

Preserving Maritime History

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Cultural
Preservation
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Precept of Conservation

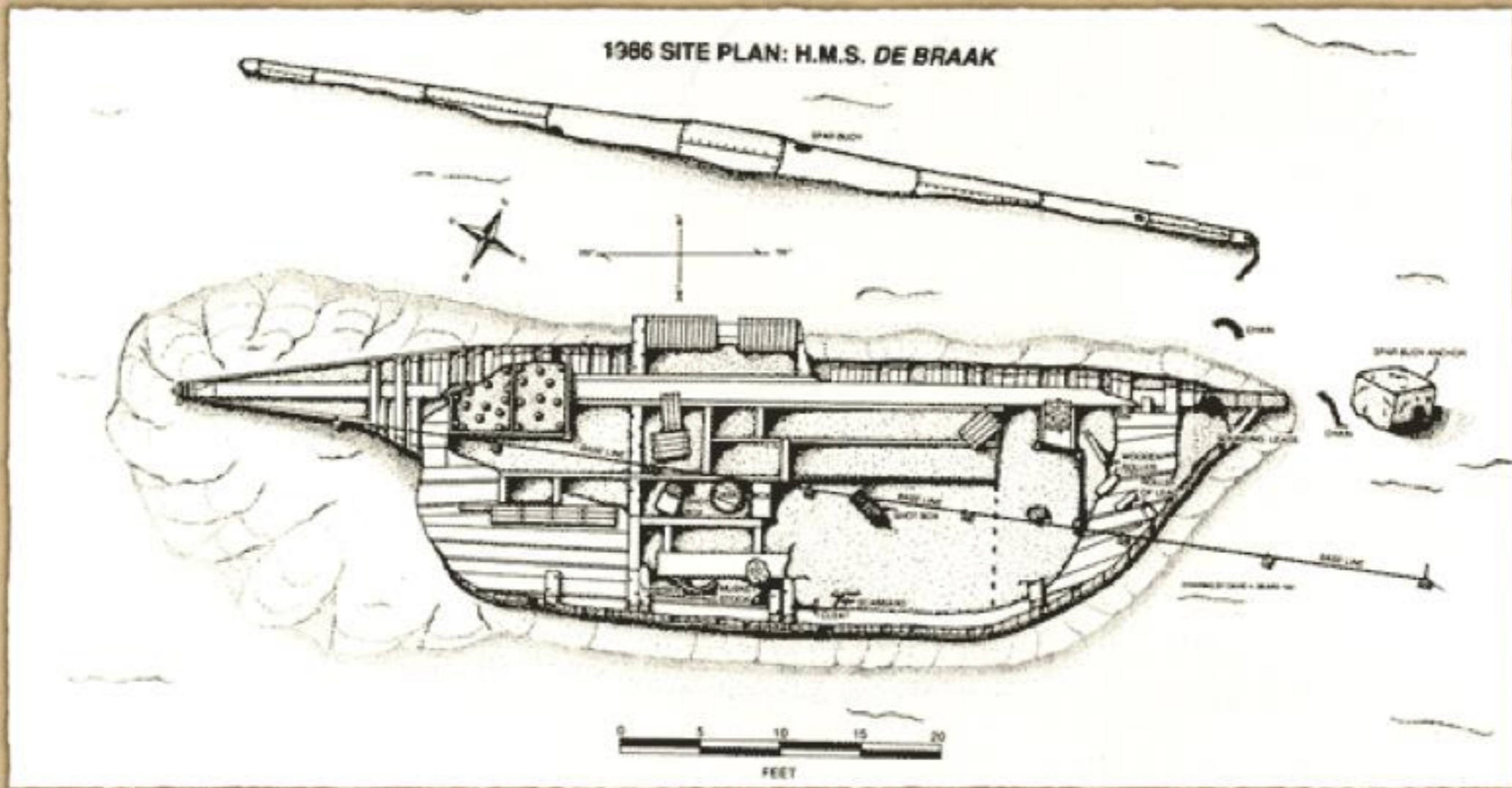
- Preservation of cultural property including materials that hold scientific, historical, religious or social significance.
- Irreplaceable legacy to be preserved for the future.
- Opportunities for further study and enjoyment of the material remains of our past.

