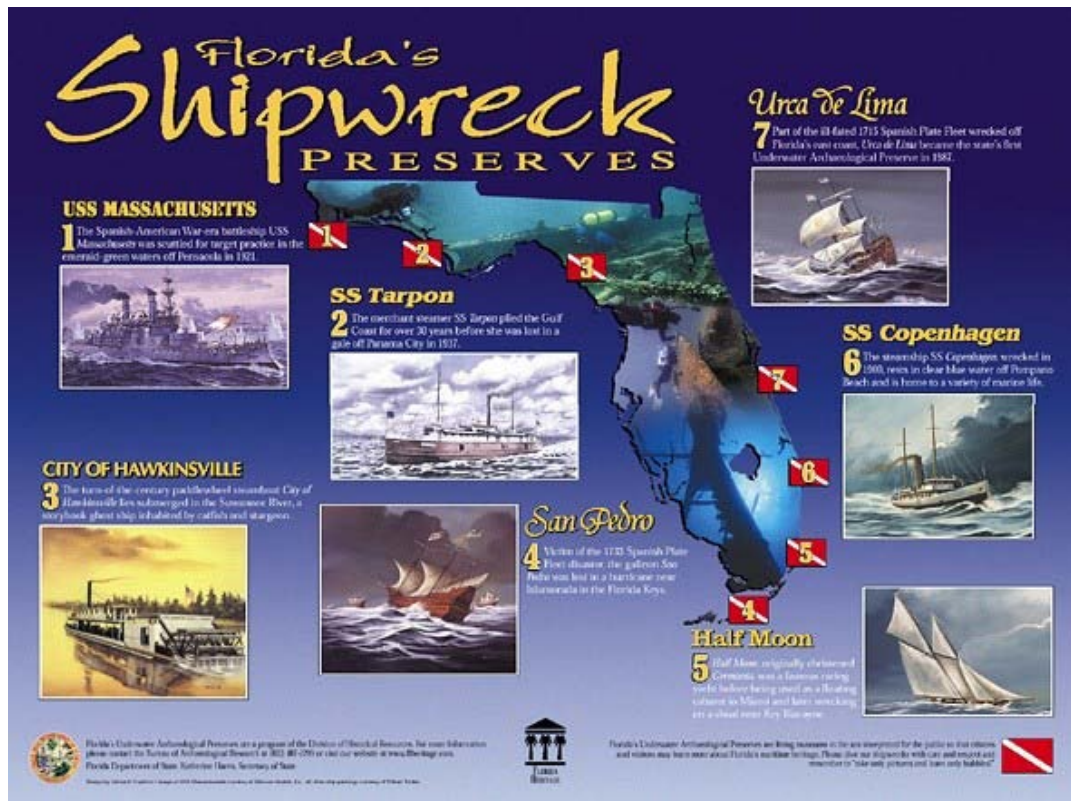


A Proposal to Establish the Shipwreck *Vamar* as a State Underwater Archaeological Preserve



Bureau of Archaeological Research
Division of Historical Resources
Florida Department of State
Glenda E. Hood, Secretary of State

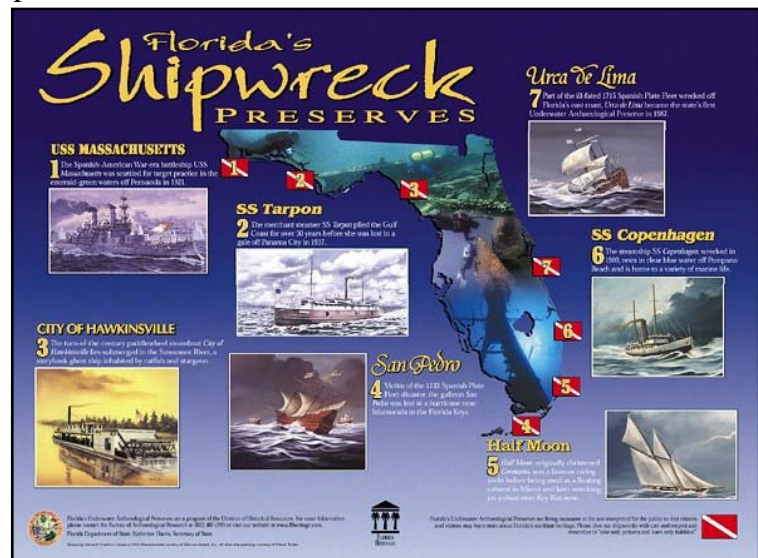
July 2003

ABSTRACT

Objective

To propose the establishment of a state Underwater Archaeological Preserve at the submerged site of *Vamar*, the remains of a steamship sunk off Mexico Beach, Florida, and nominated to become the ninth shipwreck park in Florida. A cooperative effort between state, county, and city officials, as well as local organizations and individuals, is proposed to create a new historical attraction for Northwest Florida.

Florida's program of shipwreck parks began in 1987 with the designation of the first Underwater Archaeological Preserve at the site of *Urca de Lima*, a Spanish vessel that wrecked near Ft. Pierce in 1715. A second Preserve was established in 1989 on *San Pedro*, a galleon that grounded in the Florida Keys in 1733. *City of Hawkinsville*, a sunken steamboat in the Suwannee River, became a third shipwreck park in 1992. USS *Massachusetts*, the nation's oldest surviving battleship, was designated in Pensacola in 1993 and the wreck of the steamer SS *Copenhagen* near Pompano Beach became a Preserve in 1994. In 1997, SS *Tarpon*, a merchant vessel that sunk in a gale off Panama City, was designated a Preserve. In 2000, Florida's seventh Preserve was established at *Half Moon*, a German racing yacht sunk off Key Biscayne near Miami. The latest Preserve is the Norwegian lumber barque *Lofthus* wrecked off Boynton Beach. These sites,



as important examples of our maritime heritage, are made more accessible to visitors by underwater maps and mooring systems, and are interpreted through the World Wide Web, widely distributed brochures, and other literature. They have become popular destinations for Florida residents and visitors.

