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From the SelectedWorks of Jan Comfort

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Opening the Bar: First Dredging at Charleston, 1853 - 1859

I read with great interest John B. Bond's account of the dredging of Charleston harbor. I was especially pleased to find information about the inventors of the machinery. Due to my role as "Patent Coordinator" at the Clemson University Libraries, I have begun to amass information about South Carolina inventors. Although I have been able to find some biographical information about early inventors, it has been difficult to find information specifically relating to their inventions, and the process of patenting their machines. I particularly enjoyed reading of the negotiations between Captain Cullum, the inventors, the city council, and the Commissioners. Apparently these types of interactions have changed little in 150 years. Another interesting report on how dredging the harbor effected commerce and the economy of Charleston can be found in the dissertation Charleston, South Carolina, Merchants, 1815 - 1860: Urban Leadership in the Antebellum South by Gregory Allen Greb (University of California, San Diego 1978).

In reviewing the information I have collected on South Carolina inventors, I believe that I have identified Nathaniel Lebby's patents relating to the machinery used in the dredging project.

After the war, two patents were issued to N.H. Lebby of South Carolina. The first, U.S. patent number 68,214 for a Centrifugal Pump, was issued on August 27, 1867. The patent document contains the following rather lengthy sentence:

"The present invention consists in so constructing a centrifugal pump, so far as it relates to the hanging of the wheel and its arrangement or attachment within its casing, that the wheel can be freely and easily removed for the purpose of clearing the pump-wheel, if it should become choked, whereby the use of a strainer is dispensed with, which, as is well known, often becomes "choked", and occasioning much trouble to cleanse it owing to its location under or within the water."

The patent is illustrated with two figures which show an elevation and a vertical section drawing of the invention. It is interesting to note that Lebby's patent document was witnessed by H.A. Duc, Jr., who himself patented a centrifugal pump (U.S. Patent number 85,802, granted January 12, 1869.)

The second patent is for an Improvement in Centrifugal Pumps, U.S. patent number 97,655, was issued on December 7, 1869. It appears to modify his original patent, and is primarily a description of the two illustrations included with the patent.
Apparently, work on these two inventions led Lebby to envision other applications of his ideas, as he patented an *Improvement in Ore Washing Machines* on April 12, 1870 (U.S. patent number 101,890). James M. Eason went on to invent an *Improvement in Stump-Extractors*, which issued as U.S. patent number 102,516 on May 3, 1870.

Further information about South Carolina inventors can be found in the following article: Comfort, Jan. "South Carolina Inventors and Inventions 1836 - 1873." The South Carolina Magazine of Ancestral Research. 25(3) Summer 1997.

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