Challenges to our Precepts (Underwater or Terrestrial)

- Treatment
- Timely treatment
- Funding
- Interpretation and study
- Long term curation and stewardship

3 Large Scale Maritime Projects

- HMS DeBraak
- World Trade Center Shipwreck
- The Ronson Ship



HMS DeBraak
Site Plan

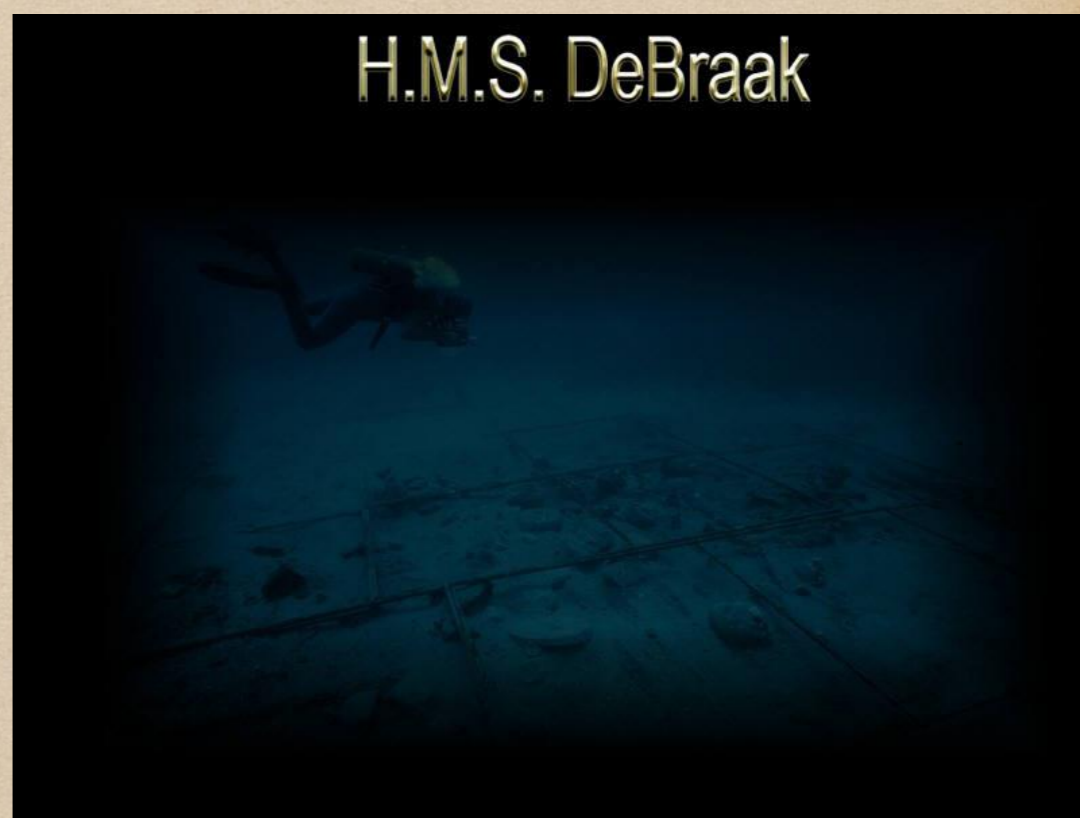
Brief History of the HMS DeBraak

- Cutter DeBraak (Dutch for The Beagle).
- In 1780's, sailed against England under the Dutch Flag
- Seized by England and brought into Royal Navy as HM Sloop of War Braak in 1794
- Re-rigged with sixteen (16) 24 pound carronades and sank in 1800.



Salvage of HMS DeBraak

- DeBraak was salvaged by a salvage company "SubSal" in 1984 and a cannon, an anchor, and a ship's bell.
- In 1985 Delaware took active interest and approximately 27,000 artifacts and the hull were recovered including cannons, cannonballs, barrels, anchors, and personal items.
- Although the museum was involved, the shipwreck was recovered by a salvage company. Therefore initially the academic and archaeological community was not supportive of further study.



H.M.S. DeBraak

Conservation Effort

- Only a few objects initially conserved.
- Majority of large scale naval objects sat in large tanks of water for 20 years before funding any conservation effort.



Sample Conservation Photos



Sample Conservation Photos



Hull of the DeBraak

- Although ultimately the majority of the collections were eventually conserved, unfortunately the Hull to date has not been.
- Hull has been maintained wet with a cycling spray system for almost 30 years.
- Although the museum has been vigilant in their attempts to stabilize and curate the hull, unfortunately such a large scale project is fraught with funding difficulties, logistics for treatment and ultimately lack of dedicated exhibit or interpretive facilities.



