

False River Sunken Barge Emerges During 2016 Drawdown

To set the stage, there was a cotton seed business at New Roads, where this barge was pushed from plantation to plantation and loaded with sacks of cotton seed. The cargo was then taken to the New Roads Oil Mill, where it was off-loaded, taken to the mill and processed. The Mill was operational in 1902 according to old newspaper clippings, though it may have been running well before that. Obviously more will be discovered by local historians as they look into this. The Steamer False River was mentioned in clippings as well, and she made her first trip in September of 1906, though there were obviously other boats doing this work earlier. At some point the Mill closed, and the barge was left at the end of the dock, where it sank.

The barge itself is barely intact, but much of the wood is in remarkably good shape. The cleaning crew is walking all over the bottom of it, and the boards were firm and solid feeling (see photos). The metal fasteners are a mixed bag, some holding the bottom together have fared pretty well, but others, including some holding up the sides, are not good condition. The barge is a flat bottom barge, with sides about 3-4 feet high, though exact height is hard to determine at this point. It is a double rake and is a very open hopper barge, no wing tanks or other such niceties. It appears there was a narrow walkway around the inside of the sides of the hull, just a board fixed on the inside of the hull to walk on, it is still there in some areas. There is what appears to be a cover of sorts some distance from the barge, appearing to be in fair condition. There is a kedge anchor on one end of it.

Additionally, there are some other artifacts at the site. Of great interest is a paddle wheel flange assembly. In the photos, it looks like a series of three disks joined together with a crank at the end. This is the heart of a paddle wheel from that period. There is also an iron rudder head, the control unit fitting on top of a rudder post (see photos). There was a fire on 21 December, 1907 of the steamer False River at about that location. The boat burned furiously because it was loaded with fuel, and the fire department could do little to save the wooden boat, though the machinery was saved. The paddle wheel flange assembly and the rudder head may be from this boat that burned.

Information and photographs courtesy of Captain Bob Mueller, U.S. Coast Guard (retired), Vice President of Compliance and Risk Management, Turn Services, New Orleans, Louisiana.

