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Part 1: Building Ship No. 290

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CSS *ALABAMA* : AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

In Six Parts:

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here

---> Part 1: Building of Ship 290

Part 2: Officers and Crew

Part 3: Cruise of the *Alabama*

Part 4: Battle with *USS Kearsarge*

Part 5: Wreck Exploration & Excavation

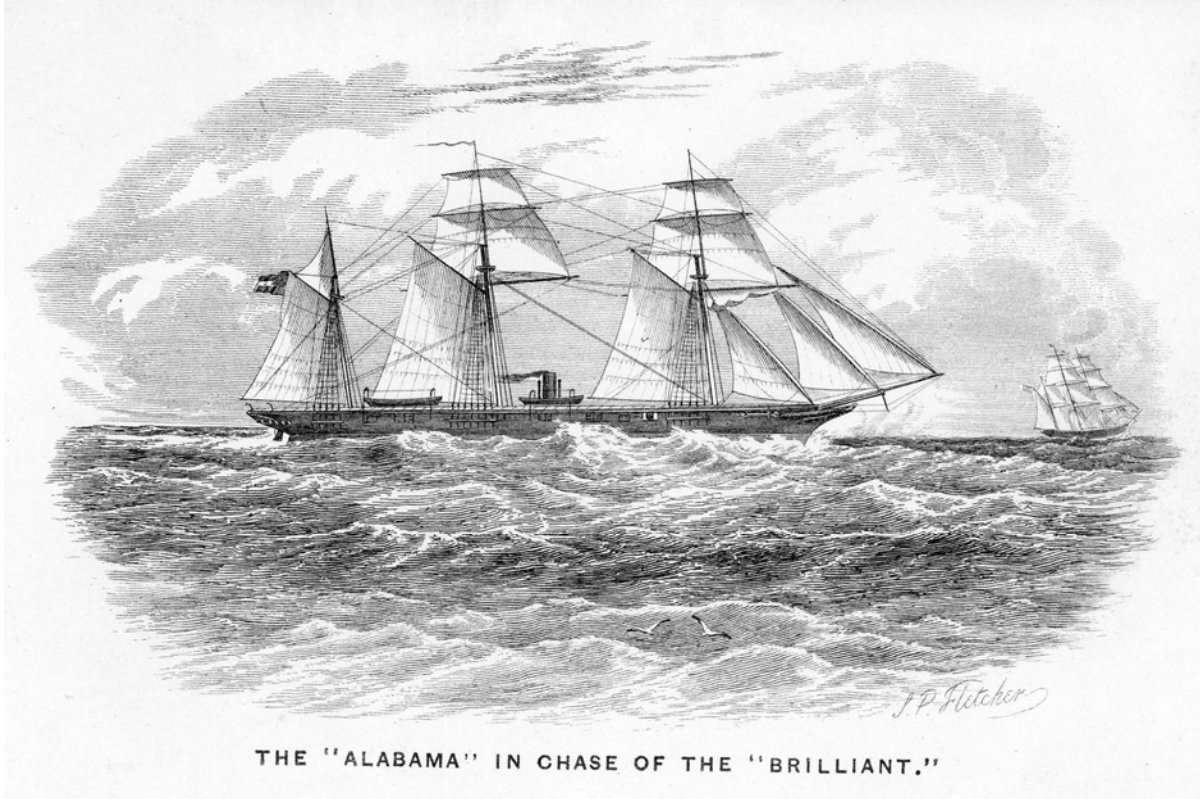
Part 6: Miscellaneous and Bibliography
(the Alabama Claims, poems, music, sword of
Raphael Semmes)

To read any of the other parts, return to the menu
and select that part to be downloaded.

Designed and Assembled by
Jack L. Dickinson
Marshall University Special Collections
2017

CSS Alabama: An Illustrated History

BUILDING SHIP NO. 290



Classified as a bark-rigged sloop-of-war known as "hull 290," built by Laird Shipbuilders in England, launched 15 May 1862.



BUILDER OF THE ALABAMA: CAPTAIN JAMES DUNWOODY BULLOCH

Bulloch was born in Georgia and served in the U.S. Navy before joining the Confederate cause. In 1861 he was given command of the *CSS Fingal*. In 1862-63 he was the financial agent of the CS Navy Department in Europe, securing vessels for the Confederacy, such as the *CSS Alabama*. He gave his title as "Naval Representative of the Confederate States in Europe." He also established an extensive spy network. After the war he was not granted amnesty, so he remained in England. He recounted his wartime service in *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe*, published in 1883. He died on January 7, 1901, in Liverpool, England.

