

# PROLOGUE

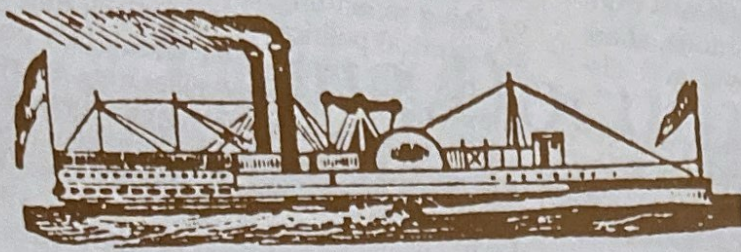
*Quarterly of the  
National Archives*

SPRING 1992

VOL. 24 NO. 1



# FOR SMITHVILLE.



## The Stmr. Waccamaw

WILL leave Market Dock SATURDAY (to-morrow) AFTERNOON at 2 o'clock for Smithville, returning Monday.

For freight or passage, apply to

T. D. MEARES, JR., Agent,  
At office of James & Meares.

June 23-1t

6-23-1871 5

*During an exercise in underwater archaeology, ten middle school students explored a shipwreck near Wilmington and identified it as the steamer Waccamaw. The students discovered the ship was christened the Nuestra Señora de Regla in 1861 for use as a ferry-boat in Havana, Cuba, and that she served the Union in the Civil War as the Commodore Hull. The Wilmington Star ran these advertisements in the 1870s for the Waccamaw's Cape Fear River cruises.*

### NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

Grand Family Excursion  
-to-  
Smithville and Black Fish Grounds,  
Under the auspices of the

APOLLO BAND  
on the

Str. WACCAMAW,  
Friday, July 2nd, 1875.

EVERY ARRANGEMENT WILL BE MADE for the comfort and convenience of the Excursionists. A String Band will be on board, and those who do not wish to visit the Black Fish Grounds can remain at Smithville, where a Hall will be engaged for Dancing until the Steamer returns. The Boat will leave Market Wharf at 8 o'clock sharp.

Tickets for sale at the several Book Stores.  
Tickets for Gentlemen \$1 00. Ladies 50 cents.

S. J. WEST,  
J. E. WILSON,  
H. J. BAUMAN, } Committee.

6-29-1875,  
June 29-3t

---

# The Mystery of the *Nuestra Señora de Regla* Underwater Archaeology in North Carolina

---

By Richard Triebe and Mark Wilde-Ramsing

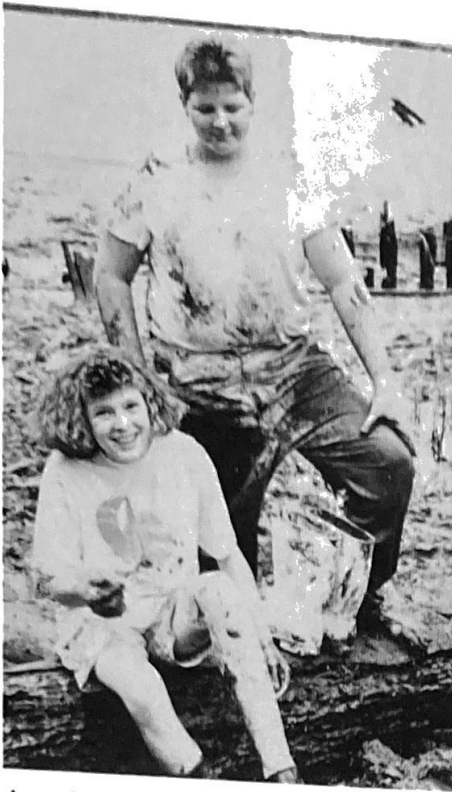
Only when eighth grader Melanie Brice stood knee-deep in slippery black muck did she understand what the world of underwater archaeology was all about. She was one of a group of ten middle school students working with her teacher, Charles Baker from the Pender County Academic Enrichment Program, and underwater archaeologists from Fort Fisher, North Carolina. Their assignment: to identify the wreck before them, whose wooden ribs protruded from a mud flat in the Cape Fear River.

Although the wreck had been discovered in the early 1970s, its specific identity was a mystery, despite attempts by North Carolina underwater archaeologists to link it to historical research. Was it an old blockade-runner used during the Civil War to bring Confederate supplies to the vital port of Wilmington? Or was it, perhaps, the remains of the magnificent *Sylvan Grove*, a New York-built excursion steamer that reportedly burned to the waterline in January 1891 in the vicinity of the mystery wreck.

On this sunny fall day the students, organized into teams, set out to accomplish the first objective of underwater archaeology: to determine the nature and type of the site by collecting detailed measurements and samples of what remained. They thought they were well prepared after having spent an entire day several weeks before looking at slides and artifacts and discussing underwater archaeology. But it was only after they pushed back the marsh reeds, smelled the river's strong odor, heard the lapping of the water, and slopped around the remains of a once-proud steamer that they understood what they had been told: archaeology is much more than talk and text books.

Three energetic boys proceeded to get down and dirty. Their mission was to dig around the wreck's ends to determine bow and stern and later to excavate within the hull in an attempt to recover artifacts. A group of four students recorded overall wreck measurements. While periodically probing the mud, they found that the main deck was completely intact about a foot below the surface. In the one place where they penetrated the deck, perhaps through a hatchway, they could feel the bottom of the wreck fully six feet below. Under the mud where they now stood lay a well-preserved steamship from many years ago — an archaeological treasure!

## PROLOGUE



*A muddy day of work on the wreck taught Melanie Brice and Danny Rivenbark what underwater archaeology is all about.*

Three others concentrated on mapping specific features of the wreck, primarily the bottom of the boiler, the engine bed, and the remnants of the paddlewheels. At first they tried their best to avoid getting muddy, but it was a situation in which one simply could not keep clean, and as each student resigned himself or herself to that fact, many became outright playful, wanting the clean ones to share in the fun. Big, muddy handprints on the shoulders of one student's clean white T-shirt typified those mischievous feelings.

