

Regina
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In 1904, the Cuban Molasses Transportation Company, based in Havana, Cuba, commissioned the building of *Regina*, a steel steamer, in Belfast, Ireland by the Workman, Clark & Company shipyard. She was later converted into a tanker barge.

Regina joined a growing fleet of tankers carrying molasses from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico to the East and Gulf coasts of the United States for use by rum distilleries and by animal feed manufacturers.

On March 5th, 1940, *Regina* was under tow by the tugboat *Minima*, bound for New Orleans with a cargo of more than 350,000 gallons of molasses. Two days into the journey a cold front swept across the Gulf, accompanied by 8 to 12 foot seas and gale force winds. *Minima* attempted to alter course but before she could reach safety, her towlines parted near Egmont Key and *Regina* drifted helplessly away.

In the late afternoon of March 8th, *Regina* grounded in the heavy seas on a sand bar off Bradenton Beach. Pounded by the surf and wind, the tanker began to crack and break apart. Because of the turbulent waters the vessel's crew of eight stayed aboard, stranded, only 200 yards from shore.

Local residents gathered along the beach and built bonfires to re-assure the crewmen that they had been seen. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard attempted to reach the ship by both air and sea but they were unable to successfully approach her at night in shoal water. A decision was then made to approach *Regina* from shore using a line-throwing gun. A coast guard gunner's mate, Frank Barnett, made several attempts to reach the barge from shore but each shot fell short.

By early morning hundreds of spectators gathered on the beach and bared witness to the ship's cook and his faithful German Shepherd dog as they jumped overboard in an attempt to swim to shore. Both disappeared in the heavy surf about 100 yards from land; their bodies were found a few days later down shore.

Eventually a small yachting dinghy reached the stranded crew but on its return, the boat capsized. A chain of people linking hands from the beach through the surf quickly formed in order to rescue the men.

Regina was a total loss; her cargo of molasses drained into the gulf and her stranded and battered hull became part of the landscape. Today, more than sixty years of pounding surf have left the tanker a sunken hulk, partially buried under sand, but her remains are teeming with sea life. This wreck is popular with scuba divers and snorkelers due to its proximity to the beach and its myriad tropical fish. In 2001, *Regina* was nominated to become Florida's tenth Underwater Archaeological Preserve and in 2004 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.