# City of Hawkinsville Archaeological Assessment
# Suwannee River, Old Town, Florida
# February 24, 2001

**Research Report #11**

**Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research and**
**Florida State University Program in Underwater Archaeology**

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## Abstract

The Florida State University Program in Underwater Archaeology and the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research conducted an archaeological survey of the submerged remains of the *City of Hawkinsville*, a late 19th century stern-wheeler steamship. This is the third reassessment performed on this wreck in the Suwannee River by this cooperative team. Work conducted at the site included the removal of snags and refuse from the wreck, cleaning the plaque that identifies the vessel as an underwater archaeological preserve, observations and recording of any missing planking on the bow of the wreck, and measurement of the paddle wheel spokes. These base line measurements of the wreck are for recorded observation of site deterioration.

## Acknowledgements

This project would not have occurred without the support of state officials from Florida's Bureau of Archaeological Research (BAR), Dr. Roger Smith, Jim Dunbar, and Della Scott-Ireton. Additionally, thanks go to Dr. Michael Faught for his continued interest and efforts in conducting work on the *City of Hawkinsville*. To Chris Horrell and Katie McClure for their patience and leadership to plan and organize this project. Lastly, this project would not have been successful without the able and hard working field crew and divers of this year's anthropology 4131 class. These people supplied their time and energy to the project and include Michael Arbuthnot, Stephanie Dale, Brian Dean, Zuli Gokay, Willie Hoffman, Doug Lewis, and Brian Marks. Members of previous years' 4131 classes also graciously volunteered their time and expertise to this project. These people include Melanie Damour, Patrick Gensler, Rachel Horlings, Mark Galloway, and Jennifer McKinnon.

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## Historic Background

The Suwannee River was a major waterway in Central Florida during the mid to late 19th century. Steamboats of this era used the river to transport cotton, lumber, and people down river to Cedar Key where the cargo would be transferred onto larger oceangoing vessels. The steamboats were flat bottomed, making them ideal vessels for the shallow water runs to riverside towns such as Columbus, Georgia. Steamboats helped tie in small river communities into the larger economic framework of the South during this time (Dunbar 1991: 1, Horrell 2000: 2).

As a coastal steamboat, the *City of Hawkinsville*, was the largest and last steamboat to operate on the Suwannee River. The *Hawkinsville* was constructed in Abberville, Georgia in 1896 as a 141-foot long stern wheeler with a single stack, two decks, and a square stern. The vessel was originally constructed for the Hawkinsville Deepwater Boat Line of Hawkinsville, Georgia. The *Hawkinsville* was sold to the Gulf Transportation Company in 1900 to be used on the Suwannee River. Her route ran from Branford to Clays Landing, Old Town, and eventually to Cedar Key. New steamboats like the *Hawkinsville* moved lumber from the inland communities to Cedar Key for transit across the ocean. The vessel may have operated in other capacities. Recent accounts suggest that the *Hawkinsville* may have transported materials used in the construction of the rail bridge spanning the Suwannee at Old Town. These new rail connections crossing the river eventually ended the steamship era on the Suwannee River. These vessels became obsolete as transportation on the river. Official registry records state that the *Hawkinsville* was in service until May 19, 1922. That day, her captain, Mr. Currie, took the last steamboat on the Suwannee River to the old landing near Old Town and abandoned her (Horrell 2000: 2).

Figure 1: *City of Hawkinsville* docked - Photo Courtesy of Florida Photo Archives

Presently, the *City of Hawkinsville* sits on the limestone bottom of the Suwannee River on the Dixie County side of the river. Sometime after the boat sank, the upper deck was removed. She is lying on her starboard side, exposing the planking and main deck. The engine components remain on the vessel, providing an excellent example of late 19th century technology. When tannic levels and water stages are low, the *Hawkinsville* provides SCUBA divers an excellent dive. In 1989, Mike McCaskill nominated the City of Hawkinsville as a state underwater preserve. It achieved that status in 1991 and remains a popular attraction for divers who visit the Suwannee River (Horrell 2000: 2).

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## Previous Field Work

The following represents fieldwork performed March 8-11, 1999.

