

**Gordon Willey's  
Notes on Fort Hawkins WPA Excavations,  
September, 1936**



*LAMAR Institute Publication Series,  
Report Number 180*

**The LAMAR Institute**



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Transcribed and Edited by Daniel T. Elliott

The LAMAR Institute, Inc.  
Savannah, Georgia  
2012



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## Introduction

Fort Hawkins was explored for the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service by archaeologist Gordon Randolph Willey and a small Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) crew in September, 1936. Little is known of this excavation project other than a few surviving black and white photographs, partially excavation plan sketches, and Willey's typed field notes. No report of this work was ever published, the artifacts from the excavation were never analyzed, and this important research languished in filing cabinets until it was exhumed in the early 1970s by University of South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology researchers. Photocopies of these precious notes were passed from archaeologist to archaeologist, portions were included in subsequent archaeology reports on Fort Hawkins by Stanley South, Richard Carillo, and Daniel Elliott, but the full collection of Willey's efforts at Fort Hawkins remained unpublished.

This short LAMAR Institute monograph seeks to remedy this oversight by presenting the total package of Willey's notes, sketch maps, and site excavation photographs by a photographer identified as "Coke". Transcriptions of Willey's typed notes, which are difficult to read, are provided in this report. These notes are transcribed *verbatim*. Willey spent most of his career as an archaeology professor at Harvard University. His short stint of excavations at Fort Hawkins took place at the dawn of his career, prior to achieving his advanced degree. Gordon Randolph Willey died on April 28, 2002. He was never interviewed in later life about his involvement at Fort Hawkins in the 1930s. Willey's personal papers have not been examined to see if any more information

survives concerning his 1936 visit to Fort Hawkins.

Charles Fairbanks, who served as Senior Foreman Archaeologist at Ocmulgee National Monument in the 1930s and was Willey's successor in that capacity, provided this summary of Willey's excavations at Fort Hawkins:

*This excavation was carried on by C.C.C. enrolles under the direction of Gordon R. Willey, Senior Foreman Archaeologist. The crew was lent for this purpose by Ocmulgee National Monument. Excavation consisted of exploratory trenches up to the site of the blockhouse and in other sections of the hill, the only area in which any significant material was discovered was that adjacent to the southeastern block house. Here the trenches uncovered the original stockade leading up to the stone foundations which were found in situ. The stockade was indicated by a vegetation line and the partly decomposed basal ends of the posts. The stockade bore the proper relation to the block house, as shown by early drawings, but could not be traced for any distance. The only materials found were a lead button 1.9 cm. in diameter, a lead disk 4.1 cm., in diameter and a fragment of a granite celt of Indian manufacture.*

*The posts extended three feet into the present soil, which had been graded before excavations were begun, thus the recorded depth of the stockade agrees very well with that actually discovered. The posts were from nine to twelve inches in diameter and were set three or four inches apart. In as much as the posts were partly decayed this indicates a close correlation with the figures previously mentioned for the diameter of the stockade posts (cited in Bryan 1939:11).*

Willey's 1936 excavations at Fort Hawkins were followed by the completion of the replica blockhouse in 1938 and a historical summary of the site and its partial reconstruction in 1939 by Benjamin L. Bryan, a Junior Research Technician at the Ocmulgee National Monument. Fort Hawkins was not included in any later National Park Service management or development. Apparently, higher ups in the National Park Service decided that Fort Hawkins was not worthy to be part of the Ocmulgee National Monument. Recent research by the Fort Hawkins Commission, The South Carolina Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, The LAMAR Institute, and the Society of Georgia Archaeology have shown this to be a very short-sided and ill-advised decision.



# Transcription of Willey's Field Notes

REPORT ON FT. HAWKINS  
EXCAVATIONS  
FOR DR. C.C. HARROLD and HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
Submitted by  
GORDON WILLEY  
[Cover Page]

Ft. Hawkins Excavations  
By Gordon R. Willey  
September 8 to 21<sup>st</sup>, [1936]

## Introduction:

Ft. Hawkins, erected upon the site of the present day schoolyard, overlooking the Ocmulgee River, in Macon, Ga. was built in the year 1806, by the famous old Commandant and held by him for the following few years. This information is supplied in Butler's account of 1879, a history of the region, and from undetermined folk-lore information. However, all historical indications point to this evidence as correct.

