

Exhumation at the Citadel's Johnson Hagood Stadium

Twenty-six Confederate sailors and marines, and the remains of a three-year-old child, were carefully recovered from under the floor of the Johnson Hagood Stadium during June and July 1999. On November 12, 1999, they were reburied in the Soldiers Ground at Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, South Carolina. How these people came to be buried under the floor of the stadium and how the Charleston community came together to rescue them is a tale of dedication, perseverance, and luck. It is also a story of community relationship and interdependency.

When South Carolina seceded from the Union, the Charleston Mariner's home donated its burial ground to the state for use as a military cemetery. It was used by the Confederacy until the capitulation of Charleston in 1865. The majority of the war-related dead in the area were sent to the larger cemeteries, such as Magnolia Cemetery Soldier's Ground. But a significant number of Confederate and Union dead are still to be found in smaller, less centralized cemeteries scattered throughout the state. The Confederate Naval and Marine Cemetery was maintained by the ladies of Charleston. In 1922, the cemetery was spruced up by the addition of a fence made of

white concrete pillars with black iron pipe rails and the placement of an obelisk, which enumerated the names of those who were known to be buried there. Burial information was derived by the ladies from the surviving headstones.

However, it is important and cautionary to note that extensive vandalism between 1865 and 1922 had destroyed a significant number of the headstones. The obelisk further noted that there were "ten unknowns" and "four torpedo boatmen" from *H.L. Hunley* buried at the site.

Starting in the 1900s, the area surrounding the cemetery was used as a fairground and livestock exhibit area for many years. Given this extensive use, it is not surprising that Charleston would consider the fairgrounds an ideal location for a public stadium. The military cemetery was still clearly marked in the 1940s when the decision was finally made to build a stadium. The city negotiated with a developer to have the cemetery moved and the stadium constructed on the cemetery site and adjoining grounds. It is at this point that historical events become murky. It appears that the developer moved the stones to a place or places unknown and the obelisk was relocated to Magnolia Cemetery Soldier's Ground. Unbeknownst to the city, the graves were left behind.

The stadium was completed in 1947. The majority of the construction work for the stadium was done by hand; very little in the way of heavy equipment was used. The girder supports were attached to floaters rather than pylons, which was a departure from normal engineering. The soft sands of Charleston are not stable and pylons sunk to great depths are usually used to provide support. The floaters were for the most part 5 foot by 6 or 7 foot concrete pads roughly 28 inches deep. While clearly a design exception in terms of earthquake-related safety, the use of floaters proved to be an unintended asset for archeological preservation. No pylons extended through the burials. Conversely, it became clear that the workmen had unearthed the dead on at least four separate occasions while preparing the

Volunteers on skirmish line clearing fill dirt on top of the cemetery located inside of the stadium. Photo courtesy Tirza I. Leader, SCIAA.



Union and Confederate reenactor volunteers' honor guard for the Confederate Sailors and Marines burial. Photo courtesy Daryl P. Miller, SCIAA.



in-ground molds for the floaters and had poured the concrete directly on top of skeletal remains.

The stadium was subsequently presented as a gift to the Citadel, South Carolina's Military University, in 1967. The Citadel staff had no idea that the stadium was on a former cemetery site. In the early 1990s, a group of local historians, reenactors, civic organizations, and genealogical groups banded together as the Confederate Heritage Trust (CHT). The CHT, a non-political non-profit organization, has as its mission the preservation of historic battlegrounds, camps, graves, and the history of the Civil War. As part of this mission, the Confederate Heritage Trust made it a specific task to search for Civil War graves at the Magnolia Cemetery's Soldier's Ground. Needless to say, they didn't find the graves. Backtracking from that revelation, the Trust came to the conclusion that the graves might not have been removed from their original location.

The CHT contacted the Citadel and eventually were permitted to search for those historic graves that based on the plat should have extended into the stadium's parking lot. In 1993, the Trust located 14 graves and recovered 13 bodies. The failure of the developer to move the

bodies was no longer a supposition, it was now a fact. Negotiations with the Citadel for the recovery of the remaining bodies took several years. The reasons for this were quite ordinary and understandable. The projected cost of the recovery from beneath the stadium was quite expensive. None of the groups, including the Citadel, had the available monies. The danger to both the structure and researchers undertaking any recovery program was also considerable. Undermining a historic stadium with known structural defects is not the type of project one does without due consideration, study, and care. Last, and certainly not the least, was scheduling-related concerns. The Citadel is a highly-active military academy and university with intensive community interactions. Many organizations, schools, and groups rely on the Citadel for sports-related facilities support and consequently the stadium is in constant use.

