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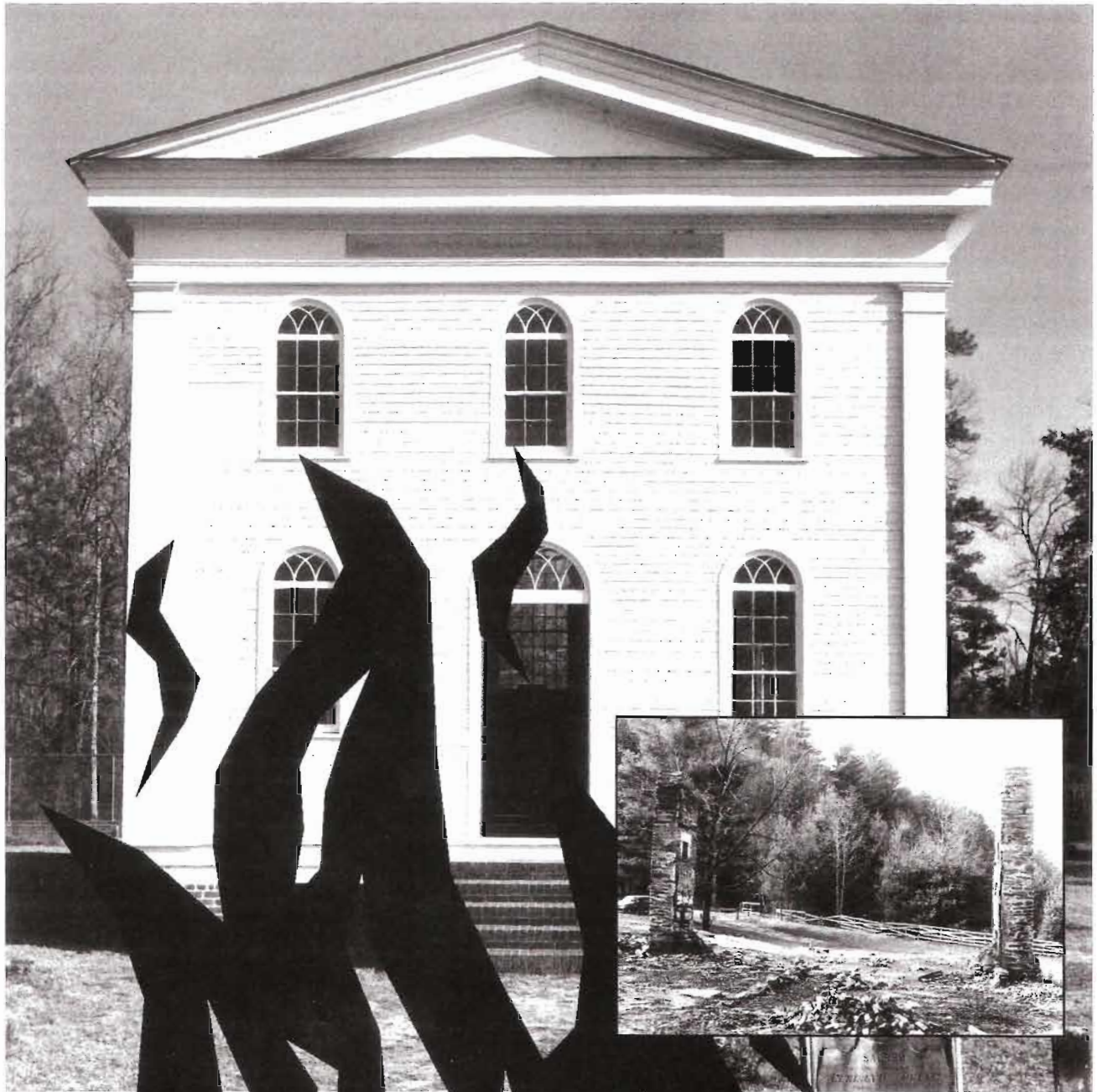


## LOCAL GOVERNMENT HOME RULE

*Confronting the  
Challenges of Growth*

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S.C. DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Black Mingo (Old Belin's) Baptist Church in Williamsburg County before it was burned down by arsonists in 1993.  
 Insert, Russell House ruins in Oconee County after arson destroyed it in 1988. It's unique architecture made it an historic treasure.

