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LITERATURE SEARCH FOR THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS'
 MURRELL'S INLET NAVIGATION PROJECT

by

Newell O. Wright, Jr. and Alan B. Albright
 Research Manuscript Series No. 112
 (Revised)

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Prepared by the
INSTITUTE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
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PROJECT BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Murrell's Inlet Navigation Project is to provide a safe permanent channel for vessels from the open ocean to the village of Murrell's Inlet. This is felt to be necessary because of the large amount of sand migration in the vicinity of the Inlet that often leads to an almost total closing of the Inlet. The project will be carried out by deepening the inner channel that lies in the center of Main Creek, dredging a small auxiliary channel, and dredging an entrance channel connecting the inner channel to the sea, out to the 10' contour mean low water. The main channel would be protected by two jetties, one to the north containing a weir section and one to the south. Inside the north jetty and adjacent to the weir section, a sand deposition area will be dredged which is expected to hold a three year accumulation of migratory sand. It is expected by this operation that a safe permanent entrance will result, permitting a more efficient use of Murrell's Inlet.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the literature search was to determine if there was a reasonable chance that terrestrial or underwater sites of historic or archeological interest might be located in the designated dredging or spoils dumping areas as detailed in the Corps of Engineer's Environmental Impact Preliminary Statement in order to provide sufficient information to plan the nature and extent of field investigation if it is warranted.

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GEOMORPHIC CHANGES AT
MURRELLS INLET S.C.

Mean High Water Shorelines
Compiled From U.S.C. & G.S. Charts
Datum N.A. 1927
Corps of Engineers

