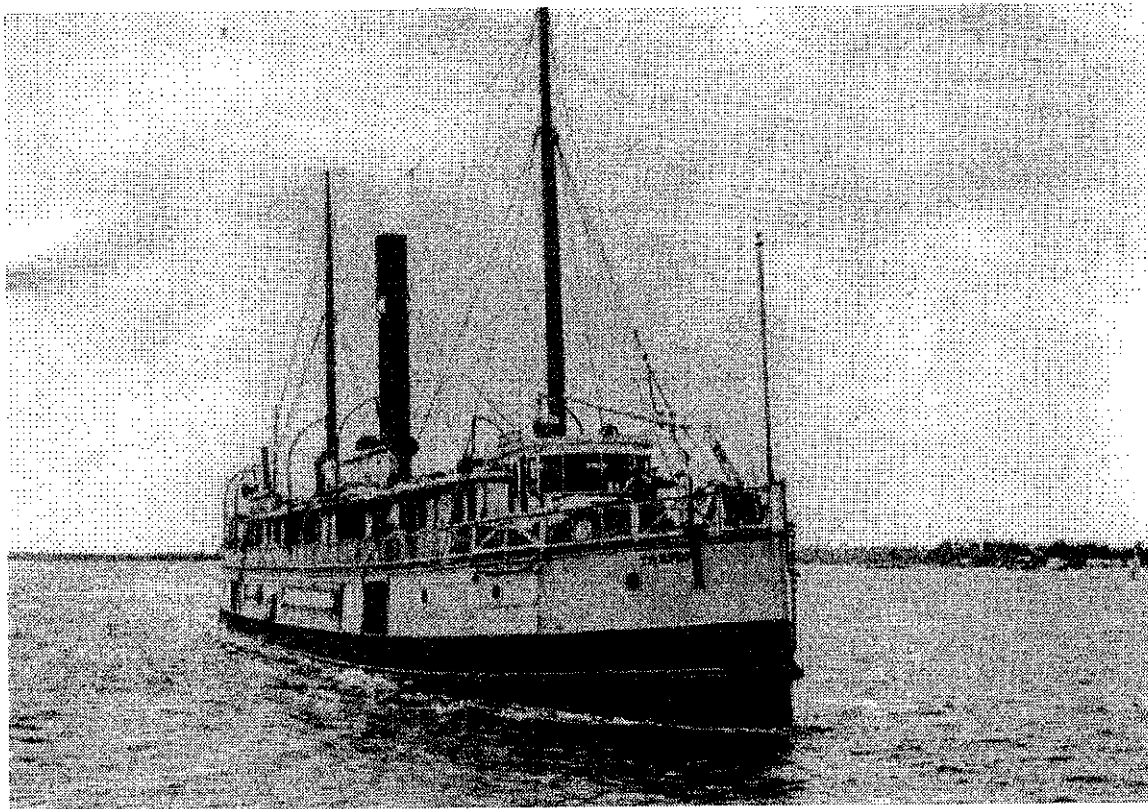


**A Proposal
to Establish the Shipwreck *Tarpon*
as a
State Underwater Archaeological Preserve**



**Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources
Bureau of Archaeological Research**

October 1996

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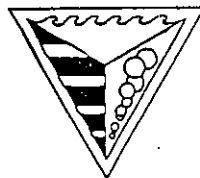
prepared by
Bureau of Archaeological Research
Division of Historical Resources
Florida Department of State
Sandra B. Mortham, Secretary of State



Bay County, Florida



and
The Museum of Man in the Sea



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Abstract

Objective

This report is a proposal for the establishment of a State Underwater Archaeological Preserve at the sunken remains of *SS Tarpon*, a steam freighter that sank during a gale off Panama City in 1937. *Tarpon* was among five shipwreck sites nominated by members of the Bay County waterfront community to be considered as candidates for Florida's sixth shipwreck park. As a Preserve, *Tarpon*, a vessel that once played an important role in the development of Florida's Panhandle communities, can better be interpreted and made more accessible to today's public to increase an appreciation of her service in regional and state history, and to commemorate and to preserve her grave. A cooperative effort between state, county, and city officials, as well as local organizations and individuals, is proposed to create a new historical attraction for Bay County.

Florida's program of shipwreck parks began in 1987, when the *Urca de Lima*, a Spanish galleon that sank near Ft. Pierce during a hurricane in 1715, was designated as a preserve. A second preserve was established in 1989 on the *San Pedro*, another galleon that grounded in the Florida Keys during a hurricane in 1733. *City of Hawkinsville*, a sunken steamboat in the Suwannee River, became a third shipwreck park in 1992 as a result of a cooperative venture between the government and the public. *USS Massachusetts*, the nation's oldest surviving battleship, became a preserve in 1993, and the following year a fifth preserve was established on *SS Copenhagen*, a British steamer that wrecked off Pompano Beach in 1900. As important examples of our maritime heritage, these sites are interpreted through widely distributed brochures and other literature, and made more accessible by mooring systems and underwater maps. They also attract many tourists each year.

Built in 1887, *Tarpon* was acquired by the Pensacola, St. Andrews & Gulf Steamship Company in 1902 for freight and passenger service between the ports of Mobile, Pensacola, Panama City, Apalachicola, and Carrabelle. At a time when there were few paved roads or bridges in northwest Florida, *Tarpon* and her master, Willis Barrow, developed a reputation for dependability and performance in transporting passengers and goods on schedule. Despite storms, fires, and several groundings, the 160-foot steam freighter made weekly trips along the Gulf Coast for decades until 1937, during her 1,735th voyage, the 50-year-old *Tarpon* sank in a gale eight miles off Panama City. Eighteen people, including Capt. Barrow, lost their lives. Thirteen survived; some were in the water for over 30 hours before being rescued. Today, remains of *Tarpon* are teeming with marine life. Under ninety feet of water, features of the old steamship are easily recognizable to the underwater visitor, although natural deterioration and storms have collapsed portions of the hull. The site probably is one of the oldest artificial reefs in Bay County, but also represents a fascinating archaeological site. Yet, many who swim through the broken wreckage have taken the opportunity to collect items of the ship's hardware and cargo as souvenirs, with little regard for historic preservation of a unique part of Florida's maritime heritage.

Suggested Steps for the Establishment of a Preserve

This proposal was produced in response to nominations of five local shipwrecks by members of the Bay County waterfront community to be considered for a new State Underwater Archaeological Preserve. Each of the nominees, *Vamar*, *Chickasaw*, *USS Strength*, *E. E. Simpson*, and *Tarpon*, were studied and ranked for their suitability as preserves according to the following criteria: historical significance, archaeological integrity, public accessibility, natural beauty and aquatic life, and potential for public interpretation. *Tarpon* was found to rank significantly higher in all categories as a preserve candidate. The purpose of this document is to present a case for designation of *Tarpon* as an Underwater Preserve, and to solicit at all levels a cooperative venture between the government and the public to establish the shipwreck park. The project will depend on community support and participation, which have been key elements in the development of other shipwreck preserves in Florida. The following steps are suggested to prepare the site for preserve status: completion of a full archaeological inventory of ship features and remnants of cargo at the *Tarpon* site; a biological assessment of marine life on the wrecksite; consideration of a mooring buoy system to provide increased visitor access to the wreck and to protect the *Tarpon's* remains from anchor damage; installation of an underwater plaque designating the site as a state preserve; preparation and printing of a brochure detailing the ship's history and its present situation; preparation of a laminated underwater map that can be used to orient diving and fishing visitors to the features of the site; and creation of a museum exhibit with photographs, artifacts, and audiovisual materials.



Proposal

Introduction

Underwater archaeological preserves are partnerships between government and the public for managing and protecting submerged cultural resources in a cooperative spirit. Underwater sites of recognized historical and marine value are designated as state preserves in response to local nominations, and to fulfill a public desire for a greater understanding and appreciation of these unique public-owned resources. Once a submerged site is nominated, it is carefully researched and evaluated for its suitability to become a preserve through a series of criteria such as historical significance, archaeological integrity, biological diversity, public accessibility, and recreational potential. If the site meets these criteria, data from its evaluation are presented in a formal proposal for the creation of a new preserve through a cooperative endeavor between the public and private sectors. Information generated by the proposal will help to devise methods of site enhancement, interpretation, and protection that are appropriate for the new preserve, based on local needs and desires. Interested organizations and individuals then work together with state and local governments to prepare the site and to maintain it as an historical attraction.