Armed with posthole diggers and a screened sifter box, the digging team attempted to enter the interior of the hull where the probes had earlier penetrated the deck. They hoped to retrieve telltale artifacts that might help date the wreck. As they went deeper, groundwater rushed into the hole, collapsing side walls and making efforts to reach the hull bottom six feet below impossible. However, they were successful during their exploration of the bow in recovering sev-

eral metal spikes that had fallen from the wreck. When analyzed later, these samples helped establish a date of construction for the wreck.

After several hours, the tide began to bring water back over the site, preventing further examination. By that time, though, all delegated tasks had been accomplished, at least as far as the environment would allow. When the students left the wreck, they carried with them vital archaeological data including precise measurements on the hull and its components, identification of the machinery and boiler type, and evidence that the vessel had burned.

The instructors considered it a successful day: (1) the students adjusted well to the messy, alien environment in which underwater archaeologists often work; (2) they took the archaeological exercise seriously, recording precise information that would be vital for success when they searched for the wreck's identity in the historical records; and (3) they even found a touch of humor in their activities, a lesson they should learn to use in all adversities in life.

Previous documentary investigations, based primarily on a book published in 1956 by Louis Phillip Hall called *Land of*

*the Golden River*, had tentatively identified the wreck as the *Sylvan Grove*. In the book, Hall stated that the *Sylvan Grove* burned during the winter of 1890 while tied at a dock on the west side of the river, across from Nun Street. He further wrote, "For many years the hulk of this grand old steamer, which had burned to the waterline, was still visible from the docks of Wilmington, N.C."

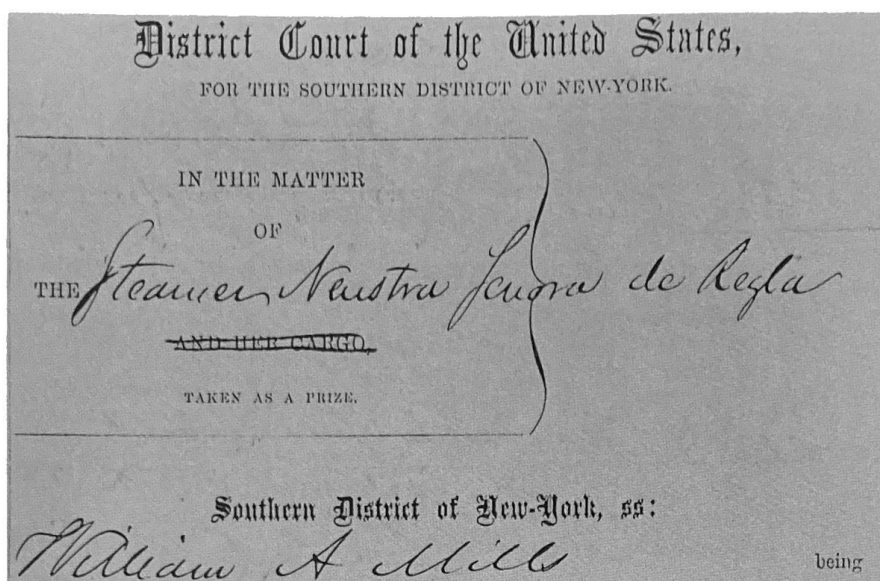
The *Grove* was one of a fleet of passenger steamers that operated in New York harbor from the 1860s until the late 1880s. First leased and later bought by the Southport Steamboat Company, the steamer was brought south to run excursions from Wilmington to the resort hotel at Carolina Beach during three summer seasons. It was a total loss when it burned and sank and was soon replaced by the excursion steamer *Wilmington*, which operated well into this century and is fondly remembered by the older residents of the Cape Fear region.

As the students sat in the New Hanover County Library conference room for a briefing in preparation for the day ahead, it was obvious that they wished to be out on the river again, digging and exploring. The prospects of searching books, listening to museum curators or



*Tyree Sykes (left) and Archaeological Technician Julep Gillman-Bryan watch Malinda Carter record measurements onto a site map.*

## PROLOGUE



From prize court records relating to the *Regla*, researchers from the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Unit were able to sketch the steamer's turbulent history.

librarians, and interviewing "old timers" were less appealing than sifting through the mud of history.

The students viewed slides of the previous fall's expedition and discussed fact sheets. These sheets contained both a record of the measurements and information collected at the wreck site and a list of previously collected documentary sources, mostly about the *Sylvan Grove*. This vessel was basically the only candidate. While it had the general characteristics found on the wreck, however, its specific measurements and features, especially the engine type, left considerable room for question. The students formed into teams to tackle a variety of research topics in the North Carolina Room, a section of the library, which contains a wealth of local history.

One group studied maps hanging on the walls, lying in drawers, and on microfilm to determine the exact locations of places mentioned in newspaper articles that had reported the *Grove's* burning and sinking. Names like Kidder's Mill and Northrop's Mill, Carolina Oil and Creosote Works, and McClammy's Wharf represented lumber-related businesses long since faded away as the area's forests were depleted early in this century.

Another team searched two dozen entries in the 1889 *Wilmington Star* newspapers for references to the *Sylvan Grove*. They were hoping to find a description or perhaps a sketch revealing significant alterations to its hull and engines to help match it with the wreck remains.

Nearby, two students interviewed Dr. Robert Fales, an octogenarian whose father had run a busy fish market in downtown Wilmington. As they questioned him about the wreck and the *Grove*, it became evident that the memory of neither survived sufficiently for the doctor to recall. Apparently stories of the steamer's exploits in Wilmington must not have been remarkable enough to have been passed along to his generation.

In an attempt to extract candidates other than the *Grove*, another team searched the Wilmington port records for steamboats operating during the nineteenth century that matched the mystery wreck's 130-foot measured length. Later, when representatives from each team summarized their findings, they reported locating three vessels operating in the Wilmington area during the nineteenth century that had the same general characteristics as the wreck. They were the *Evergreen*, the *General Howard* and the

steamer *Waccamaw* (formerly the *Nuestra Señora de Regla*).