Vamar is a steamship that sank with a cargo of lumber off Mexico Beach in 1942 under mysterious circumstances. As an easily accessible historic shipwreck, *Vamar* meets all the criteria to become an excellent addition to Florida's Underwater Archaeological Preserve system.

Suggested Steps for the Establishment of a Preserve

This proposal is the result of months of historical research by state archaeologists, local historians, and divers, as well as a recent campaign of underwater mapping in response to local nomination of the site as an Underwater Archaeological Preserve. The purpose of this document is to present a case for Preserve designation and to solicit input at all levels for a cooperative venture between government entities and the public to establish a shipwreck park. The project will depend on a community partnership, which has been a key element in the establishment of other shipwreck Preserves in Florida. Suggested steps to develop a Preserve are listed below.

(* indicates the step has been completed in the case of *Vamar*)

1. A shipwreck is nominated to become a Preserve, generally by a local diver, boat captain, or school children, by submitting a nomination form to the Bureau of Archaeological Research. *
2. The wreck site is visited by State archaeologists to determine if the shipwreck meets criteria for Preserve status: *

in State waters	recognizable features
accessible to public	identity and history verifiable
safe diving conditions	plentiful marine life
3. If the shipwreck meets the criteria it becomes a Preserve candidate. *
4. State personnel visit area businesses, local government, Chamber of Commerce, boating and fishing clubs, dive shops, etc. to garner interest and assistance. *

5. An informal Friends of the Preserve group is formed by interested individuals and is aided by State personnel. The Friends promote and help to establish the Preserve, and also raise funds and solicit in-kind donations and services which may range from providing refreshments at the public meeting to raising funds for a site plaque.
6. State archaeologists, with the help of local divers, survey and record the shipwreck and prepare a detailed site plan. Together with the Friends group, State personnel research the ship's history and verify its identity. An assessment and inventory of the site's biological diversity also is conducted. *
7. Once the site plan and history are complete, a public meeting is planned to present an official proposal for the new Preserve to area citizens and businesses and to address any questions or concerns.
8. The proposal, which includes the site plan and ship's history as well as educational and economic benefits of the Preserve, is distributed to area media. If there is public support, the proposal is considered to be accepted.
9. A formal opening ceremony with State and local dignitaries is held to dedicate the new Preserve and to place an underwater plaque designating the site a State Underwater Archaeological Preserve and Florida Heritage Site.
10. The Preserve is interpreted for the public through a brochure, an underwater guide for divers and snorkelers, a web page, a poster, and a local museum exhibit of artifacts, photos, etc. The Preserve also is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.
11. The Friends of the Preserve provide continuing support by monitoring the site, distributing brochures and posters, and promoting visitation.

PROPOSAL

Introduction

Florida's Underwater Archaeological Preserves are partnerships between government and the public to manage and protect submerged cultural resources in a cooperative spirit. Underwater sites of recognized historical and recreational value are designated as state Preserves in response to local nominations, and by a public desire for a fuller understanding and appreciation of these unique public-owned resources. Once a submerged site is nominated, it is carefully researched and evaluated for its suitability to become a Preserve, considering such criteria as historical value, archaeological integrity, biological diversity, public accessibility, and recreational potential. If the site meets these criteria, data from its evaluation are presented in a formal public proposal for the creation of a new Preserve through a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors. Public input generated by the proposal will help to determine appropriate methods of site enhancement, interpretation, and protection based on local needs and desires. Interested organizations and individuals then work together with state and local governments to prepare the site and to maintain it as an historical attraction.

Shipwreck parks are a relatively new phenomena as a means of education and preservation through recreation. Following the lead of Michigan and Vermont, where sites in cold, fresh water were established as preserves, Florida's program began in 1987, with the



designation of *Urca de Lima*, a Spanish merchant ship cast ashore near Ft. Pierce during a hurricane in 1715, as the first state Underwater Archaeological Preserve. Salvaged soon after her wrecking, and again by modern treasure hunters, the remains of the wooden sailing ship lie in shallow water on an offshore reef, where they

became a popular location for sport divers. Members of the St. Lucie County Historical Commission approached the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources to explore the possibility of giving the shipwreck a special status that would both interpret and protect the site for future visitors. Local waterfront businesses joined with city, county,

and state officials to enhance the wreck with replica cement cannons to replace those removed long ago. An official bronze plaque, embedded in a cement monument attached to a large mooring buoy, was positioned near the wreckage to mark the site and to prevent anchor damage. Interpretive brochures, thousands of which subsequently have been circulated, were widely distributed to encourage public visitation and participation in the maintenance of this unique piece of Florida's maritime heritage. *Urca de Lima* thus was adopted by the local community as a new historical attraction; by placing the site in the public's trust, it became important for everyone to preserve.

