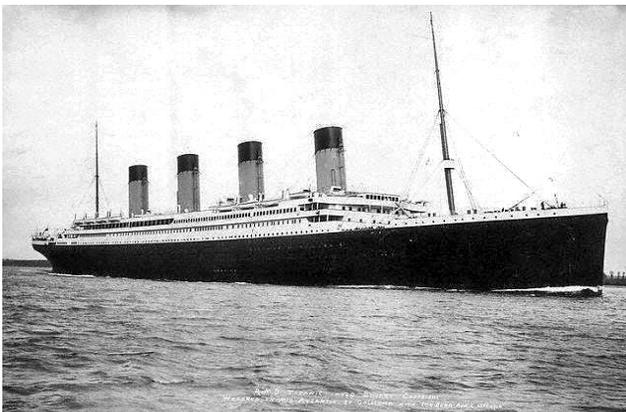




TITANIC – The Schenectady Connection

by Ed Reilly

April 15, 2012 marked the 100th anniversary of the tragic sinking of the Titanic. The basic facts regarding the event are extremely well known and can be expressed in one long and heart-wrenching sentence: On April 3, 1912, the Royal Mail Ship *RMS Titanic*, the largest ocean liner built to that date, left Belfast, Ireland, near where it was built at the Harland & Wolff shipyard for J.P. Morgan's White Star Line; took on passengers at Southampton, England, Cherbourg, France, and Queenstown, Ireland; began its maiden voyage on April 10 bereft of binoculars in the crow's nest because of an oversight, bound for New York City carrying 20 lifeboats whose combined capacity was only a third of that needed for all passengers, steamed on under command of Captain Edward John Smith, who, despite eight wireless warnings of floating ice in the shipping lanes, was ordered by White Star Line's Managing Director, J. Bruce Ismay, to maintain maximum speed of 22½ knots along a minimum distance great-circle route in hopes of reaching New York on Tuesday, April 16, a day ahead of schedule; sideswiped a large iceberg at 11:40 p.m. on a calm moonless night, Sunday, April 14, 375 miles southeast of St. John's, Newfoundland; suffered a 300 foot gash below its waterline that flooded more watertight compartments than the 4 of 16 it could tolerate; began to sink at midnight; sank below the waves at 2:20 a.m. on the next day, drowning 1,530 people, mostly men, leaving adrift in lifeboats 705 survivors, mostly women and children, who, two hours later, were rescued by the *S.S. Carpathia* and brought 963 miles southwest to New York City to continue their lives as best they could.



← *RMS Titanic leaving Southampton
on April 10, 1912*

This actual photo is the last one taken of the *Titanic* afloat. The color image at the top is a romanticized artifact, a still photo used to promote James Cameron's movie *TITANIC*. Used with the stated editorial permission of 20th Century Fox, it was formed by superimposing an image of a 90% scale model ship on a photo of a gorgeous sunset.

New York State connections

At the time of the tragedy, no passenger was a resident of Schenectady, but one survivor who was heading here, Ellen “Nellie” Hocking, subsequently became one. Her story, the principal focus of this essay, will follow a brief digression about those with other local connections.

Five members of the Ryerson family from Cooperstown were on board. Four survived, but its patriarch, Arthur Larned Ryerson—described in several Titanic accounts as a wealthy “steel magnate”—did not, nor did his close and more famous friend, John Jacob Astor. But the Ryerson family would not have been on board the *Titanic* had they not received a wireless message that Arthur L. Ryerson, Jr., age 20, had been killed in an automobile accident in Haverford, PA, on April 8.

Survivor Gilbert M. Tucker, Jr. of Albany landed on the first lifeboat to leave the ship. Tucker's account of the disaster was published in the Albany *Times Union* of April 19, 1912. Tucker died at age 88 in California and was returned home to be buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands. And according to records from the same cemetery, English crewman Arthur Bright stayed in America, moved to 50 Dove St. in Albany, and died there in 1921. But according to Encyclopedia Titanica (www.encyclopedia-titanica.org), Bright died in England in 1955 and is buried over there.

Miss Kornelia Theodosia Andrews, vice-president of the Hudson City Hospital, was returning home with her sister, Anna Hogeboom, and their niece, Gretchen Longley. All three boarded Lifeboat 10 and survived, but Miss Andrews died of natural causes in Hudson, NY, on December 4, 1913, less than two years later. Niece Gretchen Longley (later Leopold), died on 11 August, 1965, aboard a cruise ship, the S.S. Constitution, in the Mediterranean. Even more ironically, Robert DiSogra, the president of the Titanic International Society at the time, was a waiter aboard the Constitution, knew of Mrs. Leopold's death, but did not learn until years later that she was a Titanic survivor.

The Schenectady connections

To repeat, no survivor or victim was a resident of our city or county as of April, 1912, but two listed their intended destination as Schenectady. One was 18-year-old Edward Willey, a farm laborer from Drayton, England, who boarded the *Titanic* at Southampton as a third class passenger. He was travelling from Drayton to Schenectady, possibly to work at one of the many farms in Glenville, Niskayuna, or Rotterdam, perhaps even our own Mabee Farm. His body was either never found, or he may be one of several unidentified *Titanic* victims who were recovered and buried in one or another of three cemeteries in Halifax, Nova Scotia where 121 victims are interred. DNA analysis may yet discern the identity of some of the unidentified victims, and poor Ed Willey may be one of them.