Another group related that while Dr. Fales could not recall the wreck or the *Grove*, he did remember the area as a ship's graveyard. Those studying maps reported that the most likely site for the wreck of the *Grove* was not where the mystery wreck was, but about a half mile downstream.

The newspaper team found no mention of major renovations to the *Grove's* physical structure or machinery but did find an advertisement for the steamer with a sketch showing its boiler and smokestack aft of the engine. They could not be certain if this was actually the *Grove* or merely a generic sketch used for advertising purposes, but if it was the former, here for the first time was evidence that the *Grove's* machinery was laid out as it was on the wreck.

After lunch, the group headed to the New Hanover County Museum. There the curator hustled the students down into the basement of this former armory building. These tight quarters, where reserves once took firing practice, is home to the museum's many artifacts, photographs, and documents. Here the students could search what the museum had in its collection on the *Grove* and the other candidates, the *General Howard*, the *Evergreen*, and the *Waccamaw*.

There were no photographs of the *Grove*, but the museum did have some rather interesting artifacts related to the ship. Encased in plastic sleeves for protection were two season tickets for the year 1888 and a lithograph advertising the ship's excursion run to Carolina Beach.

Unfortunately, the museum collection contained no information at all relating to the other steamers, so the students explored another avenue: photographs cataloged under related subject headings. Before they could reach down and inspect the goods, several students were outfitted in dainty white gloves, which brought snickers from their classmates. However, it was an important precaution to avoid getting fingerprints and body

## PROLOGUE

oils on the original prints. Their only successful find was an aerial photograph taken in 1924 that showed the shoreline of the river and the barely visible wreck. Upon close inspection under a magnifying glass, its boiler and port paddlewheel could be seen.

From the confines of the museum the students proceeded to a totally different setting. William Reaves is a local historian who has spent a lifetime collecting information on Wilmington and the surrounding area. Most of his old books and newspapers had been placed in a wooden shed. Now arrangements were made to move the collection, with the help of the students, to better storage conditions at the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Unit's (UAU) facility at Fort Fisher. In return for their efforts, Mr. Reaves had promised to share information that he had collected on the *Grove* and perhaps the other three steamers.

The shed door fell apart as it was pried open. Inside was a museum curator's nightmare: a multitude of books and boxes of documents stacked to the ceiling in great disarray. Rats, roaches, silverfish, and who knows what else, had, much to the disgust of the students, held a run of the place for quite some time and had left their droppings to prove it. They had gnawed away at the binder's glue in many of the books, but what was worse, the creatures had been very untidy researchers by eating some of the papers and making nests in others.

There was nothing for the students to do but to dive right into the work at hand, as they had last fall at the muddy wreck site. As boxes of files and books were gingerly handed out, the students formed a line, bucket-brigade-style, and kept constantly alert for any creepy crawlers that might be contained within.

Slowly students on the front line made their way into the room. It was not until the van and a utility trailer were nearly full that they found the box holding file folders with steamboat headings.

There was information on each candidate except the *Evergreen*. Several of the students began eagerly searching



*In exchange for information on the Wilmington area's steamers, Charles Baker and his students moved William Reaves's old books and documents to a storage facility.*

through these files, especially the one for the *Grove*, which was particularly full. It was startling to realize that they were perusing the original clippings taken from newspapers over one hundred years old. Later that week, when they had time to fully investigate the folders, they found this clipping in the *Waccamaw* file:

The Last of the Waccamaw  
The old side-wheel steamer *Waccamaw*, that has been lying for a long time on the west side of the river, opposite Capt. Skinner's ship-yard, was burned to the water's edge yesterday forenoon. The fire broke out about 11 o'clock, and is thought to have been caused by some boys who were seen leaving that side of the river in a small boat just before the fire broke out. (*Wilmington Star*, 9-7-1886)

Two months later the students were at Fort Fisher to comb through historical documents concerning the *Waccamaw*. Without a name for the wreck, little could be discovered of its history, but now a vast amount of information was surfacing. New documentation further supported identification of the wreck, for the *Waccamaw's* registered measurements and engine type fit very neatly with findings recorded at the wreck site. By the end of the day, the students had revealed an exciting history for the vessel.

Originally named the *Nuestra Señora de Reola*, it was built in New York City as a ferryboat to operate in Havana, Cuba, in 1861. On its maiden voyage it was captured reportedly as a blockade-runner, sold, and converted into a Union gunboat

## PROLOGUE

and renamed the *Commodore Hull*. From 1862 to 1865 it played an active part in the Albemarle campaign in the sounds of North Carolina. After the war, the steamer was decommissioned and sold to private interests in Wilmington, where it was renamed the *Waccamaw* and continued as a passenger and freight carrier and later as a wrecking vessel on the Cape Fear River until it burned and sank in 1886.

Though the students had uncovered a detailed history of the vessel as the *Commodore Hull* and the *Waccamaw*, using the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies* and Wilmington newspapers, the task of unraveling its service as the *Regla* from stacks of primary research materials was beyond their capabilities. The fact that copies of these documents were even in the possession of the North Carolina UAU was due to a stroke of luck. Because of the many blockade-runners sunk off the coast and the interest they command, a graduate student had brought to the at-

tention of the unit's archaeologists a back issue of *Prologue* (vol. 21, no. 3), which told of prize court records dealing with captured blockade-runners that were held at various regional facilities of the National Archives.