As early as 1964, Florida officials heard arguments from the Monroe County Advertising Commission and the Florida Keys Underwater Guides Association that at least one of the Spanish shipwreck sites of the 1733 fleet disaster should be set aside as an historic monument rather than remain available for salvage activities. But that hope was not realized, and it was another twenty-five years before the idea came to fruition. During the summer of 1988, eleven of the 1733 Spanish wrecksites were surveyed and assessed by field school students from Indiana University and Florida State University. The students rated each site for its accessibility, archaeological features, natural marine life, and potential for enhancement and interpretations. Several were found to be seriously disrupted by illegal salvage activities; but others, such as *San Pedro*, lying in 18 feet of water near Islamorada, were relatively undisturbed and were covered with living coral and sea life. Data from the survey were presented in a public proposal, which recommended the establishment of *San Pedro* as the state's second Underwater Archaeological Preserve.

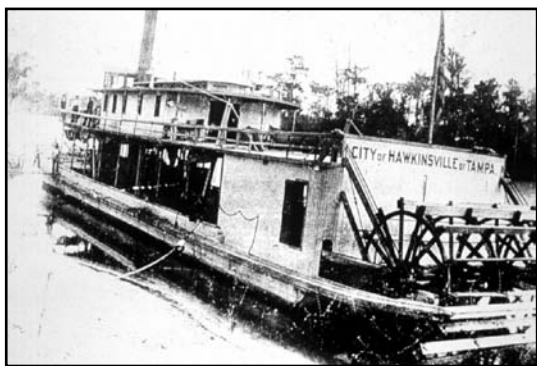


Circulated throughout the Upper Keys by the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce, the proposal generated considerable public interest and enthusiasm. Local civic leaders and waterfront operators organized the *San Pedro* Trust to serve as a non-profit support organization for the preparation of the Preserve. A local cement plant agreed to fashion concrete cannon replicas, the Coast Guard supplied several mooring buoys, and an old galleon anchor was donated for placement on the site. An underwater plaque, set into a carved limestone monument, officially designated the Preserve and acknowledged its

sponsors. As with *Urca de Lima*, an interpretive brochure was prepared for international distribution to encourage visitors to tour *San Pedro* on their own, or to take advantage of several boat rental firms, glassbottom boat tours, or snorkeling and diving charters in the Islamorada area. A plastic-laminated underwater guide to the site was prepared to orient snorkelers and divers to the archaeological and natural features of the park. The new Preserve was designated in April 1989 and has since become a popular destination for thousands of visitors to Florida who are curious to see first-hand the remains of an old Spanish treasure galleon. *San Pedro* also represents one of the oldest artificial reefs in the United States.

Meanwhile, other states began to consider the concept of underwater archaeological preserves. State officials from North Carolina visited the *San Pedro* Preserve to gain information that helped them to work with local divers in Cape Hatteras, where USS *Huron* became that state's first preserve in 1991. Puerto Rico has requested assistance in planning a park on a sunken Spanish-American War vessel; cooperative efforts with New York state have led to the establishment of several historic wrecks in Lake George as shipwreck preserves. Maryland, California, South Carolina, and Wisconsin now have underwater archaeological preserves, parks, and trails as well.

Due to the enthusiastic responses received from the communities that participated in the establishment of the first two Florida Preserves, the Division of Historical Resources in



1990 prepared over a thousand mailings state-wide to solicit nominations for potential new Preserve sites from waterfront operators, dive clubs, and amateur groups. Responses to the mailings endorsed a variety of sites, some suitable and others not. By mid-1990, two leading candidates for new state archaeological Preserves had emerged. The first, a steamboat named *City of Hawkinsville*, was nominated by the principal of rural Bronson High School in Levy County. Lying at the bottom of the Suwannee River after accidentally sinking in the 1920s, *Hawkinsville* is a surprisingly intact example of late 19th-century steamboat technology. The largest and the last steamboat to ply the Suwannee, she was forgotten until local divers found her near an old landing in the 1960s.

The boat is over 145 feet long and looks like a storybook ghost ship, with her paddle wheel spokes and steam machinery still in place.

With the help of high school students and local divers, *Hawkinsville* was evaluated and mapped, eventually resulting in a proposal that was submitted to the civic leaders of three neighboring counties and the waterfront communities along the river. The proposal led to the formation of a community support organization in conjunction with Gulf Marine Foundation, a local non-profit group. A large monument with three bronze plaques was designed for placement in the boiler room of the sunken boat, mooring buoys were anchored downstream of the vessel, and underwater lines were placed around the wreck to guide visitors. Brochures were printed for distribution and a laminated underwater guide for the site was prepared. The *Hawkinsville* Preserve was opened in June 1992 and is the only Florida Underwater Archaeological Preserve in a river environment.

The second candidate for a new state Preserve resulting from the request for nominations was **USS *Massachusetts***, nominated in 1990 by an Escambia County diver and amateur historian. The nation's oldest surviving battleship (BB-2), *Massachusetts* was one of three "Indiana" class, sea-going coastline battleships authorized in 1890 by the United States Congress to be built for the new "Steel Navy." Launched in 1893 and commissioned in 1896, she was just over 350 feet long with a beam of 69 feet and a draft of 24 feet. *Massachusetts* served in the Spanish-American War and World War I, but quickly became obsolete as a weapon. The ship was loaned to the Army as a target, towed to Pensacola in 1921, scuttled in shallow water, and subjected to artillery tests. After spending 70 of her 100 years under emerald Gulf of Mexico waters, today *Massachusetts* is a giant artificial reef, harboring a myriad of marine life. Although the ship is partially buried under white sand, her gun turrets are awash, and the naval technology that transformed her nation into a major seapower is laid out for all to see.