# South Carolina's Dwindling Cultural Resources

Myles C. P. Bland

What are cultural resources? Cultural resources are the historic structures and archaeological sites which cover the state. South Carolina has a rich and varied history, and nowhere is this better represented than in the material record that has been left behind for us to enjoy. Historic landscapes and prehistoric archaeological sites literally stretch from the coast to the upstate. These resources are nonrenewable and cannot be replenished. Unlike a forest, which can be harvested for timber and replanted, cultural resources can never be replaced once they are destroyed. Unfortunately, this destruction is proceeding at an alarming rate within South Carolina. Unless action is taken, very significant portions of the historic and prehistoric record will be forever lost. South Carolinians will lose more than their history, however. This unchecked loss of cultural resources may seriously impede the development of heritage tourism. Tourists who are interested in history and heritage will simply have to go somewhere else, and they will take their money with them. Since much of our state and local economies depends on tourism, this loss will be keenly felt. A continued lack of interest in the preservation of cultural resources may very well have other deleterious effects, such as the loss of a great body of historical information. Regardless, the loss of so many irreplaceable resources is simply inexcusable and this loss of heritage diminishes all of us as culture and a society.

### Current Threats To South Carolina's Cultural Resources

**Looters** "Pot hunters" is the term applied to people who search for artifacts but are unconcerned with knowing more about the people who made them. These searches generally consist of unauthorized and uncontrolled digging on sites often reached by trespassing upon private or state land. The sites are frequently remote, and they are almost completely destroyed by the large pits that are the end result of such looting. The artifacts and pots are sought for trade in the illicit art and artifact marketplace. Once the artifacts are removed from their contexts, they can provide little information about the past. Thus, pot hunters literally steal history, and some have called them "thieves of time". The damage these pot hunters can do is simply staggering. The Ware Creek Ridge site in Hampton County was looted for over twenty-five years before it was brought to the attention of state officials. Chester DePratter and Tommy Charles of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology discovered over 600 potholes, some of which were over twenty feet in diameter and over two and one half feet deep.

Other types of looters also threaten the cultural resources of South Carolina. Civil War battlefields throughout the state are constantly being searched by relic hunters who use metal detectors. These relic hunters dig with probes and leave oval shaped holes or "footprints," and they can completely strip a site of all metal in a relatively short period of time. Looters also seek other items such as projectile points or "arrow-heads," and elaborate pins carved of bone. These bone pins, for example, can fetch as much as



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Large pits called "potholes" are what result after artifact looting. Archaeologists from the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology assess "pothole" damage caused by looters at the Ware Creek Ridge site in Hampton County.

\$1,000 according to Dr. Kenneth Sassaman of the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program. Looters have severely damaged if not destroyed the 4,000 year old record of the coastal Stallings culture in South Carolina to retrieve such pins. Dr. Sassaman further states in *Site Destruction in Georgia and the Carolinas* that, "while the third millennium demise of the Stallings Culture remains shrouded in mystery, a second fall is underway through the wanton destruction of the last vestiges of a once great and thriving hunter-gatherer society" (p. 26).

**Vandalism and Arson** Vandalism seriously impacts the cultural resources of this state. Vandals shoot or steal historical markers and park signs and rob these areas of much of their beauty. Graffiti and spray painting are also problems. In addition, prehistoric cultural resources are tar-



geted by vandals. In August of 1994, vandals attacked a prehistoric soapstone quarry on the Pacolet River Heritage Preserve in Spartanburg County. The vandals used a claw hammer to rip away soapstone bowls that had been carved in an outcrop by prehistoric Native Americans. These vandals operated with a complete and, unfortunately, typical disregard for the protection afforded the site by its placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The site is also currently ranked twelfth on the South Carolina Heritage Trust's ranking of the one hundred most historically significant sites in South Carolina.

Arson is one particularly destructive act of vandalism. Historic structures are very vulnerable to arson due to their construction materials and the fact that they cannot be monitored at all times. As a result, arson at the hands of vandals has claimed numerous historic structures throughout the state. Arson destroyed the Russell House in Oconee County in May of 1988. The Russell House dated from around 1867 and it had been placed on the National Register of Historic Places due to its unique architecture. In 1993, arsonists burned down Belin church in Williamsburg County. This pre-Revolutionary War structure was completely destroyed by individuals who rammed a gate with their vehicle to gain access to the site.

