



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ANNA MARIA ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The wreck of the barge Regina sits partially submerged a day or two after it went down in March 1940. The ship settled over the years and today is completely underwater.

Wrecked barge could become historic site

Lorraine and Pet Athos, owners of Sea Trek Divers, are trying to preserve the old Regina molasses barge.

By Laurie Sanfilippo
SUN CORRESPONDENT

Much still remains a mystery about the Regina. It has been there as long as anyone can remember, a tangible remnant of Anna Maria Island history.

The capsized barge, which holds about 20 ft. below the surface off of 10th Street, began its voyage into fate on March 8, 1940, carrying 300,000 gallons of molasses. On its way to New Orleans from Cuba, the 300 foot tanker broke loose from its tugboat during a raging storm and ran aground on a sandbar. The vessel's cook and German shepherd mascot fought the high seas in an attempt to reach safety, but failed.

After the storm had calmed, a group of locals gathered on the beach to watch the last visible signs of the Regina's wreckage sink slowly into the sea and thousands of gallons of molasses turn the Gulf a dark chocolate color.

Preservation efforts

Sixty-one years later, local residents are still looking after the Regina. A recent meeting at Sea Trek Divers on Seventh Street, was the culmination of efforts by the

dive shop's owners, Lorraine and Pete Athos, to have the barge declared a Florida Heritage Site by the State's Bureau of Underwater Archeological Research. State representatives Roger C. Smith and Della Scott-Ireton responded enthusiastically to the Athos' nomination, which could put the Regina alongside seven other shipwreck preserves in Florida waters.

"These are living museums in the sea," said Della Scott-Ireton. "They preserve and provide an important glimpse into our maritime heritage for generations to come."

The efforts began earlier this year, when Lorraine and Pete Athos came across a notice from the state outlining the criteria for nominating a shipwreck preserve.

"We immediately thought of the Regina," Lorraine said. "Since we opened our shop four years ago, it has been a favorite among divers and a legend among longtime residents. We knew that it would make a great nomination."

Last week's review

The Athoses prepared the nomination forms and contacted the State, which sent archeologists Smith and Scott-Ireton to review the site last week.

"The Regina met all our criteria," said Smith. "It has public access, its identity is secured, it has archeological structural features that can be interpreted. There is marine life

Wreck could become

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that can also be interpreted, and it's in state waters."

Another criteria

Another less technical but equally important criteria is the community's level of interest in adopting the site as its own. The state will fund and supply basic set-up costs (brochures, a plaque, markings, etc.), but it is up to the community of Anna Maria Island to maintain, protect and promote the site.

"We're not looking for money; we're looking for a partnership with the community," said Smith. "Tallahassee can't be out here every day to watch over the Regina. We're looking for a way in which people from all walks of life will get involved."

The next step comes from the state. It will prepare a proposal document, which is Tallahassee's response to the Regina's nomination, and return to Anna Maria Island for a public meeting.

"We'll host a conference on maritime history with a keynote speaker, a slide show and a site plan," said Smith.

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