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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Sprague

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Vicksburg Harbor Project

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Vicksburg

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Mississippi

VICINITY OF

CODE
28

COUNTY

Warren

CODE

149

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Vicksburg

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Vicksburg

VICINITY OF

STATE

Mississippi

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Office of the Chancery Clerk, Warren County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Vicksburg

STATE

Mississippi

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION**CONDITION**

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED
 GOOD RUINS
 FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE April, 1974

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

When the Sprague left St. Louis after being fitted with her sternwheel in 1902, she was 318 feet long, with a deck of 275 feet, a beam of 61 feet, and a hull depth at midships of 7.4 feet. She was powered by 28-inch and 63-inch diameter by 12-foot stroke tamdam compound condensing engines. The pittman was 30 inches wide, 24 inches deep, and 50 feet long. Originally, the sternwheel was 40 feet in diameter, but it was soon cut to 38 feet to increase her RPM from nine to eleven. The immense pilot wheel was 13.5 feet in diameter.

Over the years, the Sprague has always been painted white, although different colors have been used for trim. Under the ownership of the Monongehela Coke and Coal Company her trim was painted as follows: hull, red; paddle wheel, red with white ironwork; roof, black; pilothouse nameboards, black with gold letters; stern bulkhead, white with a large black sign lettered in white; hog chains and braces, white; chimney stacks, pipes, and other ironwork, black; pilothouse interior, light green.

Shortly after the Sprague was taken to Vicksburg, she was altered in order to provide space for the Little Theater's melodramatic performances. Removal of the boilers to allow for a stage caused the bow to rise nearly three feet. To counteract this imbalance and to prevent driftwood from snagging, the four massive ten-ton rudders were removed from the stern. Prior to the devastating fire in 1974, the Sprague's hull had been replated and was to undergo a general renovation in the near future. Now the giant towboat rests on the banks of the Yazoo Diversion Canal with the upper deck gone, the stacks tumbled, and the forward superstructure buckled. Although the Sprague appears to be a sad derelict, she is not abandoned by the concerned citizens of Vicksburg who are once again striving to save her through legislative appropriations and fund-raising efforts.

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The largest and most powerful steam towboat ever constructed, the Sprague is also significant for its role in the development of commerce and transportation during the first quarter of the twentieth century. It remains today a symbol of the great era of river trade in the United States.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the towing of barges had begun to show great promise for the transporting of bulk commodities. Coal to fuel industry was moved downstream from the vast fields along the Monongehela River in Pennsylvania. When the opening of new mines farther south forced the consolidation of northern producers, the Monongehela River Consolidated Coal and Coke Company (commonly called the Combine) was organized, with a tremendous investment in the means of distribution as well as of production. Because there were few locks and dams, the movement of traffic downstream was dependent on periodic rises in the river, and it was in order to take full advantage of the river stages that the Combine set about to build a towboat capable of pushing tremendous amounts of coal at one time.

On December 4, 1901, the Dubuque Boat and Boiler Works launched the Sprague, which was christened in honor of Peter Sprague, marine construction superintendent of her owner, the Combine. Because the tremendous length of the Sprague precluded passage of Keokuk Lock with the sternwheel in place, the boat was towed to St. Louis, where the wheel was fitted in June, 1902. (After suffering a collision on an ill-fated maiden run to Cairo, Illinois, in September of the same year, the Sprague was taken to Pittsburgh for considerable alteration to strengthen her structure and improve the signal system.) The Sprague left Pittsburgh in March, 1903, with twenty-five loads, picked up twenty-six more at Sand Island, and left for New Orleans on what would be her first completed run. After returning to Pittsburgh for still more alteration, the Sprague set her first record in May, 1904, by pushing 53,200 tons of coal. In February, 1907, she broke her own record and set the world record with a sixty-unit, 67,307-ton tow covering an area of eight acres and measuring 1,125 feet by 312 feet.