**Natural Processes** Nature itself can be destructive to historic sites. Storms are a major natural threat for above-ground structures. High winds and flooding can seriously damage buildings weakened from age. Archaeological sites are less susceptible to storms since they are below ground, but they too can be damaged. Trees toppled by high winds affect archaeological sites by pulling up substantial amounts of dirt with their root bundles. This sort of damage is a very real concern since South Carolina can expect one hurricane to make landfall every six years according to a 1973 U.S. Atomic Energy Commission report cited by Robert Morgan in *Site Destruction in Georgia and the Carolinas*. Robert Morgan, Forest Archaeologist of the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, points out that "clean-up activities, such as the demolition of structures and the use of heavy machinery for debris removal, severely affected cultural resources" af-

ter the 1989 Hurricane Hugo. Morgan goes on to list other post-storm procedure such as reforestation, salvage timbering, and fire suppression trenches that have negative effects upon the cultural resources of an area.

Erosion is another natural process that can damage historic or prehistoric sites. Sites eroding into the sea or a river, or subject to wave action, are not only losing their integrity, but also they are becoming much more visible. This increased visibility makes them particularly susceptible to pot hunters who can easily travel to the site by boat. These looters then undercut and probe the eroded embankment with metal rods in their search for artifacts, thus furthering the erosion. According to Dr. Gail Wagner of the University of South Carolina, this is precisely what is happening at the Mulberry Mounds site in Kershaw County. Mulberry, one of the most famous archaeological sites in the Southeast, was first excavated in 1891 by researchers from



Archaeologists have to carefully search for some "potholes" that are partially hidden under fallen tree limbs and brush.

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At Saint Mark's Episcopal Church in Sumter County, a gravestone remains broken after vandals attached a chain to a four-wheel drive vehicle to break it.

the Smithsonian Institution. One mound has been eroding into the Wateree River for many years, and collectors boat to this National Register of Historic Places site quite frequently. Chris Judge, archaeologist for the South Carolina Heritage Trust, calls the Mulberry site one of the most looted sites in South Carolina.

**Grave Desecration** In February of 1994, numerous Native American graves were desecrated near Stokes Bluff landing in Hampton County. Pot hunters scattered the remains of an infant, a child, and at least eight adults all around their pit as they attempted to recover artifacts. In August of 1994, the grave of a Confederate soldier was desecrated in an apparent attempt to collect bones for satanic cult purposes. Historic graves of this era are sometimes looted for their military buttons. Despite the fact that the desecration of graves is a felony carrying a fine of two thousand dollars and a sentence of no less than one year under Section 16-17-600 of the amended 1976 South Carolina Code, it still continues in South Carolina. This heinous crime continues largely because looters seek the artifacts that were buried with deceased persons and they choose not to obey the law. According to Dr. Jonathan Leader,

deputy state archaeologist, "this is a crime that cannot and will not be tolerated".

Gravestones are also a target for vandals. Often burial markers are shot or knocked over by uncaring individuals, and in some instances they are stolen due to their unique aesthetic designs. In 1994, vandals stole an engraved plaque from a graveyard on Badwell plantation in McCormick County. Fortunately, this plaque was later recovered during a drug raid. It has since been replaced with a replica. At Saint Marks Church in Sumter County, vandals have pulled down gravestones with chains attached to a four-wheel drive vehicle. The vandalism at this 1855 church was so great that a full-time caretaker has been installed.

**Development** The development of certain tracts of real estate for commercial or private use can impact both historic structures and archaeological sites. Sites on the National Register are presently afforded some protection by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 from adverse effects which result from federally funded development. For this legal reason the South Carolina Department of Transportation has an archaeology division which checks the proposed highway right-of-ways for historic and prehistoric remains. The Historic Preservation Division of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History plays a similar role within South Carolina. They review and comment on the effect federal and state projects will have on significant historical properties. Federal lands such as the three-hundred-square-mile Savannah River Plant also have archaeological divisions which can assess the impact on sites from proposed development. Cultural resource companies in the private realm conduct archaeological work to keep agencies in compliance with the law, and this work is subject to a mandatory review by the State Historic Preservation Officer. Non-governmental development, however, is generally unregulated unless it impacts wetlands or requires certain licenses. Hilton Head is an outstanding exception in that it has city ordinances which protect archaeological sites, as do a small number of other South Carolina communities. The Coastal Zone Management Act of 1977 also gives protection to cultural resources along our shoreline. This act allows the South

Carolina Coastal Council, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, to require that projects which need their certification conduct archaeological assessments when the area is eligible to be or is on the National Register of Historic Places. In general, however South Carolina has relatively few state guidelines concerning the conservation of historic properties.

