

the local newspaper opined: "There is no doubt but that the Southern Railway is watching the movement closely and with a jealous eye."⁵¹

Maybe the Southern was jealous, maybe it wasn't, but there's no doubt as to the Southern's displeasure a couple of years later:

Brunswick, Ga., Nov. 10 [1908]. The Ocmulgee river steamer Emmett Small, loaded with 250 bales of cotton, consigned to Liverpool, reached port late this evening from Macon, and attempted to land her cargo at the Southern Terminal docks. Employees of the Southern cut the boat's lines, setting her adrift. Later she docked at Downing wharf.

Capt. Thompson will call upon the authorities tomorrow and a bitter contest is practically assured. The Southern had given orders to all its employees at its several docks to cut the lines of the river steamer should she attempt to land.

The Small had already made fast this evening and was preparing to discharge her cargo when her lines were cut.⁵²

A previous rail/boat conflict had occurred in 1872. The Macon and Brunswick Railroad, which later was acquired by the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia, which in turn was acquired by the Southern – the Macon and Brunswick had in 1872 been the defendant in a case brought by the Ocmulgee Boat Co. of Hawkinsville. The boat company charged that M & B's bridge across the Ocmulgee at Hawkinsville was a public nuisance because it obstructed navigation. The railroad demurred and the court sustained the demurrer.⁵³ But eventually, that is, in the early 1890s, the railroad – at that time it was the E T, V, & G – agreed to provide a draw span for both the Hawkinsville bridge and a bridge near Macon. Also, in the early 1890s, other bridges between Hawkinsville and Macon were redesigned and rebuilt to allow steamboats to go through.⁵⁴

STEAMBOAT FEVER IN MACON

As those projects were nearing completion planning was underway in Macon for a celebration. The Macon *Evening News* reported:

When the river is opened to navigation from Hawkinsville to Macon, Messrs. R. M. Rogers and George T. Harris, the board of trade's energetic and enthusiastic committee, will celebrate the event by a grand jubilee demonstration. A battery of three guns, wadded with The Evening News, which paper is always on a boom and is constantly booming Macon, will proclaim the glad tidings, and at night a grand pyrotechnic display will be had. On the day of this celebration Macon merchants will have several boats to arrive from Hawkinsville with goods that...will be brought to Hawkinsville by the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia railway, and then shipped up the Ocmulgee to this city.

The opening of the Ocmulgee means cheaper freight and increased business for Macon.

This city is jubilant over the outlook for the future...⁵⁵

If Messrs. Rogers and Harris had been able to foresee the future they might not have been quite so exuberant. Macon businessmen did get into the steamboat business by organizing first one company then another, but they were not very successful – and whether or not the Ocmulgee between Macon and Hawkinsville really was navigable was still being tested and debated twenty years later. That first company was the Macon Navigation Co. which, in the late 1890s, had two boats, the *City of Macon* and the *Ida*, running between Macon and Brunswick. The company was out of business by 1903, for in July of that year a new steamer, the *J. C. Maloy*, went up to Macon to test the navigability of the river – with a view, the *Hawkinsville Dispatch and News* reported, to re-establishing the boat line between Macon and Brunswick.⁵⁶

The *J. C. Maloy's* test run was to be replicated in 1904 and 1906. In 1904, Colonel J. B. Quinn of the Corps of Engineers was host to members of the Macon Chamber of Commerce aboard the steamer *Oconee* on a trip down the Ocmulgee, the object being to test the navigability of the river.⁵⁷

In 1906, a group of Macon businessmen chartered the steamer *Nan Elizabeth* for a three months test of the river's navigability. Favorably impressed, the group organized a twenty-five thousand dollar stock company, the Macon and Brunswick Navigation Co., in May 1907. The company's president was Emmet Small who

also was president of the Macon Chamber of Commerce; its vice president was A. E. Chappell. Two boats were acquired, one named the *Emmet Small*, the other the *A. E. Chappell*. There was trouble with both. In May of 1909 the *Small* ran into a sandbar on the Ocmulgee about fifteen miles below Macon, was very badly damaged, and most of its cargo lost.⁵⁸ The *Chappell*, with a beam of forty-two feet, was simply too wide for the narrow upper reaches of the Ocmulgee. In January of 1910, after it had been leased to the Georgia Cooperage Company, it was bound from Macon to Dublin but was making very slow progress, so slow, the *Dublin Courier-Dispatch* reported, that at least one passenger abandoned ship:

Dr. A. T. Summerlin left Macon on the Chappel, intending to make the trip as far as Hawkinsville, but gave up the trip after two or three days and walked to the Southern road and came back home via Macon.