In 1999, two buoys were replaced as vandals had removed them. There was one marker buoy and one mooring buoy replaced. Chuck Meide and Dr. Faught also deployed the side-scan sonar to get images of the wreck. They ran track lines up and down river with ranges varying from 100m to 20m. While diving on the wreck, they removed snags and monofiliment line. They also examined the remaining bricks and noted the name of STEVENS on each one. (Scott, Dunbar, and Meide 1999: 4-8)

The following represents fieldwork performed February 12, 2000

Principle investigators during this operation were Jim Dunbar and Della-Scott Ireton. The crew consisted of 14 volunteer divers from the ANT 4131 course taught at Florida State University. The first dive on the *Hawkinsville* was an orientation and cleaning dive. Additionally, an attempt was made to relocate a lost buoy. Divers began examining the wreck and clearing any loose debris. This was followed by the removal of additional snags and working a chain from the bow to the stern buoys through eyebolts anchored into the limestone bedrock. The stainless steel chain was placed through the eyebolts and attached by zip ties and is to act as a guide for future visitors to the site as well as an aide should any of the buoys ever become lost again. The bow section was remapped, the boiler room was examined, and the plaque and buoys were cleaned. The sudden upward slope under the missing gunwale was reassessed, and the original map appears correct and the curve does exist and the sag is there. Dr. Smith and Dr. Faught took pictures to note the condition of the vessel. Photographs were taken of the plaque, divers in the boiler room, on the stern, and near engine equipment (Horrell 2000: 4-6).

## Methodology

The investigators on this project used non-destructive means to investigate the *City of Hawkinsville*. Divers used SCUBA to perform their tasks, except in areas of the wreck where the depth is less than 3 feet. Measurements made in the bow were taken transversely from a forward running baseline attached to a bulkhead (aft end). Measurements on the paddlewheel spokes were taken from the outer edge of the hub to the tip of the spoke. All measurements were made in feet because the *Hawkinsville* was built in using feet and inches, not metric measurements.

## Field Work

The following represents fieldwork performed February 24, 2001.

**Objectives:**

Clear wreck of any trash and snags; note location of very large snags so they can be removed
Clean marker and mooring buoys
Clean plaque inside boiler room
Check condition of hardware anchoring buoys
Note site deterioration via swim-over to determine general site condition
Measure planking on the bow
Measure paddle wheel spokes
Recover brick for cataloguing and study

The principle investigators during this operation were Dr. Michael Faught and Della Scott-Ireton from the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research. The crew consisted of 10 volunteer divers from the ANT 4131 course taught at Florida State University as well as 5 other FSU students who participated in previous ANT 4131 classes, the University Dive Officer, Dan Marrelli, and Mike Pomeroy also participated in the operation.

The day was partly cloudy and in the low to mid 70's. The water was about 68° F, and the entire dive team was wearing either full wet suits or drysuits. The water level of the Suwannee River was low due to drought, and several frames on the port side of the bow protruded above the water level. The low water levels caused visibility to be relatively good (between 4-6 feet). The low visibility is caused by tanins in the water. Dive lights were required to see the wreck. There is a layer of sediment on the wreck that when kicked up by divers, it caused visibility to decrease to less then one foot, but the moderate current (approx. ½ nmph) cleared the sediment from the wreck quickly. The maximum depth was 25 feet along the buoy chain on the starboard side of the wreck.

The first dive on the *City of Hawkinsville* was an orientation and cleaning dive. The first dive team of eight divers descended onto the wreck, and removed pieces of monofilomentline and other trash snagged on the bow. A large tree trunk was observed lying transversely across the bow. The stem post and the loose planking timbers were still lashed together with the polypropylene rope attached in previous years by FBAR divers. However, most of the rope had come undone and the planks were loose and wavy. During this initial dive, divers were able to determine that the wreck had deteriorated since last year's investigations. The plaque located in the boiler room was located and was partially cleaned of algae.

The goals of the second dive were to allow a second team of six divers to orient themselves to the wreck and continue the clean up. A secondary goal for this dive was to investigate the buoy chains and free them from entanglements. Divers removed a T-shirt, monofilomentline, as well as many glass and aluminum beverage containers. The second group of divers also located the plaque and finished the removal of algae. The second and third marker buoys were freed from each other as they had become entangled in the last year.