Development and cultural resource management do sometimes conflict, but these conflicts can often be resolved if they are raised early in the planning process. Archaeological sites are particularly susceptible to this development since they are hidden below ground. Lesley Drucker and Paul Storch in *Archaeology for Business People: A Handbook for South Carolina Developers and Planners* state it is "advised to consult with an archaeologist early during the preconstruction process" since "it is often possible to incorporate known archaeological sites into protected buffer zones, green space, or other minimal impact areas" and thus avoid the expense of conducting a dig (p. 3). In 1994, the Kershaw County town of Camden entertained a proposal to build a horse arena on a plot of land that is also part of the Historic Camden Park. Annually the arena would generate an estimated 210,000 badly needed dollars for the town, but its construction would also damage the outstanding Colonial period archaeological record. Bruce Rippeteau, director of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, has pointed out that a possible solution may simply lie in the proper monitoring of the site and the addition of a layer of topsoil to protect it.

### Other Threats

Countless other activities threaten cultural resources within the state. Mining, farming, logging, power line construction, and a diverse number of other actions can and do seriously impact historic sites. Obviously, all of these activities cannot and should not be halted for the sake of historic preservation. The goal is the achievement of some sort of balance between the use and the preservation of the land. Current initiatives help achieve this balance, but more needs to be done. As noted archaeologist David Anderson wrote in a paper "The Future of South Carolina Archaeology" delivered at the 21st Annual Conference on South Carolina Archae-

ology, "while it is true that many of the state's largest and most significant sites will indeed be destroyed through development, looting, erosion or other forces in the years ahead, at least some of these sites will be preserved, either by enlightened landowners or through outright purchase and protection by inspired public and private programs."

According to Keith Derting of the Information Management Division of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, South Carolina presently has approximately 17,200 archaeological sites listed in its files. This works out to about two sites per every square mile. Some counties, such as Calhoun, Lee, and Pickens have less than sixty-five sites each. Unlike our neighboring states to the north and south, which have been archaeologically probed for decades, South Carolina has a relatively short history of archaeology. Large tracts of this state simply have not been studied.

South Carolina also possesses substantial underwater cultural resources. These resources consist of shipwrecks, submerged structures, and paleontological fossils. These resources are presently administered under the South Carolina Underwater Antiquities Act of 1991, and they cover a vast area. The Underwater Archaeology Division of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology is charged with managing 2,873 square miles of submerged land. Christopher F. Amer, head of the Underwater Archaeology Division writes: "of the hundreds of vessels that sank or were otherwise wrecked on South Carolina's coast only a few score have been located and investigated by archaeologists"<sup>1</sup> Sports divers who collect fossils and artifacts on submerged state lands must apply for and may be granted hobby licenses by the Underwater Archaeology Division. They are required to report their finds to the state archaeologist.

### What South Carolina Stands To Lose

**Heritage Tourism** Presently tourism creates about 100,000 jobs in South Carolina and lowers the taxes of each household by two hundred dollars. A 1991 study conducted by Longwoods International for the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, which is cited by Lesley Drucker in *Historic Landscapes in South Carolina*, indicates that tourists visit historic sites

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second only to beaches (40.8% to 32.5%). South Carolinians also enjoy visiting historic landscapes. Visits to historic sites by state residents rank fourth behind shopping, eating out, and evening entertainment. Drucker also points out that, according to the American Automobile Association, vacationers who travel by car come to the Southeast more than any other region in the nation. Fort Sumter in Charleston alone has hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. These visitors become highly significant when one considers the amount of money they pump into the local economy for gasoline, food, and lodging.

The role of heritage tourism within our state economy is also one which can be expanded on a statewide level. While every county in South Carolina does not have access to the beaches or mountains, every county does have important historic and prehistoric cultural resources. There are countless Civil and Revolutionary War battlefields, colonial settlements, and Native American archaeological sites from the coast to the midlands to the upstate. The prehistoric Native American record of occupation alone spans over 12,000 years in South Carolina. The development of heritage tourism is also generally less environmentally damaging than the introduction of other industries, and it can be done within our state.

Heritage tourism, however, does require the preservation and proper management of cul-

tural resources for a number of reasons. First of all, more sites and outdoor interpretive exhibits have to be developed and this cannot occur if the sites are already destroyed. These exhibits would have to be authentic to attract the real long-term interest of the public, and new attractions would have to be occasionally added much as a museum changes its exhibits.

