



Titanic graves at the Baron de Hirsch Jewish Cemetery in Halifax. Photo courtesy of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

A n n a l s o f F u n e r a l S e r v i c e H i s t o r y

When the Death Ship Docked

BY CALVIN SUN

Unsinkable ... iceberg ... tragedy — these words are synonymous with Titanic. Through books, television, and movies — most notably the 1997 James Cameron film — millions have learned about the ill-fated liner and its passengers and crew. Many people know that survivors were taken to New York City.

Fewer know that victims were taken to Halifax, where the majority lie in rest.

Recently, my family and I, plus another family, spent a week on vacation together in the Canadian city of Halifax, capital of the province of Nova Scotia. For years I had been intrigued by the story of Titanic. But until recently I, like many others, knew only of the sinking, and not of the recovery of the victims. This vacation was memorable not only for the fact that our two families remain friends, but also for giving me even more knowledge about the Titanic.

During the last year, I had purchased and read my first source of information about the Titanic-Halifax connection: the book “Titanic: Destination Disaster” by John P. Eaton and Charles A. Haas. Only then did I learn of Halifax’s sad distinction of having the largest number of Titan-

ic graves in the world.

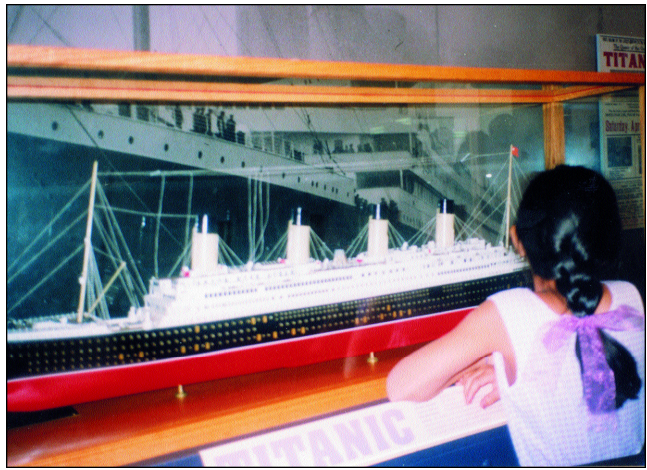
All of these factors had led to my wanting to vacation in Halifax. And after successful negotiations with my family (who unbelievably had wanted to go elsewhere) and my wife’s friend’s family, we set off for Halifax. From Philadelphia, we drove north to Boston, then on to Portland, Maine. That evening, we (along with our car) boarded the Scotia Prince, a ferry which connects Portland with Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. The next morning, we left the ferry and drove three hours to Halifax.

During our time in Halifax, we would visit many places. However, two of them proved particularly useful: the Citadel, and the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, also known simply as the “Maritime Museum.”

Located on a hill overlooking the city, the Citadel is the most-visited site in Canada. For years, it defended the city and its strategic harbor from potential French and U.S. attacks, which never occurred. Now inactive, the Citadel offers sweeping views of Halifax and surrounding areas.

The Maritime Museum, on the waterfront, contains numerous Titanic-related exhibits. In particular, the museum contains the only known surviving deck chair. The museum

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Replica of Titanic at the Maritime Museum in Halifax.

received this chair from the family of the the Rev. Henry Cunningham of St. George's Church, who had served as chaplain on one of the victim recovery ships, and who had received the chair in recognition of this work.

When one sees these exhibits, and visits the sites, one can truly appreciate the magnitude and importance of the steps involved in recovering the Titanic victims.

First Efforts

Once the White Star Line confirmed the Titanic as lost, it engaged — through its Halifax agent A.G. Jones — funeral director John Snow to coordinate the preparations for Titanic victims. A.G. Jones also chartered the first of four vessels which would recover victims: Mackay-Bennett, owned by the Commercial Cable Company, and commanded by Captain F.H. Lardner.

