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Catonsville, Maryland's connection to Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth

By Heather Norris, Baltimore Sun, October 8, 2015

Before he became the infamous assassin of a U.S. president and long before he was an actor traveling the country, Booth was a boarding school student at St. Timothy's Hall preparatory school in Catonsville.

Booth and his younger brother, Joseph, attended the school from 1852 to 1853, during which time they lived in the dorm on the school's campus, said Terry Alford, a professor of history at Northern Virginia Community College.

Their mother enrolled them at the strict military school for boys soon after their father died in an effort to provide them with some structure in their lives, but Alford says the time spent there may have been some of the most transformative in Booth's life. "John didn't hear anything at the school that didn't confirm his thoughts about slavery," he said. "That was a thoroughly Southern school."

A large, imposing structure, the school was known for its austere environment and the thoroughly Southern attitudes of its students, according to Alford, who recently finished a book about Booth. The vast majority of the students came either from Maryland or states farther south, and though the faculty consisted mainly of northerners, the school became a breeding ground of Confederacy support, he said. Some of the Confederacy's most notable figures, including a few generals, were educated at St. Timothy's Hall, said Alford, who visited Catonsville as part of his research for the book.

"He was just in the middle of a cauldron of adolescent energy," said Alford. A lot of that energy, he added, was spent promoting the southern cause.

In 1985, when longtime Catonsville historian H. Ralph Heidelbach comprised his booklet, "Catonsville Churches and Schools Before 1950," he devoted 10 pages to St. Timothy's Hall. In it, he quotes liberally from the 1977 work by Enick Davis that provided a history of the school for the Historical Society of Baltimore County's History Trails publication.

"By 1850, St. Timothy's Hall was prospering," wrote Davis. "In that year there were one hundred and thirty-two students enrolled at the school, with a staff of fourteen professors."

Students at the school, most of whom hailed from middle and upper middle class families, studied art, history, philosophy and other subjects, in addition to military tactics, Davis wrote.

Under the rules of headmaster Rev. Libertus Van Bokkelen, the boys were required to wear military uniforms while they attended classes and were forbidden from receiving food from home, singing, dancing or studying in groups, said Alford.

"Throughout the 1850's the school flourished and by 1860 was at the height of its prosperity," Davis wrote. "During the following months the nation plunged headlong into the impending civil war. In November, the Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, was elected president, much to the disappointment of the students of St. Timothy's Hall, who had almost unanimously supported the Southern Democratic ticket of Breckinridge and Lane."

"The thing about Maryland was that it was very divided," said Anne Rubin,

an associate professor of history at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who teaches classes on the Civil War and the American South.

Throughout his adolescence, Rubin said, Booth was far from alone in his support for the Confederacy. There was a large contingent of people living in Maryland at the time Booth was growing up who sympathized with the Southern cause and who, during the war, operated various underground networks to smuggle supplies to the southern states.

With each Southern state's secession, the student body at St. Timothy's paid homage with a sunrise artillery salute, not authorized by the school's faculty, according to the written account by Davis.

In fact, Alford said, there was some fear during the war that the boys might steal the school's training weapons and join the Confederate army.

In 1853, Booth, a young teen at the time, participated in an uprising at the school led by the upperclassmen in protest of the school's strict rules, Alford said. About half of the student body left the school and set up camp in the woods nearby to protest Van Bokkelen's policies. After a three-day standoff, he said, parents were called in to mediate an end to the boycott.

According to Alford, though Booth struggled at times in class, he excelled socially at St. Timothy's Hall, meeting a number of boys who would eventually become his comrades in his effort to upend the Union government.

"He was unbelievably popular," Alford said.

He easily made friends with his classmates, some of whom included Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of Robert E. Lee, the commanding general of



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Confederate forces, and a future Confederate general himself, and Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Loughlin, both future co-conspirators in Booth's initial plot to kidnap the president.

The Catonsville Library's Catonsville Room houses a number of official records pertaining to the school and its history.

Located adjacent to the current site of St. Timothy's church on Ingleside Avenue, the school building was destroyed by fire in 1872, after the school had closed and the building was being rented out to boarders.