Ironically, the Sprague may hold records for tows lost as well as those successfully carried. In 1904 a tow of empties was lost on the falls at Louisville when the steamer blew a cylinder head. The next year, 1,200,000 bushels of coal, or approximately 34,200 tons were lost. Then, after a long period free of accidents, the Sprague demolished thirty-five barges containing approximately 53,200 tons of coal, when her tow struck a stone dike at Island 30 above Osceola, Arkansas. This wreck formed another island in the Mississippi for a time.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Custer, Jack. The Steamer Sprague. Vicksburg, Miss.: Vicksburg Harbor Commission, n.d.

Personal Inspection of Sprague remains by William C. Wright, Historical Archaeologist, October 15, 1976.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Nine

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 5	6 9 9 9 9 0	3 5 8 4 5 2 5	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

William C. Wright, Historical Archaeologist

ORGANIZATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

DATE

November 1, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 571

TELEPHONE

(601) 354-6218

CITY OR TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE X

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elmer B. Hilliard

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

December 27, 1976

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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8 - SIGNIFICANCE

Because of terrific losses from wrecks and competition from the railroad, the Combine abandoned the towing business in 1916. The Sprague was sold to the Aluminum Ore Company of St. Louis, which used the towboat to push bauxite from Bauxippi, Arkansas, north and return with general cargo south. Aluminum Ore Company sold the Sprague to Standard Oil Company in 1925 to tow crude oil to the refineries at Baton Rouge.

The Sprague is well remembered for the humanitarian service she rendered during the great Mississippi River flood of 1927, by transporting about 20,000 refugees on empty barges from inundated Greenville to the safety of Vicksburg's hills, where the Red Cross had established a "tent city." It was also in 1927 that the Sprague suffered her first and only accident with fatalities. Thirty-five miles upriver from Vicksburg she struck a shoal with a tow of ten barges containing 100,000 barrels of crude oil, and the resulting explosion cost the lives of a mate and three deckhands. The pilot managed to disengage the Sprague and save all but four barges.

During World War II the Sprague was used continuously for the transporting of oil, but the close of the war ended the steam era and ushered in a new diesel era for river transportation. The more efficient diesel towboat required only one-third the crew of a steamer, and the Sprague, now almost half a century old, was found obsolete and no longer economical. In late 1947, news of her impending end and subsequent scrapping was announced. After a decommissioning service at Memphis on March 5, 1948, the proud old steamer, which had traveled a distance equal to forty times around the equator, set out on a final run to Baton Rouge with a tow of empty barges.

A reprieve came in time from the concerned citizens of Vicksburg, Mississippi, a town which also owes its parentage to the river. A committee arranged to purchase the Sprague from Standard Oil Company for the sum of ten dollars, and the old stern-wheeler was given a new home on the waterfront of Vicksburg, where it would serve as the setting for the annual melodrama of the Vicksburg Little Theater. Since her arrival at Vicksburg, the Sprague has been used not only for Little Theater performances, but also for a river museum, a meetingplace, and the home of the Vicksburg Yacht Club. She provided a setting for the movie "Showboat" and became a major attraction when she was towed to Pittsburgh for that city's bicentennial celebration.

Tragedy struck the Sprague on the night of April 15, 1974, when fire destroyed most of the boat's superstructure. After surviving forty-seven years of towing cargos as different as coal and Model-T Fords, and suffering collisions, groundings, and explosion, the Sprague now rests, ingloriously beached on the banks of the Yazoo Diversion Canal. Many of Vicksburg's concerned citizens are once again trying to save this symbol of the golden river era through legislative appropriations and contributions toward a restoration.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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CONTINUATION SHEET