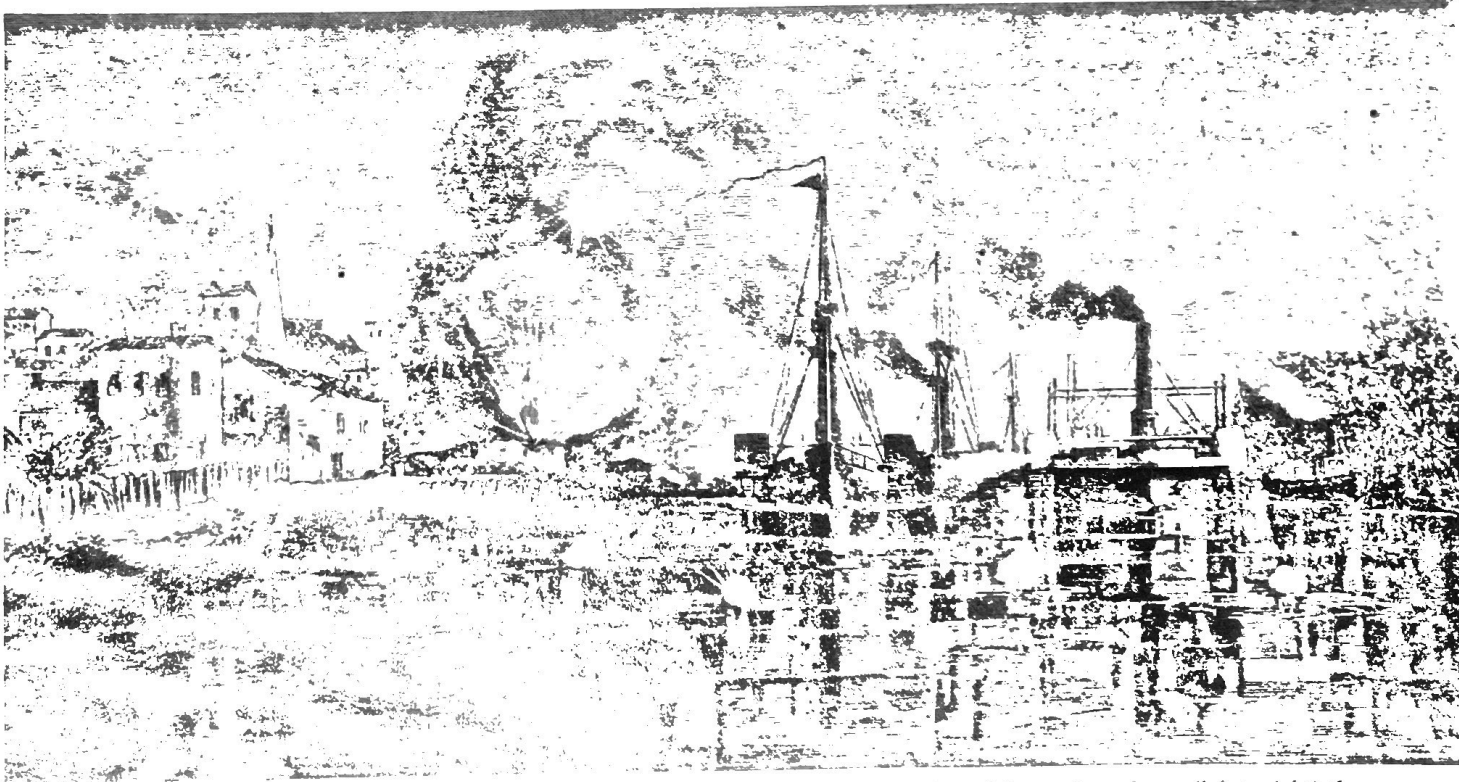
On the chance that there were proceedings for the *Regla*, inquiries eventually led to Dr. Robert Morris, director of the National Archives–Northeast Region, who reported a documentary gold mine.<sup>1</sup> The overwhelming task of sorting through over eight hundred pages copied from the original letters and legal documents from the prize court collection was undertaken by Richard Triebe, a volunteer for the North Carolina UAU.

It was obvious to Triebe that the documents had not been sorted, perhaps not even read, during the last one hundred years. Many of the papers were out of sequence, and some, through the ravages of time or poor penmanship of the writer, were practically illegible. A few of the pages were missing, and approximately

sixty documents and business and personal letters were written in Spanish.

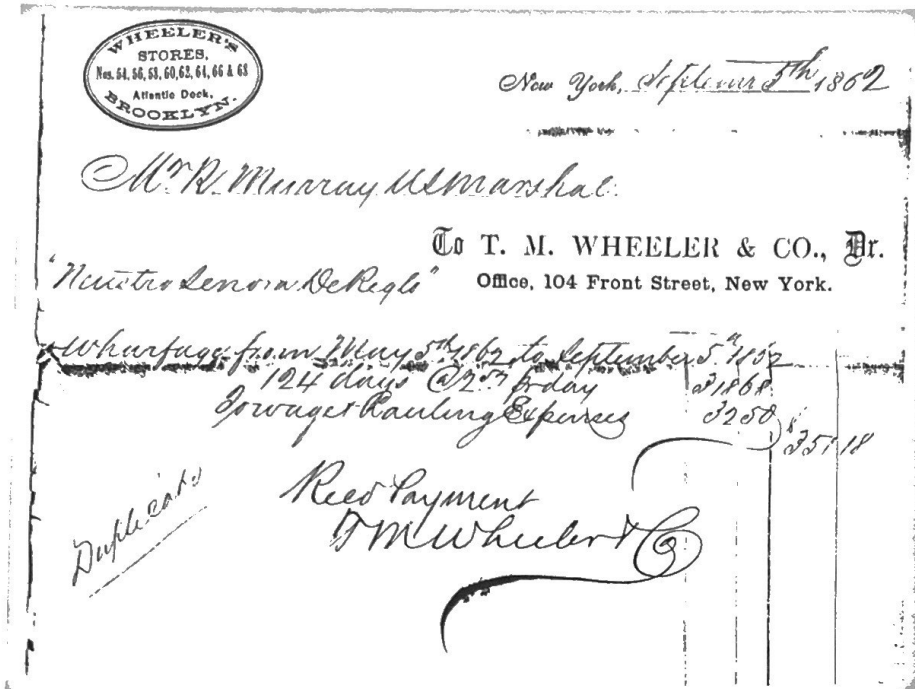
A telephone call to the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNC-W), inquiring as to the meaning of the ship's name, *Nuestra Señora de Regla*,<sup>2</sup> eventually led to a concerted effort to decipher the contents of the Spanish documents as well as two in French. Three professors of Spanish and two senior students<sup>3</sup> wrestled for a semester and a summer with hard-to-read copies of handwritten papers from a century ago. Each person was responsible for transcribing a fifth of the total documents and letters, which had been randomly divided. The team then met regularly to decipher particularly difficult penmanship or misspellings. Eventually they produced transcriptions in Spanish of all the papers, summaries in English, and a classification of the materials both by authors of the documents and chronologically.

