

Texas & Southwest

ALABAMA

Schooner comes ashore for another peek

Tourists, locals agog after Isaac reveals ship that ran aground in '23

GULF SHORES, Ala. — The pounding surf and currents from Hurricane Isaac on a remote spit of Alabama shoreline have again revealed the wreckage of a schooner that ran aground in 1923, delighting curious tourists and locals.

The schooner Rachel and its eight-man crew ran aground near historic Fort Morgan on Oct. 17, 1923, during a tropical storm. The men were headed to Mobile after a stop in Cuba.

"A tropical storm much like Tropical Storm Isaac that we just went through was hitting the Gulf Coast, and a large number of these schooners were out in the gulf," said Michael Bailey, historian for the Fort Morgan Historical society.

Because the Rachel was so far onshore, its owners could not salvage it, Bailey said. The

owners tried selling the wreck with no luck. Later, the Rachel was burned. Bailey isn't sure who burned the ship or why.

Shifting sands and tides eventually buried the Rachel until Hurricane Camille struck the Gulf Coast in 1969 and part of the ship was exposed.

Bailey glimpsed the Rachel for the first time when it was unearthed by Hurricane Frederick in 1979. He began to seriously delve into its history in 2004 after it was unearthed by Hurricane Ivan.

"I saw 20th-century features and thought it could have been from early 1900s," he said. "I found a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shipwreck study that had a description of the Rachel and learned it was built in Mosspoint, Miss., at the De Angelo Shipyard," he said. Bailey found a relative of the ship's builder who gave him copies of the ship's plans and photographs of the ship.

Although the Rachel was a

common ship for its time, the wreck provides a unique look at what life was like along the Gulf Coast almost 90 years ago, Bailey said. He likened schooners of that era to the semi-trucks that fill interstate highways today. The schooners supplied many of the region's industrial and commercial needs.

According to local lore, the Rachel might have had alcohol on board with the hope of making a little extra money from the voyage.

"That's not impossible," Bailey said. "She was coming from Cuba and it was during Prohibition."

Hurricane Isaac uncovered more of the Rachel than has been seen in a long time. On a recent afternoon, beachgoers crawled through its charred remains and posed for photographs.

The Rachel might be intentionally re-covered with sand because of the danger from

scrapes, cuts and bruises its rusted iron skeleton and splintered wood pose to tourists, Bailey said. In the meantime, people like John Lamb of Richmond, Ky., are making the most of its reappearance.

Lamb, who was vacationing in the area, took pictures of his young son by the wreck as he thoughtfully explored every inch of the Rachel.

"I think the most interesting thing is that, being from Kentucky, we don't ever see anything like this. We thought we'd come check it out," he said.

Jim Fletcher of Fort Worth has a vacation home on the beach and has seen the Rachel after previous storms. Fletcher was excited to find more of the ship exposed after Isaac.

"History is a very fleeting thing, and I think you should take advantage of it when you have the opportunity before it is gone forever," he said.

*Melissa Nelson-Gabriel,
The Associated Press*



Brian Kelly/(Mobile, Ala.) Press-Register

Parts of the Rachel, whose owners couldn't salvage it, have been exposed by hurricanes before, starting in 1969.