Sometimes, said Lisa Vicari, a volunteer at the Catonsville Room, it's interesting to think about what the town was like in the mid-19th century. With vocal support of the Confederacy among some prominent families and a free black community, "that makes for a very interesting mix," she said.

For information from the library's Catonsville Room, go to bcpl.info.

Critical piece of Antietam battlefield to be preserved

By Julie E. Green, Hagerstown Herald-mail, September 30, 2015

SHARPSBURG — Lilli Wilson said she and her husband, Craig, decided before his death a little more than a year ago that when they were ready to sell their home, they would contact the Civil War Trust.

The Wilson's home — 44.4 acres at the intersection of Dunker Church Road and Cornfield Avenue — is part of an area where thousands of Confederate and Union soldiers were killed or wounded during the bloody cornfield portion of the Battle of

Antietam on Sept. 17, 1862, Civil War historian Dennis Frye said.

On Wednesday morning, Civil War Trust officials announced that the nonprofit group had purchased the Wilson property as part of an approximately \$1 million investment that includes plans to secure two other properties on the battlefield and turn over all three to the National Park Service.

"That's what we saved. Forty-four acres that the historians will tell you was every bit as bloody as the cornfield," Civil War Trust President James Lighthizer said of the Wilson property.



NPS Photo

The property has been known as the "hole in the doughnut," said Lighthizer, referring to the formally privately owned, triangular piece of land surrounded by federal parkland.

Lighthizer, Antietam National Battlefield Superintendent Susan Trail and Deputy Interior Secretary Mike Connor addressed about 100 people who crowded under a tent by the park's visitors center in rainy weather to hear the trust's announcement.

The Civil War Trust also has "secured commitments" for a roughly 6-acre property in the East Woods and a 1.2-acre tract in the North Woods, the latter of which was secured in a public auction less than two weeks ago, said Mary Abroe, who serves on

the trust's board of trustees and on Save the Historic Antietam Foundation's board of directors.

The cost of buying and restoring the Wilson property will be \$575,000, according to an email from trust spokeswoman Meg Martin.

The trust purchased the Wilson property in July for \$510,000, according to online Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation records.

Purchase and restoration of the East Woods property will cost \$315,000, while buying and restoring the North Woods tract will cost \$350,000, Martin said.

Abroe said the trust has received about \$250,000 from its members so far to buy the East Woods property, and it expects to ask its members "to step up" to help preserve the North Woods tract.

The trust is expecting to close on the East Woods property in mid-October, Martin said.

Save the Historic Antietam Foundation, also known as SHAF, is contributing \$50,000 toward the purchase of the North Woods property at the intersection of Sharpsburg Pike and Dunker Church Road, SHAF President Tom Clemens said.

It is also providing another \$15,000 toward buying the East Woods property near the intersection of Smoketown and Mansfield roads, Clemens said.

Frye said that the East Woods tract is the "bull's-eye," meaning it is where the heaviest fighting occurred in that wooded area. The North Woods tract is where the Federal army launched its attacks, he said.

SHAF volunteers have been working to clear brush from the Wilson property so professionals can come



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in and clear "nonhistoric" trees in an attempt to return the property to its battle-era view, Clemens said.

Nonhistoric fence lines, a large dilapidated modern barn, and — once Wilson moves — the house will be removed from the property, according to the trust.

Clemens said trees will probably need to be planted at the East Woods and North Woods properties to restore those lands. Structures on both those properties would be removed under the plan, he said.

Connor, who has visited Antietam on several occasions, including family trips to ride bikes around the park and to experience the annual memorial illumination, said the Wilson property will become an "outdoor classroom."

With the battlefield's 125th anniversary as a federal park last month and the upcoming 100th anniversary of the National Park Service next year, Connor said: "The preservation of this tract at the center of the Antietam battlefield is just an incredible accomplishment and very appropriate achievement in the history of conservation overall."

Antietam National Battlefield Begins Repairs to the Historic Burnside Bridge

NPS Press release, October 7, 2015

On October 10 the Burnside Bridge will be closed for major repairs to the historic structure. The bridge was built in 1836 and was made famous during the Battle of Antietam. In January of 2014 a section of the stone facing on the upstream side of the bridge collapsed into Antietam Creek. Temporary repairs were made and an engineering assessment of

the entire structure was undertaken. The investigation revealed substantial deterioration of the walls and significant water infiltration contributing to the structural instability of the bridge. In addition, the bridge piers have voids that need to be filled to stabilize the structure.