The limits of the structure, and the exact nature of the structure are, in part, supposition. It is known that a blockhouse of stone (basement) and log (superstructure) existed upon the southeastern corner of the area, and was probably, the southeast blockhouse of the stockade-fort. Butler tells of another blockhouse of similar dimensions (28' sq.) on the northeast corner [sic, northwest corner].

Some years ago [1928], a local group in the city, reconstructed the old basement portion of the southeast blockhouse, using the original stones, in part, and building upon what they believed to be the exact location of the original. Only the door was placed upon the east side, for modern convenience. There is considerable doubt as to whether a door was originally in the stone sub-structure.

The questions to be decided by this excavation are:

1. Is the Southeast Blockhouse correctly placed?
2. What are the nature of the old stockade walls extending from blockhouse to blockhouse?
3. What is there [sic, their] location?
4. What is the location of the other blockhouse(s)?
5. What area, shape, etc. did old Ft. Hawkins maintain?

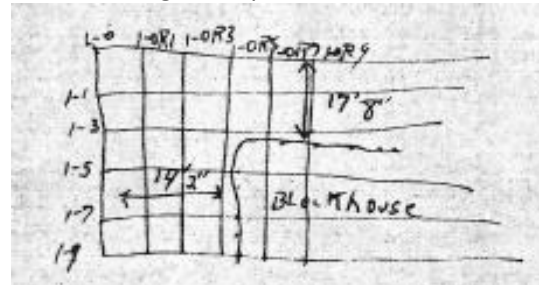
Upon the advice of Dr. C.C. Harrold, General W.A. Harris, and Mr. J.N. Solomon, all of the Georgia Historical and Archaeological Societies, and with the permission and co-operation of Dr. A.R. Kelly, this work was begun.

The following is the day by day technical description of work, in detail. The results of the excavation are explicitly summarized in the conclusion and by a map. All exact engineering records were taken by Dr. Kelly's engineering staff, and are in preparation [apparently these maps are still in preparation only all of the engineering staff is likely deceased]. [Page 1]

Diary on Ft. Hawkins Excavations  
Tuesday, September 8, 1936

Work begun at Fort Hawkins in an effort to determine the stockade walls which lead, according to Butler's account of 1879, west and north from the southeastern blockhouse. This blockhouse (stone basement) was reconstructed a few years back.

The following is the plan of excavation:

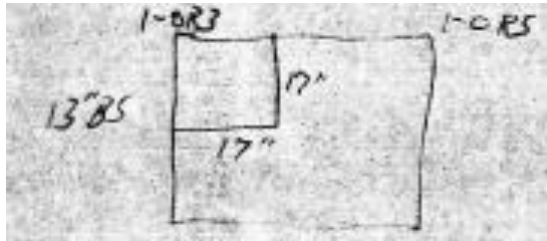


Allowing for further expansion.

First cut made 3' south of offset 0. This north profile shows line of apparent midden about 18" to 24" below surface which is present

sod line. The midden has an average depth of four to five inches.

Post (decayed[]) and posthole were discovered:



Evidence of more posts indicated in the profile. There is a high probability that this is the stockade running north.

Old china, square nails, a metal button are found in the profile at a depth of 18" or more, being in the midden. At east end of cut, an overly [overlay] of exceptionally hard red clay slopes upward from a depth of 21"BS to surface near station 1-OR7. This top clay presumably extends over entire school yard for a depth of a few inches. That it is definitively recent is proven by recent material (bottle) found in this layer.

Between stations 1-0 and 1-OR1 what appears to be a trail shows up in profile, the top being level with top of adjoining midden, but the depth at this spot is greater. It had a laminated and packed appearance. It is possible, however, that this might be a deposit of heavier midden.

Wednesday, September 9, 1936

Work begun by deepening 3' cut to south of offset 0. The [Page 2] average depth of this trench upon starting work this A.M. was 36". It appears as if we are in undisturbed red clay; however, cut will proceed to uniform depth of 48" for definite assurance.

Apparent stockade just east of station 1-OR3 gaining in verification by appearance of more decayed wood mould on south profile of this trench.

Between 1-0 and 1-OR1, the midden deposit or trail mentioned in notes of 9/8/36, funnels down to a small mould of about an 8" width at bottom of trench. The depth is now 44", and this mould appears to be going deeper.