Florida's Underwater Archaeological Preserves

As a means of education and preservation through recreation, shipwreck parks are a relatively new idea. Following the lead of Michigan and Vermont, where sites in cold, fresh water were established as preserves, Florida's program began in 1987, when the *Urca de Lima*, a Spanish merchant ship cast ashore near Ft. Pierce during a hurricane in 1715, was designated as the first State Underwater Archaeological Preserve. Members of the St. Lucie County Historical Commission had approached the Florida Division of Historical Resources to explore the possibility of giving the shipwreck special status that would both interpret and protect the site for future visitors. Local waterfront businesses organized with city, county, and state officials to enhance the wrecksite with replica cement cannons to replace those removed long ago. An official bronze plaque, embedded in a cement monument attached to a large mooring buoy, was positioned near the wreckage to mark the site and to discourage anchor damage. Interpretive brochures, 30,000 of which subsequently have been printed, were widely distributed to encourage public visitation and participation in the maintenance of this unique piece of Florida's maritime heritage. *Urca de Lima* thus was adopted by the local community as a new historical attraction; by placing the site in the public's trust, its preservation became important to everyone.

As early as 1964, Florida officials heard arguments from the Monroe County Advertising Commission and the Florida Keys Underwater Guides Association that at least one of the Spanish shipwreck sites of the 1733 fleet disaster should be set aside as an historic monument rather than remain available for salvage activities. But this option was not

realized, and it was another twenty-five years before the idea's time had come. During the summer of 1988, eleven of the 1733 Spanish wrecksites were surveyed and assessed by field school students from Indiana University and Florida State University. The students rated each site for its accessibility, archaeological features, natural marine life, and potential for enhancement and interpretations. Several were found to be seriously disrupted by illegal salvage activities; but others, such as the *San Pedro*, lying in 18 ft. of water near Islamorada, were relatively undisturbed and covered with living coral and sea life. Data from the survey were presented in a public proposal, which recommended the establishment of *San Pedro* as the state's second underwater archaeological preserve.

Circulated throughout the Upper Keys by the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce, the proposal generated considerable public interest and enthusiasm. A "*San Pedro Trust*" was organized by local civic leaders and waterfront operators to serve as a non-profit support organization for the preparation of the preserve. A local cement plant agreed to fashion concrete cannon replicas; the Coast Guard supplied several mooring buoys; and an old galleon anchor was donated to be placed on the site. An underwater glass plaque, set into a carved limestone monument, officially designated the park and acknowledged its sponsors. As with the *Urca de Lima*, an interpretive brochure was prepared for statewide distribution to encourage visitors to tour the *San Pedro* on their own, or by taking advantage of several boat rental firms, glassbottom boat tours, or snorkling and diving charters in the Islamorada area. A plastic-laminated underwater guide to the site was prepared to orient snorklers and divers to the archaeological and natural features of the park. Designated in April 1989, the new Preserve has become a popular destination for thousands of visitors to Florida, who are curious to see first-hand the remains of an old Spanish treasure galleon, which represents one of the oldest artificial reefs in the United States.

Meanwhile, other states began to consider the concept of underwater archaeological preserves. Underwater archaeologists from North Carolina visited the *San Pedro* park to gain information that helped them to work with local divers on Cape Hatteras, where the USS *Huron* became that state's first preserve in 1991. Since then, cooperative efforts with New York State have led to the designation of several historic wrecks in Lake George as shipwreck preserves; California followed with the establishment of a sunken preserve in Lake Tahoe. Recently, Puerto Rico has requested assistance in planning two parks on sunken Spanish-American War period vessels.

Due to the enthusiastic responses received from the communities who participated in the establishment of the two Florida parks, the Division of Historical Resources in 1990 prepared over a thousand mailings statewide to solicit nominations for potential new preserve sites from waterfront operators, dive clubs and amateur groups. Responses to the mailings produced a variety of sites, some suitable and others not. By mid-1990, two leading candidates for new state archaeological preserves had emerged. The first, a steamboat named *City of Hawkinsville*, was nominated by the principal of Bronson High School, in Levy County. Lying at the bottom of the Suwannee River after accidentally sinking in the 1920s, the *Hawkinsville* is a surprisingly intact example of late 19th-century steamboat technology. The largest and the last steamboat to ply the Suwannee, she was forgotten until local divers found her near an old landing in the 1960s. Over 145 ft. long,

the boat looks like a storybook ghost ship, with pieces of her paddle wheel and steam machinery still in place.

With the help of high school students and local divers, *Hawkinsville* was evaluated and mapped to produce a proposal to the civic leaders of three neighboring counties and the waterfront communities along the river. As a result of the proposal, a community support organization was formed in conjunction with Gulf Marine Foundation, a local non-profit group. A large monument with three bronze plaques was designed for placement in the boiler room of the sunken boat; mooring buoys were anchored downstream of the vessel; and underwater lines placed around the wreck to guide visitors. Five thousand brochures were printed for distribution, and a laminated underwater guide to the site was prepared. The *Hawkinsville* Preserve was opened in June 1992.

The second candidate for a new state preserve was the USS *Massachusetts*, nominated in 1990 by a Pensacola diver. The nation's oldest surviving battleship (BB-2), *Massachusetts* was one of three "Indiana" class sea-going coastline battleships authorized in 1890 by the United States Congress to be built for the new "Steel Navy." Launched in 1893, and commissioned in 1896, she was just over 350 feet long, with a beam of 69 feet and a draft of 24 feet. *Massachusetts* served in the Spanish-American War and World War I, but was quickly obsolete as a weapon. Loaned to the Army as a target, she was towed to Pensacola in 1921, scuttled in shallow water, and subjected to artillery tests. After spending 70 of her 100 years under emerald Gulf waters, today *Massachusetts* is a giant artificial reef, harboring a myriad of marine life. Although partially buried under white sand, her gun turrets are awash, and the naval technology that transformed her nation into a major seapower is laid out for all to see.

After extensive historical research and field evaluations, the sunken battleship was determined to be an excellent candidate for Florida's fourth shipwreck park. Detailed site maps, along with the ship's original plans, were incorporated into a formal proposal, which was submitted to the Pensacola public in May, 1992. A community support organization, "Friends of the *Massachusetts*," was formed by waterfront concerns, civic groups, and interested individuals, to help in the establishment of the new park, which was dedicated amid much fanfare on June 10, 1993—the 100th anniversary of the battleship's launching.

Early in 1993, the Florida Division of Historical Resources sent another mailing to over 2,000 waterfront organizations throughout the state, soliciting nominations for additional preserve candidates. Response to the mailing included a Broward county nomination from a local charter captain for the consideration of the wrecked steamship *Copenhagen* in shallow water off Pompano Beach. The nomination was supported by the Marine Archaeological Council (MAC) of Broward County, which has conducted work on several local shipwreck sites, including the *Copenhagen*. Working with MAC and the Broward County Office of Natural Resource Protection, state archaeologists assessed the proposed preserve, and helped to organize a local support group, which became known as the "Copenhagen Clan" (the ship had been owned by a Scottish firm). Made up of state and county officials, local divers, fishermen, and charter boat businesses, the Clan became an effective community force that actively pursued the establishment of the fifth State Underwater Archaeological Preserve, which was opened in June 1994. The *Copenhagen* preserve

has since become one of the most popular diving destinations in South Florida, and is visited regularly by tourists from this country and abroad.

Bay County Shipwreck Preserve Candidates

In November of 1994, in response to a long-standing invitation, State Underwater Archaeologist Dr. Roger C. Smith attended a meeting in Panama City to discuss local input on the possibilities of creating new underwater preserves in Bay County, which is noted for its shipwreck population. Present at the meeting were Ron Hardy, owner of Hydrospace Dive Shop and Gulf World, Douglas Hough, Director of the Museum of Man in the Sea, Danny Grizzard, Director of the Panama City Marine Institute, and Charlie Gonzales of the Bay County Planning Office. From the meeting came five nominations for candidates as shipwreck preserves: *USS Strength*, a World War II minesweeper that was used to train Navy divers; *Chickasaw*, a 1908 steel tugboat built in Pensacola; *E. E. Simpson*, an 1877 tugboat that sank in 1926; *Tarpon*, an 1887 steamer that served the Gulf Coast but was lost in 1937; and *Vamar*, a 1919 steamer which supplied Byrd's Antarctic base but sank in 1942.