JAMES D. BULLOCH'S BOOK (Marshall Univ. Special Collections)

Bulloch
 July 1862

Presented, to
 Mr Arthur French
 by his friend
 James D. Bulloch
 Liverpool
 17th Dec 1866

This is the Book used
 by Com - J. D. Bulloch,
 whilst superintending the
 building of the '290' ship
 'Alabama' & other cruisers
 Arthur L. French
 Nov 1869

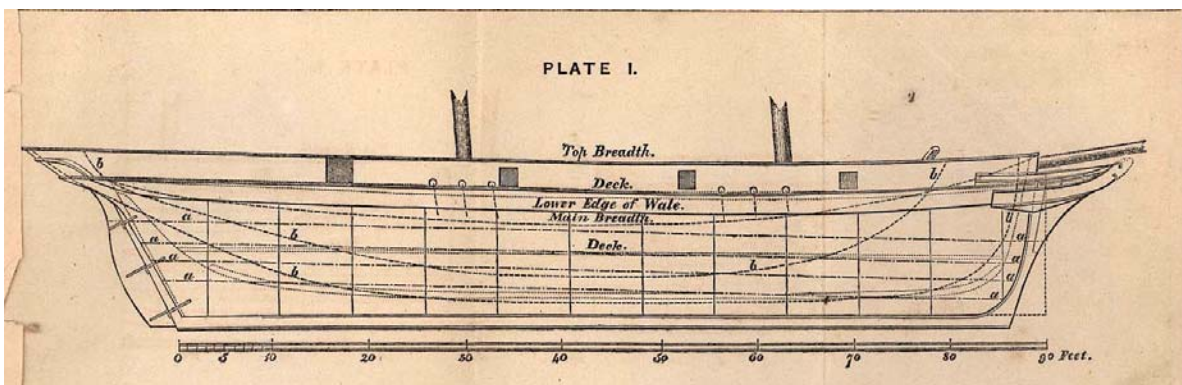
RUDIMENTS
 OF
 NAVAL ARCHITECTURE;
 OR,
 AN EXPOSITION
 OF THE
 ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENCE
 AND THEIR
 PRACTICAL APPLICATION
 TO
 NAVAL CONSTRUCTION;
 COMPILED FOR THE
 USE OF BEGINNERS.

SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

BY
 JAMES PEAKE,
 ASSISTANT MASTER SHIPWRIGHT, H. M. DOCKYARD, WOOLWICH, AND
 FORMERLY OF THE SCHOOL OF NAVAL ARCHITECTURE,
 H. M. DOCKYARD, PORTSMOUTH.

London:
 JOHN WEALE, 59, HIGH HOLBORN.
 1859.

This book by James Peake, *The Rudiments of Naval Architecture*, was originally published in London in 1849. The 1859 edition was used by Captain James D. Bulloch while he was in Great Britain securing vessels for the navy of the Confederate States of America. Bulloch signed the flyleaf as follows: "Bulloch/ Jul 1862." and "Presented to / Arthur French/ by his friend / James D. Bulloch / Liverpool / 17th Dec 1866." Arthur French added the following notation, "This is the Book used / by Commander J. D. Bulloch while / superintending th[e] / building of the '290' ship / [the] 'Alabama' & other cruisers / Arthur L. French / Nov[embe]r 1869"



**In the builder's own words:
James D. Bulloch**

“The contract for the vessel afterwards called the *Alabama* was made in my own name as a private individual, and the negotiations were carried on between the members of the firm and myself.

The general dimensions and other particulars of the *Alabama* were: length 220 feet; breadth, 32 feet; draft, with all weights on board, 15 feet; tonnage 1040; engines, two horizontal of 300 horse-power nominal, but on trial trip indicated 1,000 horsepower. She was barque-rigged, with very long lower masts, to get large fore and aft sails. She was admirably fitted in every respect: engines equal to Admiralty standard; brass screw, Griffith's pattern, with lifting apparatus, and stowage in iron bunkers for 350 tons of coal. She was provided with a double suit of sails and the usual outfit for an East India voyage. She had five boats, including launch, cutter and whale-boat, and ample ground-tackle. She was well supplied with hawsers, and had spare blocks, running gear, etc., to meet all requirements for at least a year. The engineer's stores and spare engine-gear were on the scale supplied to ships of the Royal Navy intended for long and distant voyages, and she was provided with condensing apparatus and cooling tank to supply fresh water...I was satisfied in every particular with the manner in which the builders fulfilled their contract, and I believe she was as fine a vessel, and as well-found, as could have been turned out of any dockyard in the kingdom, equal to any of her Majesty's ships...”

Bulloch's *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe*, Vol 1, pp. 60-61.

Bulloch describes her armament:

(Bulloch engaged a civilian crew and captain to sail the 290 to the Azores where she was outfitted with armament, coal, and provisions.)