The third dive was the final orientation dive for a group of six divers. The goal for this dive was to check the length of the buoy chain, clean the buoys, and to continue trash clean up. The chain was found intact, in good shape, and free of entanglements. The line from the buoy marking the stern of the vessel was entangled in a large branch. It was impossible to untangle without cutting the rope or the branch. This task would have been difficult and dangerous as the current in that section of the river was flowing at approximately 1 nmph. Divers did some minute cleaning of the plaque and then moved to cleaning the four buoys. During this dive, Dr. Faught assessed the amount of deterioration since the site assessment last year. He also recovered half of a brick for analysis. The brick was recovered 90-cm at a compass bearing of 250° from the boiler rack forward of amidships on the starboard side. The brick was red with VENS imprinted on it. Bricks have been found in previous years with STEVENS imprinted years (Scott, Dunbar, and Meide 1999: 4-8). No conservation has yet to be performed on the brick.

During the fourth dive, a mapping project was set up. Experienced mappers worked with new students in teams of 4 at the bow of the wreck using tape measures and mylar on clipboards. A bulkhead in the aft end of the bow was used as a datum. A baseline was run forward from this bulkhead. Measurements were taken transversely from the baseline. Divers mapping the port side of the bow were shallow enough they did not require SCUBA gear. These divers measured the frames from a longitudinal timber. With the exception of the northernmost frame, all frames present last year were present, though reduced in length. After measuring the frames, they measured three of the remaining planks.

The starboard side of the *Hawkinsville* was 3 to 5 feet deep. The tree across part of the bow caused some confusion making it difficult to locate the stem post. Once the stem post was located, the divers oriented themselves along a starboard longitudinal timber, #2 (a bulkhead) on the BAR site map. This timber was used as a baseline. The tape was attached to a metal fastener where the bulkhead met the boiler room. The tape was stretched along the bulkhead 17ft towards the bow. They measured offsets to the starboard side to record deck planking. The first plank was at approximately 10 feet forward of the boiler room, forward of where the hogging truss is fastened on the starboard side. The divers mapped a few timbers before concluding their dive.

The fifth and final dive concluded the mapping project. Divers continued mapping the bow while a team of three measured the spokes of the four paddlewheel hubs in the stern. The divers working on the port side of the bow continued to work without SCUBA gear, though a diver was required when the depth was deeper then the length of the diver's arm. The planks forward of the plaque were measured from the plaque towards the bow. This task was made more difficult because sections of planking were missing and the remaining planking was covered with algae growth. The algae made it difficult to discern if there was one plank or two planks right next to each other. It was also difficult to determine what plank sections went each other. Divers also mapped the separation of planks from the stempost. The starboard side was approximately 15.75 inches from the stem post. It was extremely weak and would even sway in the current making accurate measurements impossible.

The paddlewheel spokes were measured for the first time since 1990. These measurements will be used for future deterioration evaluation. Divers measuring the spokes of the paddlewheels measured from the outer edge of the hub to the tip of the spoke. The divers started at the starboard side of the most starboard hub. They started with the spoke nearest to the 12 o'clock position and worked clockwise, labeling all spokes with corresponding clock position. However, the divers did not know how many spokes where on each wheel, and their turned out to be more than 12. The mylar data sheets show this as spokes are numbered 12, 1, 2, … 11, 12, 13. The divers noted the exposed wood on the top of the hubs had suffered the worst damage and those on the bottom and away from the wreck had survived longer and showed less damage from impact current driven debris.

| Spokes measured from outward edge of hub to end of remaining spoke. (measurements in inches) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Port | | | Starboard |
| 12 o'clock | 4.5 | | | 10 |
| 1 | 6 | 1 | 4.75 | 10 |
| 2 | 6.25 | 5 | 4.25 | 4.5 |
| 3 | 12 | 10 | 6 | 6.25 |
| 4 | 6 | 8 | 61.5 | 6 |
| 5 | 11 | 46 | 43 | 7.5 |
| 6 | 11 | 14.5 | 7.25 | 7 |
| 7 | 7.25 | 8.5 | 40 | 8.5 |
| 8 | 41 | 14 | 37.25 | 11 |
| 9 | 38 | 64 | 12 | 26 |
| 10 | 22 | 7.25 | 6 | 66 |
| 11 | 6 | 6 | 11.25 | 6 |
| 12 | 7 | | 9 | 12 |
| 13 | | | 4 | 4.5 |

Figure 2 – Paddlewheel hub and spokes

Throughout the day, motorboats maneuvered up and down the river. These boats sped by at high speeds, creating large wakes. These wakes would impact the exposed portions of the wreck, rocking them back and forth. The wakes also caused minor movement of planking underwater.