Triebe's task of making sense of the



A U.S. Navy flotilla captured Plymouth, North Carolina, on October 31, 1864. This engraving of the capture shows (left to right) the USS Scharrock, the USS Onsego, the USS Commodore Hull, and the USS Bazely.

## PROLOGUE



*The Regla was docked at the T. M. Wheeler & Co. wharf from May 5 to September 5, 1862, while her ownership was being decided in the New York City prize court.*

many documents written in English was not much easier, but the more he and the UNC-W team read, the more exciting and real this ship became. They soon discovered that the ship that lay quietly in the mud of the Cape Fear River had a fascinating but turbulent history.

During the spring and summer of 1861, the *Nuestra Señora de Regla* took shape under the watchful eye of Capt. Ignacio Reynals. Captain Reynals was hired by the Bay of Havana & Regla Co. of Cuba to be her master and to supervise the construction of their new steam ferry. Every morning he would go to Mr. John Englis's shipyard in New York City with a copy of the plans and specifications. According to these plans, the vessel was to be a 139-foot sidewheel steamer with a beam of 28 feet, a draft of 10 feet 9 inches, and a burden of 300 tons. She was to be largely built of seasoned white oak, have two pilot houses on the promenade deck, two rudders, and a square-rigged foremast and top mast. Her two paddlewheels were approximately twenty-eight feet in diameter and powered by an inclined engine with a thirty-six-inch cylin-

der and a nine-inch stroke. Captain Reynals made certain that the steamer was built solidly throughout. She had two iron bands in the bow, with one of them sheathed in copper and going around the entire ship. But Captain Reynals was not satisfied with just having the ship built properly; he was determined to make her a first-rate steamer down to the lavish seat cushions in the cabins and the colorful stained glass windows. To his delight, she was not only completed in early October, but she measured up to all his expectations.

The month of October found Captain Reynals very busy. He not only supervised the finishing touches on his steamer but also raised a crew. They were an incongruous lot, half American and half Spanish—twenty-two in all. Because of the Civil War, the Americans, all from the New York area, were not happy about the prospects of heading south, even if the destination was Cuba. In general, steamships were new, and many old sailors considered them a passing fad. If the *Regla* developed a problem on her maiden voyage, it was very likely she

would be forced into a Southern port for repairs. This idea did not sit well with the Northerners on board. The Cubans did not mind; for years they traded rum, sugar, and cigars with the South for cotton and naval stores. It is human nature to be suspicious of foreigners, particularly ones who do not speak English, and so the American crewmen kept to themselves. Since Captain Reynals was a Cuban subject, he was not entirely trusted either.

As the day of his departure from New York harbor neared, Captain Reynals grew restless. The American Civil War had broken out in April of that year, and President Lincoln had announced a total Union blockade of Southern ports. How would this affect his voyage to Havana? Although he had no plans to enter a Southern port at this time, who could say what the future might bring? Even though the *Regla* was superbly built, her design was not meant for oceanic voyages. She was to be used as a steam ferry in harbors and bays during fair weather. Because of her limitations, Captain Reynals decided to hug the coast all the way to Florida before sailing to Cuba. If the weather threatened, he could run in toward shore and find a safe anchorage in some harbor. But if he was forced to do this, would he be able to sail into a Southern port for protection? Since the *Regla* was a Spanish ship, and therefore considered neutral, Captain Reynals felt he could not legally be denied any port under stress of weather. But did the Union blockaders feel the same? The captain could only hope they did.

On the morning of October 12, 1861, the *Regla* steamed out of New York harbor boldly displaying the Spanish flag as a sign of her neutrality. That afternoon the ferry encountered a gale off Barnegat, New Jersey. The tremendous seas lifted her decks and broke her guards, and she put back to New York for repairs.

Having been repaired, the steamer cleared New York for a second time on October 27. The ship coasted along under fair weather until the twenty-ninth, when she was boarded by an officer from the



## PROLOGUE

gunboat USS *Underwriter* south of Hatteras Inlet. Her papers were examined and found to be in order, and so she was allowed to proceed.

During the afternoon the weather became threatening and blew the *Regla* ashore that night at Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina. In an attempt to free the boat, the crew threw coal and fresh water overboard until they floated clear and dropped anchor in deep water. In the morning, Captain Reynals was informed that the crank and eccentric arm of the engine were broken, and he ordered the flag flown at half-mast, signaling their need of assistance.

Soon a small boat appeared from shore and sailed to the stricken vessel. On board were three men, two of them pilots, one of whom was hired to take them to Charleston, South Carolina, where the needed repairs could be made.

Shortly after the *Regla* resumed her voyage on October 31, she encountered a heavy gale from the southeast. The captain and crew were so afraid that they elected to steer for shore and ground the vessel to save their lives. Luckily, the closer they got to shore the easier it became to ride out the storm, and they dropped anchor near the beach.

On the morning of November 1 the wind calmed enough to send a boat ashore, and they discovered they were fourteen miles north of Georgetown, South Carolina. The engineer told the captain that the condition of the machinery necessitated putting into port for repairs. Charleston was now out of the question because of the distance, so the ferry limped toward Georgetown.

The *Regla* anchored outside of Georgetown Bar and sent a boat ashore for a pilot to guide them into the harbor. As soon as the five crewmen stepped ashore, they were taken prisoner by Confederate soldiers. The Spanish vessel remained at anchor all day waiting for the crew to return, which they never did.

The following morning, November 2, the Confederate gunboat *Nina* steamed out of the mouth and came alongside. When the Confederate captain de-

manded the Northerners on board, Captain Reynals refused to turn them over. Consequently, he and the remaining crewmen were taken prisoners, and the *Regla* was towed inside the bar and anchored under the guns of a Confederate battery.