(Letter from Bulloch to S. R. Mallory, CS Secretary of Navy, Aug. 11, 1862)

“When finally armed the *Alabama* will have a battery consisting of a 7-inch 100 pounder rifled gun, Blakely pattern, 84 cwt.; one 8-inch solid shot 68-pounder, smooth bore, 108 cwt.; and six 6-inch 32 pounder guns, 55 cwt. each. The 8-inch gun is of course provided with shell as well as shot, and I have provided seventy 42-pound spherical shot for the rifled gun in addition to the elongated shell and shot peculiarly adapted to its character. It will give me the greatest satisfaction to know that Commander Semmes is fairly afloat in the *Alabama* and confident of his ability to do good service with her.”

Official Records of Union and Confederate Navies, II, 2, p.236.

(cwt is abbreviation for hundred weight)

Bulloch describes the launching:

“When ‘290’ was to be launched, it was necessary to provide an appellation for her...when the ship got free of the blocks and glided down the ways, she had been christened *Enrica*.”

Bulloch, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States*, p.229.

(She was launched in May, 1862, and was probably renamed the *Alabama* in July of 1862.)

THE CONTRACT FOR SHIP No. 290

This is the first page from the *Contract Book* of John Laird Sons & Company for the construction of ship No.290, which was named the *CSS Alabama*. The contract was made between Laird's and Captain James D. Bulloch on August 1, 1861, for £47,500. The contract called for an initial payment of £29,500, followed by payments of £9,500 when the frame was completed, £9,500 when the upper and lower deck shelves were in place, £9,500 when the vessel was launched, and a final payment of £9,500 when the vessel performed satisfactorily.

187 No 290 James Dunwoody

Contracting Parties James Dunwoody Bulloch Esq
and
John Laird Sons & Company

Date of Contract 1st August 1861

Price £47,500

Payment

paid	1/5 (£9500)	on execution of Contract
paid	" 9500	when the Frame is up
	" 9500	when the upper and lower Deck shelves are in place - Beams in - keelson in place - Garboard Strakes fitted & bolted - and bends dumped on.
	" 9500	when Vessel Launched
	" 9500	" satisfactorily tried, and delivered afloat, uninjured in the River Mersey with the Builders' Certificate.
	<u>£47500</u>	

To build up & complete the Vessel with the best materials, and of the best description which can be obtained, and with every requisite ready for sea, and in accordance with the Specifications annexed to the Contract

Fire Insurance. Until Vessel delivered Contractors to keep the same Insured against fire in the office of the Royal Insurance Co Liverpool, or in such other office as may be agreed upon, for the benefit of the Owner, to the amount of the Instalments paid by him

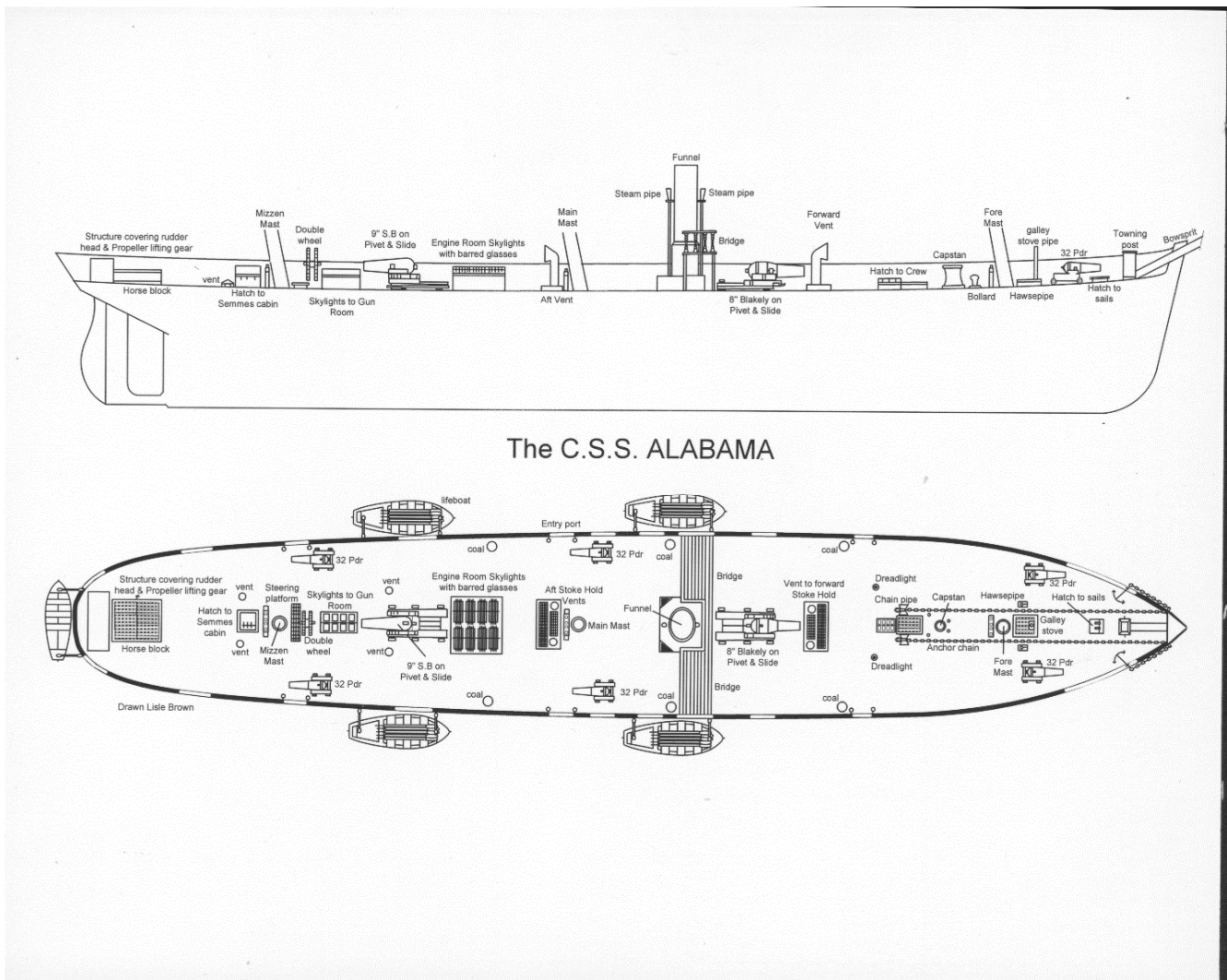
Any damage by fire or otherwise previous to delivery to be made good by the Contractors, and any monies recovered from the Insurance office to be applied in the expense thereof.

