

Delgado, James P., Deborah E. Marx, Kyle Lent, Joseph Grinnan, and Alexander DeCaro. *Clotilda: The History and Archaeology of the Last Slave Ship*

University of Alabama Press, 2023

216 pp., illustrations, glossary, bibliography

ISBN 9780817321512 (hardcover) US\$39.95; 9780817362676 (softcover)

US\$29.95; 9780817394431 (e-book) US\$29.95

This compact volume documents the clandestine voyage of the *Clotilda*, the last known ship to transport enslaved Africans to the United States, and represents a significant contribution to the fields of maritime archaeology and African American history. The discovery and subsequent analysis of the wreck are contextualized in a detailed history of the ship's slave-trading mission and the experience of the enslaved people aboard. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the authors explore the effects of the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring legacy in the Deep South.

The *Clotilda*'s 1860 voyage was orchestrated by Alabama businessman and slaveholder Timothy Meaher as a deliberate act of defiance against the abolitionist movements that animated the contemporary political discourse. It also represented a statement of Southern slaveholding solidarity in a nation wracked by sectional tension. Meaher's decision to smuggle 110 Africans from present-day Ouidah (modern Benin) to Mobile, Alabama, was emblematic of the persistent demand for enslaved labor in the antebellum South and the ease with which the anti-slave trading laws of 1807 could be violated. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this enterprise was the cavalier attitude of Meaher and his co-conspirators, who embarked on the voyage to satisfy a bet that he "could get away with the crime" (2). Once the ship arrived at Mobile and unloaded her human cargo, the *Clotilda* was set ablaze, effectively erasing physical evidence of the operation.

Delgado and his colleagues reconstruct the *Clotilda*'s story as a crime scene using all the forensic tools available, including historical records, oral histories, and cutting-edge archaeological methods. The authors provide a detailed account of the ship's construction, its transformation into a vessel for human trafficking, and the socio-political environment that enabled its voyage. Throughout, there are poignant reminders of the atrocities of the slave trade and the resilience of those who endured its horrors, including first-hand accounts from the *Clotilda* survivors who established the community of Africatown, Alabama, in 1866.

One of the book's most compelling aspects is its exploration of the archaeological efforts that led to the *Clotilda*'s discovery. The authors detail

the challenges faced in locating and identifying the wreck, including the complexities of underwater excavation in zero-visibility conditions and the need for cultural sensitivity. The successful identification of the *Clotilda* in 2019 stands as a testament to the perseverance of researchers and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. Complex archeological methodologies are explained in accessible language, ensuring that the work remains useful to scholars and approachable to general audiences. The inclusion of photographs (some in color), maps, and diagrams further helps to visualize both the human story and the archaeological processes involved. A glossary of technical terms is a useful addition.

Ultimately, this is an important book that bridges the gap between archaeology, historical scholarship, and public history. The narrative plumbs the broader implications of *Clotilda*'s place within the transatlantic slave trade while emphasizing its significance in contemporary discussions about race, memory, and justice. The authors argue that the ship's discovery offers an opportunity for reflection, urging readers to confront the enduring impact of slavery on American society and engage honestly with our past. In the current climate, this message is all the more powerful and more urgent.

S.A. Cavell
Hammond, Louisiana

**Elliott, Richard V. *The Boats of Summer*. 2 vols.
Schiffer Publishing, 2024**

Vol. 1: 304 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index
ISBN 9780764367403 (hardcover) US\$59.99

Vol. 2: 272 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index
ISBN 9780764367410 (hardcover) US\$59.99

The two volumes of *The Boats of Summer* might appear to be typical coffee-table books with their beautiful historical illustrations. But, while the two volumes certainly have all the qualities of a good coffee-table book, they are also an important contribution to historical research.

The late Richard V. Elliott grew up near the Hudson River and became an expert on the passenger steamships navigating the Hudson River and New York Harbor. The two volumes now published are the result of Elliott's lifelong research on the subject and are edited by Elliott's widow Linda Elliott.

The volumes tell the history of these excursion boats by focusing on individual histories of famous and lesser-known ships. The first volume details