In response to the nominations, Smith submitted a grant application to the Florida Coastal Management Program of the Department of Community Affairs to seek partial funding for partnership project to investigate and to assess the five Bay County preserve candidates. The application was approved, and federal funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was awarded to the Division of Historical Resources in partnership with Bay County and the Museum of Man in the Sea. Both state and local in-kind and cash resources were made available to match the grant award. Early in 1996, a Bay County Shipwreck Survey field office was established at the Panama City Marina under the direction of Dr. Michael Faught and Capt. Keith Plaskett to work with the local waterfront community. The mission of the Survey called for the assessment, through historical and archaeological research, of each of the five shipwreck candidates, and a ranking of their suitability to become a State Underwater Archaeological Preserve. Criteria developed from previous underwater preserves were used to assess the new nominations.

These included:

- **Historical Significance:** Is the assumed identification of the vessel historically accurate? Are there sufficient records to interpret the historical particulars and to reconstruct the career of the vessel in question? Did the vessel play a significant role in regional, state, or national maritime history? Are there historical ties to the present-day local community, which might help to perpetuate the maritime traditions and values represented by the vessel? Can the historical significance of the vessel be understood by non-residents who visit the site?
- **Archaeological Integrity:** Are the remains of the vessel contiguous, rather than displaced? Do sufficient architectural features of the vessel survive in order to reconstruct and to interpret its original form and distinctive parts? Can these features become recognizable to the visitor with interpretive assistance? Are there portable artifacts that might disappear or archaeological features of the vessel likely to become damaged by increased visitation?
- **Aquatic Life:** Has the vessel become sufficiently incorporated into the submerged ecosystem so that it supports a variety of aquatic life? Are the natural resources of the site adequate to be recognized and interpreted for their own merit to the visitor? Do sufficient sedentary species of wildlife

exist to support an interpretive explanation of their ecological niche within the framework of the sunken vessel? Can pelagic life be identified as to seasonality and water conditions?

- **Water Conditions:** Are water conditions generally favorable for visitation? Are there adverse tidal currents or surge factors that might hamper visitation? What is the relative water clarity on the site, compared with regional norms? Are there adverse surface or bottom conditions that vary depending on weather or increased visitation? What seasonal or other local factors affect the water conditions at the site?

- **Public Interpretation:** Do the historical, archaeological, and ecological features of the site lend themselves to educational and interpretational materials? Can an underwater guide, based on these recorded features, be designed to provide a self-guided tour of the site? Are there sufficient data to interpret the site's significance and current condition to non-diving visitors? Can a shore-based exhibit be fabricated to fully interpret the site and its contents?

- **Public Accessibility:** Is the depth of the site within the limits of safe diving practices? Is the site location near enough and convenient to local dive charter operations? Given sufficient locational directions, can the site be easily accessed by visitors using private transportation?

Over a period of four months, the five preserve candidates were located, explored, recorded, and assessed. One hundred and forty-two dives were conducted during twenty-two offshore visits to the five sites in order to complete the investigation. Accurate GPS (Global Positioning System) and LORAN (Long Range Radio Navigation) positions were recorded for each candidate. The sites were surveyed to record archaeological features with underwater drawings, photographs, and video. These data were combined to make preliminary site plans for each candidate as aids to interpretation.

Concurrently, historical data on each of the five candidates were obtained from a number of federal, state, and local repositories. These data included various items, such as ship's plans, inspection and survey records, investigative reports, old photographs, newspaper clippings, etc. Local people familiar with the sites or their histories were interviewed to collect anecdotal information. A portfolio, containing the various historical and archaeological data, was assembled for each candidate. From these portfolios, the candidates were ranked according to the criteria listed above. *Tarpon* ranked the highest of the five candidates, followed by *Simpson*, *Vamar*, *Strength*, and *Chickasaw*.

Bay County Preserve Candidates - Criteria Ratings Matrix

Shipwreck	Historical Significance	Archaeological Integrity	Aquatic Life	Water Conditions	Public Interpretation	Public Accessibility	Total Ranking
<i>Tarpon</i>	5	5	5	5	5	2	27
<i>Simpson</i>	4	3	3	4	4	4	22
<i>Vamar</i>	5	4	3	3	4	1	20
<i>Strength</i>	4	2	4	3	3	3	19
<i>Chickasaw</i>	2	2	3	5	2	3	17

Key: 5 = Outstanding; 4 = Good; 3 = Medium; 2 = Fair; 1 = Poor



History of the Steamship *Tarpon*

"The steamer *Tarpon* is no mere boat. To Pensacola and other coast cities the *Tarpon* is an entity, alive as some boats are, with the people and events which have made history. In time the *Tarpon* will become a legend, just as the *Robert E. Lee* of Mississippi fame had become. Captain W. G. Barrow. . . had the record of making runs, no matter what the weather, and of being always on time." (History of Escambia County, Biography Section, 1934)

Early History

The twin-screwed steamer, official number 130381, was constructed in 1887 at Wilmington, Delaware by the renowned shipbuilders Pusey and Jones. Christened *Naugatuck*, the new ship was delivered to the Naugatuck Valley Steamboat Company of Derby, Connecticut. Designed to provide freight and passenger service along the Naugatuck and Housatonic Rivers to New York City, the iron-hulled vessel measured 130 feet in length, 26 feet in beam, with an 8-foot depth of hold. Built with a bar keel and two thick fender strakes completely encircling the hull, *Naugatuck* spent her first winter helping to keep the Housatonic River channels free of ice as she went about her business. The superstructure and passenger areas were made of wood; originally she was equipped with a foremast with an eagle at the top, later a second mast would be installed. Propulsion was provided by twin compound fore-and-aft steam engines (nos. 779 and 780) designed to be handled by a single engineer, transferring power to two composite shafts to drive twin iron propellers.

Competition with local railroads caused hard times for the steamship company, and within two years the ship was offered for sale. *Naugatuck's* new owner was Henry Plant, whose railroad empire terminating at Tampa, Florida, bridged the gap between North and South to become one of the largest conglomerates in the United States. The steamer was put into service in the local Tampa area, expanding Plant's marine operations. In 1891, she was sent back to her builders, who lengthened her hull by 30 feet and added several state-rooms. Renamed *Tarpon*, she returned to her Florida career, and may have been one of the dozens of Plant vessels used to transport troops and supplies to and from Cuba during the Spanish-American War. After Plant's death in 1889, *Tarpon* served his corporate successors until 1902, when she was sent to Philadelphia for sale. Her buyers, the newly-incorporated Pensacola, St. Andrews & Gulf Steamship Co., sent Captain Willis Green Barrow to bring *Tarpon* back to Florida. From this point onwards, the lives of the ship and her skipper were to become inseparable.

Vital Statistics and Data for *Tarpon*

Rig/Type of Craft	Twin-screw, Steam-powered Vessel
Official Numbers	Hull # 241 Vessel # 130381
Date of Construction	1887 alterations 1891
Place of Construction	Wilmington, Delaware
Builder	Pusey and Jones Shipyard, Wilmington, Del.
Trade	Freighter and Passenger Carrier
Principal Dimensions	Length: 130 ft. at the waterline (additional 30 ft. added in 1891, totaling 159 ft. 9 inches) Beam: 26 ft. Depth: 7 ft. 2 inches
Tonnage	Gross: 449 tons Net: 281 tons Displacement after rebuilding: 315 tons
Power	450 Horsepower 2 fore-and-aft Compound Engines (originally coal, then switched to oil)
Crew	10 listed originally for <i>Naugatuck</i> , 31 aboard when she sank
Owners	Naugatuck Valley Steamboat Company, H. B. Plant, Peninsular and Occidental Steamship Co., Pensacola, St. Andrew & Gulf Steamship Co.
Homeports	Derby, Conn. Tampa, Florida Pensacola, Florida