On November 4 Captain Reynals was taken to Charleston as a prisoner and presented to General Ripley. Don Francisco Muñoz de Moncada, the Spanish consul in Charleston, learned of this and arranged to free the captain. After returning to Georgetown to pick up the broken machinery pieces, Captain Reynals went back to Charleston to have them repaired.

Two weeks later, on November 20, the captain, accompanied by the Spanish consul, traveled to Georgetown aboard

the steamer *Dixie*. The consul brought with him his clerk, Emilio Puig, and several bundles of letters and dispatches that the captain had agreed to deliver to Cuba. The consul read to the crew a formal protest made by Captain Reynals concerning their capture and detainment by the Confederates. The crew agreed that it was factual and signed a paper saying so. Because the letters were extremely important, the consul instructed his clerk to assume a missing crewmen's identity and see that the dispatches were delivered to the intended parties in Havana.

The *Regla* attempted to leave Georgetown on November 23, but the pilot refused to take them out of the harbor because a blockading vessel had been sighted on the horizon. They finally left on the twenty-fourth and were boarded

L. I  
W. H. Seward  
Department of State,  
Washington, 6th May, 1862.

To  
E. Delafield Smith, Esquire,  
Attorney of the United States  
for the Southern District of New York,

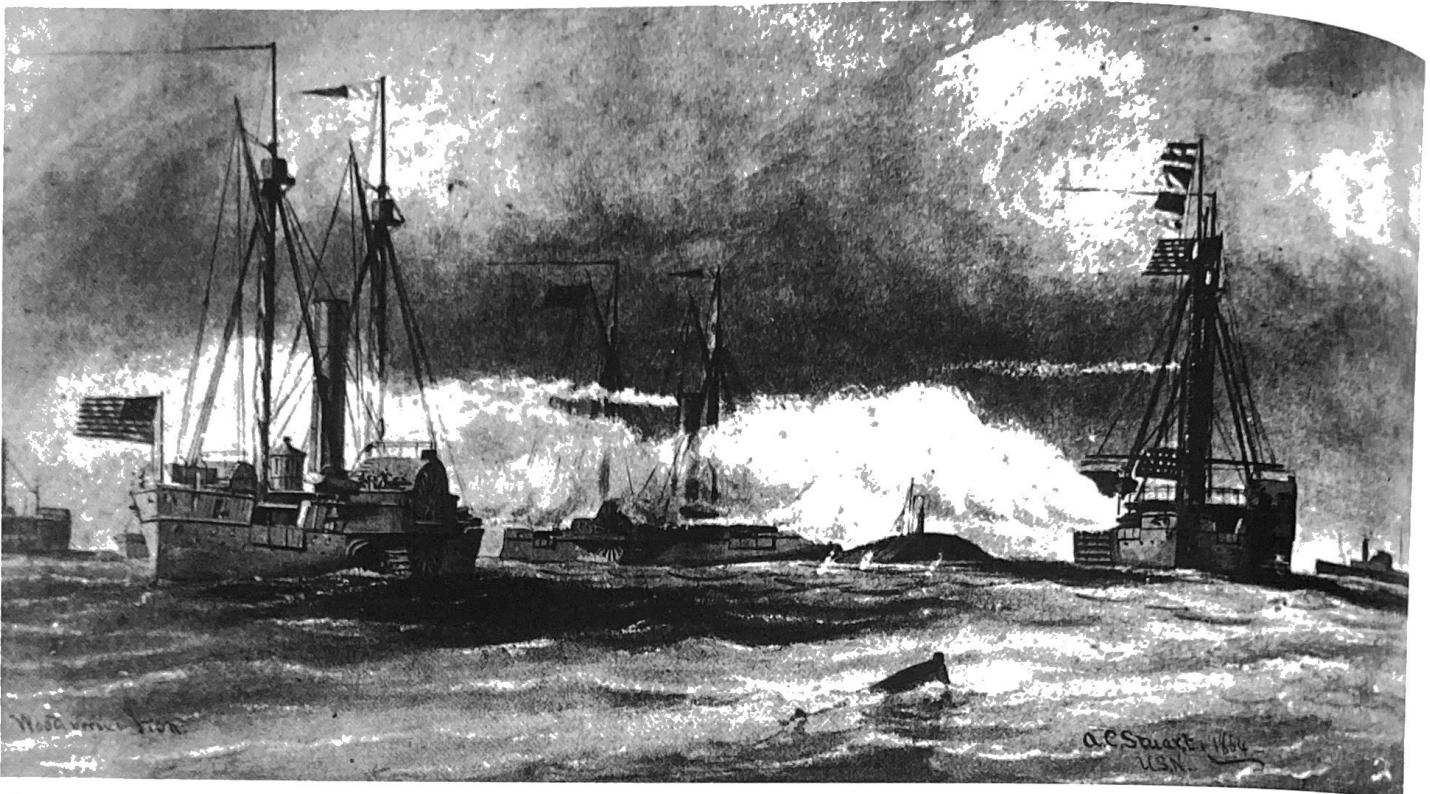
Sir:

Noticing the arrival at New York of the Spanish steamer *Nuestra Señora de la Regla*, which was seized at Port Royal by General Sherman for an alleged illegal breach of neutrality, I now transmit the papers found on board of her and an abstract of them which I caused to be prepared and which you may find useful.

I am your obedient servant,  
(s'd) William H. Seward.

One day after the *Regla* returned to New York, Secretary of State William H. Seward sent Attorney General E. Delafield Smith the papers the steamer was carrying.

## PROLOGUE



The USS Commodore Hull (far left) saw action when Confederate ships took on Union steamers in Albemarle Sound, N.C., in June 1864. The other ships were the USS Wyalusing, the USS Sassacus, the CSS Albemarle, the USS Mattabesett, and the CSS Bomb Shell.

by the USS *Susquehanna* off Port Royal, South Carolina, on the twenty-fifth. The *Regla's* papers were found to be in order, and she was allowed to anchor for the night before proceeding to Port Royal.

