

The HERA Revisited



APRIL 2005



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The *HERA* was an American, three-masted schooner of 388.91 gross tons, built at Boston, Massachusetts in 1869.

Her length was 132.1 feet, breadth 29.2 feet and depth of hold 11.1 feet.

Her signal letters were JHNV.

Originally owned by bankers Herman Chapin and E.C Neufelder, the *HERA* spent her early years crisscrossing the Pacific between San Francisco and Australia.

It was on one of these voyages in 1870 that the *HERA* gained worldwide notoriety when her mate was washed overboard. Not a particularly unusual incident at face value but the mate turned out to be none other than George Gordon; the 6th Earl of Aberdeen and eccentric heir to the Gordon Distillery fortune, for whom scores of private detectives had been scouring the globe.

In 1873 the *HERA* joined numerous other fast sailing vessels in the lucrative trade between San Francisco and Portland, Oregon, before spending many years in the Bering Sea cod fishery.

With the discovery of gold on the beach at Nome, Alaska in 1898 the aging *HERA* was pressed into service transporting the massive rush of miners north.

In October of 1899 the old schooner was again front page news when she was reported in distress off Cape Flattery, Washington State, with two hundred returning miners aboard. Her captain indicated that he was short of supplies; an understatement indeed, as most of those aboard were in a state of starvation, two of their number having already perished from hunger.

Upon the vessel's rescue, by the tug *SEA LION* and the US Revenue Cutter *GRANT*, the *HERA* was towed into Seattle harbour where she was quickly purchased by a group of local businessmen that included a Mr. Shirk and a pioneer magnate of the Emerald City, Joshua Green, owner of the LaConner Trading and Transportation Company.

THE LOSS

The *HERA*, having undergone about \$1500.00 worth of repairs, departed Seattle for Honolulu on November 18th 1899 with a 700 ton cargo that included grain, animal feed, flour, tin-ware, grand pianos, 1800 barrels of Roche Harbour lime, a knocked-down schoolhouse on deck and 60,000 quart bottles of Seattle Malting and Brewing Company's "Rainier" beer, packed in 1000 oak-staved barrels.

Aboard were Captain J.J. Warren, part-owner Mr. Shirk and his daughter Mabel, as well as fifteen crewmembers.

The *HERA* sheltered at Clallam Bay for a week as continual storms chewed up the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Finally Warren raised sail and the *HERA* crept passed Cape Flattery, straight into the teeth of a raging southeaster which began to sweep her towards the unforgiving shore of Vancouver Island.

As the gale worsened and Captain and crew fought to wear the ship out to sea, water began seeping between the hull planks of the aging *HERA*.

It soon became apparent that the pumps could not handle the increasing flow and even though the volatile lime had been loaded high in the hold, on top of the other cargo, it got a good soaking.

The barrels swelled and burst and the lime began to smoulder.

THE LOSS (Cont'd)

Warren later wrote, *“The smell of smoke put the crew into a frenzy; sealing companionways, hatches, vents and caulking open deck seams in an attempt to smother the growing inferno”*.

With his vessel afire and in a leaking condition Warren ran her before the wind, towards land.

For twenty-four hours straight the crew manned the pumps and attempted to contain the fire.

Late on the afternoon of November 25th the *HERA* dropped anchor off Lennard Island, at the approach to Templar Channel, Clayoquot Sound.

The sea was still high and the fire increasing in intensity when Warren had the vessel's only lifeboat swung out and he, Shirk, Mabel and two crewmen set off to get help from the settlement on Stubbs Island. Before they reached it, a group of local men in the Tofino lifeboat, with Phillip Jacobsen at the tiller, had already set out for the stricken *HERA*.

In a letter written to a friend, Mrs. Spain of Clayoquot described the scene:

“We have had great excitement here all day. About 10o'clock Fred (Frederick Spain, Provincial Constable) and several others sighted a ship at sea flying a flag of distress.

“They thought she was on a rock so Fred and five others decided to go out to her, even though there was a terrible sea running.

“I think you can imagine better than I can describe my anxiety, as well as that of Mrs. Brewster's and Mrs. Jacobsen's whose husbands went also. It was a very brave act as they encountered a great deal of danger.

“Captain Warren and four others, including Miss Shirk and her father, had already left in the ship's boat. As the tiny launch could only carry five persons Warren intended to return for the others when the rescue party arrived.