Because of its port location, and its access to railroad lines, Halifax proved to be an ideal location from which to begin the recovery. In fact, several newspapers had reported in error that Titanic had survived the collision, and was being towed to Halifax. This confusion occurred because of a mix-up in interpreting two different wireless transmissions:

- Baltic had inquired whether Titanic was all right
- Asian had reported that she was towing the disabled Deutschland to Halifax

Mackay-Bennett left the Halifax waterfront on Wednesday, April 17. On board, along with the officers and crew, were funeral director Snow, as well as Canon Kenneth Hind of the Anglican All Saints Cathedral in Halifax. Canon Hind would be responsible for leading services held aboard the ship. No representatives of White Star Line accompanied Mackay-Bennett or any of the other ships.

The spot at which Mackay-Bennett left the waterfront is known today as Karlsen's Wharf. Several blocks north of the Maritime Museum, the wharf is used by the Karlsen Shipping Company, Ltd., of Halifax. According to Fred DeBaie, marine superintendent of the company, Karlsen took over the wharf in the mid-1940s.

Recovery

The ship traveled through 700 miles of fog and choppy seas for three days. On the morning of Sunday, April 21, it

began recovery efforts. According to crew member Arminias Wiseman, that part of the ocean “was covered, as far as the eye can see, of remains and of corpses which rolled on water like stoppers...” That day, Mackay-Bennett recovered 51 bodies.

As these bodies were brought aboard, a simple but effective method of tracking them was used. This method, developed by

John Henry Barnstead, Halifax Deputy Public Registrar of Deaths, involved placement of a stenciled numbered tag with each body; inventorying and placement of victim property in a bag, with same number; recording of property as well as name (if known) and description of victim on a correspondingly numbered page of a ledger book.

These records proved useful in identifying victims, because



George Wright made many efforts to break down the class distinctions of his time. An example of such an effort was a public housing development he built. Located in the south end of Halifax (left) this development provided — on the same block — housing for upper-, middle-, and working-class residents of the city. In this develop-



ment lived Captain DeCarteret of the Minia. Several blocks away is George Wright's own home (right). Just before leaving England on Titanic, he had changed his will, donating the home at his death to the women of Halifax. To this day, the home remains the property of the Women's Council of Halifax.

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of the extreme distress their bodies had suffered. In these cases, the records often allowed for identification in the days, months and even years that followed.

Below are examples of recovery records, showing how the information gathered helped to identify the victim:

- *No. 124 — Male — Estimated Age 50 — Light hair & moustache.*

- *Clothing — Blue serge suit; blue handkerchief with “A.V.” belt with gold buckle; brown boots with red rubber*

soles; brown flannel shirt; “J.J.A.” on back of collar.

- *Effects — Gold watch; cuff links, gold with diamond; diamond ring with three stones; £225 in English notes; \$2,440 in notes; £5 in gold; 7s. in silver; five 10 franc pieces; gold pencil; pocketbook.*

- *First Class Name — J.J.Astor*

- *No. 206 — Female — Estimated age, 30 — Fair Hair*

- *Clothing — Brown Coat; green cardigan; dark shirt; brown skirt under;*



The spot at which Mackay-Bennett left the waterfront is known today as Karlsen's Wharf.

boots; no stockings.

- *Effects — Wedding ring; brass keeper; mouth organ; purse and two coins; a letter; 65 kroner; had four children with her; letter from husband, Neil Paulsson, 94 Townsend St. Chicago.*

- *Third Class Ticket No. 349909 (5 Tickets) — Name — Alma Paulson*

- *No. 202 — Male — Estimated Age, 35 — Black hair, no marks*

- *Clothing — Grey overcoat; grey muffler; uniform, green facing; green socks; crucifix.*

- *Effects — Diamond pin; gold watch; keys; knife; sovereign case, No. 2; pocketbook; memo book; 8s.; gold ring, marked “J.F.P.C.”*

- *Name - J.F.P. Clarke*

One victim, the fourth recovered, touched the crew of Mackay-Bennett. A fair-haired baby boy about two years old, he was found floating on the ocean with no identification. Moved by this sight, the officers and crew later would contribute to his grave marker.

In death, as in life, class distinctions prevailed. First-class passengers were embalmed on board and placed into caskets. Other passengers and crew were placed on ice below deck or simply stacked on deck and covered with canvas.