The \$1.7 million preservation project to insure the iconic bridge's long term structural stability will be completed in two phases. Phase 1 will primarily focus on in-stream work to strengthen the stone piers and arches. Portable dams will be installed in the creek to divert the water during this phase and work will continue through fall. Phase II will begin in early spring with repairs that require selectively dismantling and rebuilding sections of the bridge walls. The contract will be managed by the National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center. For more information contact Park Superintendent Susan Trail at 301-432-7648 or e-mail her at Susan_Trail@nps.gov

Relocating Rockville Confederate statue may exceed cost estimates

The Sentinel, October 8, 2015

ROCKVILLE — Moving the controversial Confederate Cavalry Statue from the Red Brick Courthouse to the Beall – Dawson house may cost Montgomery County taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars beyond initial estimated costs, according to public officials.

Monday night, Council member Beryl Feinberg mentioned she's heard estimates that just the new signage recommended to accompany the monument and show and explain its historical relevance could cost \$50,000-\$200,000.

Council member Tom Moore countered that the \$200,000 estimate for putting up signage was not accurate.

The Beall-Dawson House itself is a historic home-turned-museum, with living arrangements set up to mimic life in the 19th century - complete with a slave quarters.

On Oct. 5, council members shot down a motion to formally tell county officials the monument would be welcome on the grounds of the Beall-Dawson House and that council members wanted to discuss allocating the costs for its relocation and curation.

The majority of members cited a pending request for the Historic District Commission to reconsider its September decision authorizing county officials to move the statue.

Moore, whose term ends next month, introduced the motion Monday, backed by his top ally on council, Julie Palakovich Carr.

He called the statue a "stain" on the city and county, having previously targeted his opposition to its existence on the historic courthouse grounds due to the Confederacy's support for slavery.

Those two council members were the only ones to support the motion after Feinberg raised questions about whether city taxpayers would be on the hook for any costs.

"I've heard costs of anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000. I think we have more leverage with the ... county if we have an understanding so I wouldn't want to signal anything at this point," said Feinberg, receiving immediate backing for her position from Mayor Bridget Donnell Newton.

"I think that's why we need to know the cost before we move it again and



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whose cost," Newton said after the meeting.

Feinberg joined Newton and Council member Virginia Onley in defeating Moore's motion. Onley did not offer an opinion about her vote from behind the dais.

While Feinberg and Newton have aligned themselves this election season, Onley split with her fellow Team Rockville member Palakovich Carr on the vote.

Moore previously endorsed the Team Rockville slate, including Onley. He and Feinberg both ran under that moniker in 2013, but Feinberg is running for re-election and Moore is retiring from council.

Palakovich Carr mentioned "no one objected to the Beall-Dawson House" serving as the new location for the statue.

Moore, however, objected to the idea that the city needs leverage at all to negotiate with the county.

"You know, we're working with our neighboring jurisdiction, our surrounding jurisdiction, on a really difficult and emotional problem that has kind of gripped our area for months, and this is not the time to be talking about what kind of leverage we can get on that," said Moore.

"You know, this statue is a stain on our county and our city as it sits uncared for on courthouse grounds."

The Confederate Cavalry Statue came up as a topic for discussion Monday only after an odd series of events.

During the prior week's council meeting, Newton informed her fellow council members they needed to vote on a recommendation before a county-imposed Oct. 8 deadline for allowing the Beall-Dawson House to play host to the monument.

In a Sept. 24 letter addressed to City Manager Barbara Matthews, the County's Department of General Services Director David Dise wrote, "In an effort to move forward as expeditiously as possible, we are requesting City authorization to proceed by October 8th so the County can make application to the HDC before the November meeting deadline."

When asked during a break in the council meeting whether City Council members planned to discuss it at all, Moore appeared surprised to realize it wasn't on the agenda.

Seated behind the dais, he then whispered to Newton about it shortly before the television camera resumed taping.

She replied to him inaudibly but in a manner indicating it could come up during a session of the meeting called "Old/New Business."