Guarantee Contractors to replace any and every defective or bad material or work of any description in the Engines Boilers, Machinery & appurtenances of the Vessel, that may become apparent within 6 months after delivery, and which shall be proved by the Owner to have existed at the time of delivery, without charge.

CONSTRUCTION PLANS AND SCHEMATICS FOR SHIP No. 290

The plans of the *CSS Alabama* were copied from the original drawings at the offices of Hill, Dickinson Co. (successor to John Laird Sons & Co.) by William Stanley Hoole in 1957. Hoole made both a photostatic copy, as well as a tracing of the originals. Hoole's copies are housed at the William S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, and are used with permission in this exhibit. Copies of the drawings were subsequently found in the National Archives.

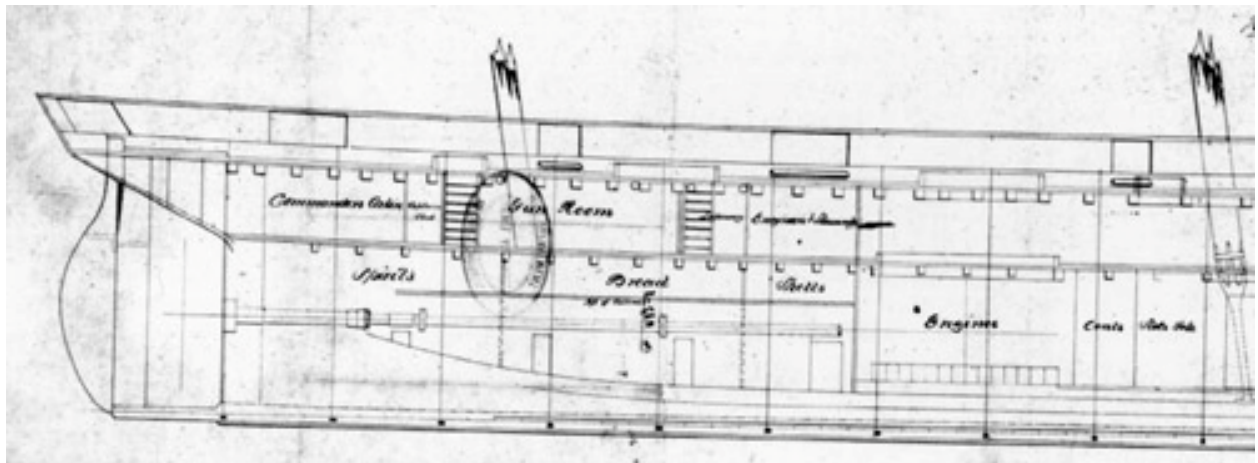
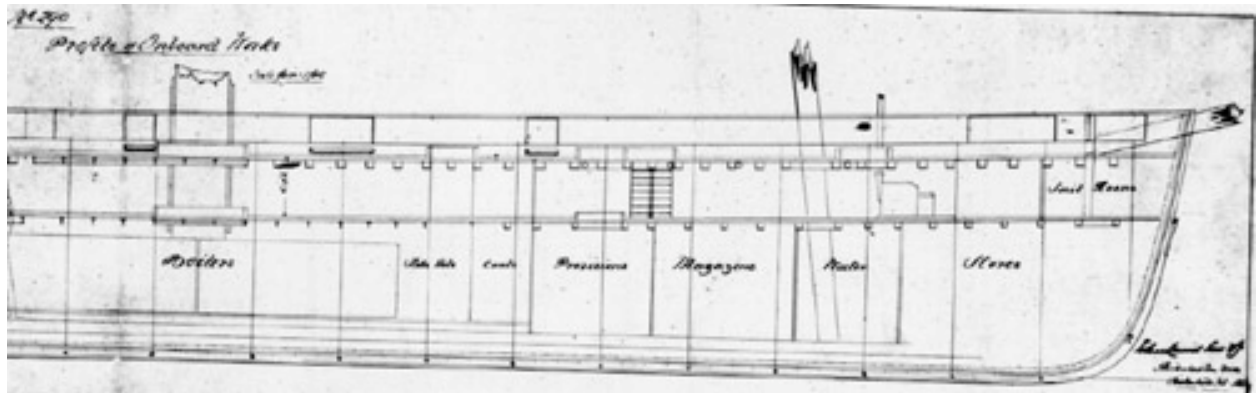
The schematic drawings below were prepared especially for this exhibit for clarification of the original plans. The drawings were drawn several years ago by the late curator of Marshall University's Special Collections Dept., Lisle Brown, from the original specifications.