After extensive historical research and field evaluations, the site of the sunken battleship was determined to be an excellent candidate for Florida's fourth shipwreck

Preserve. Detailed site maps, along with the ship's original plans, were incorporated into a formal proposal which was submitted to the Pensacola public in May 1992. A community support organization, Friends of the USS *Massachusetts*, was formed by waterfront concerns, civic groups, and interested individuals to help in the establishment of the new shipwreck park, which was dedicated amid much fanfare on 10 June 1993 - the 100th anniversary of the battleship's launching.

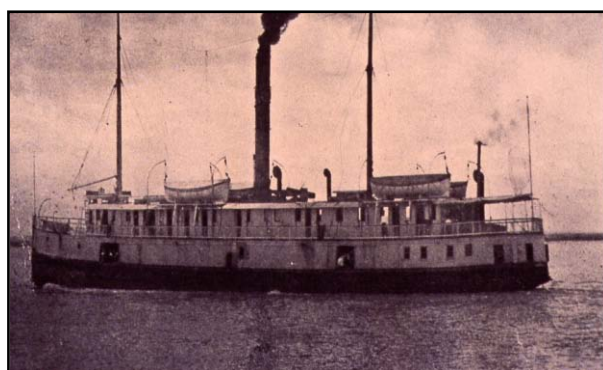
Early in 1993 the Florida Division of Historical Resources sent another mailing to more than 2,000 waterfront organizations throughout the state, soliciting nominations for



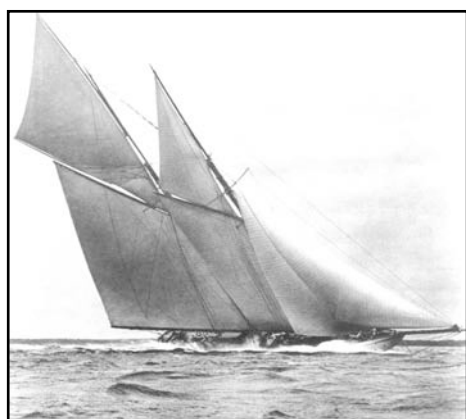
additional Preserve candidates. Responses to the mailing included a Broward County nomination from a local charter boat captain who urged consideration of **SS *Copenhagen***, a wrecked steamship in shallow water off Pompano Beach. The nomination was supported by the Marine Archaeological

Council (MAC) of Broward County, which has conducted work on several local shipwreck sites, including *Copenhagen*, as well as by local dive shops and county government. Working with MAC and the Broward County Office of Natural Resource Protection, state archaeologists assessed the proposed Preserve and helped to organize a local support group, which became known as the *Copenhagen* Clan (the ship had been owned by a Scottish firm). Composed of state and county officials, local divers, fishermen, and charter boat businesses, the Clan became an effective community force that actively pursued the establishment of the fifth state Underwater Archaeological Preserve, which was opened in June 1994. The *Copenhagen* Preserve has since become one of the most popular diving destinations in south Florida, and is visited regularly by tourists from this country and abroad.

In 1994 five shipwrecks off Panama City in Bay County were nominated as Preserve candidates. A survey of all the sites was conducted, including historical

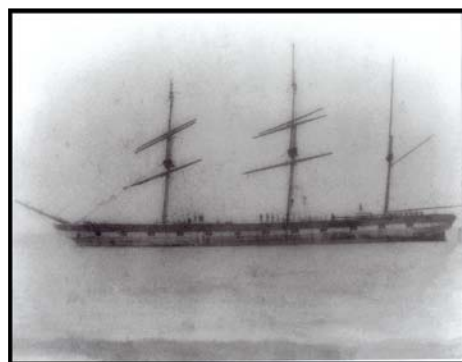


and archaeological research, and each was ranked based on its suitability to become a Preserve using criteria developed during previous projects. The shipwreck judged to be the best candidate was **SS *Tarpon***. This merchant steamer plied the Gulf of Mexico between Mobile, Alabama and Carabelle, Florida, but in 1937 sank fully loaded off Panama City in a gale with considerable loss of life. A community support organization, Friends of *Tarpon*, was organized and helped to make the Preserve a reality. *Tarpon* was dedicated as Florida's sixth Underwater Archaeological Preserve in 1997 and, at 100 feet deep, is the only Preserve requiring advanced-level diving skills.



In 1997 the Florida Division of Historical Resources received a nomination for a Preserve at the wreck of ***Half Moon*** from a local Miami diver and amateur historian. Research on Miami shipwrecks and maritime history identified the shipwreck as a prime Preserve candidate. Located in shallow water just off Key Biscayne, *Half Moon* was a popular snorkeling and diving site but its history was not known. Through cooperative research by state personnel, maritime historians in Germany and England, and descendants of the vessel's owner, *Half Moon*'s identity and history were verified. The vessel was a sleek racing yacht named *Germania*, built in Germany in 1908, but it ended its days off Miami as a permanently moored fishing barge before being wrecked in a storm in the 1930s. A community support organization, Friends of *Half Moon*, was formed to guide the establishment of the Preserve and a graduate student at the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine & Atmospheric Science chose the wreck as the subject of his master's project. *Half Moon* was officially designated a Preserve in 2000.