“When they got to the ship after a long, hard pull they found it to be on fire and six desperate men ready to jump into the boat as soon as she came near enough.

“Of course if they had done this the boat would have been swamped and all drowned, and it was only by standing up with axes in hand and calling out that the first man to jump in would be killed that this was prevented.

“Then safely, one by one they were got on board.

“By this time the ship was red hot.....”

Abandoned, the *HERA* drifted with the incoming tide into and around Tofino Harbour. The fire, now consuming decks, masts and rigging, lit up the dark, November night.

Mrs. Spain continued:

“As I write she is just in front of the house, one of the grandest yet one of the most awful sights I have ever seen.

“The whole room is lit up with the light from her, and I have only to turn my head to see her.

“She is one mass of roaring flame, and it is a very black night, the whole harbour is lit up”

Finally, as water filled her holds, the *HERA* slipped to the seafloor off Felice Island and entombed up by the sands of Clayoquot Sound.

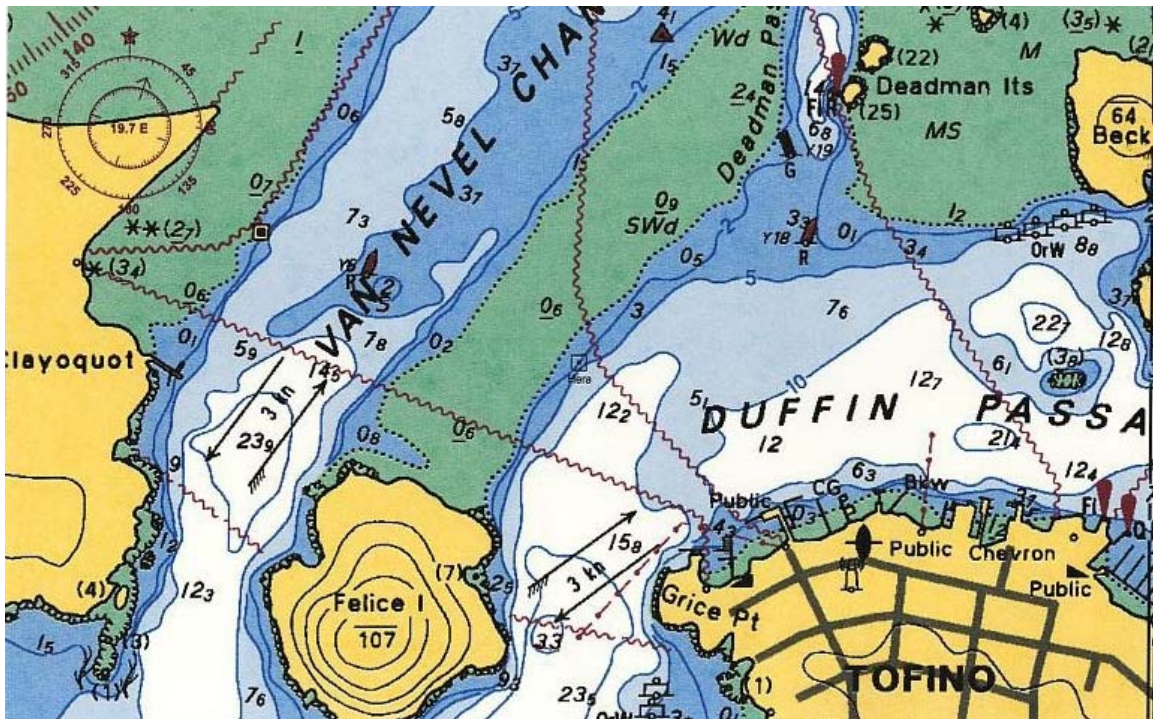


Fig. 1 Section of chart showing *HERA* location

THE DISCOVERY & BEYOND

In December of 1974, seventy-five years after the *HERA* disappeared from view, a commercial crab fisherman alerted Tofino diver, maritime historian and all-round wreck hound, Rod Palm, to the fact that one of his traps had fouled on the bottom and that when he'd pulled up the trap's line it was rust-stained.

Never one to turn down a lead Palm immediately headed out to the site and followed the line down.

On reaching bottom he found the line tangled around a large ship's deck knee, protruding about a foot out of the sand.