He states that he does not believe the Ocmulgee above Hawkinsville can ever be made navigable because of the narrowness of the river. At times he said the Chappel would almost fill up the river. One could almost jump to either bank, he said, from the deck of the boat.

Dr. Summerlin says that a great deal of money has been spent by the government in driving piling...to widen and deepen the channel.⁵⁹

Also dynamiting.

On at least one occasion members of the Macon Board of Trade accompanied engineer P. J. Keating down-river to watch detonations. Aside from just liking to see things get blown up, they had a genuine interest in seeing a safe channel opened. But opening it was extremely difficult – how difficult is indicated by the fact that in 1909 a system of locks and dams was proposed. It was proposed but not adopted.

In 1910 Walter D. Johnson, supervisor of a survey of the Ocmulgee then underway, suggested this: that cargo be carried in small boats from Macon to Hawkinsville, then be transferred to larger boats to finish the trip to the coast.⁶⁰

Also in 1910, the *Hawkinsville Dispatch and News* characterized Macon's persistent pursuit of an impossible goal as rather "the fight of the

ancient Knight at a windmill....

"That Hawkinsville is the real head of inland navigation on the Ocmulgee is a fact," the newspaper asserted. "The opportunity for Macon is to abandon attempts on the river between that city and ours...and have President Massee bring his inter-urban electric [rail] line to Hawkinsville to connect with boats here..."⁶¹

Ultimately, in 1911, the Macon businessmen involved in the Macon and Brunswick Navigation Co. appear to have given up. The *Macon News* reported:

Business men of Macon have made a persistent effort for a number of years to secure navigation between this city and Brunswick...[but] after a number of attempts it was found that the type of boat secured could not be operated successfully at all seasons of the year. It was then decided to sell the present boats and purchase smaller ones. The stock of the company was owned in small blocks, and while all of the men interested were anxious to have smaller boats purchased, there was no one who would take enough time to manage the deal.⁶²

Finally, the traffic manager of the local freight bureau succeeded in interesting a New York financier, who might or might not have understood what he was getting into, in taking over the company.⁶³

STEAMBOAT FEVER IN HAWKINSVILLE

Macon's move into the steamboat business in the 1890s was preceded by Hawkinsville's in the 1880s. An organizational meeting of the Merchants and Planters Steamboat Company was held in Hawkinsville on June 6th, 1881. Officers were elected and a boat-acquisition committee appointed. Among those attending was Simon Merritt, former Ocmulgee steamboatman just returned to Hawkinsville after an absence of thirteen years. Asked for his advice Mr. Merritt stated that

he with others organized a boat company many years ago, and carried cotton from Hawkinsville to Savannah for fifty cents a

bale. He admitted that he made a mistake, however, in trying to run a big boat in a dry river between Hawkinsville and Macon, and lost about twenty thousand dollars; but he was glad to learn that the river has been greatly improved below Hawkinsville, and he believed that a boat could take cotton to Savannah for a dollar a bale, or less, as the insurance on cotton is now only about one-half or one-third of what it was in those days. . . .⁶⁴

Mr. Merritt's name was added to the acquisition committee, making it a committee of four who were to look for a boat to buy or lease. They found one and bought it almost immediately. It was the *Mary Fisher*, newly built in Houston County by Captain A. K. Fisher. It was, asserted the *Hawkinsville Dispatch*, "a splendid steamer—pronounced by good judges to be one of the best ever placed upon the Ocmulgee."⁶⁵ The *Mary Fisher* ran between Hawkinsville and Savannah with cargoes destined for not only those places but also for points along the rivers. "We learn," the *Dispatch*

The Town Owns a Boat

Hawkinsville Dispatch
July 21, 1881

The steamer *Mary Fisher* was brought up to Hawkinsville yesterday afternoon. As the whistle sounded her approach, the citizens of the town turned out in large numbers to welcome her arrival. The bluff on the river was crowded with spectators, and the staunch steamer came up in fine style. The boat is commanded by Capt. William Taylor, a veteran boatman, with Mr. Joe E. Reynolds as engineer, and John Swain, colored, as pilot.

Every doubt was put at rest yesterday as to the capacity of the Ocmulgee for navigation in the summer season. The river was certainly very low, but the boat was built exclusively for river purposes.