Initially, Mackay-Bennett intended to return as many victims as possible to Halifax. Only those too badly disfigured or decomposed were to be buried at sea. As the days passed, however, Mackay-Bennett found more and more victims. For example, during just two days (April 22 and 23), the ship recovered 114 bodies. Because of these large numbers, Mackay-Bennett began burying more and more victims at sea, re-

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ardless of condition. These burials were done using scrap iron, which would weigh down the canvas-enclosed bodies. At the same time, Captain Lardner contacted White Star Line requesting additional ships. In response, White Star chartered a second one, the Minia. Owned by the Anglo-American Telegraph Company Ltd., Minia was commanded by Captain W.G. S. DeCarteret. Ironically, Captain DeCarteret lived in a home built by a Titanic victim, Halifax philanthropist George Wright.

Considered by many to be a social progressive, Wright made many efforts to break down the class distinctions of his time. An example of such an effort was a public housing development he built. Located in the south end of Halifax, this

development provided — on the same block — housing for upper-, middle-, and working-class residents of the city. In this development lived Captain DeCarteret of the Minia.

Minia left the Central Wharf, on the Halifax waterfront, on April 21. Its departure was almost delayed because of a lack of caskets. However, a Halifax casket company worked continuously the previous day and night to meet the demand.

Working both alone and later with Minia, Mackay-Bennett recovered a total of 306 bodies, of which 116 were buried at sea, before leaving the area for Halifax on April 26. Continuing by herself, Minia recovered an additional 17 bodies, of which two were buried at sea.

Montmagny, the third ship to join, recovered four victims, of



Today, both the rink and Snow's funeral home still exist, but at different locations. The former rink location now is an army-navy



surplus store (left), while Snow's former funeral home is now a famous Halifax restaurant called The Five Fishermen (right).

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whom one was buried at sea. She took the other three (including Charles Hays, president of the Canadian Grand Trunk Railway) to the coastal town of Louisburg. From there, railroad cars took the coffins to Halifax.

The final ship chartered — Algerine — left St. John's, New-



On April 21, an overflow crowd gathered at St. Paul's Church. This church, the oldest Protestant one in Canada, sits opposite Snow's 1912 funeral home (now The Five Fishermen restaurant) in a place called the Halifax Grand Parade. At the service, many Canadian dignitaries paid their respects to the victims, in particular to church member George Wright, a businessman and philanthropist, thought to be the only Halifax resident to die in the disaster.

foundland, on May 15. However, she recovered just one victim, saloon steward James McGrady. He was the last victim recovered during the operation (although three other ships not part of the "official" recovery effort — Oceanic, Ilford, and Carpathia —discovered a total of eight additional bodies, all of which were buried at sea).

Although McGrady was the 328th and final victim found during this White Star-sponsored recovery, he was assigned number #330. This discrepancy arose because recovery personnel, for unknown reasons, failed to use two pages of their ledger book.

Return to Halifax

On April 30, Mackay-Bennett (by this time called the "Death Ship" because of its contents) arrived in Halifax with its 190 victims. As it entered Halifax Harbour, church bells throughout the city rang in tribute. The ship docked north of its departure point, at a wharf run by the Canadian Navy. This location offered not only more space, but also a high wall to shield the ship and its contents from the curious. Mackay-Bennett unloaded the Titanic victims while being guarded by both Halifax police and crew members of the Canadian naval ship Niobe. Once removed from Mackay-Bennett, the victims were taken by horse-drawn hearse to the Mayflower Curling Rink, then located on Agricola Street in the city's north end.

The area to where Mackay-Bennett returned is still a naval facility, and therefore closed to the public. This facility is located directly beneath the Angus L. MacDonald Bridge, which connects the cities of Halifax and Dartmouth.

Because of the large number of victims, Snow and the Halifax authorities had decided to use this rink as a temporary morgue. Curling, a popular Canadian sport, involves the spinning of a special stone over ice, within a hockey-sized rink. The large amount of space there would allow for the organized processing, identification, and claiming of victims.

Within the main section of the rink, temporary partitions

were erected, creating cubicles each holding up to three bodies. Once embalming was complete, the bodies of victims were brought into these cubicles, where family members could view and identify them. On several occasions, nurses at the rink had to administer smelling salts to revive those who had fainted.