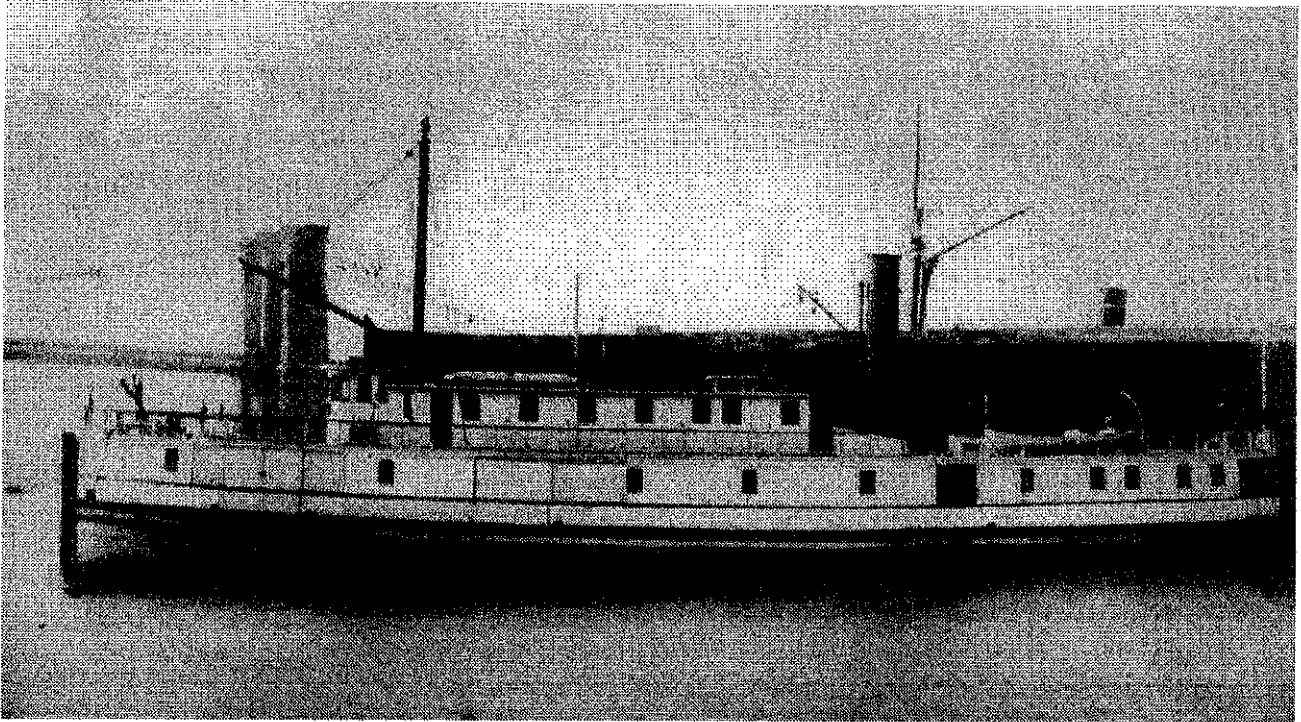


Fig. 1. Steamship *Naugatuck* as constructed in 1887 in Wilmington, Delaware.

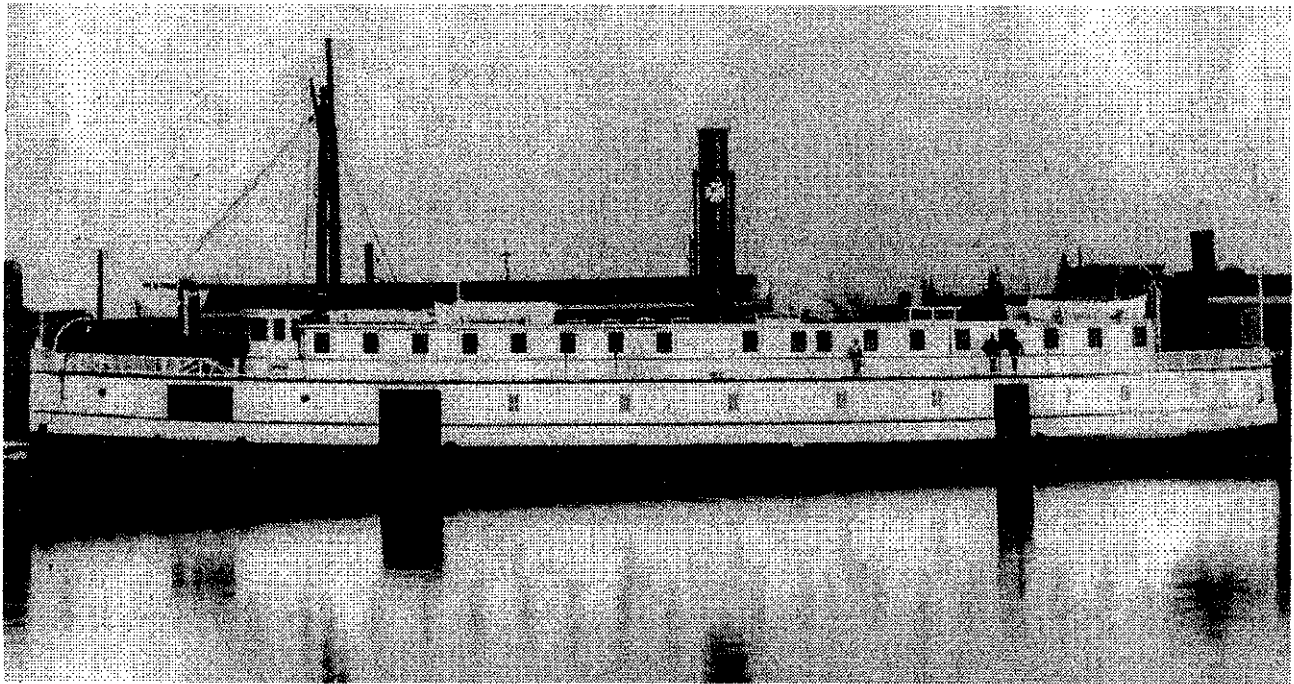
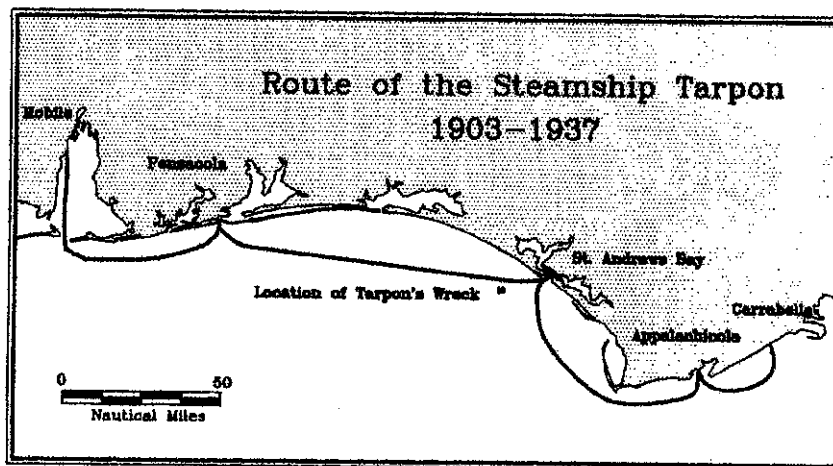


Fig. 2. *Naugatuck* as lengthened and refitted in 1891.

Gulf Coast Service

Beginning in 1903, *Tarpon* and her master Barrow became famous along the northern Gulf Coast, making weekly runs between the ports of Mobile, Pensacola, St. Andrews Bay (Panama City), Apalachicola, and Carrabelle. With few paved roads or bridges, commerce and communication between coastal communities was almost totally dependent on waterborne traffic connecting the bays and rivers with the Gulf. Barrow and *Tarpon* developed a reputation for reliability and dependability, transporting passengers and essential supplies while maintaining a strict schedule regardless of weather. The captain often was quoted as claiming that "God makes the weather, and I make the trip." To the men, Barrow "was a rough and grumbly sea salt; to the ladies, he was a gentleman of the highest caliber; to the children, he was an inspiring hero." As of 1908, he was also the president and major stockholder of the steamship company.



