



HOW TO FIND REGINA

The wreck of *Regina* is situated approximately 75 yards off the shore of Bradenton Beach at latitude 27° 28.135' N and longitude 82° 42.129' W. The site is in 12-20 feet of water and wreckage rises several feet off the sea floor. Please anchor in the sand to avoid fouling your anchor or damaging the shipwreck. Remember to display a "divers down" flag when diving or snorkeling. A laminated underwater guide is available from local dive shops to orient divers on a self-guided tour of the preserve.

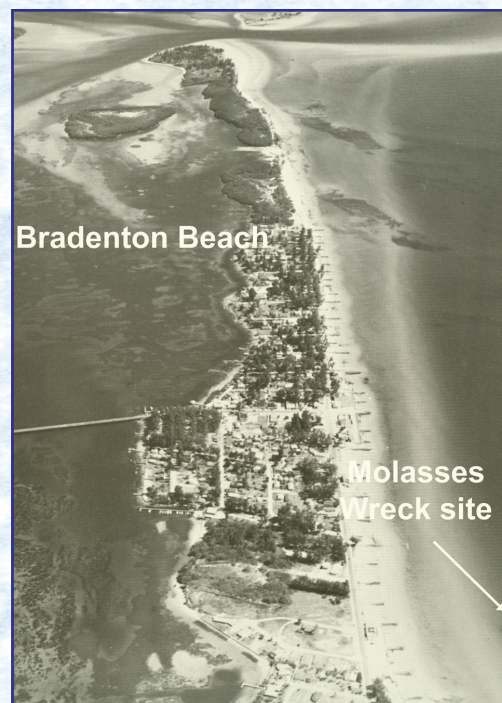
As with all other historical and archaeological sites on public uplands and submerged bottomlands, *Regina* is protected by Florida laws prohibiting unauthorized disturbance, excavation, or removal of artifacts. Please help keep the site intact for others.

"Take only photos and leave only bubbles."

REGINA State Underwater Archaeological Preserve

The 247-foot long steel tanker-barge sank on a flat sandy bottom on an even keel with her bow pointing north. *Regina* was a total loss; her cargo of molasses drained into the gulf and her stranded 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. Locally known as the "Sugar Wreck" or the "Molasses Barge," the wreck is popular with scuba divers and snorkelers due to its proximity to the beach and its myriad tropical fish.

Regina continually is covered and uncovered with sand, a result of periodic beach renourishment activities and natural wave and storm action. Many features are recognizable. The stern section is the most prominent element and provides a beginning point for exploration as it rises to just a few feet from the surface. The ship's steering quadrant is visible on the starboard side of the twisted stern. North of the stern are a ventilator, bollard, pressure box, and winch. Nearby, one of the ship's boilers lies half buried in the sand. Farther north, extensive sections of collapsed decking and stanchions provide a home for toadfish and seafans. At the extreme northern end of the site, *Regina's* bow protrudes from the sand, a focal point for schools of small baitfish.



Painting Courtesy
William Trotter

For more information call
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MANATEE COUNTY

FRIENDS OF REGINA

REGINA

Regina was a steel steamer built in 1904 in Belfast, Ireland, by the Workman, Clark & Co. shipyard for the Cuban Molasses Transportation Co., based in Havana. She was 247 ft. in length, with a 36 ft. beam, a 14 ft. draft, and was rated at 1,155 gross tons with a net tonnage of 669. Designed with a single deck and a single propeller powered by a triple-expansion steam engine producing 850 hp., the steamer also was rigged as a schooner for auxiliary power, and was fitted with electric lighting.

Regina joined a growing fleet of large and small tankers carrying a specific liquid cargo: molasses. Shipped from several locations in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico to the United States' East and Gulf Coast ports, molasses was used not only by rum distilleries but also by animal feed manufacturers. New Orleans was a principal port of the world's molasses trade; cargoes were transferred to river barges for distribution inland to feed producers in the Midwest. Some sources report *Regina* was the first Cuban vessel to bring molasses to the US.