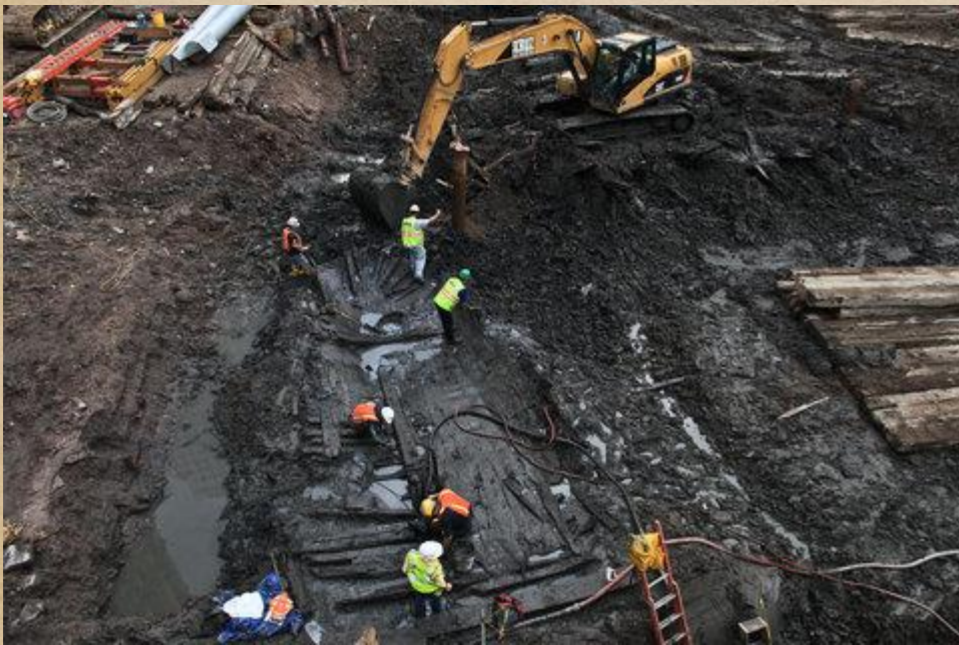


World Trade Center Hull



WTC Hull

- In 2010, during redevelopment of the WTC properties a Revolutionary War Era ship was recovered out of the landfill.
- Hull, leather shoes, wooden cask and barrel, personal items and anchor (unrelated to ship) recovered.



WTC Hull

- The hull appears to have been scuttled into the landfill as part of the cribbing utilized to create the land expansion of lower Manhattan in the early 19th century.
- The client for this project is the Port Authority of New York/NJ.
- Similar to the DeBraak, many of the small artifacts were conserved and are awaiting long term curation with the state.
- In this case, the Hull is actually being treated at the Conservation Labs of Texas A&M – one of the few facilities in the US that can handle such a large project.
- I was involved initially with the recovery of the ship and treatment of many of related artifacts.

- One unusual object was a fragment from the timbers of the ship having an incised tree mark on it. It is unclear to the archaeologists if this was a mark by one of the ship builders or what it represents.



Concerns

- Although hull will be conserved, disposition of hull and collection is a concern.
- Collections heading to NYS Museum archaeological collections but hull disposition uncertain.
- Preliminary discussions with 9-11 Museum, but mission of that museum not related to 18th Century Naval History.
- No access for public to this unique archaeological resource.



The Ronson Ship

- In 1982 early 18th-century three-masted ocean trader ship recovered from Water Street in lower Manhattan.
- 200 tons and over 30 meters long by developer Howard Ronson. Joan Geismar from NYC was retained as the archaeologist.
- The Ronson Ship was an old hull, a condemned vessel that was filled with debris as a crib for a wharf or expansion of the waterfront.
- Ship had been stripped of its rigging, gear, and decorations, before being filled with debris.

• After excavation, the bow of the Ronson Ship was removed for conservation.



Some Artifacts from Ronson Ship Landfill



Pipe bowl fragment



Shoe soles



Wooden Domin

o

Concerns

- Similarly to the other two projects, much of the assemblage was conserved by a variety of conservators including myself over a protracted period of time.
- Due to budgetary constraints, the hull never received its full conservation treatments. Although PEG infusion was started, the timbers were moved to Virginia, staff changed, and for an extended period of time, the hull became orphaned.
- Conservation volunteerism finally helped stabilize some of the timbers.
- The hull is now residing at the Mariners Museum with the rest of the collection.
- Unfortunately, further treatments were warranted but have not been carried out due to financial constraints.

Question to Ponder

- Keeping in mind that one of core precepts of conservation is to preserve cultural history as an irreplaceable legacy how are we as a profession going to ensure that this is realized.
- These three examples explore the unique challenges in their treatment of large maritime collections and further study.
- However, the challenges of long term curation and stewardship is relevant to both terrestrial and marine archaeological collections.
- Moving forward, how can our profession be more proactive in our legacy is not lost.

Contact Information

- Questions or discussions welcomed!

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