PROFILE OF INBOARD WORKS OF STEAMER "290"

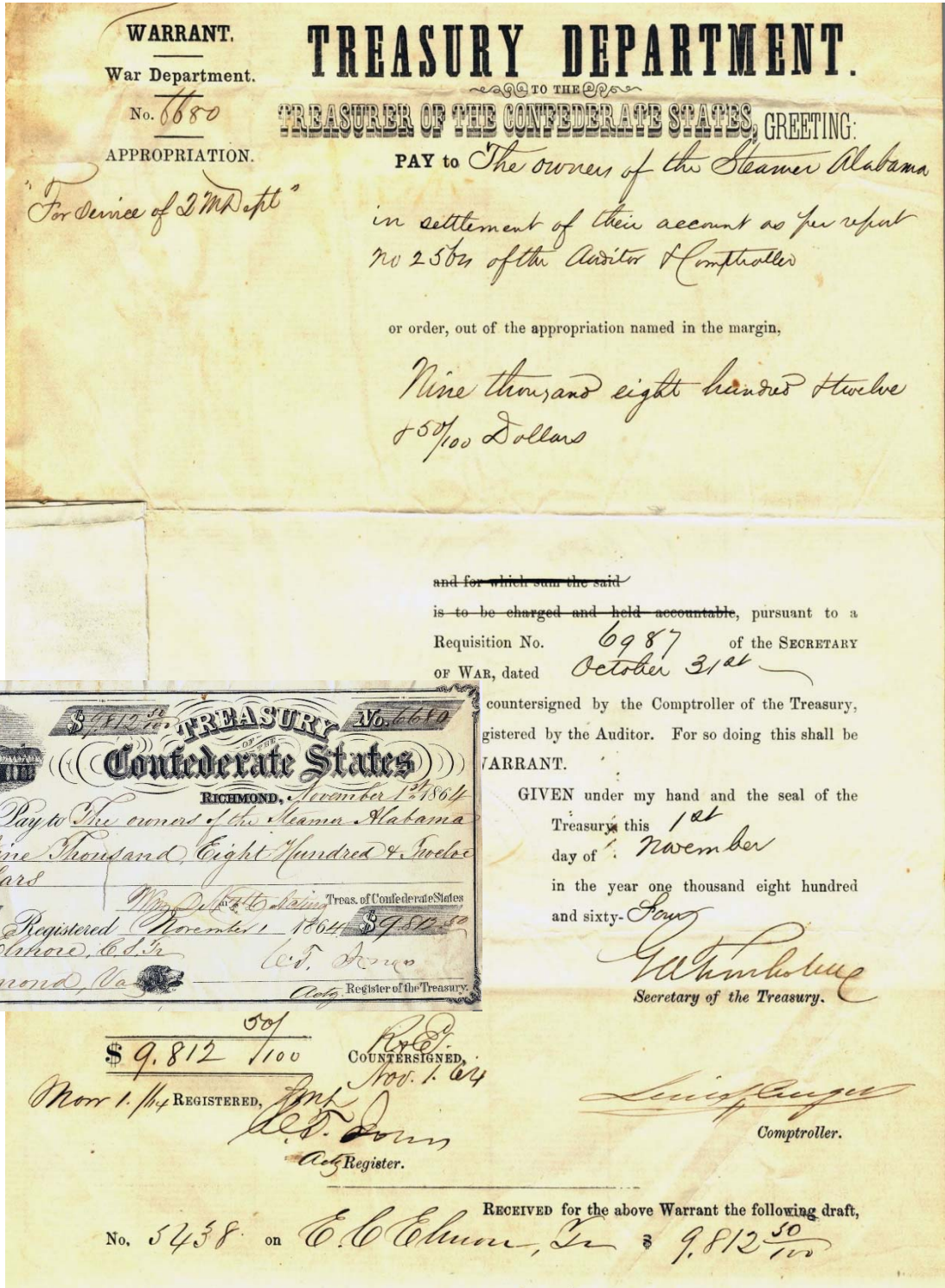
Copy of the original drawing by John Laird Sons & Co., 1861