Local residents rescuing *Regina*'s crew. Photo courtesy the National Archives.

Converted to a tanker barge, *Regina* left Havana on March 5, 1940, under tow by the tugboat *Minima*, bound for New Orleans with a cargo of more than 350,000 gallons of molasses. Two days later, a cold front swept across the Gulf of Mexico from the northwest, accompanied by 8 to 12-foot seas, gale force winds, and freezing temperatures. Waves crashed over *Regina* contaminat-

ing its freshwater tanks, and pushing the tug and tanker towards the shore. *Minima* attempted to alter course toward the shelter of Tampa Bay, but before she could reach safety, her tow lines parted near Egmont Key and *Regina* drifted helplessly toward Anna Maria Island. A local resident caught sight of the rolling tanker on the afternoon of Friday, March 8, and advised the St. Petersburg Coast Guard Air Station of her ordeal.

In the late afternoon of March 8, the converted tanker grounded in heavy seas on a sand bar off Bradenton Beach. Pounded by the surf and wind, the vessel began to crack and break apart as nighttime approached. *Regina*'s crew of eight stayed aboard the stranded tanker, only 200 yards from shore but afraid to abandon ship in such turbulent conditions. They sought shelter in their cramped quarters in the forward part of the vessel, the water rising almost up to their shoulders. As word of the disaster spread, local residents gathered on the darkened beach, where they built fires to reassure the crewmen that they had been seen.

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard cutter *Nemesis* and patrol boat CG145 had been dispatched from St. Petersburg, but were unable to approach the stranded barge at night in shoal water. Instead, *Nemesis* searched for and found the tugboat *Minima* but was unable to communicate with her. The Air Station advised *Nemesis* that the Bradenton police believed the barge could be reached from shore, and arrangements were made to transfer a line-throwing gun to CG145, which proceeded to the dock on the eastern side of Anna Maria Island. On the island, gunner's mate Frank Barnett was met by local men, who took him and the line-throwing gun across the island to the site of the wreck. At one o'clock in the morning Barnett twice at-

tempted to shoot a line from the beach to the barge, but each shot fell short.

At daybreak, Barnett and local men attempted to fire two more lines, but again they fell short. They also tried



Archaeologist recording the wreck of *Regina*

to send a line to the barge by a rocket gun, but the heat of the rocket burned away the wire used to attach the line. By then hundreds of spectators had gathered on the beach, as news of *Regina*'s stranding traveled from the island to the mainland overnight. At first light a Coast Guard seaplane bucking strong winds circled low over the barge and made two passes to drop life preservers to her crew. All but one lifejacket were washed ashore by the waves and wind.

As the crowd of onlookers watched in horror, one of *Regina*'s crewmen plunged overboard in a vain attempt to swim ashore. His German Shepherd dog followed him, but both disappeared in heavy surf about 100 yards from land, almost within reach of local resident Eddie Glant, who was swimming

toward them with a lifeline. The man was later identified as the ship's cook.

Eventually a small yachting dinghy was brought to the scene of the wreck, and Barnett endeavored to row out to the barge with life preservers collected from the beach. After two attempts, he managed to reach the stranded crew taking off Captain José Urquida before heading back to shore. As they approached the beach the boat capsized, but a chain of people linking hands out into the water assisted in the rescue. With Barnett's energy spent, local men who had been working with him increased their effort to complete the rescue. Furman Smith manned the dinghy and managed to secure a line to the barge from the beach. Smith, Billy Parker, and Clayton Adams, assisted by several other people, finally rescued the remainder of the crew. The body of the drowned crewman was found a few days later.

Gunner's Mate Frank Barnett received a letter of commendation from the Commandant of the Coast Guard. Bradenton honored its courageous young men with statuettes awarded at a meeting of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

In 2001, *Regina* was nominated to become Florida's tenth Underwater Archaeological Preserve. The site was recorded and the ship's history researched by State archaeologists and the Friends of *Regina*. The *Regina* Preserve was dedicated, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, in 2005.