That catch, however, is motions made during that time need at least a supermajority (4-1) to pass instead of a standard majority (3-2).

Susan Swift, the city's director of Community Planning and Development Services, said during the council meeting conversations she had talked with county staffers about a request for the Historic District Commission to reconsider its support for the county's relocation of the statue.

After the meeting, Newton and Onley stayed in their chairs at the center of the dais and discussed the holdup of the vote.

During the conversation in the City Hall's council chamber, Newton told Onley she wanted to review the tape of the Historic District Commission's September meeting to determine whether the commissioners had a

"complete lack of regard" for the experts in the room at the meeting.

Those experts were a group of local historians who backed the statue's staying at its current location.

They tried to counter staff claims about the monument's historic designation, but the commission chairman did not formally recognize them since public comment time ended earlier and they had already spoken.

Brady photo chair goes on auction

Detroit News, October 8, 2015

One of the most famous chairs in American photographic history is going up for sale. The chair will be sold at Bonhams auction house in New York on October 26. A wooden chair gifted to the photographer by Abraham Lincoln and used to snap five U.S. presidents is on sale for \$250,000.



Abraham Lincoln and Son - [Brady chair](#)

The chair is one of 262 chairs commissioned for the United States House of Representatives in 1857, after a design by Thomas Ustick Walters. The commission was so large, and included desks as well,

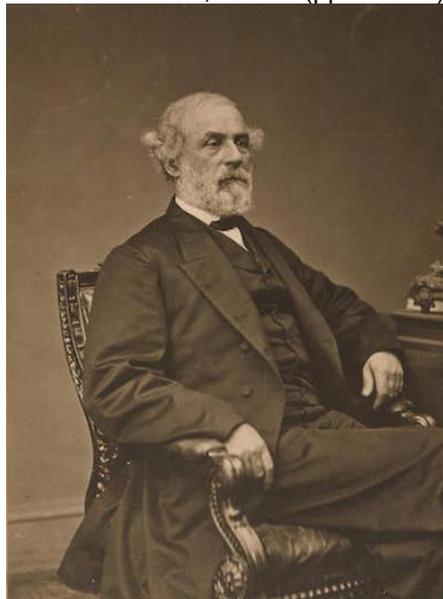


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that it was completed by several firms, including Bembe and Kimbel of New York, Hammitt Desk Mfg. Co of Philadelphia and Doe Hazelton & Co. of Boston. While survivors do occasionally surface at auction, those bearing the stamp of Bembe and Kimbel, as seen on this chair, are relatively rare. By 1863, several of these chairs had left the House of Representatives for a variety of reasons.

The chair was in Brady's studio by February 9, 1864 and used when Lincoln and his son, Tad, were photographed in what would become one of the most iconic and poignant photographs of Lincoln. However, the circumstances surrounding exactly how Brady acquired this chair are not completely clear. According to family tradition, the chair was given to Brady by Abraham Lincoln; while the friendship between Lincoln and both Brady and his associate, Alexander Gardner, is fairly well documented, no correspondence survives from either Brady or Lincoln mentioning this chair specifically. Brady had as an apprentice from 1867 Levin Corbin Handy, who was his nephew by marriage. Handy's two daughters, Alice H. Cox and Mary H. Evans, believed that Lincoln had given Brady the chair as a gift and relayed this story to Brady biographer Roy Meredith, who subsequently cited the story in his book *Mr. Lincoln's Camera Man: Mathew Brady*, New York: Charles

Scribner's Sons, 1946 (pp. 78-81).



Robert E. Lee – Brady chair

The lack of primary documentation, in the form of diaries or letters from either Lincoln or Brady has prevented Lincoln scholars from giving the story full credence. The only documentation known to exist are signed affidavits from Mary Evans, Will H. Towles and Frank B. Kaye, who worked with Towles; in each of the affidavits, the chair is referred to as "The Lincoln Chair." Handy acquired Brady's photographs upon Brady's death and this collection is now at the Library of Congress. The surviving pictorial archive in both the Brady-Handy



U.S. Grant – Brady Chair

Collection and the Meserve collection of Lincoln photographs now at Yale indicates that this chair did not appear in Brady's studio prior to February 1864 and is different from a similar chair owned by Alexander Gardner. The Gardner family chair stayed in the Gardner family until 1921 when it was gifted to the Church of New Jerusalem; it was subsequently sold at auction in 2001 when it was acquired by the collection of the Lincoln Financial Group and is currently on permanent view at the Indiana State Museum in Indianapolis.