The *Mary Fisher* is now the exclusive property of the merchants and businessmen of Hawkinsville. All others have been bought out, and the boat will be run altogether in the interest of the town.

noted March 16th, 1882, "that the people along the line of the [Ocmulgee] are delighted at the regularity in which this boat is making her trips, as it proves of much convenience to them in getting their goods from Hawkinsville, where we also learn many are turning their trade who had not traded here in the past."⁶⁶

During the 1870s, 1880s, 1890s and for some time after the turn of the century Hawkinsville was the upriver terminus for most steamboat traffic on the Ocmulgee. In 1873 it was announced that the steamer *Daisy* would run between Hawkinsville and Lumber City for the benefit of "people living along the river who desire to buy their goods in Hawkinsville and have them shipped to their homes."⁶⁷ Also in 1873, the *Silver Springs*, a new boat from the St. Johns River in Florida, arrived in Hawkinsville for service on the Ocmulgee.⁶⁸ In 1879 the new steamer *Fox* began running between Hawkinsville, Lumber City, and Doctortown. In the early 1880s the *Mary Fisher*, the *Halcyon*, and the *Cumberland* were running up to and down from Hawkinsville. In the middle and late 1880s the *Abba* and the *J. C. Stewart* were running, and a move was afoot to establish a line of boats between Hawkinsville and Brunswick.⁶⁹ Promoting the proposed project, the *Brunswick Breeze* pronounced it to be "a much safer route than to Savannah, as there is but one sound for the boats to pass through, while to Savannah there are three or four, thereby trebling the risk."⁷⁰

Actually the route to Brunswick was riskier than the *Breeze* wanted to believe, and the risk was still limiting steamboat traffic to Brunswick a decade and a half later. On October 29, 1901, the *Brunswick Times-Call* reported that on the three rivers—Altamaha, Ocmulgee and Oconee—there was in active operation in 1900 the following boats: *Altamaha*, *Fitzhugh Lee*, *City of Macon*, *City of Dublin*, *Little William*, *Ida*, *John L. Day*, *G. T. Melton*, *Harry G. Day*, *Annie Garbutt*, *Gypsy*, *Relief*. And the *Times-Call* added:

Up to now the boats on these rivers...have been forced to keep away from here because of the risk and danger of crossing Buttermilk sound near the mouth of Altamaha, and St. Simons sound right here at Brunswick. On account of the insignificant depth of the flat bottom river boats, and the surface they present to wave

action, boat owners have had to run their crafts up and down [the Altamaha] from Doctortown, where the bulk of the freight went on to Savannah [by rail]. . . .

But, the *Times-Call* went on to say, there was a solution to the problem:

A way has been found by Capt. Cassius E. Gillette whereby the danger and risk [of crossing St. Simons Sound] disappears.... Capt. Gillette finds that by connecting Plantation creek with Clubb creek on Back river, between St. Simons Island and a point near McCullough's dock, a perfectly safe channel can be made, which will enable the river boats, lighters, rafts, etc., to avoid St. Simons sound and come right into Brunswick.

Two days later, November 1, 1901, the *Times-Call* again declared:

...this place is practically inaccessible to river boats on account of the necessity of crossing St. Simons sound which is unsafe for flat bottomed river crafts a great part of the year.

This exposed navigation can be cut off very readily, and at a small expense by connecting Clubb creek and Plantation creek across Brunswick peninsula by a dredged cut only about 300 feet long, and the slight widening of the upper end of Plantation creek for a distance of about one-half mile. When connected the two creeks would have a navigable depth of 5 feet at mean low water. The total cost will not exceed \$8,000.

The money was not available. Five years later, Congressman Brantley was still seeking it. "As it is now," he asserted, "the passage around St. Simons is at times out of the question. The survey has already been made for the cut off and it could be put through without delay."⁷¹ It wasn't. There was no appropriation.

In the 1890s and for several years after 1900, in addition to some of the boats already

Steamer Halcyon.
REGULAR TRIPS TO HAWKINSVILLE.
The steamer Halcyon will make regular trips on the Ocmulgee river, leaving Hawkinsville every Tuesday and connecting at Doctortown with the S. F. & W. Railroad. All freights received and given the best of attention. Business solicited.
Feb 15 1m
B. MOBLEY,
Captain.