Apparent stockade is almost assuredly verified as, just before noon, 3 decayed posts in floor of trench and one in north profile are clearly brought to light. They are badly decayed and of undeterminable diameter. They appear to be set from 7 to 10" apart.

Thursday, September 10, 1936

3' trench to south of offset 0 was leveled off at an average depth of 48". North profile of this cut read.

The funneling at the bottom of the supposed trail between 1-0 and 1-OR1, ended at a special depth of 69", growing smaller and twisting, suggestive of root growth.

At 10AM 3' cut to west of control 1 was begun. In this cut a piece of wood, probably pine, was found at a depth of 18", 54" north of station 1-7. It crossed the floor of the trench, and still shows in west profile. However, this was apparently a board or timber lying flat. It was in the deep humus overlying the red clay.

Work closed with depth at 37" in north of cut and 20" in south end where terrain is lower.

Friday, September 11, 1936

Work continued on 3' cut to west of control 1.

3' cut to east of 1-OR3 between offsets 0 and 1, was begun in an attempt to trace stockade back from 3' trench south of offset 0 toward the blockhouse.

Directly in front of station 1-5, in middle of trench, a decayed post was found in position, depth 22", in the red clay of 3' cut to west of control 1. This is the best evidence, yet, of the south stockade wall running from the west of the blockhouse.

In a 3' cut to east of 1-OR7 between offsets 0 and 1, three more rotted posts were uncovered as the work of tracing the stockade south along this cut was carried out.

In 3' cut to west of control 1, at station 1-5, post mould and discoloration of the earth seems to indicate definitely the stockade running west from Seast [Southeast] blockhouse. At this point, it will adjoin the blockhouse at 11'6" from northwest corner of

this building as compared with 8' on the north side.

The east stockade, running north, was traced south, within 6' of the blockhouse, being stopped here by a brick walk surrounding the structure; this was cut 3' to east of 1-OR3 between offsets 1 and 0.

In the afternoon, a 3' cut to the south of offsets 4, 3' to east and 5' to west of the station 1-4R3 between offsets 1 and 0.

In the afternoon, a 3' cut to the south of offset 4, 5' to east and 5' to west of the station 1-4R3, was opened. This is the [Page 3] first of a series of east-west cuts to run at rt. [right] angles to the stockade wall. By this method, the stockade will be followed north to the road cut.

In following the south stockade back towards the blockhouse, a 3' cut, 18" to north and to south of station 1-5, between 1-C and 1-OR1, was begun in the afternoon. 3 posts (one decayed and two moulds) were uncovered in the main trench, a 3' cut to west of control 1. More should appear as the other cut progresses toward the blockhouse.

In the middle of 3' cut to south of offset 4, at a depth of about 18"BS, two holes, in line with the posts of the east stockade, were uncovered. These go down for over two ft. and are, undoubtedly, holes of the stockade posts, long since decayed.-

At the close of the day's digging, work in the 3' cut to west of control 1 was completed; 3' cut to (18" on each side of 1-5, between 1-0 and 1-OR1) was taken down six inches BS, and after this, the cut was worked down on the sides leaving the supposed line of posts plateaued the full length of the cut to be troweled down later; 3' cut to east of 1-OR3, between offsets 0 and 1, was completed, plateaued, and twelve posts are exposed, running north and south and ready for photography; 3' to south of offset 4 was carried down to a mean depth of 18". As was mentioned, this cut has, in all probability, struck the stockade post holes.

Saturday, September 12, 1936

Work resumed on 3' cut on 1-5, between 1-5 and 1-5R1. Posts were troweled out toward stockade.

Work also continued in three ft. cut south of offset 4, 5' east and 5' west of station 1-4R3.

New cut to pick up east stockade further north was opened 3' to south of offset 12, 5' east and 5' west of line 1-R3.

3' cut to south of offset 0 was extended 30', from stations 1-OR9 to 10R15. This was begun to serve as a check for any other structures, or, possibly another stockade.

For stockade tracing, a rt. angles cut was made 3' to south of offset 16, 5' to east and 5' to west of 1-R3.

Engineers set out stakes at 20' intervals on line of control 1 and line of stations 1-R3. This extends north from offset 11[or 10--0 with strikethrough 1?] to offset 36.