The list of sitters who sat in this chair for Mathew Brady is, literally, a "Who's Who" of American history-makers. No less than five presidents graced it, as well as all manner of senators and civil servants, Civil War soldiers of all rank and file and hailing from both sides of the War, Justices, Native Americans and



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citizens, both prominent and anonymous. When used in group portraits, the most important figure in the group is shown seated in this chair; it is interesting to note that women are never depicted seated in it, in part for the practical reasons in that it wasn't wide enough for the fashionable hoop skirts of the day. Destitute and an invalid at the end of his life, Brady sold his studio in its entirety to William Stalee in 1893, three years prior to his death in 1896. Stalee subsequently sold the studio and its contents to Will H. Towles in 1903. While no inventories of either sale have been found, the chair has always remained with the studio. Frank B. Kaye was working in the Studio when Towles acquired it and his 1940 affidavit attests that the Lincoln Chair was included with the rest of the furnishings.

Shiloh Battlefield to dedicate Mississippi Monument

NPS, October 5, 2015 – The Mississippi Monument [was](#) unveiled, dedicated and transferred to the National Parks Service at the Shiloh National Military Park on Saturday, Oct. 10, at 11 a.m.

This is the result of a culmination of many years of collaborative effort of several organizations.

Artist and sculptor of the Shiloh Monument is Dr. J. Kim Sessums. Sessums' artwork ranges from graphite pencil drawings to bronze busts and statues to monument-size pieces.

In 2004, Sessums was honored by the Mississippi Senate with a resolution for his work on the then-recently dedicated African-American Monument in the Vicksburg National Military Park which was

commissioned by the National Park Service.

"The dedication of the Mississippi Monument at Shiloh is a once in a lifetime event where Mississippians of today will honor the sacrifices of Mississippians of the past. This monument represents all of the citizens of our state," said Randy Reeves, chairman of the Mississippi Veterans Monument Commission.

"This monument represents the service and sacrifice that embodies the honor and greatness of the almost 6,000 Mississippians who fought on the hallowed ground of the Shiloh Battlefield."

Keynote speaker for the event will be Lt. Gen. Harold Cross, former Adjutant General for Mississippi and a member of the Mississippi Monument Commission.

Joining him on the dais will be Reeves, National Park Service NPS Southeast Regional Director Barclay Trimble, Shiloh Park Superintendent Dale Wilkerson and Chief Ranger Stacy Allen, who will offer a brief recount of the Shiloh battle.

The private and public groups involved in the planning the design, construction and dedication of the monument include the Mississippi Veterans Monument Commission, Mississippi Division Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy Mississippi Division, members of the Mississippi Legislature, Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Shiloh National Military Park and the office of Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant.

"Beginning with the first dedication ceremony in 1902, 15 states have placed monuments to their soldiers

who fought in the Battle of Shiloh. With the dedication of this monument, Mississippi will take its place by honoring the service of its citizens on this great battlefield," said park Superintendent Wilkerson. "This dedication will be a poignant moment in history that will span generations. The Mississippi Monument is a welcome addition to the park and will enhance it greatly."

Confederate flag to stay on Georgia state license plate

By Greg Bluestein, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, September 24, 2015

Georgia officials will soon roll out a redesigned license plate that still features the Confederate battle flag emblem, months after halting the sales of the state-sponsored specialty tag in the wake of the Charleston church massacre.

The Department of Revenue and the Georgia chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans said this week they reached an agreement on the redesign and that it could be available as early as next week.

A draft of the design wasn't immediately available, but the Confederate group's leaders said it would eliminate the larger image of the Rebel flag that forms the background of the plate while retaining a small, "blood red" version of the emblem in the foreground.

Gov. Nathan Deal ordered a redesign of the license plate in June after nine black worshippers were gunned down by a suspect described by police as a white supremacist. But he stopped short of calling for the Sons of Confederate Veterans tags to be phased out or eliminated entirely, as leaders in North Carolina, Virginia



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and Tennessee ordered over the summer.