In 2002, the Florida Division of Historical Resources received a nomination for a Preserve from the Marine Archaeological Research & Conservation Reporting (M.A.R.C.) team, a group of avocational underwater archaeologists based in south Florida. Their research on east coast shipwrecks and maritime history identified the wreck of ***Lofthus*** as a prime Preserve candidate. *Lofthus*, originally



christened *Cashmere*, was an iron barque built in England in 1868. Sold to a Norwegian firm and renamed, the ship wrecked in 1898 while en route from Pensacola to Buenos Aires with a load of lumber. Unable to be refloated, the hulk was stripped and dynamited to gain access to the valuable cargo. Located in 20 feet of water off Boynton Beach, the site met the necessary criteria to become a Preserve and was recorded by members of M.A.R.C. and the Maritime Archaeological & Historical Society (MAHS). The eighth Preserve in Florida was dedicated in 2003 with the assistance of Friends of *Lofthus*.

The wreck of *Vamar* originally was nominated to become a Preserve in 1994 and was included in the survey that resulted in the *Tarpon* Preserve. Renominated by Captain Daniel



Beck of Mexico Beach, the shipwreck was revisited in 2002 by state personnel and the M.A.R.C. team. *Vamar* was found to meet all criteria for Preserve status, including public accessibility, archaeological integrity, historical significance, and abundant marine life. The wreckage was mapped and photographed and an accurate

site plan was produced. Historical research conducted by M.A.R.C. and personnel with the Florida Division of Historical Resources completed the vessel's documentation. The following document, a proposal for the establishment of *Vamar* as Florida's ninth Underwater Archaeological Preserve, is the result of these efforts.



HISTORY OF VAMAR

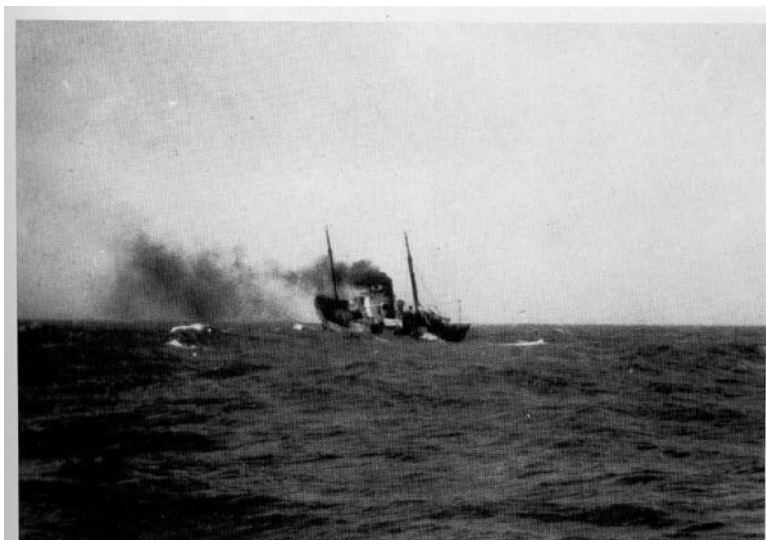
The vessel now sunk off Mexico Beach was built in 1919 by Smiths Dock Company of Middleboro, England. Originally christened *Kilmarnock*, the ship was built for the British Admiralty as part of the *Kil* class of patrol gun boats. The vessel's recorded dimensions were 170 feet in length, 30 feet in beam, a depth of hold of 16 feet, and 598 gross tons. The hull was of steel construction with triple expansion steam engines for propulsion. In the 1920s *Kilmarnock* was sold to a private firm and renamed *Chelsea*.

In July 1928, Admiral Richard E. Byrd, USN, purchased *Chelsea* as one of two support vessels that would carry his first expedition to Antarctica. Byrd planned to construct a polar base, called Little America, near the Ross Ice Shelf from which he hoped to make the first aerial fly-over of the South Pole. He purchased the small freighter for \$34,000 from the government's "rumrunner's row" of vessels confiscated for smuggling liquor. Byrd chose *Chelsea* because she was cheap and available; otherwise, he confessed, she had little to recommend her. The primary expedition ship, *City of New York*, had been built in Norway in 1882 as an Arctic sealer. As a three-masted sailing ship, her wooden hull was ideal to advance through the polar ice packs; however, her hold was too small for the crates containing the airplanes that were to fly over the South Pole. *Chelsea*'s hold, on the other hand, contained two large cargo areas with a combined volume of 800 tons.



Byrd renamed the steamer *Eleanor Bolling* after his mother, Eleanor Bolling Byrd. The vessel underwent some \$76,000 in repairs and upgrades at the Todd Shipyard in England. One of the most important upgrades was reinforcement of the bow area to withstand Antarctic ice; *Bolling* subsequently became the first metal-hulled vessel to be used

in Antarctic waters. *Bolling*'s engines were rated at 200 h.p., giving her a top speed of 9 knots. The ship proved to be sturdy but not especially stable; her crew, after encountering



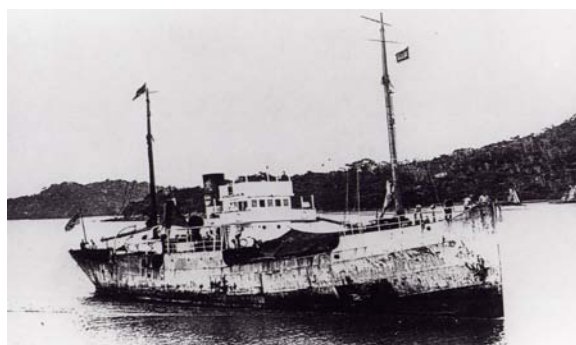
The *Eleanor Bolling*, the former minesweeper named after Byrd's mother, shows why the crew called her the "Evermore Rolling." (National Archives)

rough waves in the southern ocean, nicknamed her "Evermore Rolling."