Despite storms, hurricanes, groundings, fires, and a few yellow fever scares, *Tarpon* continued her weekly schedule between six Gulf ports year in and year out. In January of 1921 while approaching Mobile during heavy fog, the steamer collided with a five-masted schooner lying at anchor. *Tarpon's* stack and mainmast were torn away, but soon were repaired. No one in either vessel was reported to have been hurt. In December of 1922, Barrow celebrated twenty years as master of *Tarpon* by completing their 1,000th voyage to St. Andrews Bay with the distinction of having missed only one trip on account of the weather. An admiring local press estimated that in making the voyages, the steamer had traveled a distance of 700,00 miles—a distance equal to 28 times around the earth. In March of 1923, fire enveloped the entire main deck of the vessel while she was docked at Panama City; however, prompt response by the local volunteer fire department quenched the blaze. Extensive damage to the engine room was repaired. In September of 1926, *Tarpon* was blown ashore on Santa Rosa Island near Pensacola by a hurricane, and in 1929 she was stranded again by a hurricane at West Pass near Apalachicola. On both occasions, the ship quickly was put back into service. By January of 1933, Capt. Barrow celebrated his 30th year with *Tarpon* completing 1,500 voyages to St. Andrews Bay, and the following year the legendary master and his wife observed their 50th wedding anniversary in Pensacola; "flowers, gifts, telegrams, and letters told of their popularity; they are identified with the advancement of this city and section."

Last Voyage

On August 30, 1937, five weeks short of her 50th birthday, *Tarpon* was loaded as usual at Mobile for her next voyage east. She had just passed her annual inspection, and before that, a dry-dock examination and a survey by the American Bureau of Shipping. And, as usual, her captain loaded as much cargo as he could fit on the steamer. Despite repeated reminders by local inspectors at Mobile, Barrow had neglected to paint the legally required loadline on the hull of his ship. *Tarpon* often left port with her decks awash, but she always managed to reach her destination. As she left Mobile, she had over 200 tons of general cargo aboard, most of which had been loaded through four side ports—two forward and two aft along the sides of the vessel. Although she was licensed to carry a crew of 20, and an additional five "roustabouts" to help with cargo, on this voyage that number was exceeded. Mounted on the boat deck were three standard life-boats and one work boat with a carrying capacity of 61 persons.

Tarpon carried her regular crew of men concerned with navigation and engineering. On board were Capt. L. E. Danford, first mate; Capt. William "Billy" H. Russell, second mate; Lloyd Mattair, chief engineer; William McKnight, second engineer; Adley Baker, oiler; George Wolfe, purser-clerk, his son George Jr., assistant clerk; Dozier White, cook, and his wife, Lily, a maid and the only woman on board. In addition, there were a number of roustabouts for handling the cargo. In all, it is believed that there were 31 people aboard the steamer when she left Mobile.

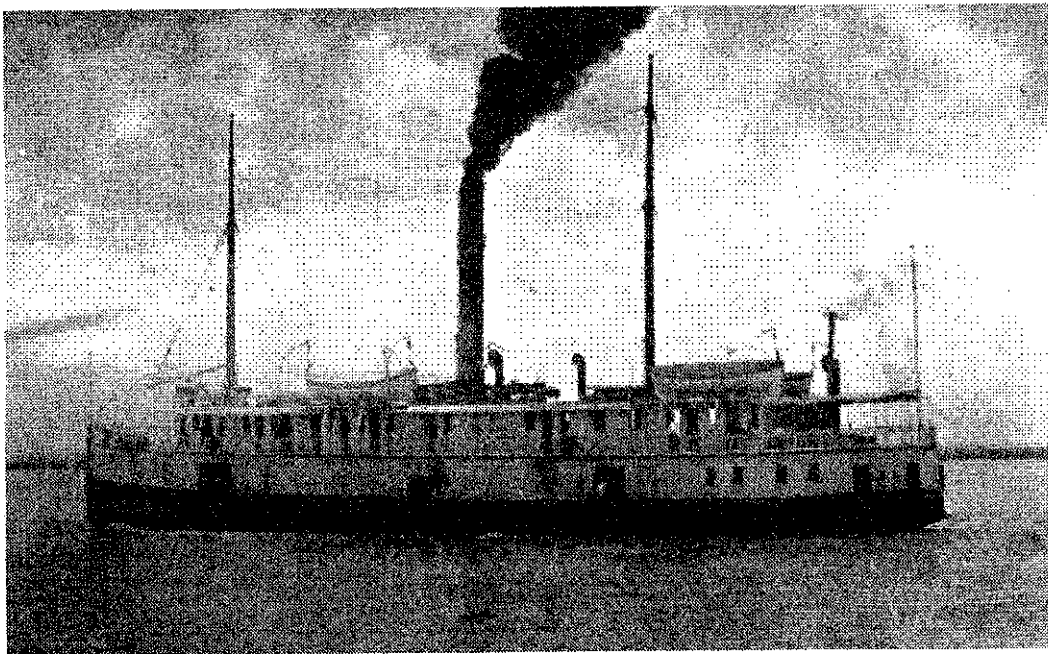


Fig. 3. Steamer *Tarpon* entering Apalachicola River.

The ship made port in Pensacola and departed for Panama City the evening of August 31. She had taken on, in addition to her cargo of flour, sugar, canned goods, and beer, a quantity of iron for the paper mills. Almost 200 barrels of fuel oil were in her tanks, as well as some 15 tons of fresh water carried forward in the hull. As *Tarpon* rounded the sea buoy and made for St. Andrews Bay, her freeboard was less than five inches.

At Mobile, Barrow had inquired about the weather. The forecaster predicted fair weather; however, by the time *Tarpon* left Pensacola the wind had freshened. As was his custom, the master retired for the night to his cabin, placing second mate Russell at the helm. At 2 a.m. (September 1) engineer Mattair was awakened by McKnight, who told him he was having trouble keeping water pumped from the bilges, due to a leak in the bow that was steadily increasing in rough seas. The ship began to list to port as the men worked the pumps. First mate Danford ordered the helm into the oncoming seas, and sent Russell below to jettison barrels of flour from the port side to counter the list. When she returned to an even keel, she was put back on course. In his cabin, Barrow had been informed of the problem, but remained confident of his ship despite the increasing weather. Just before dawn, the wind had reached gale force, and the pounding seas began to pour through *Tarpon's* wooden bulkheads, causing her to list to starboard. The roustabouts were sent below again to jettison more cargo, and Danford tried to keep the vessel headed into the seas. But the situation was futile; the engineers and mates realized that the ship could not be righted. Danford turned *Tarpon* toward shore, intending to try to beach her before she sank. Captain Barrow finally emerged from his cabin to receive the engineer's report that the ship was out of control. He ordered more cargo overboard, and then ordered Danford to put the vessel back on her course. But *Tarpon* had begun to sink. When Barrow finally gave the order to abandon ship, the vessel already was settling down into the sea by the stern.

The crew on deck frantically donned cork life jackets and tried to launch the four lifeboats. Most of those below remained trapped as the ship plunged beneath the waves. Only one boat was freed; it contained Lily White, whose husband tied her inside so that she would not be washed away. Unfortunately, she drowned when the boat capsized. Second mate Russell was killed by a falling boom as he tried to help Capt. Barrow into another lifeboat. The chief engineer and Danford were both swept overboard, but managed to climb aboard a hatch cover. Seeing Barrow adrift, they pulled him aboard; but, around noon *Tarpon's* 81-year-old master succumbed, and his crew released him to the sea in a life jacket they found floating nearby. Elsewhere, oiler Adley Baker and crewman Cecil Smith floated among debris near other crew members, some of whom already were dead. As the weather cleared, Baker sighted land in the distance and decided to swim toward it, despite Smith's objections. Alternately swimming and resting, Baker finally staggered ashore somewhere near Philips Inlet, west of Panama City, after spending 25 hours in the water. It was 10 a.m., September 2.

In a twist of irony, while *Tarpon's* crew fought for their lives, the Coast Guard cutter *Triton* was only seven or eight miles away attempting to refloat a barge at the entrance to St. Andrews Bay. *Tarpon*, however, had no radio, and no distress flares were fired. A crewman on the fishing smack *Success*, which had anchored off Panama City Beach that morning, noticed the steamship between downpours about an hour before she sank; but, knowing her schedule, he paid little attention. Except for her crew, he was the last person to see *Tarpon* afloat.

