

April 14, 2000

Dear State Legislator:

I am Steve Phillips, President of Southern Skin Divers Supply in Birmingham, Alabama. This is the oldest dive store in the South. It was started in 1953 by Bill Tant. We have trained over 10,000 SCUBA divers. We also use and sell metal detectors and gold prospecting dredges.

Last year a bill called the Submerged Resources Act was slipped through the legislature. This bill was poorly thought out and wrong from the start because of what it tried to claim for the Alabama Historical Commission. I think what the legislature wanted to do was protect shipwrecks and historical sites. What has happened is that the legislature has given museum bureaucrats "carte blanc" to do to us whatever they want. The original act was supposed to issue permits without limitation. However, the proposed rules are much more restrictive. The only people who can get a permit to find anything, (including gold dust, old bottles and nails, and even rocks) are *professional archeologists*. Because this is an underwater law, persons who obtain a permit must also be a very good diver. Alabama has no archeologists who are also good divers. People like myself and my sons, other divers, and collectors are the ones who are really competent to be finding these artifacts. This bill seems to be trying to outlaw diving and gold prospecting, which are none of their business and are very popular hobbies.


I asked Mr. Lee Warner, the executive director at the Alabama Historical Commission, where he got his advice on these regulations. He said from *his* Marine Advisory Committee. I told him neither I nor any other dive store owner was consulted about this bill. I asked him where he got his committee and he informed me that he got it on his own. As far as I know, no collectors, dive store owners, gold prospectors, or relic hunters were allowed to provide any input at all. It is wrong for the state of Alabama to have a law that is contrary to all other laws in the United States and also wrong for the state to prevent any kind of salvage by people who are not professional archeologists, but who do this sort of thing. *Professional archeologists* rarely find anything because they mainly do their work indoors in the museum.

What this is really about is MONEY, not money for the collectors, prospectors, or divers, but money to grease the palms of the *professional archeologists*. The good tax-paying, normal citizens of Alabama should not have to grovel or ask "May I?" to a bunch of museum bureaucrats. Those bureaucrats are not knowledgeable. They do not put out good, useful books. The books about relics, artifacts, and gold prospecting are put out by the collectors themselves. The museum bureaucrats do not serve or help the common people. Instead, they only like to talk to one another, are extremely greedy of what they do know, and do not share their knowledge or findings. My experience for the last 35 years of diving and collecting has taught me to have little respect for them.

I would appreciate it if you would investigate what is happening here. Talk to people affected, not just those who work for the government or museum. When you look in the museums and see the artifacts, find out who found them. Practically nothing comes from the archeologists. Instead, the artifacts come from good-hearted and generous relic hunters and salvors, whether on land or underwater. We share our findings and want others to see what we have found. We have filled the museums. By the way, museums have a little known policy called de-assession. They constantly sell items donated to them that should be on display. The museums do not have room to display the relics they have and are not interested in more. They are interested in the money and are extremely jealous of knowledgeable relic hunters, gold prospectors, and collectors who do for free what bureaucrats are getting paid for. Not only do hobbyists do it for free, they do it much better and put out good books. The state of Alabama should rethink this act and realize it will kill individual's interest in history and that most artifacts, relics, and gold found in the future will not be allowed to be spoken of. As my daddy often said "This dog won't hunt."

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Sincerely,



Steve Phillips