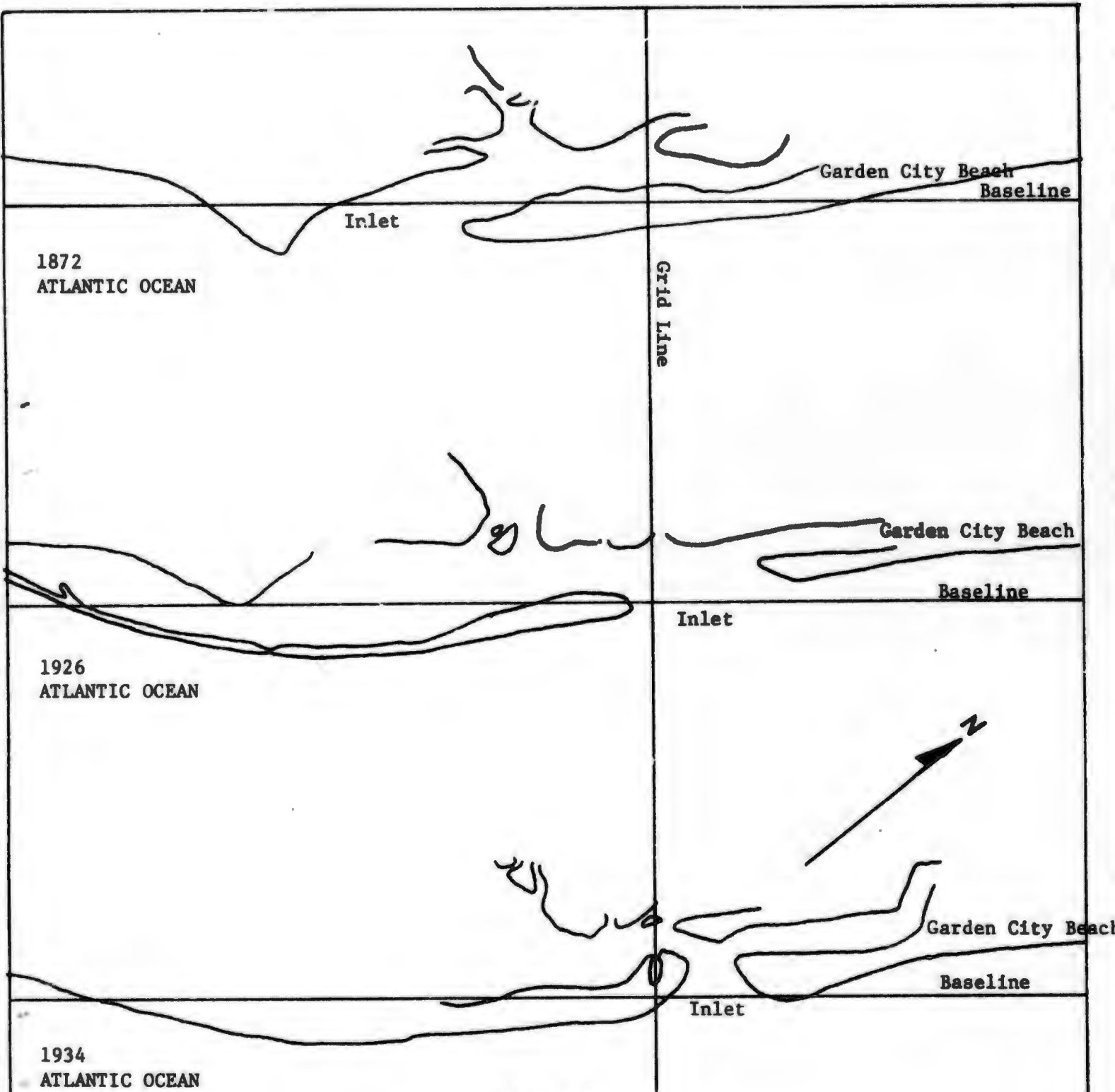


FIGURE 1A

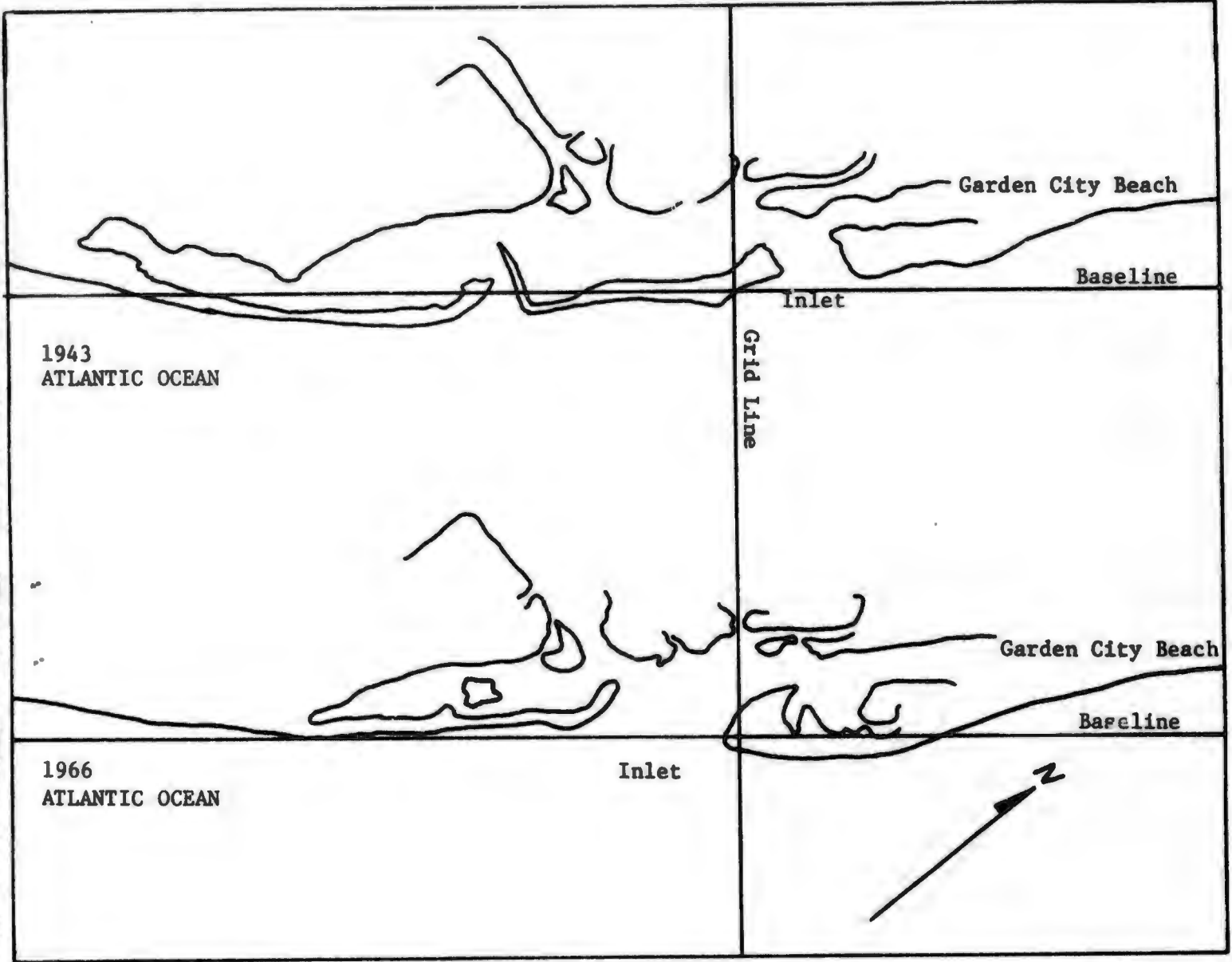


FIGURE 1B

METHOD

The literature search was carried out by Institute personnel and a contract researcher. The first step was to examine the Institute's files and site sheets for known sites both in the spoils dumping areas and especially in the designated dredging areas. This was followed by examining primary and secondary source material in libraries and archives in the Columbia area, primarily at the University of South Carolina. Several days were also spent conducting research in Georgetown and Charleston archives and libraries and in speaking with local historians concerning any relevant research they might have carried out. Finally, a three day archival reconnaissance was carried out in the United States National Archives and the Congressional Library in Washington, D.C.