A passing motorist on the Gulf Coast Highway picked Baker up and drove him to Panama City to report the disaster. News of *Tarpon's* sinking quickly spread by word of

mouth and by telegraph; the Coast Guard dispatched the search plane *Victor* and the cutters *Kimball* and *Triton* to the scene to look for survivors. Rescued were Danford, McKnight, Mattair, Wolfe and his son, Cecil Smith, quartermaster Nixon Davis, fireman Claude McMillan, Clarence Reed, George Boykin, roustabout Frank Jackson. The bodies of Captain Barrow, Russell, and an unidentified man were recovered. Dozier White, the ship's cook, made shore on his own. Some of the survivors had been in the water 33 hours. Of those aboard *Tarpon's* last voyage, 18 are believed to have lost their lives; some, including the roustabouts trapped in the cargo hold, were never identified.

On September 9, the Department of Commerce convened a hearing of the Marine Investigation Board at Pensacola. At the hearing all 13 survivors testified, as did the Coast Guard and weather officials. The findings of the Board were sent to the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation in Washington for final review. When the report was released, it placed full blame on Capt. Barrow's "unwarranted determination to hold the vessel to her course in spite of the vessel's known peril, and in the face of strenuous efforts being made to beach her." The Board recommended that no disciplinary action be taken against any of the survivors, but that the local inspectors at Mobile be admonished for failure to force Capt. Barrow to place a loadline on his vessel. The Board further recommended that "... all vessels, regardless of tonnage or number of persons on board, if they customarily travel out of sight of land, be required to have a radio."

Epilogue

In the summer of 1939, almost two years after *Tarpon's* sinking, fishermen reported to the Coast Guard that they had seen the mast of a vessel nine feet below the surface of the water eight miles from shore, or 11 miles on a bearing of 265 degrees from the St. Andrews Bay entrance buoy no. 1. The Coast Guard quickly determined that the vessel was unusually large, and sent patrol boat *Nike* to investigate the derelict. When her crew finally found the sunken vessel, *Nike* radioed Coast Guard headquarters in Mobile that the derelict was believed to be *Tarpon*. The site was marked with a red flashing lighted buoy. Since the location of the derelict was to the east and slightly to the south of where *Tarpon's* survivors said the vessel sank, it was surmised that either Gulf currents, or perhaps a recent tropical storm, had moved the sunken freighter along the bottom.

The location marked by the Coast Guard in 1939 is where local fishermen in the 1940s and SCUBA divers in the 1950s and 60s found the sunken steamer in ninety feet of water. They learned to align landmarks on shore, then look for accumulations of fish and sea turtles to relocate the site on subsequent visits. Early diving stories relate that one could swim through cargo hatches into the hold, where the remains of cargo, including stacked cases of beer, were visible. During this time, at least one of the ship's anchors and the ship's bell were taken from the wrecksite as trophies. Although prohibited by state law since the mid-1960s, this practice continues today; in recent years a second anchor was taken from the site, as were a number of fittings and instruments. Visitors routinely return to the surface with beer bottles as souvenirs of their dive; perhaps they are unaware that unauthorized collecting of artifacts from a publicly-owned historic or archaeological site in Florida is illegal.

The story of *Tarpon* and her captain, W. G. Barrow, fills a dramatic chapter in the maritime history of Florida's Gulf Coast. Both the lives and deaths of the steamer and her skipper made an everlasting impact on the economic development and coastal character of the communities they served. Commemorated periodically in the years since its sinking by the popular press and in local lore, the story of this famous ship deserves to be told to future generations. The best way to perpetuate the memory of *Tarpon* is to maintain her grave site by designating it as an underwater preserve.

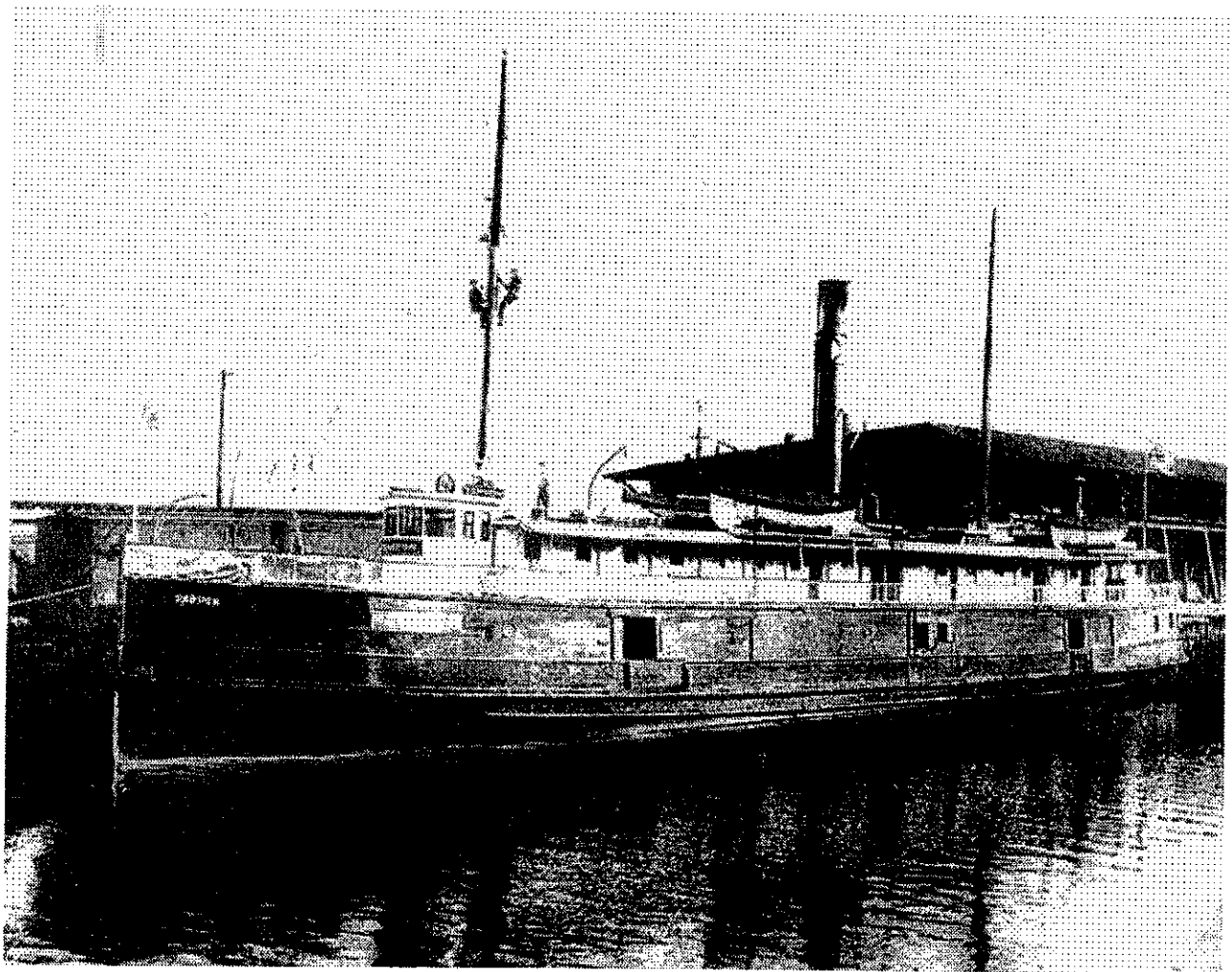


Fig. 4. *Tarpon* at Apalachicola, on a run from Manatee River to Mobile with a load of oranges.



Current Condition of *Tarpon* (8BY885)

The wreck of *Tarpon* lies on a sand and live-rock bottom at a depth of 90 feet of water, 7.8 nautical miles from shore at 30°05.702'N, 85° 56.555'W. The sunken ship is situated almost parallel to the shoreline; her bow is on a bearing of 290°. The hard bottom terrain has prevented the wreck from sinking into the sand. Water clarity generally is good at the wrecksite, compared with other offshore shipwrecks which lie to the east.