A quick scan of the area revealed more visible deck knees, ship's rigging, deadeyes, and bottles everywhere.

Closer inspection showed that the whole port-side of the vessel, above the waterline, was exposed.

A quick check through his files and Palm was able to identify the partially buried hulk as that of the *HERA*.

Given the wreck's fine state of preservation and the fact that he had dove that area many times before without seeing any evidence of a shipwreck, Palm concluded that the sands of Clayoquot Sound had only recently eased their grip on the old schooner.

Palm's euphoria over the discovery quickly turned to concern for the wreck's protection.

A trip to Victoria and a visit to the Heritage Conservation Branch ensured its' legal protection under the old Historic Sites Act, designating the *HERA* wreck British Columbia's first protected, underwater heritage site.

With permission from the Heritage Conservation Branch to undertake a four day test excavation, Palm returned to Tofino only to find that a group of divers from Port Alberni

had salvaged all visible and easily accessible deadeyes which, after realizing they had too many to transport back home, they dumped overboard at the Government Wharf in Tofino.

Undaunted, Palm undertook his excavation, which revealed that the fire had indeed ravaged the *HERA*'s decks, rigging and most of the lime but her hull, cargo and fittings below the lime had escaped the inferno and were in a remarkably good state of preservation.

Most of her 1000 barrel cargo of bottled beer remained intact; their intended destination stenciled in black paint on the barrel tops "*Lovejoy & Co., Honolulu*".

There must have been an awful lot of thirsty Hawaiians, back in the winter of 1899.

Each barrel is hooped and staved with wood and contains five dozen, brown glass, and corked quart bottles, packed in straw.

The majority of the bottles still contain their malty brew and some retain their labels; the Rainier branding and depiction of Mount Rainier clearly visible.

It's a ship full of beer; Tofino's "Whisky Galore"!

Also located during the initial excavation were intact sacks of grain, deadeyes, mast-bands, tin-ware and a variety of ship's hardware.

The latter artifacts were turned over to the Maritime Museum of British Columbia for safekeeping.

Their current provenance is unknown.

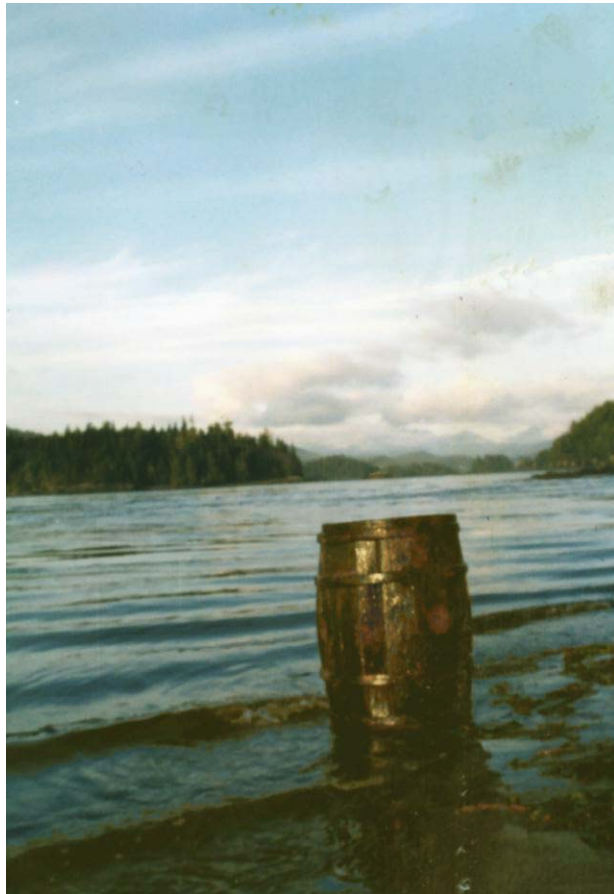


Fig 2: Conserved Barrel from *HERA* wreck

THE DISCOVERY & BEYOND (Cont'd.)

A large portion of the *HERA*'s hull and cargo remain deeply-buried in the sand overburden (the stern section lies beneath approximately 3.5 metres of sand) and is most likely in an even greater state of preservation than the more exposed and accessible portions of the wreck.

The *HERA* site offers archaeologists and marine historians a rare "snapshot" of the general maritime trade taking place in the Pacific, as the 19th century turned to the 20th. It is so rare in archaeology of any kind to have the opportunity to study and interpret anything "intact".

