

Nolan's Anchor

Years ago I went by John R. Nolan's cottage in Rockport to look at his anchor.

Out of curiosity, mostly.

I just wanted to see what a man would do with three quarters of a ton or more of anchor, and what Nolan had done was made a monument out of it with the shank pointing to the north star like a compass.

Years later and before his death, I tried to find Nolan on a number of occasions to talk to him about the anchor, but seems we were never in Rockport on the same day, and it wasn't until last week that I really found out the full story from some material sent to me by Ed Armstrong, a member of the board of directors of the new Texas Maritime Museum at Rockport and also chairman of the museum's curatorial committee.

I had known the anchor was from the steamer Nicaragua, parts of which are still rusting in the waters offshore halfway down Padre Island, where the 183-foot vessel was sunk in October of 1912 while on a voyage between Tampico and Port Arthur. Oldtimers said it happened in the waters off the Devil's Elbow, an exceedingly dangerous area where the currents have turned the waters into one of the great graveyards of the Gulf. It's where Spanish galleons, French brigs, pirate ships, schooners, and even modern freighters have come to rest, but the visibility of the Nicaragua's wreckage made it a real challenge for sea scavengers and other adventurers for years.

Like the group of "genial and kindred spirits" from this area who set sail in three chartered vessels from Port Lavaca in June of 1944, including John W. Young, L.A. Fritz, Stanley Smith, Tom O'Connor, H.C. Edwards, Martin O'Connor, Eugene Low, C.A. Keeran, E.L. Fairis, and W.H. Smith Jr., along with a cook, Alfred Butler, and a roustabout, Will Booth. From Pat Dunn's Ranch on Padre, they took Model-



Henry's Journal

By Henry Wolff Jr.

JUL 12 1989

Ts and a motorcycle down the island, which didn't give them much room to bring back their plunder, so it was decided to retrieve only one item each. Martin O'Connor got the ship's bell.

I had always been curious how Nolan got the anchor.

According to the material from Armstrong — a reprint from the Rockport Pilot of June 6, 1957, when Nolan erected his monument — the anchor had been lost overboard in a vain attempt to save the ship from destruction in the pounding surf. It remained in the Gulf until World War II when a Port Isabel shrimper picked it up in his net and brought it to Rockport where it was sold to the Rice Boat Works.

The boat works had planned to use it as an anchor in the harbor to help launch subchasers being built there during the war, but it was not heavy enough for the task. The anchor remained there until Nolan went searching for an anchor to put at his cottage in Copano Village. He was from Houston and was southwestern district sales manager for the Anchor-Hocking Glass Corp.

There are all kinds of tales about the Nicaragua itself, and one story has it that the ship was running guns to revolutionists in Mexico and was the victim of saboteurs who crippled the steering gear. Whatever the reason, 600 tons of ship ended up in the Padre Island surf where some of it remains to this day.

That's pretty much the story of the Nicaragua.

John R. Nolan's anchor.