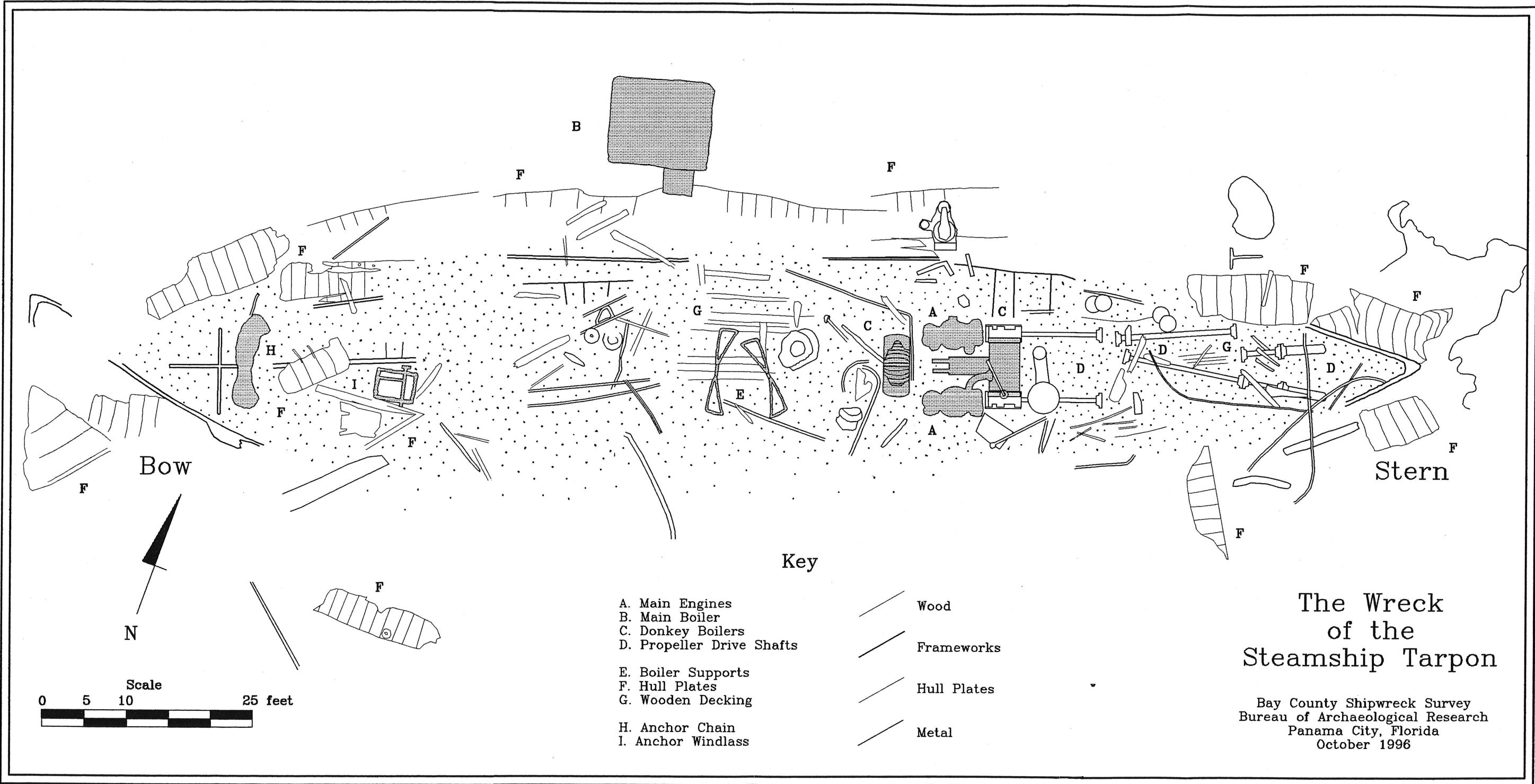
Until the early 1970s *Tarpon's* hull was almost intact. During a summer storm, much like the one that sank her, the sides finally gave way. A large section of the bow was left standing, but the midship area and stern were reduced to metal debris. In recent years, the bow section also has collapsed, with segments falling on either side of the ship's axis. The only upright feature that remains in the bow area is a vertical member just aft of the stempost. Some articulated wooden deck planks run longitudinally fore and aft in the bow. Aft of the bow rubble on the port side of the keel lies the forward anchor windlass, up side down where it appears to have fallen from the forward deck.

Several iron hull plates, some with portholes, lie flat on the sand outboard of the main wreckage. They represent portions of the port side hull and are situated almost perpendicular to the wreck's axis. At the forward starboard area of the wreckage lies the ship's main boiler, displaced from its bed in the boiler room, which was amidships just forward of the engine room. Prominent features of *Tarpon*, the displaced hull plates and boiler are evidence of powerful natural forces that have acted on the sea bottom to alter the integrity of the shipwreck over the years.

In the boiler room, the boiler bed is represented by a circular structure inside a square framework of fallen boiler supports. Aft of boiler bed is the ship's winch assembly with wire cable still wrapped around its drum. In the midships engine room, twin assemblies rise from the collapsed wreckage. They represent the remains of the ship's compound steam engines, with two vertical cylinders per engine—one for high pressure, and one for low pressure. Aft of the engines on the port side is another machine, which appears to be an electric generator. Two small donkey boilers, with exposed coils for condensing steam, are located fore and aft of the main engines.

In the stern, two composite propeller shafts run aft from the engines on either side of the keel. Once supported by pillow blocks, segments of the shafts have become disjointed. At their ends are the ship's propellers; blades of the starboard propeller are twisted and bent, perhaps from *Tarpon's* initial impact on the seabed.

Over the years, *Tarpon* has become an oasis of marine life. On any given day, a visitor can see schools of spadefish and angel fish gathering around the ship's engines. Cruising above the wreckage are amberjacks, and a friendly remora or two. Groupers, moral eels, and spiny lobsters inhabit the recesses of the sunken steamer. Around the periphery of the site, flounder, and numerous species of mollusks thrive on the bottom.

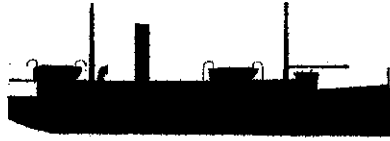


- Key**
- A. Main Engines
 - B. Main Boiler
 - C. Donkey Boilers
 - D. Propeller Drive Shafts
 - E. Boiler Supports
 - F. Hull Plates
 - G. Wooden Decking
 - H. Anchor Chain
 - I. Anchor Windlass

- Wood
- Frameworks
- Hull Plates
- Metal

**The Wreck
of the
Steamship Tarpon**

Bay County Shipwreck Survey
 Bureau of Archaeological Research
 Panama City, Florida
 October 1996



Benefits of Establishing an Underwater Preserve in Bay County

The development of Bay County has been accompanied by a growth of water sports and aquatic recreation. The proliferation of the dive charter and instruction industry along this part of the state's coastline has been in response to the demands of local residents and seasonal visitors. A number of artificial reefs—the remains of bridges, barges, and old ships—have been sunk for the benefit of sport fishermen. They have also become favorite destinations for sport divers. As the popularity of SCUBA has increased, Panama City has become a primary mecca for divers who want to dive shipwrecks. A recent survey of the best diving locations in the world, published by *Rodale's Scuba Diving Magazine* which has a circulation of 185,000, rated Panama City number two in the category "best wreck diving destination" (Outer Banks, North Carolina was rated number one).

At present, there are ten dive shops in Bay County, and sixteen dive charter boats that carry diving clientele to offshore destinations. An informal survey of diving charter activities in Bay County has concluded that an estimated 50,000 divers each year make use of local charter boats to access shipwreck and artificial reefs. By far, the largest dive charter business operates from Hydrospace Dive Shop, where five boats carried more than 31,000 divers offshore over a recent one-year period. Panama City Dive Center's six boats carried almost 18,000 charter customers in the last year, and the Diver's Den boat carried almost 350 people. Other small diver charter operators are estimated to have carried almost 600 divers during this same period. These figures indicate that Bay County is a major destination for this increasingly popular pastime.

Charter fishing also is a very popular activity in Bay County. At present, there are 28 Coast Guard-inspected charter boats, carrying an average of 10 people per trip; 42 uninspected boats, carrying 6 people; and 12 smaller guide boats, carrying 4 or less. If these charters were full on an average of 140 good fishing days per year, the annual number of people chartering a fishing trip would amount to 81,200. In addition, there are 6 head boats, that carry 60-70 people per trip; they carried 22,154 customers in 1995. The combined figures for charter and head boats suggest that approximately 103,000 people make annual use of Bay County's fishing charter businesses.