The following morning, the *Regla* had just gotten under way when she was stopped by the USS *Penguin*. She was asked to transport seven prisoners from the captured blockade runner *Albion* and to deliver a letter to Commodore Dupont at Port Royal. The Spanish ferry continued on and anchored alongside Commodore Dupont's flagship, the *Wabash*. Captain Reynals presented the letter to the commodore and explained that his ship needed coal and provisions. Arrangements were made, and the ship began loading coal on November 26.

On the thirtieth, Capt. Rufus Saxton, the federal quartermaster, came aboard and tried to purchase the vessel on behalf of the U.S. Army. Captain Reynals refused to sell, explaining he had no authority to do so.

The American crewmen grew uneasy about the Confederate letters aboard.

They did not know what they contained, but Fireman Frank McGuin overheard Captain Reynals say the dispatches ordered the Spanish and French fleets into Charleston and Georgetown to ensure the safe evacuation of foreign inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> According to McGuin, the captain also said, "If the vessel was likely to be searched he would tie a chunk of coal to them (letters) and sink them before the Union fleet would get them." Fireman Joseph McGee and Second Engineer John Hawkins confirmed this in their depositions. Rumors began to spread even faster, prompting Hawkins to slip ashore and report all he knew to Captain Saxton. Captain Saxton relayed this information to Commanding General Thomas W. Sherman, and Sherman ordered the provost marshal to conduct a search of the Spanish ferry.

Maj. Oliver Beard searched the *Regla* on December 1 and found letters concealed in the false bottom of a carpet bag put aboard by the Spanish consul. The letters were deemed to be of a rebellious nature, and the vessel was seized and

towed to Hilton Head Island. Major Beard believed he had not found all the letters and conducted a second inspection on December 17. This time he brought a carpenter with him and searched the captain's cabin. After cutting several holes in the walls, the major found more letters. One was a large order from the Confederate Ordinance office in Richmond, Virginia, to Beverly Tucker and A. F. D. Gifford, purchasing agents in London, for munitions:

10,000	Enfield rifles and bayonets
5,000	carbines
5,000	cavalry sabers
2,000	revolver pistols
200	tons saltpeter
50	tons sulphur
50	tons cannon powder
50	tons rifle powder

Many of the Spanish letters also reflect strong interest in the business of blockade-running, in particular letters from an individual named Victor Malyá (or possibly Malga) and from Hall and Company to several firms and persons in Spain and

PROLOGUE

Havana. It was Maylá's cousin Emilio Puig who was said to have brought the letters aboard the Regla.

On December 11 Captain Reynals signed an agreement to charter the vessel to the U.S. Army. (He later wrote he did this under duress.) The Regla was under control of the federal quartermaster from December 16, 1861, to January 29, 1862. During this time she hauled troops and supplies for the army.

On January 29, 1862, the Regla was delivered to the U.S. Navy at Port Royal, where she was kept in constant use as a transport until April 29. On the thirtieth she was towed by the Empire City to New York harbor for adjudication. The crew had already made the same trip, arriving on March 3, and took residence on board when she arrived.

No judicial proceedings were begun against her until June 9, when a libel of

information in prize was filed in the district court of New York City by the United States, on behalf of itself and the men responsible for the Regla's capture. What this meant was the United States filed for possession of the steamer so that it could be used by the U.S. Navy. A month later the owners, Compañía del Ferro-Carril de la Bahía de la Habana a Matanzas, filed a claim for restitution and damages.

No further proceedings were held until August 22, when a motion was filed in district court by the Navy Department in which they sought use of the Regla until a final disposition could be made in the case.

The vessel was ordered appraised by the court. The steamer was valued by two of the appraisers at \$28,000 and by a third at \$30,000. Ironically, one of the appraisers was John Englis, who had built the ship only a year before. On September 1, 1862, the Regla was purchased for \$25,000 from the New York prize court by the U.S. Navy. At the navy shipyard she was given armament of two thirty-pound rifles and four twenty-four-pound Howitzers and commissioned on November 27 the USS Commodore Hull.

On June 20, 1863, the New York district court entered a decree that the Nuestra Señora de Regla had been illegally seized and ordered the vessel be restored to the owners but reserved all questions of costs and damages for a future hearing. This hearing was the first of several that found in favor of the Cuban owners. Ironically, the amount of the judgment increased each time due to added interest, and by 1879 it was a whopping \$309,932.38! The United States attorney appealed the 1879 decision to the Supreme Court, and in 1883 the court issued a final decree lowering the award to \$144,822.50, an amount that was presumably paid.

The research on the history of the Regla reveals many different accounts of the same story. Since every crewman on the Regla had a little different version to relate, the only information used in this article has been substantiated by at least three sources. However, information that does not fit this criterion cannot be totally

*No. 1. City.*  
*J. B. (a)*  
*No. 1 (A) Port Royal, S.C. Dec. 1, 1861.*  
*Neas. Gen. E.C.*  
*The Provost Marshal:*  
*It having been reported to me that there is a ferry-boat in this harbor purporting to be sailing under the Spanish flag and containing papers and dispatches for the Rebel Government, you will, with a proper guard, board the same, examine into her character & ascertain by search if such is the case. In the event of finding any such papers on board, you will secure the same, detain her & bring her to me & bring also the master of the vessel on shore to await my orders.*  
*You will conduct your examination with great civility, propriety and decorum.*  
*W. Sherman*  
*Brig. Gen. Comd.*

General Sherman ordered the provost marshal to board the Regla at Port Royal, S.C., and to search "with great civility, propriety and decorum," for Confederate papers.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

, in June 1864.  
mb Shell.

land. Major  
found all the  
and inspection  
he brought a  
ched the cap-  
veral holes in  
more letters.  
the Confed-  
nmond, Vir-  
A. F. D. Gif-  
London, for

ayonets

also reflect  
of block-  
s from an  
(or possi-  
Company  
p pain and

PRING 1992

## PROLOGUE

discounted, nor should the questions it raises be ignored. For instance, according to Second Engineer Hawkins, they did not need to put into Georgetown for repairs. In his disposition he says:

We were not disabled or in distress at all. We had broken one portion of her backing gearing, but this was not material. We were in good condition to go anywhere, but we repaired this break on board ourselves. The Captain afterwards took the piece we had repaired and carried it to Charleston. I suppose as an excuse for going there.