Encouraged by the results of his preliminary excavation Palm attempted to raise interest and support to undertake a full-scale excavation and survey of the site, with a view to retrieving and conserving certain artifact material for interpretation and public display. Over the years, Palm invested a great deal of time and money in research and investigation, resulting in a number of proposals for field-work and funding which were politely received with interest by the Heritage Conservation Branch but never acted upon.

With the permission of Heritage Conservation Branch Palm was allowed to raise a single intact barrel for conservation and ultimate display at the Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park. Mr. Palm successfully conserved this artifact by rinsing and cleaning in fresh water, fitting it with nylon straps to retain the shape, air-drying, treating with successive coats of boiled linseed oil and turpentine and finally refastening the oak staves. This conserved barrel was duly delivered to the Vancouver Aquarium and put on public display. Its current provenance is unknown.

After numerous, fruitless attempts to garner the financial support of the Heritage Conservation Branch and others to fund a program of excavation, conservation and interpretation, Mr. Palm eventually abandoned his efforts in this regard. He attempted to recoup some of his own financial losses by (once again with the permission of the Heritage Conservation Branch) successfully marketing some of the *HERA* bottles as souvenirs, with an explanatory label, at \$16.00 apiece, in the late 1970's/early 1980's. Infact, the sale of bottles had been one proposal for raising funding for the excavation and such an arrangement is by no means unprecedented in the field of nautical archaeology. Case in point: the sale of arrow shafts to finance the excavation and conservation of King Henry VIII's flagship *MARY ROSE*. One must remember, there were originally 60,000 bottles of Rainier Beer aboard the *HERA*; more than enough for every interested institution in Canada and the United States to have an ample number for display purposes, with still thousands and thousands to spare.

The *HERA* wreck is rarely, if ever, visited by scuba divers. When it is, it is for the purpose of scavenging loose bottles and other artifacts. Despite the reporting of these intrusions to the Heritage Conservation Branch over the years, no action has ever been taken by that department. The Branch's last direct involvement with the *HERA* was a few days spent doing a layout and survey of the site as an offshoot of a shipwreck search expedition in 1977.

THE DISCOVERY & BEYOND (Cont'd.)

By not engaging in a program of archaeological survey and excavation, retrieval, conservation and interpretation the people of British Columbia and beyond are being denied the opportunity to view, to learn and to understand certain aspects of their maritime legacy.

In addition to the occasional bottle pilferer, the *HERA* wreck is being assaulted and degraded by other forces.

As Mr. Palm noted at the time of the initial discovery, it was apparent that the visible portions of the wreck had only recently been uncovered, by seafloor subsidence, storm surge, current action, or the like.

Up until that time the *HERA* had lain for 75 years in a protective “cocoon” of sand; hence the excellent state of preservation.

It has been more than 30 years now since portions of the site lost that protective cover and the actions of marine borers and other destructive organisms are taking their toll.

In addition to these natural forces, the site lies within one of the most productive commercial crab fishing areas of Clayoquot Sound and is regularly the repository for fouled traps, lines and other equipment.

Crab fishermen do not give up their expensive traps and the lucrative contents without a fight and the impact on the site, by way of their efforts to retrieve fouled traps with power winches and the like, is detrimental in the extreme.

In 1983, while undertaking their fieldwork for the inventory “a Report on the Status of the Historic Shipwrecks of Clayoquot & Nootka Sounds” for the British Columbia Heritage Trust and the Heritage Conservation Branch the Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia (UASBC) undertook a visual/photographic survey of the *HERA* site. Increased exposure of the wreck to the elements and deterioration of a number of features were noted.

In the “Conclusions & Recommendations” section of the *HERA* site report the UASBC stated the following:

“The HERA wreck was the first underwater site to receive designated heritage status from the Provincial Government – through the actions of nature we may soon lose a unique opportunity to study the relatively intact remains of a late 19th century sailing vessel.

“This surely cannot be allowed to happen.

*“It is the **strong** recommendation of the executive and membership of the UASBC that a full-scale survey, excavation, artifact retrieval and programme of conservation be instigated.*

“It is further recommended that when such an excavation is planned and undertaken that the wreck’s discoverer (Palm) be appointed as Project Leader”.