Recreational divers and fishermen are always looking for new and unique locations to pursue their sport, with a growing awareness of the need to protect the marine environment. In a 1985 concept paper entitled "Development of a National Underwater Parks Plan" for the President's Commission on the American Outdoors, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) established the need for more underwater parks, since "increasingly, scuba divers are finding it difficult to locate adequate places to participate in their chosen activity," PADI's primary argument for the establishment of underwater parks was based on its observation that "all well-planned underwater parks currently in existence are heavily used by divers," and that "more underwater parks specifically de-

signed for divers are needed." One of the paper's main points was that "it is not enough to establish aquatic ecological preserves or sanctuaries without the thought of how the area should be developed for use by recreational divers."

The PADI paper also listed the advantages of its proposed plan for more parks:

1. Increased protection of precious, unique, popular aquatic environments.
2. Increased access by scuba divers to coastal and inland aquatic environments.
3. Increased opportunity for aquatic businesses near newly developed underwater parks.
4. Increased opportunity for local support businesses (hotels, restaurants, etc.)
5. Increased income by state and local recreational departments.
- 6.

Creation of new jobs, i.e., biologists, rangers, support personnel, etc.

The economic impact of tourism on the businesses and residents of Bay County is considerable, to say the least. A recent visitor profile, compiled by the Florida Department of Commerce, Division of Economic Development, now the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, for the third and fourth quarters of 1995 and the first and second quarters of 1996 provides some interesting figures concerning the impact of a new underwater preserve on the local community. Of Bay County visitors surveyed during these periods, come 31% cited a vacation as the main reason for their trip (other reasons included business, visits to friends or relatives, conventions, etc.). The following figures were cited in the survey for specific vacation activities:

Rest and Relaxation	16.0%
Beaches	18.6%
Boating/Charters	3.1%
Fishing	3.6%
Watersports	2.7%
Parks/Preserves	15.2%
Historical Sites	2.4%
(other activities included shopping, beaches, golf, tennis, etc.)	

The average dollars spent by an average party of two people for an average trip of eight days were broken down as follows:

Transportation	\$112.64
Gasoline	\$61.12
Groceries	\$120.28
Restaurants	\$264.36
Lodging	\$506.04
Entertainment	\$114.08
Gifts	\$78.40
Other	\$84.08

Given the number of visitors to Bay County, estimated by the Tourist Development Council to be over 2.8 million per year, the above figures taken on significant values.

Creation of a new preserve will represent an added attraction for visitor to Bay County. An underwater destination, such as *Tarpon* fits neatly into three categories of tourism:

- Recreational Tourism—as a watersports destination.
- Heritage Tourism—as a historic shipwreck reflecting local maritime heritage.
- Eco-Tourism—as an interpreted repository of marine life.

Establishment of a shipwreck park at the site of *Tarpon* will benefit all interested parties, and will provide important revenue for the community as a whole. The key to successful establishment of a new preserve will rest in the hands of those who are willing to promote the idea within the community and participate in the protection and maintenance of the park, once in place.

As areas set aside for enjoyment by the public and protection by the state, underwater preserves are proven examples of public cultural resource management. Preserves have both past and future value, and provide a means of education through recreation for generations to come. Furthermore, they allow the public a chance to participate in local historic preservation. Shipwreck parks have worked quite well in other regions of Florida, and have afforded local communities a sense of stewardship and pride in their submerged historic sites. By establishing a similar preserve in Bay County, residents and visitors will have the opportunity to become better informed and more aware of the long-term value of preserving a historic shipwreck in its natural setting. This local investment strengthens a community's ties with the past, while enhancing recreation and tourism in the present.

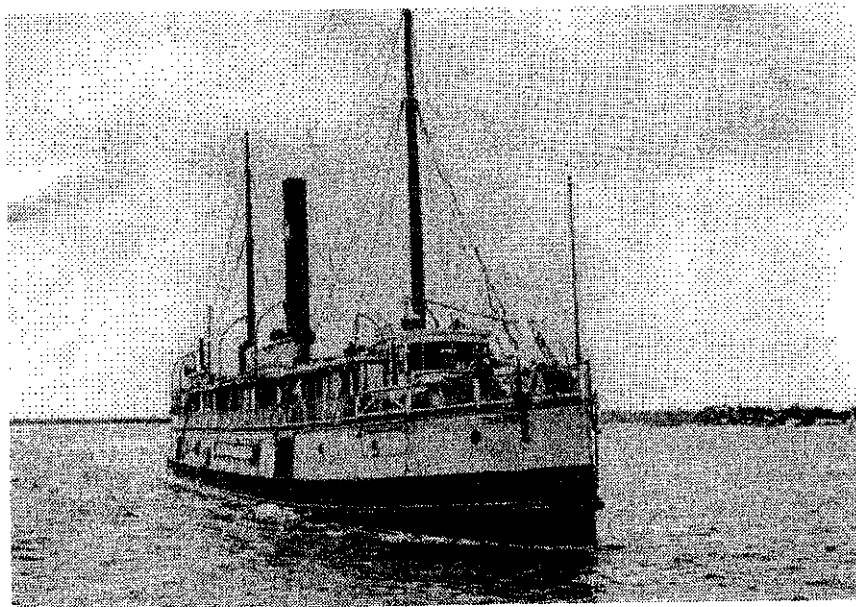
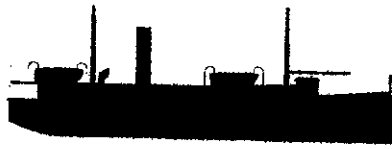


Fig. 5. Steamer *Tarpon* at St. Andrew



Suggested Considerations for the Establishment of the *Tarpon* Preserve

1. With the collection of historical materials (official documents, newspaper accounts, old photographs, etc.), and the completion of a preliminary assessment and site plan of the *Tarpon*'s remains, more is known about the ship and its current condition than ever before. However, to more fully understand the site, more complete inventories of the shipwreck's features and remnants of its remaining cargo items could be undertaken. Similarly, a detailed biological assessment of the marine life that inhabits or frequents the wreck could enhance our understanding of the natural role of the site within the offshore environment.
2. A formal management plan for the *Tarpon* Preserve should be prepared by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands for the increased management and preservation of the this publicly-owned site. The plan should be drafted so as to include Bay County as a partner in the management process. This measure would encourage a continuation of the existing partnership between state and county governments.
3. A community support organization (CSO) has been informally organized to assist in the establishment of the new Preserve. Called "*Friends of Tarpon*," the group is made up of civic and business persons, members of the waterfront community, and state and county officials. This organization could become more formally organized as an official non-profit body to oversee planning, implementation, and future maintenance of the *Tarpon* Preserve. *Friends of Tarpon* could supervise the formation of committees to accomplish various tasks, such as the following:
 - a. As with other Florida preserves, a bronze plaque could be placed in a cement monument on the *Tarpon* site to designate it as an official preserve.
 - b. To facilitate public access and safety, a mooring system could be devised at the wrecksite. Mooring buoys, fastened to the bottom around the wrecksite, could accommodate diving and fishing boats of various sizes and prevent anchor damage to the wreck and the live reef on which it lies.
 - c. The Florida Division of Historical Resources, which holds title to *Tarpon* for the people of Florida, could be asked to assist in the preparation and printing of a brochure similar to those created for other existing preserves. The brochure would briefly review the history of *Tarpon*, give directions to the site, and orient visitors to the historical and natural features of the park.

d. An underwater field guide, based on the archaeological site plan of the *Tarpon* wreck-
age, could be devised to guide visitors around the wrecksite and to orient fishermen to
prominent features of the bottom. Printed with waterproof lamination, this type of guide
has been popular with visitors to other Florida shipwreck preserves, and could be made
available at a nominal fee to the public through local waterfront businesses. A portion of
the proceeds from sales of the guide could be set aside by the CSO for future reprinting.

e. A shore-based exhibit about *Tarpon*, and other local historic shipwrecks, could be devel-
oped to acquaint those who do not visit the preserve. The public display could include
photographs, artifacts, paintings, plans and drawings, as well as narrated audio-visual
materials. The exhibit would ideally be placed in an existing museum, such as the Mu-
seum of Man in the Sea, for maximum visitor exposure.



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