Courtesy of the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama



FINAL CHECK for the C. S. S. ALABAMA

The check no. 6680 for \$9,812.50. The final payment for the CSS *Alabama*, dated November 1, 1864, and the accompanying warrant.



Both items in the Rosanna Blake Collection, Marshall University Special Collections.

“THE FAMOUS CONFEDERATE PRIVATEER ALABAMA”

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 14, 1863, p. 385

ON THE SAME principle that the police authorities send to their agents photographs of notorious villains, we to-day publish a most exact and elaborate picture of the famous rebel pirate ship Alabama, or as she is sometimes called, the “290.” It is from a photograph taken while she was at Liverpool where she was facetiously termed the Emperor of China’s yacht. As she is still at large, roaming about like her prototype in the Scripture, “seeking whom she may devour,” every shipmaster ought to take a copy of this number of our paper to accustom the eye to recognize her at a glance. We give the following description of her from an English paper:

The Alabama was built at Liverpool or Birkenhead, and left the latter port in August last; is about 1,200 tons burthen; draught about 14 feet; engines by Laird & Sons, of Birkenhead, 1862. She is a wooden vessel, propelled by a screw, copper bottom, about 210 feet long, rather narrow, painted black outside and drab inside; has a round stern, billet tread, very little shear, flush deck fore and aft; a bridge forward of the smoke stack carries two large black boats on cranes amidships forward of the main rigging; two black quarter boats between the main and mizen masts, one small black boat over the stern on cranes; the square spars on a gallows between the bridge and foremast show above the rail.

She carries three long 32-pounders on a side, and is pierced for two more amidships, has a 100-pound rifled pivot gun forward of the bridge, and a 68-pound pivot on the main tracks; has tracks laid forward for a pivot bow gun, and tracks aft for a pivot stern chaser, all of which she will take on board to complete her armament. Her guns are of the Blakely pattern, and manufactured by Wesley & Preston, Liverpool, 1862.

She is barque rigged; has very long, bright lower masts, and black mastheads; yards black, long yard arms, short poles—say one to two feet—with small dog-vanes on each, and a pendant to the main; studding-sail, booms on the fore and main, and has wire rigging. Carries on her foremast a square foresail, large trysail with two reefs, top gallantsail and royal. On the mizenmast a very large spanker and a short three cornered aft topsail; has a fore and fore topmast staysail and jib; has had no staysail to the main and mizenmast bent or royal yards aloft. Is represented to go 13 knots under canvas and 15 under steam. Can get steam in 20 minutes, but seldom uses it except in a chase or an emergency. Has all national flags, but usually set the St. George's Cross on approaching a vessel.

Her present complement of men is 120 all told, but she is anxious to ship more. Keeps a man at the mainhead from daylight to sunset. Her sails are of hemp canvas, made very roaching; the topsails have 20 cloths on the head and 30 on the foot. General appearance of the hull and sails decidedly English. She is generally under two topsails, fore and main trysails, fore and foretopmast staysails; sometimes topgallant sails and jib, but seldom any sails on the mizen, except while in charge of a vessel. She is very slow in stays; generally wears ship. She was built expressly for the business. She is engaged to destroy, fight or run, as the character of her opponent may be.

She took her armament and crew and most of her officers on board near Terceira, Western Islands, from an English vessel; the officers, chivalry of the South. All the water consumed on board is condensed.

“INTERNAL DESCRIPTION”

Spy Report, July 4, 1862

Courtesy of the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama

State room right aft. The entrance to the cabin from the deck is abaft the mizen mast, raised, about 2 feet 6 inches. The state room is seated all round; there are two small glass cases in it. At the bottom of the stairs, the communication to the right leads to a small saloon in the centre of which, is a small dining table and on each side are state cabins.

Passing from this to a little more forward, is a large saloon, where the chief officers' and chief engineers cabins are situated on each side, fitted up with chart and book cases.

From this you pass through a doorway into the engine room. There is a platform over the engines (which are two in number) and which are most complete and handsome pieces of machinery, only occupying a small space and lying entirely at the bottom; they are on the oscillating principle.

From here also you can pass into the stoke holes. Forward of this, but no communication, are the mens berths, which are quite open and spacious and run entirely forward, in the centre is the cooking apparatus. The hooks are slung to the deck for the mens hammocks. This is also seated all round. Under these seats are places for the mens bags with iron gratings which form the front of the seats. The entrance to this department is directly forward of the foremost.