Two more rt. angle tracing cuts were opened at 3' south of offsets 20 and 36, 5' east and 5' west of 1-R3.

Another opened 3' south of offset 28 in same east west positions.

In tracing cuts south of 12 and 16 evidences of decayed wood were brought up by picks from a depth of not more than 8" B.S. These were later established as rows of decayed posts, quite undoubtedly the stockade.

On offset line 0, stockade appears 13" east of line of stations 1-R3. 20' to north, stockade line is only 6" east of 1-R3 as it disappears under the profile of offset 4. 40' to north of offset 4, at offset 13, stockade goes under this profile at 19" west of line 1-R3. Thus figuring, the stockade veers west of north about 23" every 40', or at a rate of 57 1/2" per 100 ft. This is of course, based upon the assumption that the angle of deviation from true north remains the same. Figuring this much western bearing [Page 4] our present cuts at offsets 28 and 36 will miss the stockade by 5" and 28" respectively. Because of this cut at offset 28 was extended 3' west and cut at offset 36, 5' west.

In the afternoon, a 3' cut to the south of offset 24 was opened, 3' to the west of the

line 1-R3. This is a rt. angle tracing trench put here to pick up stockade.

The 3' cut is 18" to north and 18" to south of line 1-5, between 1-5 and 1-5R1 was trowled down and completed this morning. 14 posts uncovered from 6" to 8" apart.

One post was discovered in 3' cut to south of offset 24. Something very peculiar was noted here. At a depth of 10" to 18" no line of posts could be traced across the floor of the trench, and it is possible that they took a sharp turn here. Thus far, definite lines of posts have been found in offset cuts at 4, 12 and 16. At 2:30 nothing had been discovered at cut on offset 20; and 24 shows only the one post near its south profile. This one post is, however, in the direct line of my figuring, Cuts 28 and 36 are still unproductive.

At close of day, Offsets 4 and 12 completed except for troweling posts. These have respective mean depths of 33" and 22". Cut on Offset 16 taken down to mean depth of 26"; cut on 20 to 18"; cut on 24 to 18"; cut on 28 to 16"; cut on 36 to 10". 3' cut to south of offset 0, between stations 1-OR9 and 11R15, taken down to depth of 37". This cut is still in the fill that was brought in about 2 yrs. ago to build up slope. Cut must go down through old sod or midden into undisturbed if any possible posts are to be detected.

Monday, September 14, 1936

Work begun this morning by continuing 3' cut to east of 1-OR3, between offsets 0 and 3 back south to the blockhouse wall. Brick sidewalks were removed for this as for 3' cut, 18" north and 18" south of offset 5, between 1-5 and 1-3R1. Both cuts were made to trace stockade. Cut on north of blockhouse traced east blockade back to reconstructed wall. 3' cut to east of 1-L12, 5' north and 5' south of offset 5 made in an attempt to pick up south stockade.

Engineers laid out 2 cuts at offsets 44 and 46 in neighboring back yard.

Beginning at cut on offset 20, and from there north, it is highly probable that the absence of the stockade may be accounted for by the fact that it has run out of the ground at

this point. The ground is higher, here, more subject to scraping and denudation. This is also born out by the fact that the progressive rt. angle tracing cuts to the north, 4, 12, and 16, as well as 24, show the posts growing nearer and nearer the surface. On the other side of the road, at 44 and 46, the hill begins to drop again. It is, thus, possible that we will find it again at these points.

Another substantiating fact that the stockade was once following this line to the west of north (deviation of 57 ½" to 100') is that a distinct line of grass, 12" to 18" wide, follows this direction. Basing our judgement upon this degree of deviation, our [Page 5] cuts 44 and 46 have been so placed. It is possible that a sharp turn west, or even a greater angling, may be the case. If this is so, our cuts at these places will be inadequate.

Going back to the west side of the blockhouse, and the south stockade, a 3' cut to the east of line 1-L12 on offset 5 has not yet located line of posts.

Photographs: of general cuts around blockhouse (3' to south of offset 0 between control 1 and 1-OR15; of line of posts on offset 5 between 1-5 and 1-5R1; of line of posts shown in cut 3" to east of 1-R3 between offsets 0 and 3; and of general alignment of east blockade wall running north from blockhouse as determined by cuts 4, 12, 16 and 24, and by line of grass. (white string stretched along this line.

