and eventually burned.

In 1935 Mr. Hagglund found the Philadelphia standing upright with its mast stepped. The guns were removed and the hull was raised. Following its recovery the Philadelphia was displayed aboard a barge that traveled around the waterways of New York State.

After Mr. Hagglund’s death, it was offered to the Smithsonian Institution, arriving in Washington in 1961. Carefully treated and completely recorded, the Philadelphia is today a key element in the exhibits of the Museum of American History.

In the 1990s a replica was built and tested by the Lake Champlain museum. The hull of the Philadelphia is 16.1 m long. It carried 45 men and several large guns.