One funeral director — Frank Newell of Yarmouth, on the southwest coast of Nova Scotia — received a shocking surprise. While preparing victims, he discovered among them his own uncle, first-class passenger and banker Arthur Newell of Lexington, Mass.

In addition to the curling rink, John Snow's own funeral home facility, on Argyle Street, was used to prepare victims. These victims, which included

John Jacob Astor, were first-class passengers. His body was claimed by son Vincent, who had arrived in Halifax from New York via his father's private railroad car.

Of the 209 victims returned to Halifax, 59 were claimed by relatives and taken elsewhere for interment. The remaining 150 were interred in one of three Halifax cemeteries: Fairview Lawn, 121; Mt. Olivet, 19; Baron de Hirsch, 10.

Funeral Services and Interments

The earliest of many funeral services occurred even before victims were returned to Halifax. On April 21, an overflow crowd gathered at St. Paul's Church. This church, the oldest Protestant one in Canada, sits opposite Snow's

1912 funeral home (now The Five Fishermen restaurant) in a place called the Halifax Grand Parade. At the service, many Canadian dignitaries paid their respects to the victims, in particular to church member George Wright, a businessman and philanthropist, thought to be the only Halifax resident to die in the disaster.

On May 3, after victims had begun arriving at Halifax, services were held at the following churches:

St. Mary's Catholic Church, for four then-unidentified female victims (one of which was later identified as third-class passenger Margaret Rice).

Brunswick Street United Methodist Church (destroyed by fire in 1979), for 50 unidentified victims, thought to be crew members

The following day, May 4, a service was held at St. George's Anglican Church (known as the "Round Church") for the "unknown child" who had been recovered by the crew of Mackay-Bennett. After considering numerous requests from citizens of Halifax to pay for the child's funeral, the authorities granted this privilege to Captain Lard-

Victims Interred at Halifax

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Baron de Hirsch	10	10	0
Mt. Olivet	19	15	4
Fairview	121	117	4
Total	150	142	8

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Search Results

<u>Ship</u>	<u># of victims Found</u>	<u>Victims Returned to Halifax</u>	<u>Victims Buried at Sea</u>
<i>Mackay-Bennett</i>	306	190	116
<i>Minia</i>	17	15	2
<i>Montmagny</i>	4	3*	1
<i>Algerine</i>	1	1	0
Total**	328**	209	119

* Montmagny returned these bodies to the town of Louisburg, Nova Scotia on May 13. From there, railroad cars transported them to Halifax.

** Three other ships (Oceanic, Ilford, and Carpathia — the ship which had rescued the Titanic survivors) discovered a total of eight additional bodies, bringing the total number of bodies found to 336. All of them were buried at sea.

ner of Mackay-Bennett and his crew. At the end of the service, six crewmen, acting as pallbearers, carried the child's casket to a hearse.

Leaving St. George's, the hearse proceeded to the nonsectarian Fairview Lawn Cemetery in the north end of Halifax. There, the child was buried beneath a large stone marker which reads simply:

"Erected to the Memory of an Unknown Child Whose Remains were Recovered after the Disaster to the Titanic, April 15, 1912."

Ironically, this child turned out to have been buried less than 10 feet from his mother. Later research, using the records from the recovery process, identified the child as two-year-old Gosta Leonard Paulson of Sweden. His mother, 29-year-old Alma Paulson, had been traveling with him and her three other children, ages eight, six, and four. They were bound for Chicago, where her husband Nils Paulson had already settled. As the ship was foundering, Alma Paulson huddled her children around her and played a harmonica to keep them calm. This harmonica proved important later

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Grave of Unknown Child which reads:
"Erected to the memory of an unknown child whose remains were recovered after the disaster to the Titanic April 15th, 1912."

in identifying her body. Her other children were never found.

Other notable victims at Fairview besides the unknown child include orchestra violinist John Law “Jock” Hume; Ernest Freeman, secretary to White Star Line chairman J. Bruce Ismay (Ismay paid for the elaborate marker here); James Dawson, Titanic crew member (His grave is marked simply as “J. Dawson.” Many visitors particularly young girls therefore assume that he is instead Jack Dawson, fictional hero of the James Cameron movie.)