Cuts on 1-5 and 3' to east of 1-OR3, both running under sidewalk were completed, showing line of posts running up to foundation of reconstruction.

Work began on inside of blockhouse to pick up any traces of stockade that might be there.

Stockade not found in 3' cut to east of 1-L12 on offset 5. This cut was lengthened 2 ½' each way (north-south). Another cut opened 2 1/2" to each side of offset 5, 3' to east of 1-L4. Shortly before closing time, posts were found in this cut.

Tuesday, September 15, 1936

Work resumed on 3' cut to east of 1-L4 on offset 5, troweling out line of posts. Work

also resumed on 1-L12, on same alignment where posts have not yet been found. A new cut was started 3' to east of 1-L8 on same alignment and for same pupose [sic, purpose].

3' cut along north wall inside blockhouse shows nothing definite in way of posts at dept of 28"; although there is a charcoal filled post-mold which is not quite in alignment with the east stockade on outside. Unearthed some rocks which may be old foundation at depth of about 6" and about 1 1/2' from inside of north wall upon cursory examination.

At 1-5L8, 3' cut to east, posts located at depth of 24", and will be troweled out. 3' cut to east of 1-L16, on same alignment, opened to see if south stockade can be picked up further west. Cut east of 1-L12 given up at depth of 44". No posts.

3' cut to south of offset 44 minus 3', on line of stockade 5' to east and 5' to west. Assumed line of stockade at this point is 8' east of control 1.

Inside blockhouse, along west wall, nothing of importance found at 24". The appearance of old stone along north wall will make it necessary, and an interesting measure, to clear off the northwest quadrant of the interior and shave it down to that level (about 6"). This was begun shortly before noon.

3' cut to south of offset 44 minus 3' was taken down to undisturbed and into it, to a depth of 27" BS. This cut was also extended west [strikeout XX] 3' to line of control 1. No indications of posts.

Cut 3' south---east of line 1-L16, on offset 5, taken to depth of 48", but stockade not picked up at this point. [Page 6]

Friday and Monday, September 18 and 21, 1936

Work begun on 30" trench east and west between cuts at line 1-L8 and 1-L12 on offset 5. This is an attempt at a lateral trenching of the south stockade, tracing the line of posts from out at L8 to cut at L12 where we were not successful in finding them. Cut opened at east end.

Inside blockhouse, a five ft. clearing along inside of north wall was begun in an effort to lay bare the stones of what might be an old, pre-reconstruction, blockhouse. There are some stones about 6" below surface that might prove to be such. These were picked up in the excavation of the inner northwest quadrant.

Between offsets 16 and 20, work was begun in a lateral following of this east stockade. The posts, at this point are very near the surface, and the work must, accordingly, be carefully done, principally by skimming horizontally. Posts were thus uncovered between 16 and 20 at a depth of 6" to 8" BS.

Posts uncovered in lateral cut between L8 and L12 on west line from blockhouse on offset 5 at a depth of 30" BS. These, however seem to run out between these two stations. Further excavation should determine if a turn can be picked up or not.

Inside stockade work was continued by cut down in northeast corner to further seek for old foundation. As yet no work inside has found anything definite along this line.

At close of work inside, cut 36" deep in northwest corner shows only bottom of reconstruction to be underlaid by earth. No original foundation. This would indicate that the original foundation had been torn up and incorporated in the reconstructed walls. Stones found 6" bs [below surface] about one ft. from center of inside north wall were probably those left from reconstruction as they show no order, extension, or alignment. Work inside backfilled.

Between L8 and L12, lateral picked up posts for 7' west of line L8 just a little to south of line offset 5. As there is a disturbance in the north and south profile at this point, a three ft. cut running north and south, 5' long, will explore the possibility of a sudden turn at this juncture.

From 3' cut to south of offset 16, on line, 1-R3, posts traced for 11'5" north. They stop off suddenly here but should be picked up farther north as surface grass indicates disturbed area.