After an Atlantic crossing in August 1928, *Bolling* departed New York en route to New Zealand, the staging area for operations in Antarctica, to join her consort vessel *City of New York*. After being stopped by the U.S. Coast

Guard off Cape May as a suspected rum runner, the vessel encountered hurricane-force winds off Virginia; for several days the ship was feared lost because her radio failed. In November, she reached New Zealand, loading cargo for the expedition including the disassembled airplanes. Taking *City of New York* in tow to save coal consumption, *Bolling* departed for Antarctica in December, reaching the edge of the ice pack in nine days, where she transferred nearly 100 tons of coal to her consort before returning to New Zealand for more supplies, including aviation fuel.

In January 1929, *Eleanor Bolling* rendezvoused with *City of New York* again near the Bay of Whales. While the two vessels were tied up beside each other alongside the barrier ice, a large piece of ice broke off and fell onto *Bolling*'s deck, causing her to roll over and almost capsize. Fortunately, she was saved by the lines holding her to *City of New York*, and righted herself when sufficient ice had slid from the deck. Several men were thrown into the icy water, but were rescued by their shipmates, including Admiral Byrd, who dived into the water himself.



Eleanor Bolling made three more voyages between Antarctica and New Zealand before the expedition was completed in 1930. On 19 June 1930, she and *City of New York* sailed into New York harbor amid enormous fanfare. Later that year, Byrd sold the vessel to an Arctic sealing company for \$15,000, considering her unseaworthy for a second Antarctic expedition.

In 1933, the ship was purchased by Vamar Shipping Company and renamed *Vamar*. By 1942, *Vamar* was owned by Bolivar-Atlantic Navigation Company under Panamanian



registry and used as a tramp freighter. Various Coast Guard reports indicate the steamer was falling into disrepair, with her equipment in poor condition and no radio operator onboard. On 19 March 1942 *Vamar* entered Port St. Joe with a crew of 18 (Yugoslavian, Cuban, and Spanish) to take on a load of lumber for Cuba. On 21 March *Vamar* left the dock and headed south through the channel toward the Gulf of Mexico. According to an incident report given by Harbor Pilot J. Melvin

Beck, who was aboard the ship when it sank, the steamer was overloaded and seemed to be top-heavy from too much cargo stowed on the deck. As Mr. Beck guided *Vamar* through the channel, she listed to port and began to go down by the stern. After managing to get the sinking freighter out of the channel, Mr. Beck and all the crew abandoned the ship and returned safely to Port St. Joe.

For several weeks, *Vamar*'s captain and crew remained in Port St. Joe and apparently aroused the townspeople's suspicion by their conduct. Two Coast Guard investigators, Edward Duthu and DeHaven Woodcock, were sent to Port St. Joe in May and submitted their confidential report to the Director of Naval Intelligence on 29 May 1942. The investigators questioned many people in the town who had knowledge of the sinking incident and the crew's subsequent activities. Some of those who were questioned suggested that the ship had

intentionally been sunk by saboteurs to block the channel and provided information about the dubious circumstances surrounding the sinking. For example, when *Vamar* went down she had already navigated two sharp turns in the channel and was on a straightaway in calm water. Additionally, Mr. Beck told *Vamar*'s captain she was overloaded and top-heavy but his advice to shift her cargo was ignored.

After the sinking, the crew lived in town at a boarding house and seemed to have plenty of money and access to cars, despite the war-stressed economy. They used these advantages to escort the town's young ladies, much to the chagrin of the town's young men. Rumors began to circulate about a mysterious, attractive blonde woman who met the captain every week in a local bar where they sat in a back corner and spoke in low tones in a foreign language. If a serviceman entered the bar, the blonde woman engaged him in conversation and occasionally left with him, leaving the captain to wait for her return when they would resume their conversation. Although the investigators could not substantiate this rumor, they were informed that one of *Vamar*'s crewmen was prevented from taking a photo of his girlfriend on a local bridge. The angle of the photo would have included the bridge and bay, the Port St. Joe Paper Company Mill, and the port docks.

Duthu and Woodcock spoke to a night watchman for the docks who reported that he heard strange hammering noises coming from inside *Vamar* the night before she left and that whenever he walked near, the noises stopped. He also saw a woman go aboard that evening, against city ordinances. The investigators visited the sunken ship where they saw the superstructure protruding from the water and noticed that one of the stacks was almost completely rusted through. One of the divers, who surfaced while they were examining the ship, told them that the hull was so rusty that touching it caused such a cloud of rust particles in the water that visibility was reduced to nothing. The diver stated that the excessive rust made it impossible to tell if there were any holes in the ship caused by sabotage.

Although the investigators noted the concerns of the local people and followed leads on the questionable behavior of the crew and rumors of holes in *Vamar*'s hull, they could not find enough evidence to substantiate the suspicions. The exact reason why *Vamar* sank has never been determined, although overloading and shifting cargo generally are blamed. Nevertheless, the specter of foreign war-time sabotage still looms over the shipwreck.

CURRENT CONDITION OF VAMAR (8BY887)

Location

The wreck of *Vamar* is situated approximately 3.7 miles off the shore of Mexico Beach just north of the channel leading into St. Joseph Bay at DGPS coordinates 29° 53.941' N and 85° 27.806' W. The site is in 25 feet of water and wreckage rises several feet off the sea floor. *Vamar* is listed as site number 8BY887 in the Florida Master Site File at the Division of Historical Resources in Tallahassee. As with all other historical and archaeological sites on state-owned or controlled uplands or submerged bottomlands, title to its remains is vested with the State of Florida's Division of Historical Resources, under Chapter 267 of the Florida Statutes. This law forbids unauthorized disturbance, excavation, or removal of artifacts, in order to protect the site for the people of Florida.