It has been almost a quarter of a century since those recommendations were made to the Heritage Conservation Branch.

Again, no action was taken.

In 1984 the UASBC, with funding support from the now defunct British Columbia Heritage Trust, placed at the site of the *HERA* a commemorative/information plaque, the text of which includes the plea “***Please Respect Our Maritime Heritage***”.

ACTION & REACTION

In February of 2005 divers (Rod Palm & Jason Mulder) from the Tofino-based Tonquin Foundation undertook an inspection dive to the wreck of the *HERA*.

Though cursory in nature this inspection clearly showed that even more of the site has lost its protective covering of sand, that a number of site features are altered, damaged or destroyed (e.g. the vessel's mainmast, once a prominent feature of the site, is now completely absent) and that the site is inundated with numerous fouled commercial crab traps, tangled line and gear.

Mr. Palm noted, "That, if anything the site is more exposed than in past years".

He observed that at least two of the wrought-iron deck knees had collapsed and that the lead stem sheathing was bent over 60°. Mr. Palm feels sure that this is due to the efforts of commercial crab fishers attempting to retrieve their fouled traps, as the knees were previously quite firmly set.

Mr. Palm noted further, "During the survey several fully exposed barrel staves were seen scattered about the site. One of these was seen to be intact, except for the recent invasion of the marine wood borer *Limnoria lignorum*, commonly known as a Gribble.

"I say with confidence that the wood stave was recently exposed as Gribbles consume wood at a rate of about 25mm per year. The stave described had 7mm of encroachment on one edge with no damage on the adjacent edge (lightly covered with silt at the time).

"I feel that the disrupted staves are the direct result of the crab fishery. The length of the float lines to the traps in this area is generally about 30m long, so when the fisher picks up the float and wraps it on the winch, the 32kg trap may be dragged across the bottom for 20m before it actually leaves the bottom. It is easy to visualize the damage that has and continues to take place on this site.

"This site could be protected from further compromise (by the crab fishery and other manmade intrusion) by the placement of mooring buoys off the bow and stern (of the wreck). These buoys should be joined by a cork-line (a floating line of regularly spaced floats). This will give visiting divers something to tie up to rather than dropping their anchors on the site, or worse yet, dragging a grapnel to locate the site. This would also be a visual reference for the crabbers, who obviously don't want to lose their gear.

"As this is after all a heritage site, I would suggest that immediate action be taken for its protection".

Complacency and inaction is not a credo of the Tonquin Foundation.

In the coming weeks and months members of the Foundation and volunteers from local communities will undertake the following:

1. The removal of all fouled traps, lines and gear from the *HERA* site.
2. The placement of permanent shipwreck marker buoys and anchors off the wreck's bow and stern, with attached cork-line.
3. Public notices in local media and elsewhere as to the significance and status of the *HERA* wreck.
4. Notification to the local RCMP detachment as to the location of and designated status of the *HERA* wrecksite, including possible penalties under the provisions of the Heritage Conservation Act for those in contravention of the Act.
5. Notification to the local Department of Fisheries & Oceans office as to the location and designated status of the *HERA*, with a request that a Fisheries Bulletin be issued

ACTION (cont'd)

- to the commercial, First Nations and recreational fleet prohibiting the setting of traps and other gear in the vicinity of the site.
6. Notification to the local Canadian Coastguard base as to the location and designated status of the *HERA* wrecksite, including possible penalties under the provisions of the Heritage Conservation Act for those in contravention of the Act.
 7. A request to the Heritage Conservation Branch for funding to undertake the above-described work.
 8. In the event that the Heritage Conservation Branch only partially funds, or does not fund at all the above described work, the Tonquin Foundation will undertake and fund the work through financial donations from local government, business and the community at large, as well as in-kind donations of manpower, goods and services from its members and supporters.
 9. Regular monitoring of site and moorage system.

Furthermore, it is the intention of the Tonquin Foundation to undertake a complete baseline survey of the *HERA* wrecksite, utilizing site drawings, photo-mosaic techniques and videography.

To accomplish this the Tonquin Foundation will seek funding assistance from a variety of sources, including the Heritage Conservation Branch, the Clayoquot UNESCO Biosphere Trust, Heritage Canada, private foundations, individuals and corporations.

