

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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Administration
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S/SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The history of Texas is not complete without recognition of the ships, seaports, and maritime heritage that contributed so greatly to the development, economy, immigration, and culture of the state in the 19th century, and the state's preeminent symbol of this thrilling bygone era is the tall ship *Elissa*.

In the 1970s, the city of Galveston was looking for a ship to complement the restoration and redevelopment of the Strand, known in the 1800s as the Wall Street of the South, and to help Texans recognize and interpret the state's maritime heritage. Constructed in 1877 in Aberdeen, Scotland, *Elissa* is a three-masted, iron-hulled tall ship of the "barque" type, measuring 205 feet long and 99 feet, 9 inches high at the mainmast, with a cargo capacity equivalent to that of eight railroad boxcars.

Elissa transported a variety of goods around the world over the course of her more than 90 years of commercial history, first calling at Galveston in December 1883 with a cargo of bananas and one passenger, then sailing for Liverpool, England, with a cargo of cotton, and calling at Galveston again in September 1886 with a cargo of what was probably lumber or sugar and sailing for Pensacola, Florida, in ballast.

Built at the dawn of the steamship era, *Elissa* filled a niche in maritime commerce, calling on many ports, and she was sold from owner to owner, sailing under different names before being readied for the scrap yards of Piraeus, Greece, where she was recognized by a maritime archeologist. *Elissa* was acquired by the Galveston Historical Foundation in 1975, and after some initial work in Greece, she was towed in 1978 to the Royal Navy yard in Gibraltar; that same year, *Elissa* was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, becoming the first object to achieve this status while outside the territorial limits of the United States.

In 1979, *Elissa* returned to Galveston, her former port of call and new home, and intensive efforts began to raise funding and restore her to her 1877 sailing configuration; that goal achieved, *Elissa* sailed again on the Gulf of Mexico in September 1982.

Elissa is preserved and maintained by her volunteer crew, who donate thousands of hours annually and sail her at least once a year to preserve the seamanship skills of square-rig handling for future generations, providing guests with the rare opportunity to sail on a historic vessel. Restored to her former glory as a seaworthy sailing ship, *Elissa* is an irreplaceable piece of living history, and her stature is underscored by her designation as one of "America's Treasures" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and as a National Historic Landmark.

Elissa, with the support of the Texas Seaport Museum, provides students and the public with a rare opportunity to visualize the maritime heritage and culture of Texas and its coastal waters. Even today, the sight of *Elissa* in full sail evokes the color and excitement of the age of sailing ships, and this vibrant reminder of an essential piece of our shared history, representing Texas, is indeed deserving of special recognition.

RESOLVED

The 79th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designates *Elissa* the official tall ship of Texas.