New interpretive technologies which could not be integrated into the facilities at existing sites would also require the development of new historic sites. Furthermore, as the interests of the public and scholars shifted to a new group or time period, this would precipitate the investigation and development of previously overlooked cultural resources. Unfortunately, none of this can occur if most of the significant cultural resources are allowed to be destroyed.

#### Undiscovered History

South Carolina quite literally could lose large parts of its historical record through the destruction of its cultural resources. Without written historical records, researchers must rely on

these cultural resources to interpret the lives and cultures of past peoples. This interpretation cannot occur if the archaeological or structural record of a people is destroyed. The archaeological record can also clarify known events and help in the identification of biases within written accounts. If this information is not recovered or banked for future generations, it simply cannot be passed on to others. New archaeological techniques and methods which are sure to be devel-



At Historic Camden, visitors are invited to spend a few hours where the British spent a wretched winter. Fourteen Revolutionary War battles were fought in the vicinity of the park.

S.C. DEPARTMENT OF PARKS RECREATION AND TOURISM



Tidalholm, one of Beaufort's beautiful historic homes, was where the movies "The Big Chill" and "The Great Santini" were filmed.

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oped in future decades will give new insights, but only if sites remain to be excavated. Thus, a tremendous body of anthropological information for both research and education is at stake.

**Historic Structures** Very few colonial or antebellum structures still exist within South Carolina. If these venerable buildings are not preserved from destruction or falling into disrepair due to old age, we will have no real examples to show the future peoples of South Carolina, much less visitors to the state. A continued lack of interest in historic preservation may also make any pursuit of urban revitalization highly unlikely. Much of the character and aesthetic beauty of South Carolina's historic landscapes and towns lies in danger both from neglect and the encroachment of modern development.

Possible Solutions

**Enforcement** South Carolina currently has some laws that protect certain historic sites. The strict enforcement of these laws could do much to curb pot hunting that disturbs graves and actual grave desecration. The realistic threat of a felony conviction and the confiscation of private property would be a highly visible deterrent and would send a very public message that this sort of conduct will not be tolerated.

**A Statewide Contingency Plan** South Carolina needs a contingency plan to deal with natural disaster threats to its cultural resources. PALMCOP (Palmetto Archives Libraries Museums Council On Preservation) presently has contingency plans which apply to certain institutions. A statewide plan incorporating museums, historic structures, and archaeological sites needs to be developed. Protective measures and immediate, post disaster responses can greatly alleviate the damage caused by nature. Hurricane Hugo definitely demonstrated the susceptibility of South Carolina to such sudden natural disasters.

**Increased Legislation** An antiquities act that protects the terrestrial cultural resources of South Carolina is needed. A state law would address activities that threaten cultural resources but which are presently not legislated. The law could also address the issue of making the location of

archaeology sites protected information much as the location of oil wells is protected.

**Increased Resources Directed To The Effort** More state funding and manpower simply need to be directed toward the preservation of cultural resources. Very small divisions with similar budgets are currently charged with overseeing thousands of sites over thousands of square miles. Damage to these sites may go unnoticed for months, since it is impossible to monitor even a fraction of them, and increased monitoring is indeed needed. Current state facilities also need to be expanded. For example, the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology is running out of curatorial space. Efforts by a vocationalists, public groups, and other interested citizens could be used to defray some of the costs associated with both increased manpower and increased monitoring.

**Public Education** The level of public education about archaeology and historic preservation needs to be elevated. Much of the public does not know what archaeologists do or the value of saving the past for the future. Public education is also the way to teach people that whole-scale collecting of artifacts is wrong. Collected artifacts only "collect" dust or deteriorate in someone's collection, and the public loses a piece of its common history. Professionals in the cultural resource realm need to get more involved, but the state also has a role to play in teaching the conservation of such a valuable state resource.

Conclusion

South Carolina has a store of cultural resources that must be conserved with as much concern as we give to protecting the environment. These cultural resources can never be replaced once they are lost, and we are losing them at a very fast rate. South Carolina will be doing herself a great disservice if this loss is continued, and it will have serious ramifications for her residents. Quite simply, something more needs to be done.

<sup>1</sup> Amer, Christopher F., Legislation and the Management of South Carolina's Historic Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Resources, 1994.

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