At the bottom of the stairs, a little to the fore part of the ship is a small hatch which loads to the magazines, two in number. The partition on each side of these magazines is of three thicknesses of oak, between each thickness is lined with lead. These magazines are under the main deck, of what I should the men's berths in the fore part of the ship, about six or eight foot forward of the fore mast. The canisters are fixtures on their sides, the screws lying one over the other. The magazines and entrance to them, are filled with water during action, by a pipe on each side, and by a pipe in the middle of the floor, the water descends to the bottom of the ship and is pumped out by steam power.

The entrance to the cabin is abaft the mizzen mast; each side is a brass ventilator, about twelve inches high. Forward of the mizzen mast is a skylight to the small saloon and forward of this skylight is a larger one, which gives light to the larger saloon. These skylights do not stand more than a foot high on deck and which have iron bars across. Forward of this skylight and abaft the funnel, is a skylight five or six feet long, which gives light to the engine room.

The base of the funnel forms a square, about two feet high; each corner is latticed with iron rails, to throw light and air into the stoke room. Each side abaft the funnel, are two ventilators with round bell mouths and which stand about five or six feet high; more forward of the mainmast are two more ventilators of the same description.

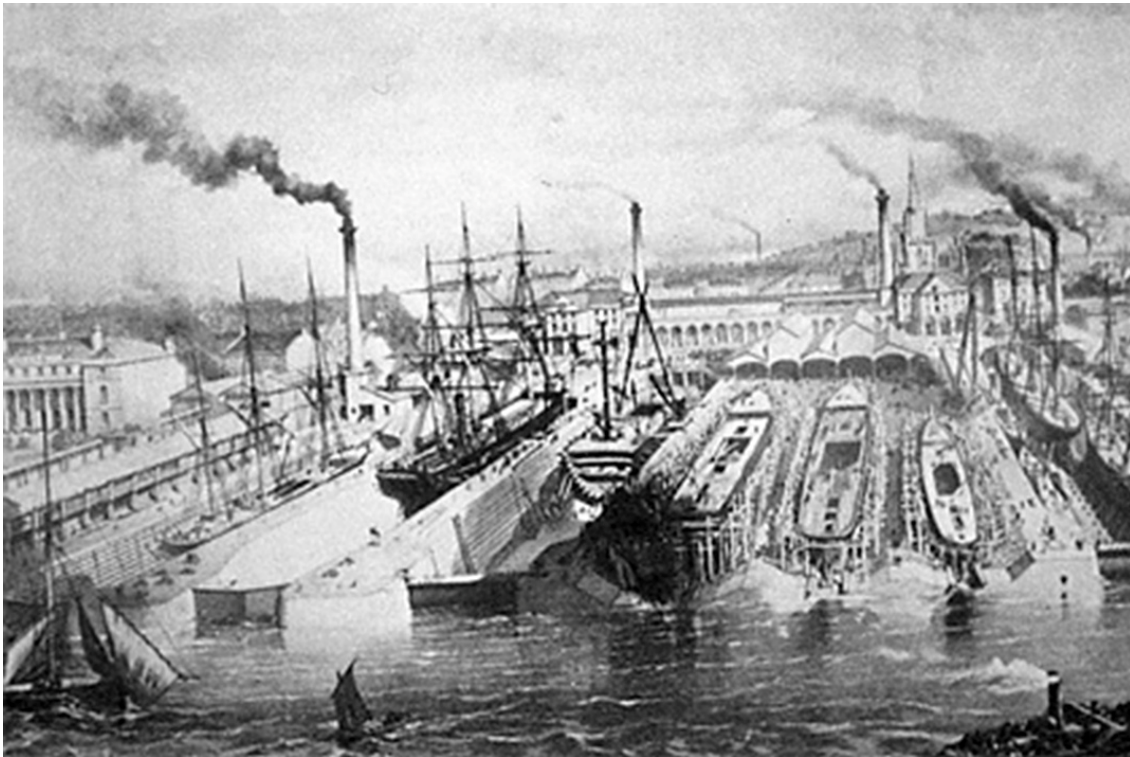
The entrance to the stoke hole is abaft the foremast. The entrance to the mens sleeping apartment, is raised, about 2 feet high. A small chimney, or brass or copper funnel rises here from the cooking apparatus. Each side of the gangway is carved oak, with an anchor and rope carved on.

Richard Broderick, a shipwright, states, that on the day of the launch of the gunboat, “No. 290” Captain Bullock and his wife, with several American gentlemen, were in attendance. Captain Bullock's wife was in one of the office windows, with other ladies. Her bonnet dropped from the window, he (Broderick) lifted it and passed it up to her. He also states, that one of the gentlemen who was present was tall, stout, and wore red whiskers. He further states that he is

sure that Captain Bullock is the owner of the gunboat and that she belongs to the same parties as the “Oroto” s.s (gunboat) (now the “Florida”) which was built by W.C. Miller, Toxteth Dock, and for the same purpose viz:- for cruising about on the American coast. He (Richard Broderick) says, in fact she is for the Confederate Government and that Captain Bullock is a Southern Commissioner.