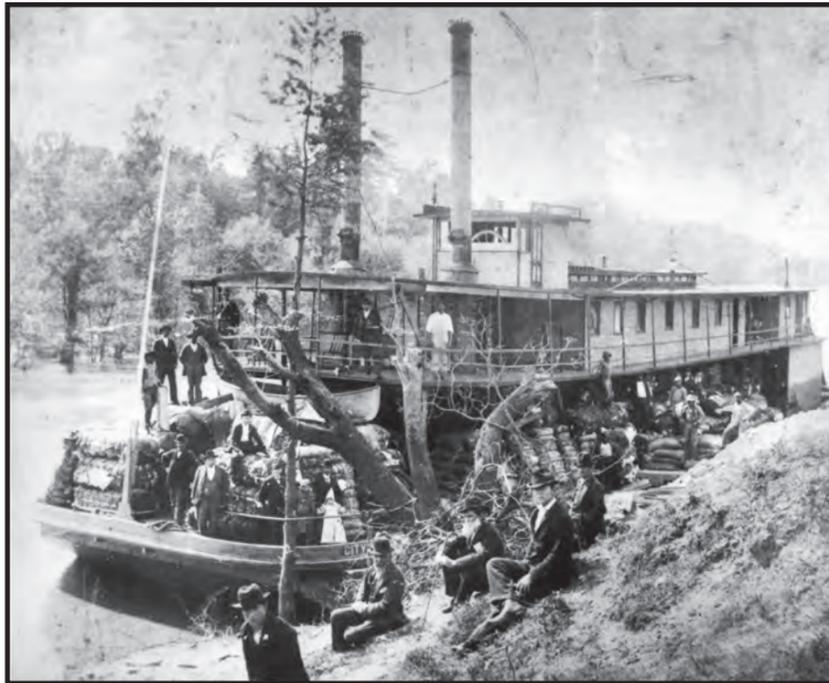
Hawkinsville Dispatch, February 15, 1883

STEAMER IDA.

A. H. HENLY, Master.
Until further notice the schedule of the above named boat will be as follows:
Leave Hawkinsville for Abbeville every Tuesday and Friday.
Returning, leave Abbeville every Wednesday and Saturday.
Prompt and reliable service and rates as low as the lowest. Your patronage solicited.
mar 15.

Hawkinsville Dispatch and News, March 15, 1900

mentioned, the following were running up the Ocmulgee to Hawkinsville: *New South*, *City of Hawkinsville*, *Dixie*, *George Garbutt*. There was



The city wharf has had a lively appearance this week on account of the heavy traffic. The Nellie Garbutt arrived Monday with a large cargo of miscellaneous freight and cotton and cleared for lower landings heavily loaded with merchandise of all sorts.

Wednesday morning the George Garbutt arrived with another large cargo of freight and is clearing with a good load. . . .⁷³

JOHN L. DAY OF LUMBER CITY: STEAMBOATMAN

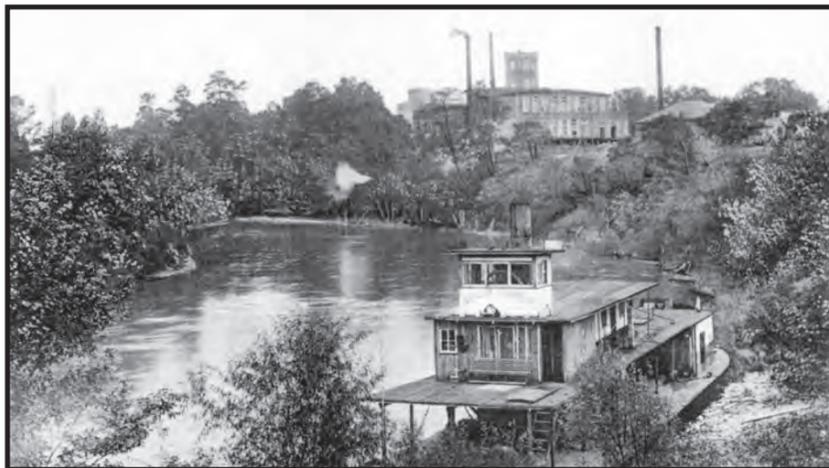
Busy as Hawkinsville's river port sometimes was, Hawkinsville had no individual steamboatman as prominent as Lumber City's John L. Day. In the death of Capt. John L. Day, *The Montgomery Monitor's* obituary stated on March 15, 1906, "South Georgia loses one of its most prominent and highly respected citizens."

He was owner of and had operated for years a line of steamers . . . and was largely identified with church and charity work.

He was very prominent as a lay member of the South Georgia Conference of the Methodist church, and contributed thousands of dollars to further the cause of Christianity. . . .

His death leaves a vacancy in the board of trustees of Emory College at Oxford, and in that of the South Georgia College at McRae.

A native of Savannah, John L. Day apparently chose Lumber City as the base of his extensive operations because of its central location. Lumber City was (is) on the Ocmulgee where the Macon



The CITY OF HAWKINSVILLE, above, and the NELLIE GARBUTT.

regular steamboat service, at times, between Hawkinsville and Abbeville, Hawkinsville and Jacksonville, Hawkinsville and Crisp, for both freight and passengers. The *City of Hawkinsville*, built at Abbeville in 1896, had gone into service with regular trips between Hawkinsville and Jacksonville. The *Dixie*, built at Lumber City in 1903, had also started out serving the same route.⁷² On December 13, 1905 the *Hawkinsville Dispatch and News* reported that river traffic was "booming":