

History of the ACUA

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given by
George Fischer
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The genesis of this earliest organization of underwater archaeologists in the New World was through the work of the late John Huston, a retired San Francisco businessman who had developed a avid interest in underwater archaeology. Huston participated in several field research projects in this country and the Mediterranean. Through his experiences he became aware that there was a dearth of communication between the few individuals who were also conducting underwater archaeological research, and that communication, as it existed, was informal at best. He moved to alleviate that problem by organizing the Council for Underwater Archeology in early 1959, of which he was president, and the primary maintaining force. The Council established an advisory committee composed of international leaders in the field. Houston established contacts with others in the both the New World and Europe, to develop a communications network.

In 1963, in cooperation with the Minnesota Historical Society, and with particular support from its associate director, the late Robert C. Wheeler, the first Conference on Underwater Archaeology was organized and held in St. Paul. There were over 150 registrants, 14 official participants, and some 23 papers and presentations during the two day conference. Attendance and presentations were not limited to the New World, but included a papers on discovery and raising of the *Vasa* in Stockholm Harbor, on the Viking ships in Roskilde Fiord, Denmark, and a film and presentation on a Byzantine shipwreck in the Mediterranean. The papers covered a wide range of topics: method and theory, applications and techniques, historical research, and conservation, as well as regional reports of research activity. The list of participants also covered a broad range, including names still well known by students of prehistoric and historic archaeology, history, and related fields.

The success of the meetings, and the interest they generated, were such that the proceedings were published in 1964 in an now very rare volume, *Diving Into the Past: Theories, Techniques, and Applications of Underwater Archaeology*, edited by June Holmquist and Ardis H. Wheeler.

As the Council on Underwater Archaeology became a significant reality in underwater research, its basis was formalized by establishing a board of directors and advisors, and undertaking many other activities, including providing scholarship monies for students of archaeology, organizing and supporting research, and other activities. In a 1964 statement Huston defined and discussed the functions of the Council:

1. Sponsor conventions on underwater archaeology;
2. Cooperate in exploration through giving advice and furnishing divers, technicians and archaeologists;
3. Head the archaeological section of the Underwater Society of America, at that time an organization of 10,000 members;
4. Sponsor excavations with technical and monetary aid; and
5. Serve as a clearing-house for information.

In this role the Council on Underwater Archaeology: corresponded with people throughout the world who wished to obtain information in the field; recorded sites of underwater finds; kept lists

of interested archaeologists historians, museums, divers and technically trained men who could furnish information or be active in exploration and excavation; collected information on techniques, such as underwater survey, site photography, mapping, pumping and sonar exploration; and published information, including a planned journal and extensive bibliography. By current standards some of this may seem a bit prosaic, but 40 years ago it was the cutting edge of the field.

Following the first conference, it was decided to hold meetings biannually. The second conference was held in Toronto in 1965, jointly sponsored by the Royal Ontario Museum and the Council on Underwater Archaeology (CUA). A third was held in Miami, sponsored by the University of Miami and CUA, in 1967. A fourth conference was planned to be held in Washington, D.C. in 1969, but following Huston's death in 1967, the organization he founded and molded into one of considerable significance became inactive. At this same time, the Society for Historical Archeology was founded. Included in its charter membership were many who were working in underwater archaeology. Although trained as prehistorians, they found themselves much involved with historic sites, but hadn't yet really begun doing archaeology underwater.

In 1970 Carl Clausen, then Florida State Underwater Archaeologist, conceived and organized an underwater session at the SHA meetings in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Nine papers were presented in an afternoon session, there was an evening panel discussion, and an interpretive film, constituting about 20% of the total SHA program. While in Bethlehem those of active and interested in the field met - all fitting in one hotel room - and decided to establish an informal committee to perpetuate the conferences through SHA, as the majority of felt that through training and orientation we had considerable in common with the Society. The following year somewhat expanded sessions were held at the meeting in Washington, D.C., and an underwater archaeological component of the SHA meeting.

At the 1973 meetings the underwater portion was again chaired by the late Robert Wheeler, who was interested not only in continuing the meetings with SHA, but perpetuating the traditions established by John Huston. At that meeting the informal committee established at Bethlehem became the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA). As there were twelve present at that formative meeting, twelve became the magic number of membership. The ACUA's primary purposes, similar to those outlined by Huston for the CUA, were to perpetuate the meetings and foster communication in the field. Initially, for want of any other option, the ACUA was self appointed, and self perpetuating.

As time passed, as was the case with SHA, the number of presentations increased greatly. The contribution of the underwater archaeological portions of the meetings became regarded as significant enough so that in 1987 the name was changed to the SHA Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology. It was at that time the ACUA formally became a committee of the SHA. We also finally resolved the problem of how the membership of the ACUA was to be selected, and became an elected body of SHA.

Through efforts of the ACUA the underwater archaeological component of the meetings were perpetuated and expanded. The international nature of the meetings originally envisioned by Huston and Wheeler continues, and has increased considerably, primarily through the effort of Paul Johnston. Considerable credit goes to J. Barto Arnold for publishing the first *Proceedings of the Conference on Underwater Archaeology* in 1978. The were published annually until 1999. During that time they were regarded as an important outlet for underwater archaeological information internationally.

The ACUA has also involved itself in many major projects; developing standards for specialty courses in underwater archaeology, and standards for conservation of artifacts from the underwater environment. The ACUA was also a prime mover in enabling passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987, a piece of legislation which has had a profound effect on the protection, management and research on underwater archaeological resources.

In the era before the late John Goggin, prior to 1960, a motivation for underwater archaeology was the excitement of using a new technology to make discoveries of materials surviving better in an underwater environment than elsewhere. It was really an era of basic “underwater” exploration. It was from this that Goggin saw the potential for research as part of archaeology, and at that point that the field achieved scholarly legitimacy. In recent years a broad range of otherwise unavailable data has become available, ranging from the well preserved organic materials from early man sites at Little Salt Springs and Warm Mineral Springs in Florida, to new historical insights and information from the Battle of Pearl Harbor generated by the National Park Service's Submerged Cultural Resources Unit on the battleship *Arizona*.

In *Maritime Archaeology*, the late Keith Muckelroy developed a new “theory” for nautical archaeology: the ship as a machine designed for harnessing a source of power in order to serve as a means of transport; the ship as an element in a military or economic system providing its basic reason for existence; the ship as a closed community, with its own hierarchy, customs, and conventions (1978:216). As a result of Muckelroy's work and the conjoining of prehistoric and historic approaches, there have been significant mutual benefits from the association of terrestrial historical archaeologists, and those interested in submerged sites. For those of who deal with terrestrial historic and prehistoric sites, as well as those underwater, this relationship and interchange has been highly synergistic.

Citations

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