Working south from offset 24, where one post has been visible, a line of stockade

mold and decayed wood was discovered, within 4" to 6" of surface, to a distance of 10' from last post discovered while working north from 16. This leaves a 10' gap with no signs of a stockade. May have been a gate. Working north from 24 no posts or molds were discovered between 24 and 28. They were picked up again at line of offset 28 and lost just 4' south of offset 32. 6" Bs [below surface] at this point. This is the last post found. This leaves another gap of over 20'. Posts probably had been completely scraped off at this interval.

Farthest north test for posts was made across road at offset 46 on line of stockade. Farthest west made at 1-L16 on offset 5. At neither cut was the stockade found.

All cuts backfilled. [Page 7]

Ft. Hawkins

Excavations

Conclusions:

The preceding technical detail leads us then to the following conclusions concerning the five points with which we started as unknowns. We can be certain of these results, based upon physical findings rather than historical report or record, within a reasonable surety.

1. I feel that the southeastern blockhouse is correctly placed in reconstruction, and is the southeastern one of historical record.

Evidence: On southeastern terrain of hill which formerly sloped to south and east more abruptly than now. (3 cut to south of offset 0)

Line of posts extend up to cement foundation of reconstruction, one post on west being actually imbedded in the poured concrete. (cuts one line 1-R3 and offset

No evidence inside of posts along west or north walls. (inside cuts)

No foundation found to otherwise prove that present reconstruction is on wrong lines, east-west or north-south, (inside cuts)

2. The old stockade walls extending from blockhouse are of wood (pine). They were posts approx. 8" and not 14" in diameter. They ran almost due north and almost due west (west of north and south of west by a few minutes).

Evidence: Examination of wood. Posthole centers average 8" apart. Cuts (all tracing cuts to north and west of blockhouse).

3. Location (See map) Plotted approx. Here and exactly by Tamplin, engineer.

4. The location of other blockhouses could not be determined.

5. Nothing more could be learned of the shape than that one corner (southeast) had an almost rt. angle turn. Tamplin, eng.

Remarks: As suggested by L.H. Solomon, it is highly probable that the stockade was worn off the high ground (between 24 and 28, and 32 to 36 on the east. This is supported by the fact that as one goes north from the blockhouse posts are discovered at a lesser and lesser depth. It is strange that the posts were not picked up at 46, across the road in a negro yard. The elevation is lower at this point. It is evident that unless the stockade turned west, up the road, it had been destroyed here or its angle of deviation from north changed suddenly causing our 10' cuts on this offset to miss it.

On the west, the condition is puzzling. Evidences of a brick foundation, post-Civil war as attested by the brick, may have destroyed it for some distance on this south side. Erosion could hardly have played a part here as the posts are [strike out "a could"] 3 ½', at all places, below surface.

Gaps on east may be gates or places of destruction or erosion.

Respectively submitted,

Gordon R. Willey

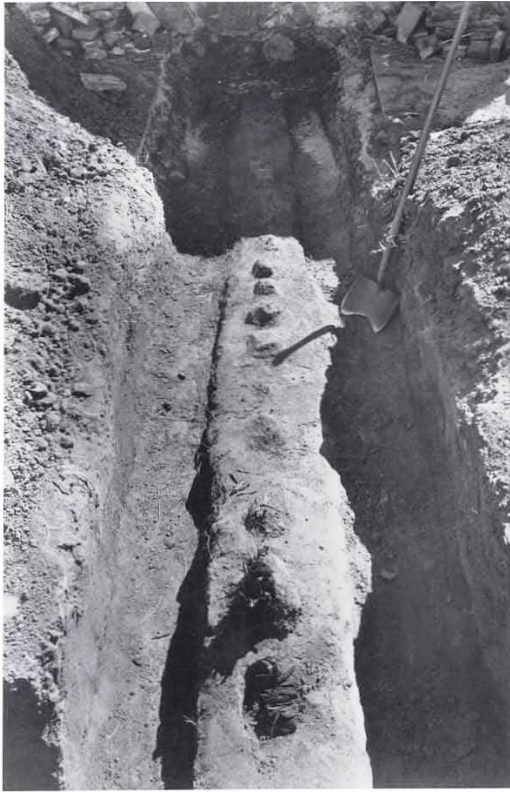
## WPA Excavation Photographs and Plan Sketches



**Figure 1. Southern View of 1936 Excavations, Vegetation Trace of Stockade Wall and Unfinished Southeastern Replica Blockhouse.**