The other person heading to Schenectady with the intention to live here was 20-year-old Ellen May “Nellie” Hocking, the fiancée of Schenectadian George Charles Hambly, born in Penzance, Cornwall, England, who had come here to work for ALCO. Ellen Hocking was also born in Penzance, but two years earlier, 5 November 1891, the daughter of Mr. William Rowe Hocking and Mrs. Eliza Needs Hocking. She was sister to William, Thomas, Sidney, Richard, Horace, and Emily. Nellie travelled second class on the *Titanic* with her widowed mother, Elizabeth “Eliza” Hocking, her sister, Emily Hocking Richards, her brother, Richard Hocking, and her two very young nephews, George and William Richards. All survived the sinking except for her brother Richard.

Eliza Hocking's sons Sidney and Richard had immigrated to America in the early 1900s and were living in Akron, Ohio. She was traveling to Akron to live with them and be there for the planned marriage of Ellen to George Hambly. I suspect that the Hocking and Hambly families knew one another in Penzance and it was there that George met, courted, and proposed to Ellen. Because of the trauma and mourning associated with the disaster, the wedding did not take place until May 14, 1913. Eliza lived in Akron for two years until her death in a streetcar accident on 15 April 1914, precisely two years to the day that the *Titanic* disappeared into the depths of the Atlantic.

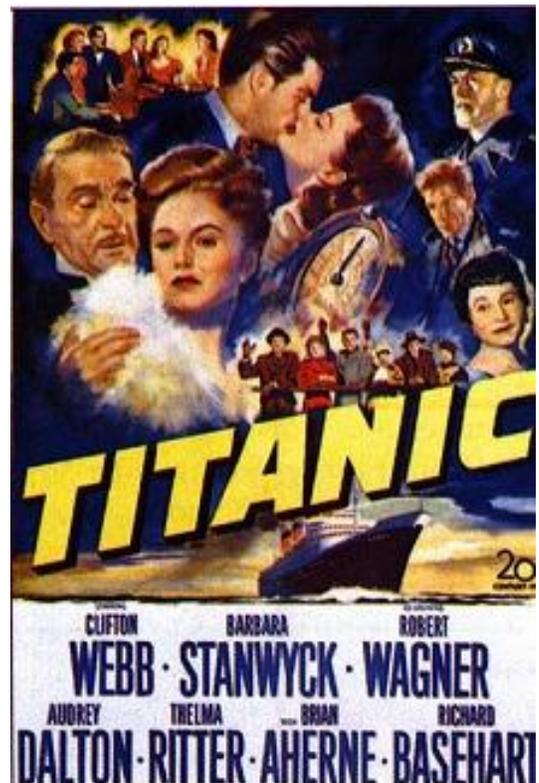
In Schenectady, Ellen and George Hambly had two sons, William and Robert. Ellen worked at General Electric and later at Ellis Hospital. According to City Directories, at one time or other the Hambly family lived at 337 Avenue B, 435 Avenue A, and 1674 Avenue A. With them or near them at other Schenectady addresses over several years were George's mother Mary, his brother Walter, his sister May, and his sister Lavenia, a cashier at the Wallace Company. George died at age 49 on December 10, 1938, making Ellen a young widow of 47, but she never remarried. His obituary said that at the time he was a cost accountant for General Electric.

Titanic, the Movies

Films about the Titanic tragedy have appeared regularly over the years, from mid-1912 through the Cameron movie TITANIC of 1997. In May of 1953, 61-year-old Ellen "Nellie" Hocking Hambly, a Schenectady resident of 40 years, was a guest of Proctor's Theatre for the TITANIC that starred Clifton Webb, Barbara Stanwyck, and Robert Wagner. At the time, Ellen was living at 2105 Dean Street in Niskayuna. The story of her visit to Proctor's was colorfully told by Jeff Wilkin of the Daily Gazette in his *Life and Arts* blog of October 16, 2008.



The Hambly-Hocking Gravestone in Parkview Cemetery





← *Something in the poster catches the Ellen's eye.*

Ten years later, on October 14, 1963, Ellen Hocking Hamby died at age 72 in Middletown, NY while visiting her son William, a building contractor. Her obituary in the *Schenectady Gazette* said that she had retired after working for General Electric and Ellis Hospital in Schenectady where she had been living at 1475 Kingston Avenue, and that she was survived by her two sons and five grandchildren. Both she and her husband, George Charles Hambly, are buried in Parkview Cemetery.

A search of online White Pages revealed that there are many Hamblys living around the country, none in Schenectady, most in our western states. One entry, for an "Alison Hambly," seemed to indicate that she had once lived here, so I emailed: "*Alison, would you be the granddaughter of Nellie Hocking Hambly, a Titanic survivor who lived in Schenectady, NY?*"

A scant five hours later, she replied: "*Yes, I am. And I love Schenectady, the town where I was born.*"

And so do we, Alison. Come back to see us soon.