To physically accomplish this survey the Tonquin Foundation will establish joint, working relationships with institutions and organizations such as the Archaeology Department of Malaspina College, Pacific Rim National Park (Parks Canada), the Bamfield Marine Station and others, in order to offer training courses in the techniques of nautical archaeology to interested participants.

The *HERA* is shallow, relatively protected and close to shore.

The *HERA* is an ideal site for a marine archaeological field school.

THE FUTURE

Amongst the main, long-term objectives of the Tonquin Foundation is the establishment of a world-class Marine Heritage Discovery Centre in Clayoquot Sound, which will trace human interaction with the northeast Pacific and beyond, from prehistoric times to the present.

Much, much more than a maritime museum, the Discovery Centre will feature interactive and static display areas, conservation facilities, First Nations galleries, a research library and archive, aquaria and floating exhibits, vessel construction and repair facilities, a theatre and meeting rooms and as Clayoquot Sound lies in the heart of what has come to be known as the "Graveyard of the Pacific" the Centre will have a large section given over to the display and interpretation of materials relating to area shipwrecks.

The *HERA* will be one of the primary wrecks featured in the Centre's shipwreck gallery. Given the fact that the site is currently under threat from forces both manmade and natural efforts must begin immediately to rescue and conserve portions of the vessel, fittings and cargo before they are lost forever.

The lower sections of the *HERA*'s cargo hold are presently still inundated with a protective layer of sand and hence their contents may be assumed to be in a good to excellent state of preservation.

THE FUTURE (cont'd)

But as observations over the past 30 years have shown this protective layer is being encroached at an ever increasing rate.

Now is the time to initiate a program of rescue, retrieval and conservation, with a view towards ultimate interpretation and display.

Dr. Jim Jobling, of the Conservation Laboratory at Texas A&M University has counseled the Tonquin Foundation to commence this program by raising a number of the loose barrel staves that are scattered about the site, in order to experiment with various methods of conservation (e.g. air drying, polyethylene glycol, boiled linseed oil and turpentine, sugar solution, etc.) so as to determine the most effective method of conservation.

To this end the Tonquin Foundation and/or its agents will soon be applying for an archaeological inspection permit to raise these loose staves for experimentation, supervised by Dr. Jobling.

The ultimate goal will be to raise a number of intact barrels and their contents, as well as other objects of cargo, ships fittings and the like for conservation, interpretation and display at the Clayoquot Sound Marine Heritage Discovery Centre, as well as other facilities in Canada and the United States.

Representatives of Seattle's Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) have expressed a keen interest in obtaining at least one of these barrels and their contents for display purposes.

The *HERA* was part owned by Seattle pioneer magnate Joshua Green, her beer and other cargo was of Seattle origin and MOHAI now displays a longtime, Seattle landmark; the red, Rainier Brewery "R" on its roof.

The Green family holdings and interests are still very extensive in the Pacific Northwest, including Safeco Insurance and Realty, the Joshua Green Corporation and Sage Manufacturing. The Joshua Green Foundation is the corporation's philanthropic arm.

Unfortunately, the Rainier Brewery is no longer in existence, although the brand name survives as a subsidiary of the Austin, Texas-based Pabst Brewing conglomerate. (It was Pabst that donated the Rainier "R" to MOHAI when the company closed and demolished the Rainier facility).

Both Dr. Jobling and the Tonquin Foundation's Executive Director, David W. Griffiths, have contacted executives of Pabst to gauge their possible interest in supporting the retrieval, conservation and interpretive programs financially, as well as utilizing the project as a promotional tool for their Rainier product line ("A Ship Full of Beer", "Don't Get Wrecked On Rainier", "The Northwest's 'Whisky' Galore", etc.).

These overtures have been received politely by Pabst, who have requested further information on required budgets, etc.

Dr. Jobling is currently working on projected budget requirements for the conservation phase of the project.

It is the hope of the Tonquin Foundation that certain, Tofino-area resort might agree to sponsor a portion of the proposed project, along with their supplying breweries, some of which have particularly innovative advertising and promotional campaigns.

However this project is ultimately accomplished, it simply must be done and done in the relatively near future or a rare opportunity for the preservation, protection and interpretation of an intact piece of the Pacific Northwest's maritime legacy will be lost forever.

The sands of Clayoquot Sound are running out for Joshua Green's old schooner; Tofino's Ship of Fire.

It is time to revisit the wreck of the *HERA*.