Fortunately, the Citadel temporarily closed the stadium in 1999 to accomplish much needed repairs. The South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA) performed ground penetrating radar investigation of the stadium's interior in order to ascertain whether there were burials still in place under the structure. The results were positive. Coordinating with the Citadel, the SCIAA and the CHT, with the active support of Senator McConnell, were able to obtain permission to exhume the skeletal remains. During June and July 1999, over 300 cubic yards of earth were excavated by 120 volunteer workers. All burials were drawn and photographed *in situ*, then respectfully transported to the SCIAA for analysis. The project area was mapped, which as it turned out was the first and only time that the stadium had an actual plan drawing. All activities at the site were recorded by the site registrar who also kept track of the visitors and community donors.

Volunteers included Euro-Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. The oldest volunteers were in their eighties, the youngest under 12. It was a very nice cross-section of Charleston's population. All were bonded together by the understanding that no one's dead should be dealt with anything less than dignity and respect. The volunteers frequently opined that if they couldn't protect a military cemetery at the Citadel, whose burials would be safe anywhere in the state? This was a serious point in a state undergoing rapid development.

The outpouring of support from the Charleston community was amazing. Coffee and rolls, lunch, and afternoon snack were provided every day for the volunteers from private individuals and local restaurants. Other items such as heavy duty aluminum foil and film were provided by community businesses. The Charleston Police Department and the Citadel University Police provided security for the site.

The cemetery turned out to occupy only a small fraction of the area originally set aside for its use. The original fence post holes from the 1860s were located very early in the project. Based on the field work, it appears that the ladies relocated the fence in order to enclose only the area where the bodies were located. The postholes from this later work along with the public and “dead” gates were also located. A significant *in situ* scattering of large broken marble chips suggests that the grave markers were simply rent from the earth and piled up in pieces by the workmen. It seems very unlikely that any would have survived intact.

The first burial was encountered on the first day of field excavations. Sandy soils made the identification of grave shafts remarkably easy. A nondenominational service was held the next day at the site for the dead and then exhumation commenced. It quickly became apparent that the burials were laid out in an east-west orientation and that they were arranged in ordered rows. A number of the burials were located beneath the stadium’s walls and floaters. In consultation with structural experts and with the permission of General Grinalds, president of the Citadel, these individuals were carefully recovered. There is little doubt that additional burials still reside under the support structure of the stadium in areas too dangerous at present to work. The stadium is scheduled for demolition and rebuilding in the next several years and SCIAA and CHT are scheduled to return at that time.

Four of the sailors were found as pairs in single interments. Skeletal evidence and historic documents made it possible to identify these individuals as probable members of the first crew of *H.L. Hunley*, the first submarine to sink an enemy vessel in time of war. Five of the first crew perished when the vessel sank at its moorings at Fort Johnson. Considered to be a secret weapon, considerable efforts were taken to keep its operation and the subsequent deaths hidden. This secrecy became moot when it sank a second time

claiming the life of its benefactor, Horace L. Hunley, and many of the mechanics who had helped build it at the Lyons Machine shop in Alabama. Hunley and the ill-fated second crew were buried at Magnolia Cemetery in a donated plot.

Reburial of the 23 sailors, marines, and child took place on November 12, 1999, at the Soldiers’ Ground at Magnolia Cemetery. Fifteen horse-drawn canons with burial platforms were used to transport the deceased to the cemetery. The funeral march started at the Charleston Battery and was lead and escorted by Civil War re-enactors in full period uniform. Many of the re-enactors had worked as volunteers on the project.

The reburial ceremonies were well attended. Several thousand people lined the 4-and-1/2-mile parade route to the cemetery. Over 2,500 people attended the burial service. It was a positive and moving experience, which demonstrated what can be accomplished when the public and cultural resource professionals unite for the common good. Every once in a while, a project comes along that epitomizes the best activities of the discipline. This was one of those instances. The South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology has been engaged in the struggle for the preservation and protection of burial grounds, cemeteries, and graveyards for decades. Approximately 100 queries from the public regarding burial issues are received each year by the Office of the State Archaeologist.

The public funding for the agency over the last several years has been stable, but not in step with either rising costs or inflation. This has made reliance on volunteers to assist with field studies and on private donors for funding a very important component of how we do business and conduct research.

The Citadel’s football team is famous for developing a playing strategy called the “wish-bone.” The field had been traditionally called the “Boneyard” in honor of that innovative play. The athletic staff of the university unilaterally chose to remove the traditional sign from the stadium as a further sign of respect for the dead.

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