**Figure 2. View of Palisade Remnants from 1936 Excavations.**



**Figure 3. Eastern View of Exposed Palisade Ditch Remnant at Interface with Western Wall of Unfinished Replica Southeastern Blockhouse.**



**Figure 4. Southeastern View of 1936 Excavations and Unfinished Southeastern Replica Blockhouse.**



**Figure 5. Northern View of 1936 Excavations Taken from Unfinished Southeastern Replica Blockhouse.**



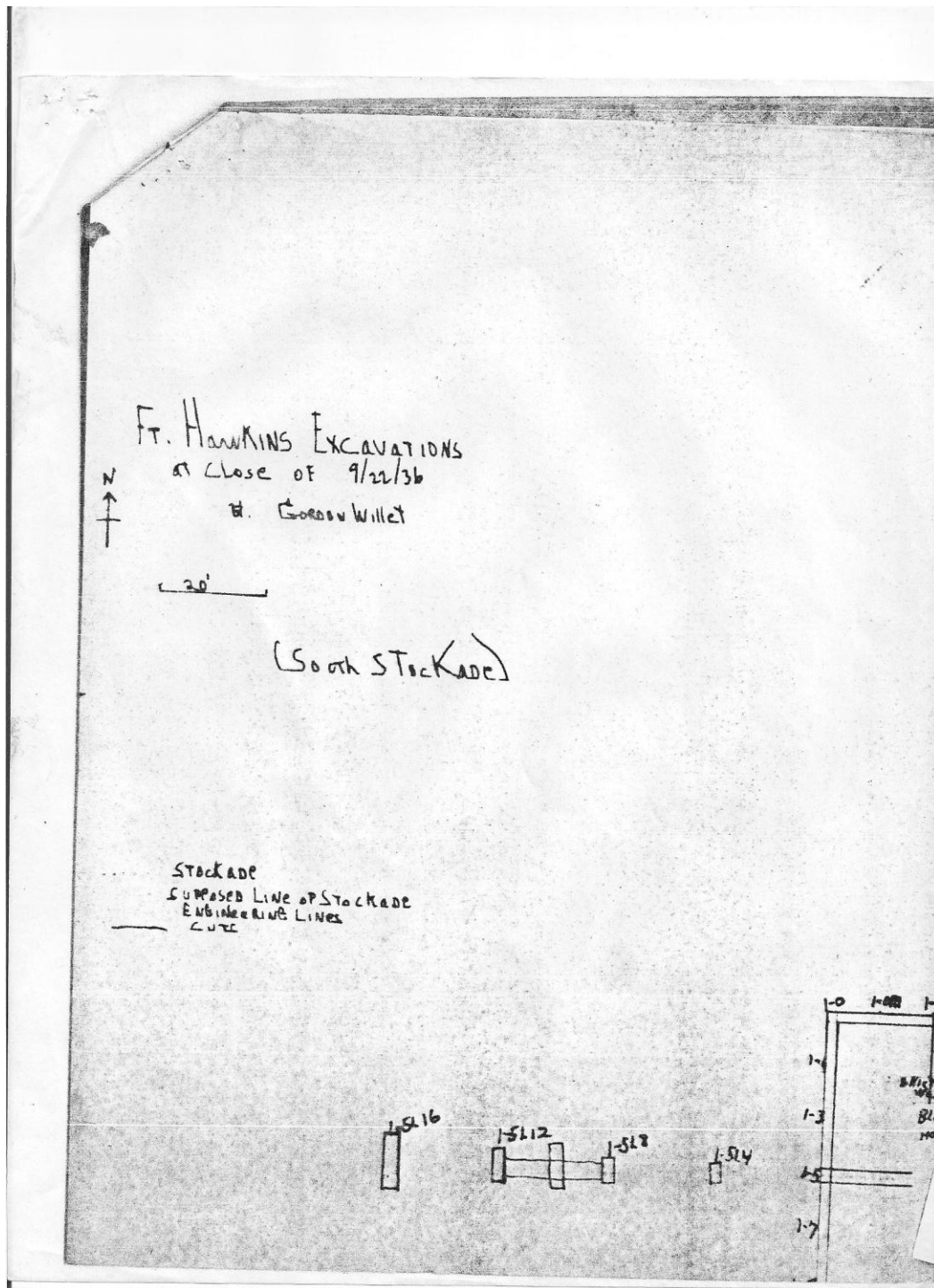


Figure 6. Ft. Hawkins Excavations at Close of 9/22/36 by Gordon Willey (South Stockade).