Did Captain Reynals have an ulterior motive for his second trip to Charleston, as suggested by the second engineer, or was this just a case of the captain making a permanent repair when it was available?

The general state of Captain Reynals's

mental condition also comes into question. In a letter from Sailing Master Sonberg to Peter King & Co. dated December 2, 1861, Mr. Sonberg wrote:

What I wonder at more than anything is that the owner of the boat even let Captain Reynals take charge of her. They certainly must know that he is not fit for her position but in the mildest terms, an old fool mixed up with considerable villainy.

Certainly the captain was under tremendous pressure. He not only supervised the building of the *Regla* but raised a crew as well. His vessel was first damaged in a gale, repaired, damaged in another gale, captured by the Confederates, released, captured by the Union Army, and throughout the entire voyage he had to deal with a restless crew. At one point

he admits they were close to mutiny. Letters written by Captain Reynals during the voyage and after its capture, when compared with those written prior to the *Regla's* voyage, are full of misspellings and confused statements, clearly revealing the captain's distraught frame of mind.

But what must have seemed the first blow came from an unexpected source during court proceedings. The Spanish consul in Charleston placed the blame on Captain Reynals by saying the only letters he had put aboard the *Regla* were dispatches for the captain general of Cuba. The consul even denied that Mr. Pugh was the man accompanying the letters, was his employee. While it is possible, as some contend, that Captain Reynals jeopardized the vessel through his ignorance



Students search the riverbank for clues to the ship's identity. Looking south of the site, they could see the steamer's masts poking out of the river in the shadow of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge

## PROLOGUE

and stupidity, it seems just as likely that the Spanish consul was trying to get himself off the hook and in grander terms avoid an international incident.

There is also the question of whether the United States overstepped legal bounds to seize the *Regla* because its occupying forces were in great need of such vessels. Consider this: when on November 30 Captain Saxton came aboard and tried to purchase the ferry, Captain Reynals refused to sell. It was the very next day that the vessel was searched for contraband and seized. This alone seems very suspicious and even more so when you add remarks made in a December 2 letter by Gen. Thomas Sherman:

If this steamer I have seized is confiscated she should be left here. She is just the thing we want, and admirably adapted for these waters and our purpose. She is new and exactly such a boat as they have at the Jersey City Ferry in New York—will carry 1,000 men, and will not draw over six or seven feet.

Federal seizure of Port Royal on November 7 may have also been a factor. Practically all of the federal vessels were of a deep draft and were unable to negotiate the shallow bays and rivers around Port Royal. General Sherman realized the importance of the seizure of the Spanish ferry and how it might aid federal advances in the area. It is all very suspect

August 27, 1872:

We learn that the excursion on the steamer "Waccamaw" on Sunday did not turn out so pleasant as some had imagined. Contrary to expectation, there was a bar on the boat where all who felt so disposed could indulge to their heart's content. Several young men became considerably elevated and were raising such a rum-pus that Capt. Potter took possession of the liquor, not allowing anymore of it to be sold. There were a number of ladies aboard, which made the affair so much more disgraceful. During the melee one young man drew a pistol and threatened to shoot the mate. One lady, so badly frightened, fainted.

*Twelve years before her demise in 1886, the Regla, by then the Waccamaw, was the scene of a drunken "rum-pus," as the Wilmington Morning Star reported.*

until one considers the fact that between the time Captain Saxton tried to purchase the vessel and its seizure, Second Engineer Hawkins went ashore and told the federal authorities about the Confederate letters on board. What else could General

Sherman do but order a search and capitalize on his good fortune?

Wasn't the U.S. government guilty of legal chicanery in maintaining possession of the *Regla* for use in the war? Over twenty-two years had passed since the U.S. Army had seized the vessel on December 1, 1861, and the Supreme Court's final decree on December 10, 1883. If the New York district court ruled on June 20, 1863, that the seizure was illegal, and restitution and damages were to be set at a later date, why in the world did it take over twenty years to decide what that restitution was? Whether it was intentional or not, the forty motions filed by attorneys for the United States and the vessel's owners allowed the *Regla* to be used throughout the war as the U.S. Navy saw fit.

Despite these and many other questions that have surfaced during a review of the prize court records, one thing is certain about the *Nuestra Señora de Regla*—she was never restored to her original owners. By the time a settlement was reached, the *Regla* had outlived her usefulness and was lying idle in a remote part of Wilmington harbor. Three years later, she was boarded for the last time by local school boys, who, by setting her afire, created an archaeological site that would capture the imagination of their counterparts over one hundred years later. □

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The National Archives–Northeast Region (Bayonne, NJ) has the prize court file for the *Nuestra Señora de Regla*, Pirah Case File, Civil War Court, Southern District of New York, Records of District Courts of the United States, Record Group 21. The difficult job of photocopying this large file of delicate, original documents was carried out by Nancyann Dziedzic, archives technician and administrative assistant, National Archives–Northeast Region.

<sup>2</sup>*Nuestra Señora de Regla* means "Our Lady of Regla." Regla was a town in the province of Havana and is now a suburb of the capital. It is interesting to note that as recently as thirty years ago steamships (ferries) went between Regla and Havana every fifteen minutes ("Comunica con Habana por medio de vapores que salen cada quince minutos." from *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*,

vol. 50 [1958], p. 240).

<sup>3</sup>The University of North Carolina at Wilmington team of transcribers included: Dr. Terry Mount, associate professor of Spanish; Dr. Carlos A. Perez, assistant professor of Spanish; Dr. Joann McFerran Mount, assistant professor of Spanish; and students Marta A. Roller and Susan D. Ball.

<sup>4</sup>Captain Reynals's position concerning the content of the dispatches was also voiced to Flag Officer S. F. Dupont, Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, Series I, vol. 12 (1901), p. 363. Although many of the personal letters in Spanish disclose the general alarm and fear of the Spanish subjects in the Charleston area, no dispatches were found that actually requested intervention from the Spanish or French government.