Physical Description of Site

The 170-foot long iron freighter grounded on a flat sandy bottom lying on her port side with her bow pointing south. After sinking, the cargo of lumber was salvaged and a team of divers was employed to attempt to refloat the ship. *Vamar* ultimately was declared a total wreck and, some years later, the Army Corps of Engineers had the wreckage dynamited as a hazard to navigation. This action produced the scattered and disarticulated features seen today.



Features of the freighter still are recognizable, however, including deck beams, rivets, and hull plates. The anchor capstan and chain are visible among the wreckage, as is the anchor hawse pipe through which the chain was led. Amidships, two bilge stringers run fore and aft and would have internally strengthened the hull. A major feature is the ship's large steam engine with exposed connecting rods. Along the starboard side of the ship, the hull plates have collapsed, exposing a bilge keel which would have been below the waterline to help keep the vessel from rolling in beam seas. Also among the wreckage amidships are collapsed davits and mast supports, as well as a large engine and the ship's generator. To the north, the stern is twisted dramatically to port; the rudder quadrant and rudder shaft are exposed and the rudder is lying partially buried in the sand. Bollards, used to fasten dock lines, and a cargo boom are visible along the stern port quarter.

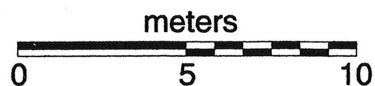
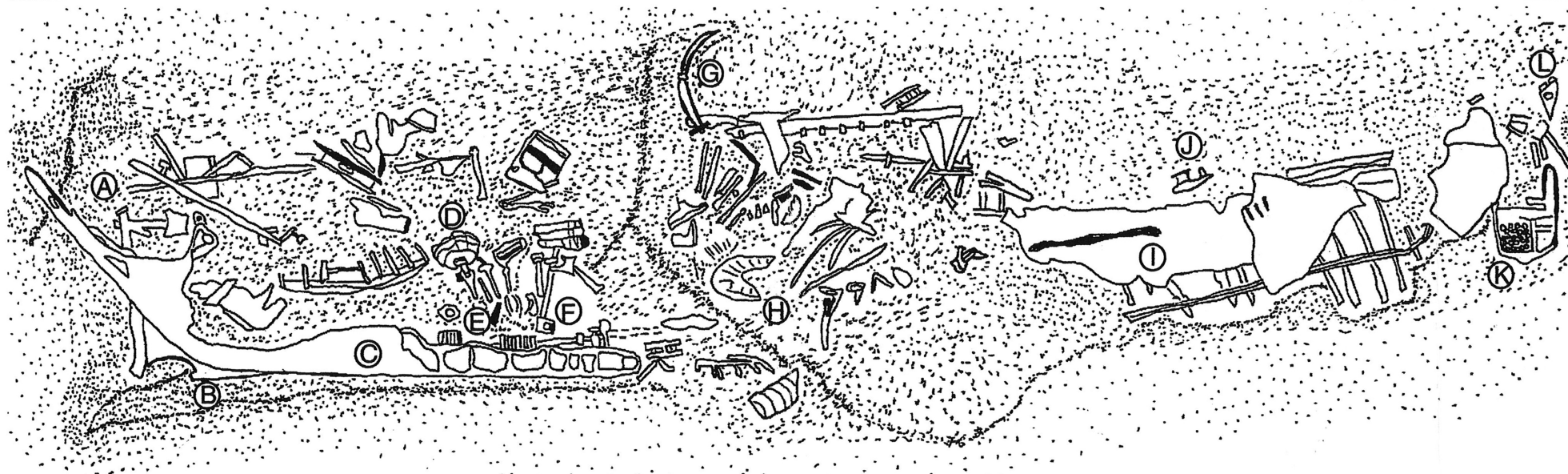




VAMAR, formerly *ELEANOR BOLLING*

Stern

Bow



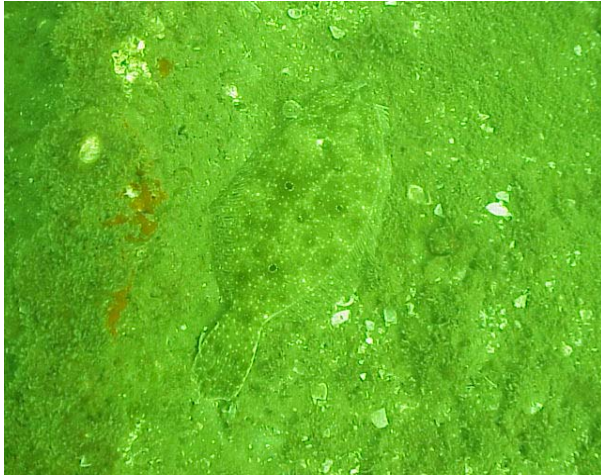
Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
Marine Archaeological Research and Conservation Reporting
June 2003

Key

A rudder post	G life boat davit
B propeller shaft	H boiler
C shaft alley	I bilge keel
D generator	J bitts
E thrust bearing	K chain/rope locker
F cam shaft	L fairlead/chock

Biological Description of Site

The wreckage provides an ideal haven for a diverse array of marine life. Soft corals and mollusks thrive on the iron hull while cavities beneath the deck provide a haven for juvenile game fish such as snapper and grouper. Large pelagic species, including Spanish



mackerel, amberjack, and ling, sometimes visit the wreck. Southern stingrays hide in the sandy flats between hull sections and flounder are camouflaged on segments of hull plating. Toadfish may be seen glaring out from their burrows under deck beams. Despite frequent visitation to the wreck by fishermen and divers, there is little litter or debris.