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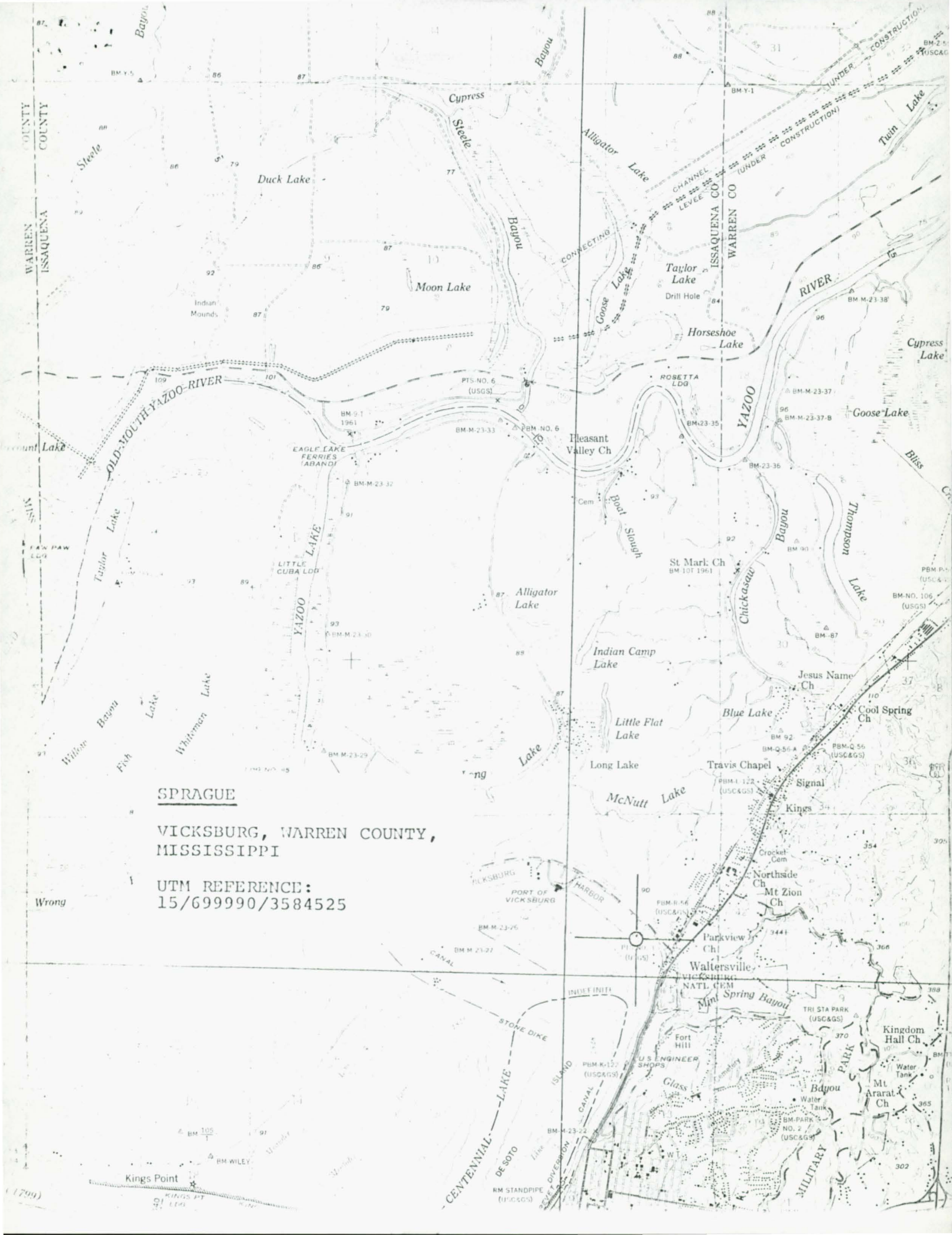
9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Steel Towboat Sprague." Marine Engineering, September, 1903, pp. 474-81.

United States. Treasury Department. Bill of Sale of Enrolled Vessel dated May 12, 1948. Transfer of ownership from ESSO Standard Oil Company to the City of Vicksburg.

Vicksburg (Miss.) Evening Post, April 16, 1974.

Way, Fredrick, Jr. Directory of Western Rivers Steam Towboats. 1954, pp. 352-56.



SPRAGUE

VICKSBURG, WARREN COUNTY,
MISSISSIPPI

UTM REFERENCE:
15/699990/3584525

Kings Point

KINGS PT LDR

(1799)