In all of the above search centers care was taken to examine not only primary and secondary sources but also to make a detailed study of the map collection.

FINDINGS

The primary finding of the literature search was that Murrell's Inlet did not play a major role in the settlement and development of the area. It was not near enough to any major plantations to serve as a shipping port nor was it as convenient as Georgetown was as a port for inland plantations. It also suffered from the same problem that affects it today -- shifting sands which can drastically change the Inlet's depth and cause the mouth to migrate from year to year. Since Murrell's Inlet village and nearby plantations are less than five miles

from the Waccamaw River with its sheltered route to Georgetown, there was really no reason for the Inlet to develop.

However, during the Civil War the Inlet began to serve a useful function as a minor port for blockade runners and especially Confederate coastal vessels. A blockade runner headed for Charleston or Georgetown but finding them heavily blockaded, might put into Murrell's Inlet as it was only intermittently watched by Federal forces. The only vessels that were recorded to have sunk in or around the Inlet up to the end of 1865 did so during the Civil War. Even reports of ship losses during the Civil War are often vague, merely reporting that the vessel sank in or at the Inlet, but never giving precise locations that could be correlated to contemporary or present landmarks. Other statements of possible ship losses during the Civil War often mentioned that vessels were burned or shelled, but failed to state that they sank as a result of the fire or were beached for repairs.

There were several categories of ship losses mentioned in the records that could be pertinent but would be difficult to make a case for, such as "lost at sea," "missing," "disappeared," etc. Their value will have to be downgraded for purposes of this survey as they could have been lost anywhere along the coast. There were, however, several reported ship losses in Murrell's Inlet during the Civil War that could have historical significance.

On April 27, 1863 crews from U.S.S. Monticello and Matthew Vasser boarded and destroyed the schooner Golden Liner in Murrell's Inlet. Later in the same year boat crews from U.S.S. T. A. Ward destroyed the schooner Rover at Murrell's Inlet. The last recorded operation of this

type during the War took place on January 1, 1864 when sailors and marines from U.S.S. Nipsic landed at Murrell's Inlet and destroyed an unidentified blockade runner.

After the Civil War, better records began to be kept and verified ship losses tended to rise, especially in the twentieth century. These vessels have a low priority for historical or archeological concern because they sank in a period of voluminous records and detailed ship design.

Plantation records, and other local primary sources were also examined to determine if evidence was ever recorded of previous Indian occupation or if land historic sites were known to the settlers. No sites of either type were discovered by the research.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above research, it is our recommendation that an underwater magnetometer survey be carried out prior to commencing the Murrell's Inlet Navigation Project.

The three Civil War vessels reported lost in the Murrell's Inlet area, Golden Liner, Rover, and unidentified schooner, could represent sites or artifact concentrations of considerable historical importance. Little was found in the literature search which would pinpoint their locations which indicates that if they are to be discovered field investigation will be required.

The specifications of the Golden Liner were not uncovered during the literature survey but it is recorded that she was schooner rigged. The vessel arrived with a cargo of flour, coffee, sugar, brandy, and

other miscellaneous items. It was reported lost in Murrell's Inlet which suggests it would lie near or inside the bar. The Rover is also described as a schooner and was carrying a cargo of cotton and preparing to run the blockade outward when destroyed. Her dimensions are not known either.

Although the composition of neither vessel is recorded, the fact they were referred to as schooners suggests a wooden hull. However, since many of the fastenings and ship fittings were probably of iron, both vessels should have a mass of iron sufficient to be recorded by a magnetometer. There is also a possibility that some unrecorded cargo might have been iron thereby possibly adding to a magnetometer signature. It was also common practice for coasting vessels traveling to unimproved ports to carry on deck a steam winch for cargo handling. This was also primarily constructed of iron. The third recorded vessel lost at Murrell's Inlet was that of an unidentified blockade runner, of which, rig, composition, dimension, cargo, etc. are unknown.

All three of the above vessels should be detectable by magnetometer if line spacing is not allowed to exceed fifty feet. Closer line spacing would be preferable. Due to the shallow water in the area, especially in the surf line, the magnetometer head should be towed on or near the surface.

Had there been evidence of seventeenth or eighteenth century ship losses in Murrell's Inlet, then it would have been necessary also to utilize a sub-bottom profiler and side scan sonar. However, even if buried deeply in the sand, Civil War vessels should have a sufficient amount of iron in their hulls, engines, or fittings to be easily detected by a magnetometer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The books listed below represent a cross section sampling of those that were examined for the purpose of this literature survey. There were many books examined from which no useful information could be extracted and to list their titles would be superfluous. The books listed below for the most part yielded negative information, which in itself can be useful. Each of the libraries, record repositories and archives visited had map collections that were examined in detail. The above mentioned holdings included microfilm and newspaper collections, both of which were also examined.

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