

TITANIC SOCIETY OF ATLANTIC CANADA

IN 2012, THE ONE HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY YEAR, the Titanic Society of Atlantic Canada was formed in the recovery port city of Halifax. You are invited to join the society to enhance your appreciation, review literature and findings, and add to the knowledge of all things *Titanic*.

Since its design, construction and launch at Belfast, Ireland in 1911, the first and final voyage of the White Star Line RMS *Titanic* in April 1912 has gained iconic status in the collective Halifax memory, sharing with the world an interest in the vessel, its passengers, crew and those connected with it.

The memory of much-loved native son George H. Wright (1849-1912) who lost his life in the disaster, added to the pall of sadness that engulfed Halifax, along with joy that Hilda Mary Slayter (1882-1965) survived.

On hearing the wireless calls for help, from Cape Race, Newfoundland on April 15th, Captain Arthur Rostron of the Cunard Line RMS *Carpathia* changed course and headed toward the sinking vessel, setting off rockets as it steamed to the rescue of the distressed ship. At 4:10 a.m. the first shivering survivors climbed from the lifeboats and were met by crew with blankets, food and drink. Around 1496 passengers and crew, unable to find space in the lifeboats, briefly struggled in the frigid North Atlantic before hypothermia claimed them. Over 712 survivors in the lifeboats listened to their diminishing cries for help, a memory that remained for the rest of their lives.

At 9:25 p.m. on April 18th, RMS *Carpathia* entered New York Harbour, passing the Cunard Pier on the Hudson River to off-load *Titanic* lifeboats at the White Star Wharf and returned to disembark survivors. Regulatory immigration inspection at Ellis Island was suspended due to the exceptional circumstances of the disaster. Thousands met the first, second and third class survivors at the Cunard Pier.

St. John's and Halifax are located on the main North American shipping lanes, offering adequate port support facilities, and making them available to conduct the body recovery mission. The Port of Halifax, with mainland rail connections to the rest of North America as well as the homeport for the major cable companies, was the choice of White Star, and became the centre of recovery operations.

The Commercial Cable Company cable steamer *Mackay-Bennett* (pronounced "Mackie-Bennett") under the command of F. H. Larder, was selected and left port on April 17th to begin her grim task. Her mission was to recover remains or bury at sea bodies recovered. John Snow Jr. of Snow & Company Undertaker supervised arrangements, including embalming fluids, coffins, canvas, scrap iron and ice. Kenneth C. Hind, assistant rector to the Dean of the Cathedral of All Saints,

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conducted the internments at sea. On April 25th, the Western Union cable steamer *Minia*, under the command of WG Squares de Carteret, joined her sister ship in the recovery of bodies. On April 30th, the *Mackay-Bennett* sailed for Halifax, having recovered 306 bodies; 116 were buried at sea and 190 were brought back to the port. William H. Snow was undertaker while Henry W. Cunningham, rector of St. George's Church conducted religious services. The *Minia* recovered seventeen bodies; two were buried at sea, and the remainder returned to Halifax on May 4th. The CGS *Montmagny* would recover four bodies and the SS *Algerine* from Newfoundland recovered one. A total of 328 bodies were recovered; 119 were buried at sea; 59 were returned to relatives; 150 are interred in Halifax.

Religious services were held at Saint Paul's Church, Barrington Street and the Synagogue on Starr Street. Funeral services were held at All Saints Cathedral, Martello Street; Saint Mary's Cathedral, Spring Garden Road; Brunswick Street Methodist Church, and Saint George's Church, Brunswick Street.

The bodies were interred in three cemeteries: 121 in Fairview Lawn Cemetery, 3720 Windsor Street; 19 in Mount Olivet Cemetery, 7076 Mumford Road; and 10 in Baron de Hirsch Cemetery, 3700 Windsor Street.

At the corner of Argyle and Carmichael Streets was formerly Snow & Company Undertaker. Near the southwest corner of Argyle and Sackville Streets was the location of Halifax Marble Works (Frederick Bishop, proprietor), which installed the headstones and bases for the White Star Line. The stones were etched by R. Frank L. Fitzgerald. White Star paid all costs related to the recovery of bodies, burial plots, headstones if required, and upkeep of the graves until the 1930s, when a fund was created for the perpetual care of the gravestones.

The biographies of Maritime shipping entrepreneurs record their innovative contributions in the pre- and post-Confederation history of the Atlantic provinces. Shipping merchants Enos Collins (1774-1871) of Halifax, and Benjamin Bowring (1778-1846) of St. John's were early trailblazers, followed by Samuel Cunard (1787-1865) of Halifax, founder of the Cunard Line.

The White Star Line has a sad history with Halifax, dating back to April 1873 when the SS *Atlantic* sank off Prospect Harbour, with the loss of 562 passengers and crew who are also buried in cemeteries in Prospect and Halifax. The White Star cattle ship *Runic*, renamed and serving as the Belgian Relief Ship *Imo*, was one of the two vessels involved in the explosion in Halifax Harbour on December 6, 1917. The Halifax Explosion claimed over two thousand lives, injuring thousands and causing millions of dollars in damage to the port city.

In 1934, Cunard and White Star Lines were merged. Today, many travellers on the Cunard Line have an opportunity to visit Halifax as a port of call.

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