## Conclusions

The *City of Hawkinsville* is slowly deteriorating. The vessel was designated as an Underwater Archaeological Preserve nearly 10 years ago, and the first mapping project was completed a year prior to its designation. The bow is experiencing rapid degradation, therefore it demands the extensive mapping performed. However, no other area of the vessel has been examined. The paddle wheel spokes were measured for the first time since 1990, and they should be reexamined next year to note any decrease in size. Other areas amidships and in the stern of the vessel should also be examined, especially areas exhibiting deterioration of the planks. If money becomes available, the vessel should undergo a complete remapping in the next few years. This will fully document the deterioration of the vessel over time, and possibly suggest areas in need of protection. The *City of Hawkinsville*'s anchor was recently donated to the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research for conservation. George Joseph Emanuel III donated the anchor in early February 2001 (Dickel, Personal Communication 2001).

## Suggestions and Recommendations for the *City Of Hawkinsville* Underwater Archaeological Preserve

1. **Snag Clearance**
   The nature of the Suwannee River causes snags to occur on the wreck, making it necessary to regularly remove the snags from the vessel. Snags include tree branches, limbs, and trunks, monofilament fishing lines, and trash accumulation on the wreck. The removal of these items will protect the wreck and will make the area safer for visiting divers. Trash removal also should extend to the staging area on the nearby riverbank.

2. **Protection for the bow**
   The present state of the *Hawkinsville*'s bow is unstable and requires added protection. Until this can be achieved, continuous monitoring is required to assess the bow's condition. Suggestions for protecting the bow include a deflection device to protect the vessel from debris and snags brought forth by the current (Scott, Dunbar, and Meide 1999:13). However, the bow should be examined and secured until something can be done to protect it.

3. **Florida State University Student participation with the Bureau of Archaeological Research**
   The cooperation on the *Hawkinsville* between Florida State University's Anthropology class ANT 4131 and the Bureau of Archaeological Research should continue. The goals of future research should include continued mapping of missing planks on the bow section and other exposed features, checking on buoy markers, anchors, and chains, removal of trash, large debris, and snags from the vessel, cleaning of the buoy lines and markers, and continued mapping of stern paddle wheel spokes. These goals are necessary to continue to provide an educational and safe Underwater Archaeological Preserve for students and sport divers. This cooperation represents an inexpensive method for the BAR to accomplish research and a valuable experience in cultural resource management for students while providing FSU with extra funds (Horrell 2000:7).

4. **Mapping and Monitoring of Other Areas of Deterioration**
   The bow of the *Hawkinsville* has received the most attention for mapping and monitoring. This is because the bow exhibits the most deterioration on the vessel. Other areas of the vessel are missing planks due to degradation and should be monitored as well.

**5. Remapping of Entire Vessel**

The *City of Hawkinsville* has changed since the last complete mapping project in November 1990. The vessel has undergone significant changes during this time. Funds should be made available in the near future for a complete remapping of the vessel. This map will show deterioration over time, as well as point out areas in need of extra protection.

**6. Implementation of a No Wake Zone**

Due to the damage caused by wakes from speeding boats, a no wake zone should be implemented up and down river of the *City of Hawkinsville*. The zone should extend from the old railroad bridge to 100 yards down river of the wreck. This should be an adequate amount of space to reduce the size and frequency of wakes impacting the wreck. The no wake zone should be enforced especially if the river levels are low and parts of the wreck are exposed.

**7. Cooperation with the Department of Environmental Protection**

The Greenways Trail should include markers, signs, and brochures about the *City of Hawkinsville* to note its presence as one of Florida's Underwater Archaeological Preserves.

**8. Continued Removal of Graffiti**

Graffiti and trash near the dive site or on the railroad bridge upriver of the site should be removed.

**9. Continued Monitoring of the Mooring Buoys and Site for Theft**.

Monitoring of the site is required to prevent theft of state owned materials, such as the mooring buoys, from the site. Suggestions include placing the State Seal decal to discourage theft.

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