In 1944, Fairview Cemetery Company Limited, which ran the cemetery, went out of business. As a result, the city of Halifax assumed responsibility. The city continues to run the cemetery to this day, under superintendent William Cleary.

The four rows of graves at Fairview are designed to resemble a ship’s hull. The right side of this “hull” is empty (i.e. contains no markers), symbolizing the damage to Titanic from the collision. Also, the “hull” faces northeast — the same direction in which the actual bow of Titanic rests at the bottom of the Atlantic.

Next to Fairview is the Jewish Baron de Hirsch Cemetery. Ten Titanic victims are interred here, of which only two are identified. But at least one of them — Michel Navratil, a Catholic — should not have been interred at Baron de Hirsch at all.

Navratil had been fleeing France with his two sons, ages three and four, because of a custody dispute with his estranged



Ten Titanic victims are interred at Baron de Hirsch Cemetery, of which only two are identified.

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wife. As an extra precaution, he was traveling under the assumed name "Louis Hoffman," and kept to himself throughout the trip. During the evacuation, Navratil handed his sons to a passenger in collapsible lifeboat D. This passenger, the Navratil boys, and the others in this lifeboat were rescued. However, Navratil himself perished. When his body was recovered, his false name led authorities to assume that he was Jewish, and to inter him at Baron de Hirsch.

Only later, when newspapers began writing and printing pictures of the "orphans of the Titanic," did Marcelle Navratil learn about her children and late husband. Brought to New York from France by White Star Line, she was reunited with them on May 16. All of them later returned aboard another White Star Line ship, the Oceanic (which ironically located and buried at sea at least one other Titanic victim).

In August 1996, 88-year-old Michel Navratil Jr. — by then a retired professor living in France — came to Halifax and the Baron de Hirsch Cemetery for the first time. Kneeling by his father's grave, he smiled and touched the marker as a priest blessed the site. Edgar Wolman, chairman of the Baron de Hirsch Cemetery Committee of Beth Israel Synagogue, witnessed the event and remembers it well. "I found the visit touching," said Wolman, "because it was the first time he had seen the



Notable victims at Fairview include James Dawson, Titanic crew member.

(His grave is marked simply as "J. Dawson." Many visitors, particularly young girls, therefore assume that he is instead Jack Dawson, fictional hero of the James Cameron movie.)

grave. I thought of it as a historic moment itself.”

Interestingly, many (if not most) other Titanic victims at Baron de Hirsch Cemetery also may be non-Jewish. That such a situation might be true does not surprise Wolman. Given the difficult situation at the time, cemetery staff could rely only on clues such as surnames. In his words, “they just had to do the best they could.”

The third Titanic cemetery in Halifax is Mt. Olivet. Run by the Catholic Cemeteries Commission, under Executive Manager Darlene Hickey, Mt. Olivet holds 19 victims, including orchestra member J.F.P. Clarke. Another victim, Serrando Ovies y Rodriguez, is the only one to have been disinterred. Originally interred at Fairview, he was later discovered to be Catholic. This discovery led to his disinterment from Fairview and reinterment at Mt. Olivet.

If you visit these cemeteries, you will notice that most of the graves have the same plain granite marker. The markers also display:

- The victim number, assigned during the recovery (in most cases)
- Deceased date of April 15, 1912



Coffins being unloaded at naval dockyard. Photo courtesy of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

• Name (where known)

To date, at least 107 of the 150 victims interred in Halifax have been identified.

Statistics of the interred victims reflect the “women and children first” policy which Captain Smith decreed that fateful night. Of these 150 victims, only eight are women.

All these Halifax sites provide an abundance of information and memories about the Titanic disaster, and of the heroic efforts of those who recovered the victims. One can draw many conclusions about the “lessons of the Titanic,” and speculate endlessly about what might and could have been. One can

admire the efforts of the ship crews, funeral directors, and cemetery staff in recovering, preparing, and laying victims to rest. But most importantly, one must remember these victims. As Ms. Hickey says, “let them rest in peace.”

AFD

Calvin Sun is a consultant who has worked with many death-care organizations. He has written for several death care publications, including American Cemetery, and has given presentations and training classes on customer service. A member of the Titanic Historical Society, he also has lectured on Titanic at the 1998 NFDA convention.