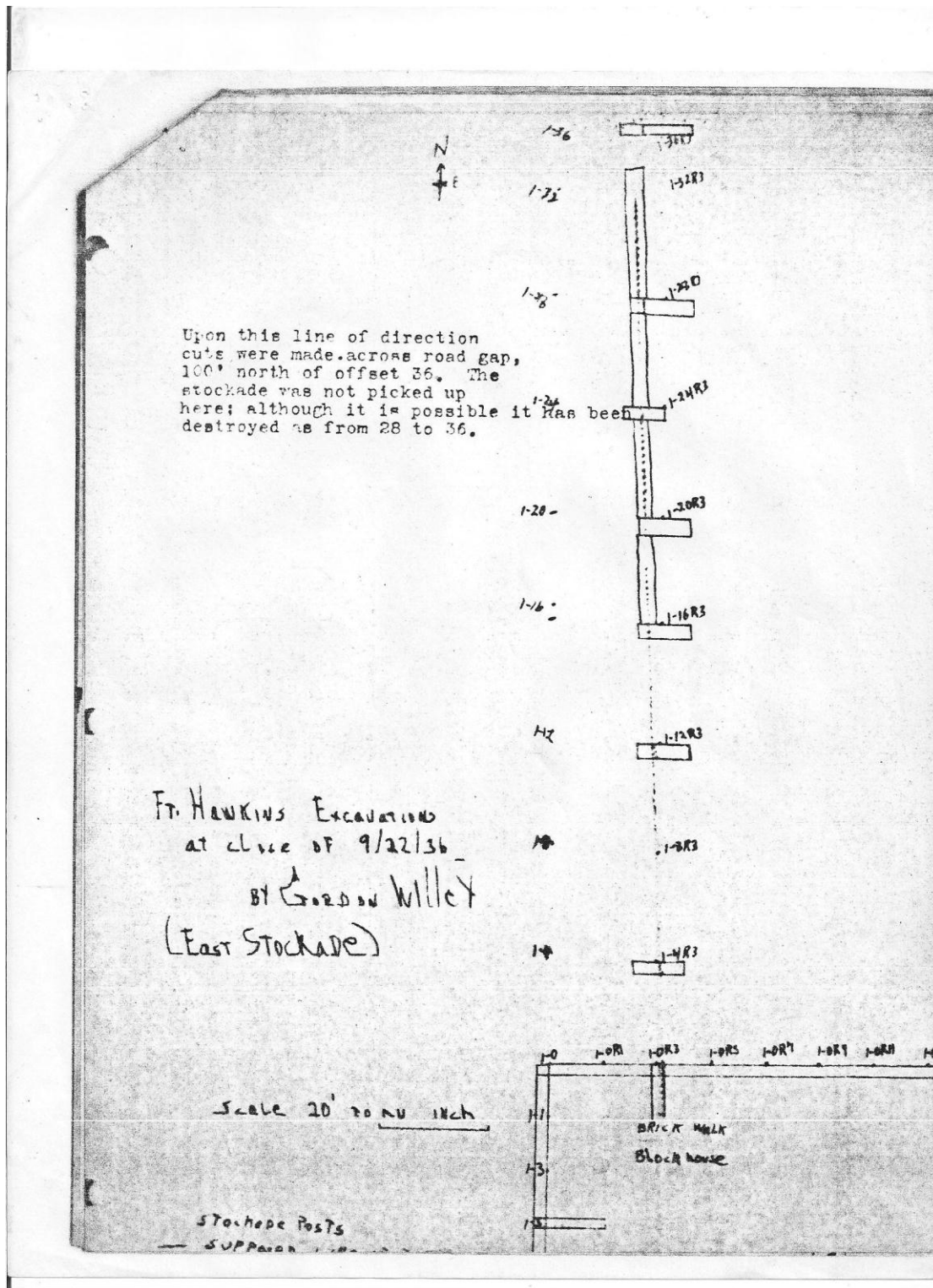


Figure 7. Ft. Hawkins Excavations at Close of 9/22/36 by Gordon Willey (East Stockade).

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