

Georges Valentine
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Georges Valentine, originally christened *Cape Clear*, was built in 1869 as a 767-ton iron-hulled screw steamer with auxiliary sails by Bowdler Chaffer & Company in Liverpool, England. In 1889 she was sold to a French firm, stripped of all steam machinery except the boiler and was rigged as a three-masted barkentine. At this time the ship was renamed *Georges Valentine*.

Over the next 15 years the vessel was sold to a handful of companies before being purchased by the Italian firm Martolo and Simonetti of Genoa, Italy. This story begins in 1904 when the Italian based vessel sailed from Pensacola to Buenos Aires with a load of milled mahogany. The international crew of twelve men, under the command of Captain Prospero Martolo, made good time through the Gulf of Mexico, and on October 13, 1904, the captain sighted the lights of Havana, Cuba.

Shortly after the ship headed northward through the Straits of Florida the ship was struck by gale-force winds. With no break in the storm, the captain ordered the deck load thrown overboard with the hope of improving the ship's stability. Unfortunately, conditions became worse, and on the third day of pounding wind and rain the sea broadsided the vessel. She remained helpless as the waves washed completely over her.

Captain Martolo tried to keep *Georges Valentine* in deep water but he was unable to control the ship. Her stern grounded in shoal water while the bow swung off as she was driven in towards shore. Three steel masts fell, killing one crewman, while the rest of the crew sought shelter but could not find any due to the loss of the deck house and lifeboats when the hull broke apart.

Two of the men swam safely to shore. Within a few hundred yards of the wreck was the House of Refuge at Gilbert's Shoal. Once on land, the men roused the Keeper of the House, Captain William E. Rea. Captain Rea immediately rendered aid to the men and then set out to find any other survivors. One of the two survivors, Victor Erickson of Sweden, sat high on the rocks with a lantern to help guide other crewmen to safety, and to watch over Captain Rea, all the while dodging lumber flying in the wind. Over the course of the night they finally found five more men, making it a total of seven saved.

The ship was a total loss but the cargo, originally valued at \$7,000.00, was sold at auction for \$200.00. Much of the lumber was used to build homes in the Stuart area. The surviving crewmembers returned home and Captain Rea and his family remained at the House of Refuge for another three years. Gilbert's Shoal House of Refuge is the only remaining House of Refuge and stands today as a testament to the dramatic events on that lonely stretch of beach.

In 2003, *Georges Valentine* was nominated to become Florida's eleventh Underwater Archaeological Preserve and in 2006 was listed on the National Register of Historic

Places. For additional information, please visit the *Georges Valentine* exhibit at the Gilbert's Shoal House of Refuge in Stuart, Florida.