

(Transcript: Early River Transportation)

(A photo of a black & white sketch of the Leaf River boat)

Prior to the arrival of railroads early settlers relied heavily on the vast network of streams and rivers in south Mississippi. Boats provided a means of personal transportation and were a life line for goods and supplies.

(A photo of "The Leaf" boat recovered from the New Augusta area)

During a summer drought in 1990, one of the boats that served this area in the early 1800's was found buried in a sandbar on the Leaf River near the town of New Augusta.

(A schematic of "The Leaf" boat)

Nicknamed "The Leaf," the recovered craft was neither a keel boat nor a traditional bateau. It was essentially a "missing link" between the two.

(A photo of pieces of wood from "The Leaf" along with cut nails and pegs)

Unfortunately, remnants of the original boat discovered near New Augusta were lost in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina. The museum salvaged a few pieces of wood along with cut nails and pegs used in the boat's original assembly. Photos of the excavation at the New Augusta site are also on display.

(A photo of the model of "The Leaf" created by L & C replicas)

That same year (2005), the historical society commissioned Butch Bouvier of L & C replicas to build a scale model of "The Leaf."

(Photos of the model of "The Leaf" with miniature passengers and cargo)

This photo of the model shows that the original craft was open and had no floors. Slats in the center supported cargo. The boat's 2 foot draft meant that it was ideal for navigating shallow south Mississippi waterways. Currents easily moved the boat downstream, while upstream journeys required poles, oars, sails and, in some cases, tow lines, to move against water currents.

Notice that "The Leaf" had two bows. These boats were too large to turn around in small streams, so the rudder was simply moved from one end to the other... a simple solution to a practical problem.

Historical society volunteers have outfitted our replica of "The Leaf" with an authentically dressed crew, passengers and items that could have made river journeys. The model represents a major era in the early development of the Hattiesburg region and serves as a prized museum display.