Georgia law for more than a decade has required a "special license plate for the Sons of Confederate Veterans," with the proceeds of the sales going to benefit the group. So far, more than 3,500 motorists have signed up for Georgia's Confederate tag, and the group's leaders said demand has recently surged.

Confederate symbols of all kinds – flags, monuments, statues, license plates, even retail items – have come under unprecedented attack across the South in the months since the Charleston church massacre.

State leaders quietly erased Confederate Memorial Day and Robert E. Lee's birthday from the official Georgia calendar in August. And debate has swirled over other symbols of the Old South, including the faces carved into Stone Mountain, the portraits and sculptures enshrined in the state Capitol and even restaurants that feature the Rebel flag.

More than 4,200 people signed a petition released by Better Georgia, a left-leaning advocacy group, calling for the state to stop selling the plates. Members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans countered with a membership drive, a lobbying campaign and the threat of legal action.

Here's how Tim Pilgrim, a Sons of Confederate Veterans leader, described the new design:

"We did agree to remove the faded background as most of the Camps indicated that they would be willing to do as long as the SCV logo was in its place of prominence on the tag. They also agreed to let us darken the red in the logo to a deeper blood red. We hope to have that completed by the

end of this week and our tag will start to be available to our membership and the citizens of Georgia by next week."

Archaeologists pluck 3 Civil War cannons from Pee Dee River

By Susanne M. Schafer, Associated Press, September 29, 2015

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A team of South Carolina archaeologists plucked three cast iron Civil War cannons from the Pee Dee River on Tuesday and marveled that 150 years in the muck hadn't done major damage to the weapons.

"These guns are in remarkable, pristine condition," state archaeologist Jonathan Leader said in a telephone interview after the recovery operation. Once they were on the riverbank, Leader sprayed the weapons with water to get a closer look.

"There's some sand stuck to them, but to our eyes, they are in brilliant, sterling condition," Leader said.

Confederate forces had dumped the cannons in the river and set the gunboat CSS Pee Dee on fire in 1865 so it wouldn't fall into the hands of advancing Union forces under Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman.

Leader said the first to be lifted from the river was the 6.4-inch Brooke rifle cannon, which weighs around 10,600 pounds. Next came the 9-inch Dahlgren smoothbore, which is thought to weigh around 9,000 pounds. Last came the 7-inch Brooke rifle, which is thought to weigh 15,000 pounds, he said.

"It all went off without a hitch," Leader said.

The operation was the culmination of work done since 2009 by researchers from the University of South Carolina's Institute of Archaeology

and Anthropology. The operation is at the site of the Confederate Mars Bluff Navy Yard, east of Florence along the Pee Dee River.

Leader's team of underwater archaeologists had located the weapons in 2009, but the details of the recovery operation took years to put together.

The cannons are being wrapped and trucked to the same center in North Charleston where the Confederate submarine H.L. Hunley is undergoing refurbishment. Once that two-year process is complete, the cannons will be displayed in the Florence area.

State underwater archaeologist James Spirek said the cannon range in length from 9 to 12 feet.

The fact that the weapons were in fresh river water, rather than salty seawater, helped them retain markings such as serial numbers, the years they were cast and other bits of information that helped flesh out their history, he added.

Spirek said the smoothbore Dahlgren was forged in Pennsylvania in 1862. It had been aboard the Union ship USS Southfield, but the cannon was captured after a ramming by a Confederate vessel.

The other two weapons are known as Brooke rifled cannons and were forged in Selma, Alabama, in 1863, he said.

The researchers said Mars Bluff was one of about a dozen Confederate shipyards built on inland waterways so they could construct gunboats, yet be protected from the forces of the Union blockade.

"Remember, the Confederacy had no navy, so these sites are pretty rare," Leader said.

The Confederates wanted to build vessels to try to break the Union's



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blockade or build barges to fire on Union forces with artillery.

The CSS Pee Dee saw limited action and it isn't entirely clear whether its cannon ever fired on the Union forces, he said.

The professor said the years long archaeology effort has been funded in part with a \$200,000 private grant from the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation in Florence.



Photo provided by University of South Carolina