

Basic Detail Report



Antonia

Vessel number

HV000006

Date

1956

Primary Maker

Norman R Wright and Sons

Description

The pearling lugger ANTONIA (pronounced 'an-TON-EE-a') was built at Norman R. Wright's yard in Bulimba, Brisbane in 1956 and designed by Norman's son Ron. ANTONIA is carvel planked and the design has many of the characteristics of the typical Thursday Island lugger, including the relatively plumb stem, long keel, gaff-ketch rig, and an elegant yacht-like sheer line. However the long counter has been shortened to fit a transom board for economy of construction and to reduce the problem of dry rot experienced in the poorly ventilated longer counter sterns normally associated with these designs. The arrangement is also typical of many luggers, with midships partitioned off as cargo holds, while the aft compartment with a low cabin was the only accommodation space. On deck a hand-operated winch was mounted well forward, and just aft of this there was a hatch to the forepeak. The internal ballast was loosely packed river stones. ANTONIA was built for Jack Zafer (trading as Whyalla Shell Company) who used the vessel for pearling operations around Torres Strait over a long period until the 1970s, along with a sister vessel built in 1958 called ANNIKI. During World War II Jack, a West Australian, was in Innisfail as a RAAF pilot carrying out aerial surveys of the Atherton Tablelands and other areas of military interest. After the war he entered a law firm in Innisfail but eventually left law to operate boats fishing for trochus shell in Northern Queensland waters. At this time he had one trochus vessel operating from Innisfail and later three trochus vessels operating from Cairns. During this period Jack moved into work as a pearl sheller with the three small boats transferring north to operate from Thursday Island. These were PHALERON, ANNA MARIA (names of his daughter Anne and wife Mary) and WHYALLA. He commissioned ANTONIA as his first purpose-built pearl shelling boat. Jack and his friend Phil Rose, an engineer, discussed the type of vessel required with Ron Wright in Brisbane who then designed the ANTONIA. Jack chose Norman Wright's yard to build ANTONIA because of their reputation as builders of fine boats. A sturdy Gardner engine was ordered for ANTONIA but the ship bringing it from England was grounded on the Arabian coast, and with the engine presumed lost, a replacement Gardner was bought from a local fishing vessel and put into ANTONIA. After the launching, Zafer, with Phil Rose, sailed and motored the boat north to Thursday Island to begin work. Zafer had secured his marine pilot's license specifically for the voyage. To everyone's surprise, the original Gardner engine turned up some months later, having been retrieved from the grounded ship and forwarded in unknown circumstances. This prompted Zafer to conceive the building of a sister vessel to ANTONIA. The boat was built by Harold Collis during 1958 at Smith's Creek in Cairns, and called ANNIKI. At

the time Harold was employed by Zafer to maintain all Zafer's boats, because of his skill as a builder of small boats. Despite Harold's initial doubts about his ability to undertake the building of a 60 foot boat, the project was completed successfully with assistance from Ron Wright, who made blueprints of ANTONIA available and assisted in solving building problems. It was a very effective collaboration. The two craft then worked the pearling fields in the Torres Strait for almost two decades. ANTONIA was the fastest lugger to operate in the Torres Strait and was incorporated into Torres Strait Islander culture and history in traditional songs which survive to the present. Between them, ANTONIA and ANNIKI brought in record quantities of pearl shell, both having skilled Torres Strait Islander skippers and crews who worked on them over many years. ANTONIA was skippered by Frances Sabatino and ANNIKI by Byra Samuel. The legendary speed of ANTONIA has a simple explanation. The replacement Gardner engine purchased by Zafer for ANTONIA had previously powered a fishing vessel and had a 57 horsepower capacity. The retrieved engine placed into ANNIKI had a 38 horsepower capacity. Zafer sold ANTONIA during the 1970s and it became a cray-fishing boat. At the end of its working life, the owners Garry and Maud Christopher realised the significance of the vessel as one of the last traditional sailing pearling luggers, and donated ANTONIA to the Museum of Tropical Queensland in Townsville. It was then passed on to the Wooden Boat Association of North Queensland who began to restore ANTONIA back to the configuration of its pearling days. In 2012 this work has now been taken on by ANTONIA's new owners, Blackbird International, see www.blackbird.vu. The name ANTONIA is pronounced 'an-TON-EE-a' because of the family's Greek origins. It was named after Jack Zafer's father-in-law who had been a Greek merchant seaman and whose name was Anthony Freeleagus. ANNIKI was a combination of Anne and Nick, Jack's two older children, whilst the youngest child was named Anthony, so all the Zafer children are connected to their father's boats.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 17.57 m x 4.57 m x 1.9 m (57.65 ft x 15 ft x 6.25 ft) Registered Dimensions: 37 tons
Engine dimensions: 63 kilowatts, 6 cylinders (85 horsepower)