



Unearthing The REAL Titanic

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When Spring brushes the countryside with brilliant color, and bathes it with sweet smells, most Southerners think of azaleas, wisteria, and Easter. But this Southern boy also thinks of the Titanic. She set sail in the spring of 1912 on a fateful voyage that would conjure myths and legends. Myths and legends are one thing . . . facts are facts.

Fact I - The Titanic was not the largest ocean liner ever built. This distinction is currently held by the newly built Queen Mary II, which weighs in at a whopping 150,000 tons. Her outward appearance may not be in the same league as her more famous sisters of yesteryear, but that's still a big boat!

Fact II - The Titanic was not the most beautiful ocean liner ever built. Most maritime historians agree that glittering crown goes to the equally glittering Normandie. Plying the Atlantic during the late 1930's, she was a floating Art Deco palace of burnished brass-and-copper, Lalique crystal, red marble, gold gilt, and exotic woods.

Fact III - The Titanic was not the fastest ocean liner ever built. The United States, launched in the early 1950's, holds that record to this day. She could dash across the turbulent Atlantic at 37 miles-per-hour. If pressed, she could easily glide along at 44 miles-per-hour. That is not a bad speed for a ship that is over 900 feet long, and weighs almost 60,000 tons.

Fact IV - The Titanic was not involved in the greatest maritime disaster. That macabre title goes to a little known ocean liner, the Wilhelm Gustloff. In the last days of World War II, this 26,000 ton liner steamed out of the harbor in Gotenhafen, Poland – now present-day Gdynia. She was bursting at the seams with over 6,000 German passengers, mostly women and children. They were being evacuated from German-held land, and were fleeing the onslaught of the advancing Russian army. Over 1,200 wounded Nazi soldiers filled her public rooms. Some maritime historians place the number of passengers aboard the S.S. Wilhelm Gustloff at over 10,000. The true number was never known, because

95% of her passengers – whatever the vast number – were sent to their deaths by three torpedoes from a Russian submarine.

There is another interesting side-note to the Wilhelm Gustloff's tragic sinking. It has been rumored for years that she was transporting much more than just passengers. One of the most famous art treasures in the world, the legendary Amber Room, which had been stolen from Russia's Catherine Palace by the Nazis in the early years of the war, might have been aboard the ill-fated liner. But that's another story for another day.



Sooooo! If the Titanic wasn't the largest, or the most beautiful, or the fastest, or the deadliest, what distinction does she hold? Answer? The R.M.S. Titanic is, and most likely will remain, the most FAMOUS ocean liner of all time.

The Titanic was famous long before James Cameron's 1997 blockbuster elevated her to the pedestal of iconic divinity, and years before that movie, I too had fallen under the Titanic's beguiling spell. In the mid-60's, wrapped-up in an old quilt on a cold March night, I watched the 1953 Fox film "Titanic" on my parents black-and-white Zenith T.V. The story, the ship, and its sinking entangled itself around my psyche.

Of all the Titanic movies that I have seen, including the 1943 Nazi propaganda film of the same title, the 1953 version remains my favorite. Granted, the special effects don't hold a candle to the Cameron film, but the 1953 version had something the Cameron version somewhat lacks – memorable dialogue. In fact, the film's witty and literate screenplay won the 1954 Oscar for screen writing.



If I was forced to choose one word that best describes my fascination with the ill-fated liner, that word would be - people. Once you get past the carved beauty of the Titanic's grand staircase, her opulent staterooms, her plush carpets, and her vast promenade decks, she was - after all - a ship, used to transport people across the Atlantic. Those people came from all over the world, and from all walks of life - the rich and the poor, the famous and the humble, royalty and commoners alike. People like John and Madeline Astor, Molly Brown, Captain Smith, and Isidor and Ida Straus are familiar characters in the Titanic saga, but have you ever heard of the Goodwins?

Frederick Goodwin, his wife Augusta, and their six children, Lillian, Charles, Jessie, Harold, William, and baby Sidney, boarded the Titanic strictly by chance. Frederick Goodwin had originally purchased a ticket on a more modest ship, but due to Britain's national coal strike - in 1912, all ships were powered by coal - the family was transferred to the Titanic. Even though they would still be traveling Third Class, the Goodwin's knew that Third Class aboard the Titanic was like Second Class on many other ships. They must have thought it a stroke-of-luck to be aboard this new wonder ship. And like the world, they were lured into a false sense of security - everyone knew the Titanic was unsinkable.

Little is known about the Goodwin's life aboard the Titanic, but it can be surmised that on the night of April 14, 1912, they, like many others in Third Class, were rudely awakened by a loud knock on their

stateroom door. Outside their stateroom door a steward most likely yelled, "Don your life jackets, and stand ready for further instructions." In First Class, that alarm was sounded by a polite knock at the door, and a polite, "Sorry sir for the inconvenience, but would you please don your life jacket and await further instructions." Alas, those instructions - especially for Third Class - never came.

Around 2:10 on the morning of April 15, 1912, ten minutes before the Titanic split apart and plunged to the bottom, Frederick, Augusta, and their children were lost in the twisting upheaval that preceded the sinking. One cannot help but wonder what they did, or what they thought, or what they saw. Did they pray? Did they cry? Did Frederick Goodwin secretly curse his decision to take his family to the New World? Did Augusta Goodwin grieve for her children, ages 1 to 16, knowing they would never experience the joys that life can bring? Who first saw the icy-cold water rapidly rushing toward them? Who first lost their footing and fell, sliding down the deck into that black icy water, as the ship's stern rose higher and higher into the frigid night sky? We'll never know the answers to those questions because the entire Goodwin family perished in the sinking - only baby Sidney's body was recovered.

The Sunday following the Titanic's sinking, the Bishop of Winchester delivered a powerful sermon. He pleaded with his flock to never forget that "the Titanic, name and thing, will stand for a monument and warning to human presumption." In today's world, which revolves around being the biggest, or the most beautiful, or the fastest, or the deadliest, it might do us a bit-of-good to remember the Bishop's sermon on presumption. And it might also do us good to remember what can happen when we fail to recognize presumption for what it is - a ticket to disaster. ☼

Please remember
to pray for our troops.
May God bless!
And keep a song in your heart!