Today, the sunken *Vamar* teems with marine life; features of the once-sturdy steamer are recognizable on the white sand bottom, providing a magical adventure for the underwater visitor. Yet, many who come across the broken wreckage have little knowledge of the ship's important history and the circumstances that conspired to leave her a permanent resident of the waters off Mexico Beach.



BENEFITS OF ESTABLISHING AN UNDERWATER PRESERVE

The development of Northwest Florida has always been accompanied by the growth of water sports and aquatic recreation. The proliferation of the dive charter and instruction industry along this part of the state's coastline has been in response to the demands of local residents and seasonal visitors. Florida has become a mecca for divers from around the world, and the sport's popularity is growing each year. According to an annual report by the Behavioral Science Research Corporation/Tourist Development Council, in 2000-20001 Palm Beach County alone had over 170,000 visitors who participated in water activities such as diving, boating, and fishing. Divers are looking for new and unique locations for underwater visits, with a growing awareness of the need to protect the marine environment.

In a 1985 concept paper entitled "Development of a National Underwater Parks Plan" for the President's Commission on the American Outdoors, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) established the need for more underwater parks, since "increasingly, scuba divers are finding it difficult to locate adequate places to participate in their chosen activity." PADI's primary argument for the establishment of underwater parks was based on its observation that "all well-planned underwater parks currently in existence are heavily used by divers," and that "more underwater parks specifically designed for divers are needed." One of the paper's main points was that "it is not enough to merely establish aquatic ecological preserves or sanctuaries without the thought of how the area should be developed for use by recreational divers."

The PADI paper also listed advantages of its proposed plan for more parks:

1. Increased protection of precious, unique, and popular aquatic environments.
2. Increased access by scuba divers to coastal and inland aquatic environments.
3. Increased opportunity for local aquatic-oriented businesses near newly developed underwater parks.
4. Increased opportunity for local support businesses (hotels, restaurants, etc.).
5. Increased income by state recreational departments and/or federal agencies from usage fees, concessions, etc.

6. Creation of new jobs, i.e., biologists, rangers, fish and game officials, support services personnel, lifeguards, etc.

The establishment of a new Preserve will represent an added attraction for visitors to Bay and Gulf Counties. An underwater destination such as *Vamar* fits neatly into three categories of tourism:

Recreational Tourism – as a watersports destination.

Heritage Tourism – as an historical shipwreck reflecting local maritime heritage.

Eco-Tourism – as an interpreted marine habitat.

It is clear that creation of a shipwreck park at the site of *Vamar* will benefit all interested parties, and can provide important returns, both financial and historical, for the community as a whole. The key to the successful establishment of a new Preserve will rest in the hands of those who are willing to promote the idea within the community and to participate in the protection and maintenance of the park, once it is established.

As an area set aside for enjoyment by the public and protection by the state, an Underwater Archaeological Preserve is an experiment in cultural resource management. These Preserves are of past and future historical value and can provide a means of education through recreation for generations to come. Furthermore, they offer the public a chance to participate in local historic preservation. Shipwreck Preserves have worked quite well in other regions of Florida and have given local communities a sense of stewardship and pride in their submerged historic sites. By establishing a Preserve off Mexico Beach, residents and



visitors will have the opportunity to be better informed and to become more aware of the long-term value of preserving a historic shipwreck in its natural setting. This local involvement strengthens a community's ties with the past, while enhancing recreation and tourism in the present.

SUGGESTED CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VAMAR PRESERVE

1. After compiling a collection of historical material on *Vamar*, and completing a preliminary assessment and site plans of the ship remains, additional research in both areas could be undertaken to more fully understand the site. This could also include conducting a more detailed biological assessment of the marine life that inhabits or frequents the wreck. Active participation of the local historical and waterfront communities is recommended to accomplish these tasks.
2. A **Friends of *Vamar*** organization should be created and sustained to include civic and business leaders, members of the waterfront community, officials from the city, county, and state, and interested private citizens. The Friends will act as an official non-profit body to oversee planning, implementation, and future maintenance of the Preserve. The Friends will supervise the formation of committees to accomplish various tasks in the Preserve's establishment.
3. As with the other Florida Preserves, a bronze plaque should be placed on the site to designate the shipwreck as an Underwater Archaeological Preserve and Florida Heritage Site.
4. The Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources will prepare, print, and distribute a brochure similar to those designed for existing Underwater Preserves. The brochure will briefly review the history of *Vamar*, give directions to the site, and orient visitors to the historical and natural features of the shipwreck.
5. Using the current site plan, an underwater laminated field guide can be devised to orient visitors around the site, to point out prominent features of the wreck, and to interpret marine life commonly found in the area. This underwater guide can be made available at a nominal fee to the public through local waterfront businesses, and a portion of the proceeds can be set aside by the Friends for a small site maintenance fund.

6. The shipwreck *Vamar* should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.
7. A shore-based exhibit about *Vamar* should be developed to acquaint those who do not visit the site with its history and present situation. The exhibit should be housed in a publicly accessible and frequently visited place and should include photographs, artifacts (if available), plans, and drawings.

Letters of support for the *Vamar* Preserve should be sent to:

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Deputy Secretary of State for Cultural /Historical Programs
Florida Department of State
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Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0250
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Painting by William Trotter.

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For additional information about Florida's Underwater Archaeological Preserves, or to obtain copies of this proposal, please contact:

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