

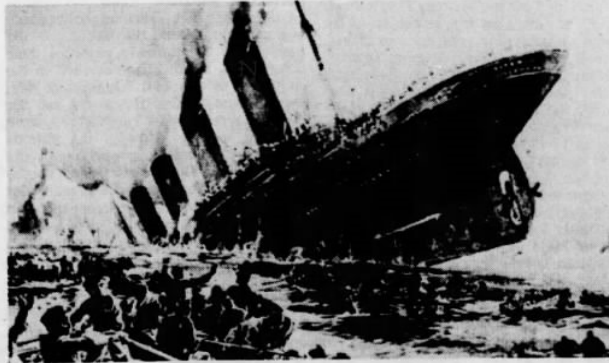
Titanic--and its memories--both vulnerable

By James Keeran

On the front page of The Daily Pantagraph, Wednesday, April 17, 1912, there is printed a list of a hundred or more names, including those of the

Albert F. Caldwell family.

The names are under the heading, "the second-class passengers on board saved from the Titanic." pographical errors had jumbled the names of Albert and Sylvia Caldwell and their infant son,



Sinking of the Titanic

Painting by Willy Stoewer, UPI

Alden.

But to the Caldwells it made little difference.

They were alive and their experience would be with them for the rest of their lives.

For Albert Caldwell, the memory came to a close in a Richmond, Va., hospital last Thursday.

He was the last known survivor of the Titanic who lived in Richmond. His son, Alden G., is probably the last known survivor of the Titanic who once lived in Bloomington.

Their story began aboard the ill-fated British White Star liner carrying Albert and Sylvia Caldwell, and their 10-month-old baby, Alden, home from Presbyterian mission work in Siam (now Thailand).

Eventually they would move to Bloomington, they would have another son and they would divorce. She later married George J. Mecherle, founder of State Farm Insurance Companies, and died Jan. 14, 1965, in Bloomington.

But their lives would cross a giant hurdle late on the evening of April 14, 1912, and the following morning.

Albert Caldwell is dead now. He died Thursday, 65 years and 35 days after his

life was saved by a bit of luck, and he was buried Monday afternoon in warm Greenville, N.C., a long, long way from the icy waters of the North Atlantic, where for several dark hours his name was being written into history.

"I was asleep and didn't feel the bump," he told a group of ministers several years ago.

He often spoke to clubs and school, church or lodge groups, especially after he retired from the insurance business in 1958.

"I awakened when the boat stopped. There was no panic. I think everyone was confident the boat couldn't sink."

The ship was 882½ feet long. It weighed 45,328 tons. It cost \$10 million to build. It was the newest and largest passenger ship on the seas of the world.

As the Caldwells were boarding the Titanic in Southampton, England, Mrs. Caldwell asked a crewman if the ship was, indeed, unsinkable.

"Lady," he replied, "God almighty could not sink this ship."

There was confidence aboard.

Five nights later, after the ship struck an iceberg, Mrs. Caldwell awakened her husband, who went on deck to see whether there was trouble.

He returned, assured there was none, and went back to sleep.

Mrs. Caldwell, however, was restless and could not sleep, and in a few minutes an officer came about getting people out of their cabins and into life jackets.

He ordered the Caldwells to a lower deck, where they were forgotten and not discovered until all but two lifeboats had been filled and set adrift.

Finally Mrs. Caldwell and the baby were hauled aboard lifeboat No. 13. But, before it, too, was lowered away, an officer saw that there still was room and told Caldwell to get in and hold the baby. It saved his life.

There were only 16 to 20 lifeboats aboard the sinking liner, enough to carry fewer than half the 2,200 aboard.

As it was, the confidence that boarded the ship with its passengers and crew turned against them.

There had been no drills, and the crew was not familiar with the new equipment.

But, there was no need. The ship was unsinkable.

It went down in 2½ hours with a 300-foot-long gash in its hull.

Only about 700 were saved. About 1,500, including John Jacob Astor and

Benjamin Guggenheim, two of the richest men in the world, went down with the ship or died of exposure in the 28-degree water.

Survivors were taken aboard the Carpathia and put ashore in New York, and as large inquiries began in both England and the United States, Caldwell and his young family moved to the Midwest, where he became a teacher and principal.

In 1924 he left education and came to Bloomington with Massachusetts Life Insurance Co.

Eventually he joined State Farm Mutual and in 1933 he moved to Richmond, Va.

While in Bloomington he was active in the Kiwanis Club, serving as its president in 1927.

In Richmond he was an elder in Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, a member of Dove Masonic Lodge and past president of the Richmond chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Surviving are his widow, Jennie; his sons, Alden G., who became a chemical research engineer in Allentown, Pa., and Raymond M., Brighton, Mich., and two grandchildren.

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