

Diver Completes Report on Willtown

By Lynn Harris

In 1682, the Lords Proprietors planned a town that would rival Charleston in its facilities for overseas trade and would offer a more salubrious climate. It was called New London, but later renamed Willtown, and had streets and stairways running down a bluff to the Edisto River. Although this riverine community could not compete with Charleston harbor as a trading depot and slowly disintegrated during the eighteenth century, evidence of the old English settlement still exist in the archaeological and historical record.

In 1969, Drew Ruddy, then a college student, secured one of the first underwater salvage licenses from SCIAA to recover artifacts from Willtown. Today, 31 years later, Drew Ruddy, has undertaken to tell the story of his early experiences as a diver and collector. As a current SCIAA Research Associate and Hobby Diver, he has recently produced a unique and highly readable report on his Willtown findings.

He writes in his introduction: "It is with amazement that I reflect today on how two teenagers with some diving experience but no archaeological training or background were able to secure a one year salvage license. Today I find myself in a different place in my life, a different level of maturity, and although not a professional archaeologist, I have acquired a greater sense of appreciation for the precision and documentation necessary to work and record an underwater historic site."

Going back to his early maps and artifact logs, Drew and his diving buddy, Steve Howard, attempted to map and reconstruct where they found artifacts in former project years. In his overview of collected materials, Drew explores possible reasons for distribution patterns related to both land and water usage during historic times.

Drew's report provides a historic background of Willtown slanted towards the maritime activities including early English explorations in the area, tensions with the Spanish, Indian trade, the Yamassee War, Stono Rebellion, and the 1863 gunboat expedition. Filled with colorful graphics like historic maps, aerial views of the Willtown waterfront, and photographs of artifacts, the report is indeed an extremely valuable addition to the literature on South Carolina's underwater heritage. Congratulations Drew!

Author's Note: *Willtown Bluff*, "...a convenient fertill piece of land fitt to build a town on...": *An Avocational Underwater Report* by Drew Ruddy (2000) is available in various local libraries.



Figure 1: Martha Demosthenes, curator of the Colleton County Museum in Walterboro, stands beside the Willtown artifact exhibit that she designed (Photo courtesy of Drew Ruddy).