Captain Butcher, who is a young man, with light whiskers and beard, is for the present, in command of her and is appointing and shipping the crew. The Chief Officer whose name, at present he (Broderick) does not know, has been in the Peninsular and Oriental Company's Service. The Chief Steward has been on board the Royal Mail Steamer “Africa” one of the Gunard Line.

There are to be two carpenters; viz;- carpenter and carpenters mate. Captain Butcher wanted him (Broderick) to go as carpenters mate but he (Broderick) would not go as the wages were too small, they only offering £6 and he (Broderick) wanting £7 per month, and also a guarantee from Mr. John Laird that his (Broderick's) wages would be all right, as they refused to say who the owners were. Mr. Laird smiled when he was asked to be security as he (Mr. Laird) said, he had no doubt it would be all right. Broderick refused to go.



John Laird and Sons Company shipbuilding yard in Liverpool.

James D. Bulloch's letter to Hon. James M. Mason

December 30, 1862

(Mason represented the Confederate States of America as appointed commissioner of the Confederacy to the United Kingdom and France.)

Liverpool, December 30, 1862

Dear Sir: I am in receipt of your letter of yesterday and hasten to reply to your enquiries seriatim.

First: Captain Semmes went on board the *Alabama* for the first time in the Bay of Angra, Island of Terceira*, on, I think, the 20th of August, 1862, but did not assume command of her until August 24, the ship then being at sea off the island Terceira.

Second: When the *Alabama* left Liverpool she had no part of her armament on board, no ordnance stores, no military equipment.

Third: When the *Alabama* left Liverpool she had not more than 30 men onboard, a number not sufficient to manage a steam vessel of her class bound upon a tropical voyage.

Fourth: Additions were made to the *Alabama's* crew after leaving England; the men were put on board at sea, off the Island of Terceira.

Fifth: The *Alabama* received her armament between the 20th and 24th of August, 1862.

Sixth: The transfer of the *Alabama* to the Confederate States as property was made on the 24th of August, 1862.

Seventh: Captain Semmes was ordered by the honorable Secretary of the Navy to the command of the *Alabama*.

Eighth: Putting a ship in commission consists in hoisting the national flag and the pennant, which latter represents the commander's dignity or authority, on a foreign station. It is usual to read the orders of the captain of the particular ship. In the case of Captain Semmes, both these formalities were complied with, and his commission as a commander in the C.S. Navy was also read to the men assembled on the quarter-deck. After this the men were released from their engagement as a crew for the *Enrica* and were asked to ship for her on the C.S. steamship *Alabama*. This took place on the 24th of August, 1862, at sea, more than a marine league from the Island of Terceira. *Enrica* was the name by which the *Alabama* was christened; 290 was simply her number in the building yard. I write the dates from memory, but can verify them if necessary by reference to my notes kept at the times of the various occurrences mentioned.

In haste to secure this evening's mail.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

James D. Bulloch

To: Hon. James M. Mason

Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, II, Vol. 2, pp 324 & 325.

* An island in the Azores archipelago.

A member of the crew on the date of the commissioning:

“Sunday, 24 August, 1862—Strong N.W. wind at 12:30, got under weigh and stood along the Island of Terceira. At 2 p.m. Captain Semmes read his commission, and formally took command of the Confederate States’ steamer ‘Alabama,’ 8 guns; hoisting the Confederate ensign at the peak, the English St. George’s at the fore, and the pendant at the main, firing a gun at the same time. Commander Semmes made a most effective, spirited address, in which (after speaking of the relations existing between the North and South) he said: ‘his principal object was to cripple the commerce of the enemy; that he was not going to fight a fifty-gun ship, but as soon as they had become proficient in the use of their weapons, he would give them an opportunity to show the world what they were made of.’ Three rousing cheers were given on its conclusion.”

From: [The private journal of an officer:] *Our Cruise in the Confederate States’ War Steamer Alabama*, 1863, p.7. (This was determined to have been written by Master’s Mate George T. Fullam, in Cape Town, South Africa, and originally published in the *South African Advertiser and Mail*, Sept. 19, 1863.)



ENGLISH NEUTRALITY; OR THE CASE OF STEAMER “290”

The New York Illustrated News, November 1, 1862, p. 416.



“JOHN BULL: My dear Jonathan, I am strictly neutral and above suspicion. I haven’t the slightest idea of the manner in which the Southerners get their piratical craft.”

(Note that the figure behind John Bull bears a resemblance to Raphael Semmes.)