

City of Hawkinsville
Take an Underwater Tour
Audio Transcript

STERN AND ENGINE

Starting downriver at the stern, we can explore the remains of the paddlewheel that propelled *City of Hawkinsville* along the Suwannee River and Gulf of Mexico. The assembly consisted of four wheel hubs on a single large center shaft, or axle, mounted just inside the crank arms on either side of the boat.

What we see today are the wheel hubs and the remains of the wheel spokes, which held the paddle blades in place. The paddle wheel was divided into two sections to offset the blades: large single blades tended to lift the stern of the vessel as they entered the water and shorter blades offset this motion to create a smooth ride. Pictured here is one of the spokes.

Here we see the starboard pitman arm, a long connecting rod between the engine and the paddlewheel. A similar arm is located on the port side. The pitman arms were offset, acting as crankshafts between the two steam cylinders and the axle to turn the paddlewheel.

As we begin to approach the steam machinery, you can see how large the steam engine is compared with the diver.

BOW

As we swim along the starboard side towards the bow, the vessel takes on the appearance of a classic storybook ghost ship. Iron fasteners have held the planks in place for almost 100 years but sediments in the flowing river have caused the edges of the planks to erode, creating gaps in the planking. The reason for this is that the bow faces upriver, exposing the front end to the force of the river currents.

Just around the corner we see the remains of the bow and the stempost. This is the point at which both the port side and starboard side met, leading the way through the waters of the Suwannee River and the Gulf of Mexico during the career of this large steamboat.

The image in corner shows you just how shallow the site is, from the bow we can easily pop up to the surface and look around.

Because the steamboat faces upriver, objects often damage the bow or get caught in it during flooding periods. For example, here is a tree trunk that floated down river and became trapped in the port side hull planking of *City of Hawkinsville*.

PLAQUE

As we swim along the decking amidships, we head towards the boiler room. The framework of the vessel is quite intact even though portions of the lower decking have eroded in some areas.

In the space that once housed the firebox that heated the boiler are three bronze plaques set into a cement monument. The largest plaque designates the *City of Hawkinsville* as the third State Underwater Archaeological Preserve. The two smaller plaques acknowledge the sponsorship by local organizations and individuals that made the establishment of the Preserve possible.

BOILER ROOM

As we swim along the starboard side of the boiler-room, which is approximately 30 feet long by 10 feet wide, we come across the remains of two cast-iron U-shaped boiler support brackets. These brackets held the boiler tight to the floor boards and prevented it from moving. Today, the boiler-room is filled with mud and fine silty sediment, which supports prolific freshwater vegetation and fish.

Small objects such as fire bricks, which protected the wooden steamboat from the hot firebox under the boiler are still visible today.

Exposed inner hull compartments allow us to explore beneath the remains of the decking.

As we exit, we begin our journey back towards to stern of the vessel.

Although portions of the deck planking may seem thin and fragile, the majority of planking amidships still remains intact.

PORT ENGINE

City of Hawkinsville appears to be different from some steamboats of its time because it had a condensing exhaust system as opposed to a non-condensing exhaust system. This meant that instead of releasing steam directly into the atmosphere from the cylinders, it allowed the exhausted steam to be circulated back to the boiler, through condenser pipes, where it became recycled and turned into steam again.

Here we come to the slide valve where the steam began to be processed.

As we continue along, past the iron fasteners, we arrive the portside engine.

Both the starboard and portside engines are uni-flow type steam engines with two single expansion, double acting horizontal cylinders, one mounted on each side of the vessel just above the main deck.

The steamboat was approximately 141 feet in length, with the hull beams running longitudinal, and with almost 6 feet depth of hull. Any hull with such an extreme length to depth ratio needed to employ the use of hogging chains to prevent the vessel from sagging at each end, and to help distribute the weight of the boat and its cargo. A hogging chain ran down each side of the vessel from the main deck at the bow, over the superstructure to the main deck at the stern. Today we can see the remains of these chains on *City of Hawkinsville*, one from the starboard bow and two others from the mid-ships. They have come loose from their original positions and hang over the sides of the vessel.