

‘Unsinkable to Unthinkable: Titanic Passengers at Laurel Hill’

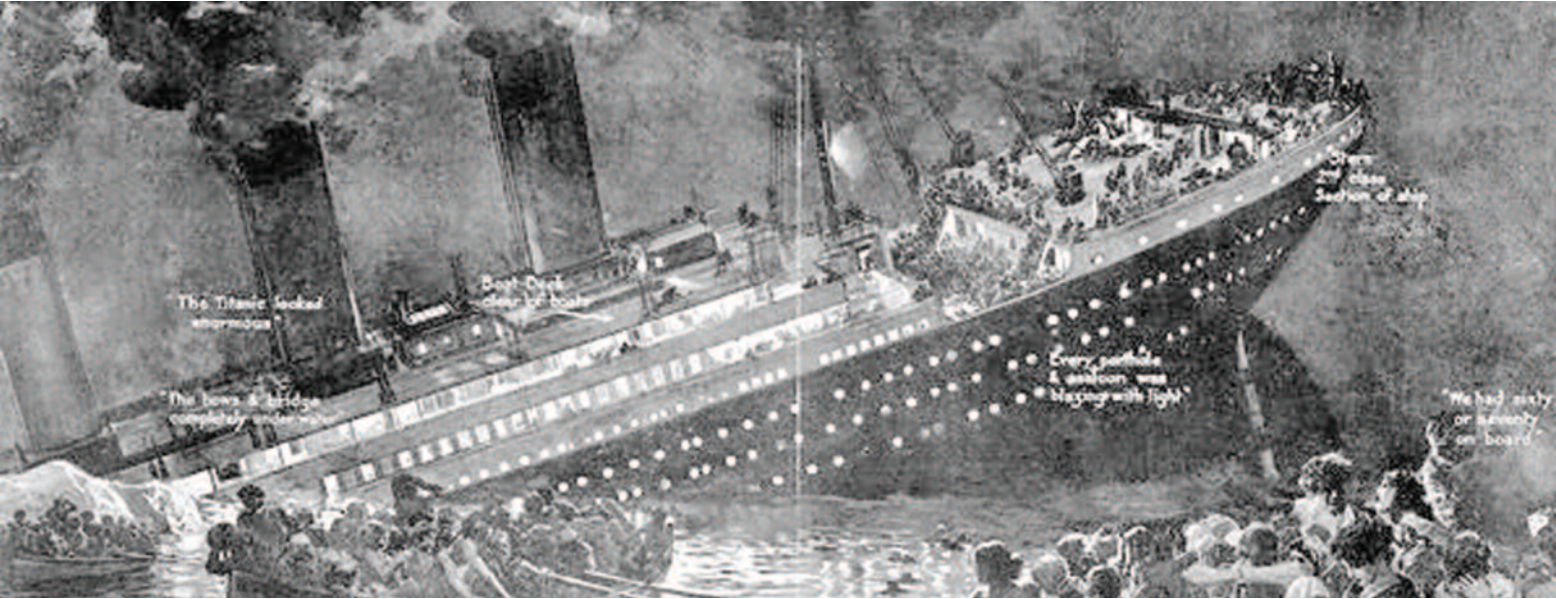
by Frank D. Quattrone

With an inspired title that captures the event’s horror and irony, a walking tour of Laurel Hill Cemetery scheduled for April 15 will commemorate the famed British ocean liner that tragically sank at the turn of the century, as well as the ship’s passengers who perished and survived.

“Unsinkable to Unthinkable: Titanic Passengers of Laurel Hill,” will take attendees on a walk through Laurel Hill Cemetery (East and West) exactly 111 years, to the day that the ocean liner foundered and sank into the depths of the icy Atlantic after striking an iceberg off the Grand Banks, near Newfoundland, Canada.

Guests will learn the stories of the six Titanic passengers entombed, interred, or memorialized by cenotaphs at Laurel Hill, including their prominence in Philadelphia area society before and after the disaster. (A cenotaph is a monument or an empty tomb honoring a person whose remains are elsewhere.) The tour is hosted by The Friends of Laurel Hill.

“Our job at Friends is to educate people on the lives and experiences of those buried here,” said Beth Savastana, a volunteer and tour manager at the cemetery. To that end, the first part of the Titanic tour will begin at 1 p.m. at Laurel Hill East (3822 Ridge Ave. in East



A walking tour at Laurel Hill Cemetery will explore the graves and monuments connected to local passengers who sailed on the RMS Titanic, the ocean liner that hit an iceberg and sank in the Atlantic Ocean in 1912.

Falls) before participants drive to Laurel Hill West (225 Belmont Ave. in Bala Cynwyd) for the second portion of the tour.

Of the 2,224 passengers and crew aboard the Titanic, 1,523 perished and only 705 survived. Among the most prominent passengers was George Dunton Widener, the son of Peter Arrel Browne Widener and Hannah Josephine Dunton, at the time the wealthiest family in Philadelphia. George booked passage with his wife, Eleanor Elkins Widener, and their son, Harry Elkins Widener. Eleanor, daughter of William Lukens Elkins, a founding partner of Standard Oil Com-

pany and Philadelphia Traction Company, and Maria Louise Broomall Elkins, survived the sinking and died during a visit to Paris in 1937. Her husband, George, who had recently built the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and was seeking French chefs to staff the kitchen, perished, as did their son, Harry, who had been searching for additional rare books to supplement his acclaimed book collection.

The Wideners had been residents at Lynnewood Hall, their palatial mansion in Elkins Park, which earned the name “the American Versailles.” It had been commissioned in 1898 to renowned architect Horace Trumbauer, with Julian Abele, a prominent African-American architect, as chief designer and draftsman. George, Eleanor and Harry are entombed in the Widener Mausoleum, located on top of a hill along the cemetery’s “Millionaires Row.”

The Potters, another prominent Philadelphia family, lived in a roomy and comfortable Chestnut Hill mansion called The Evergreens, located at Stenton Avenue and Summit Street. Thomas Potter was the founder of one of the most successful oil cloth and linoleum manufacturing companies in the country (located in North Philadelphia).

After his death in 1910, his still-grieving widow, Lily, decided to

travel to the Holy Land, and invited her daughter, Olive, who was embroiled in a bitter divorce, to join her. They booked their return trip on the Titanic. They survived the shipwreck and were among hundreds of passengers rescued by the S.S. Carpathia.

A longtime admirer of Clara Barton and an avid supporter of the American Red Cross, Lily Potter was recognized as the oldest volunteer of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross just before she died, at the age of 98, in 1954. Her daughter, Olive Potter Crolius, was also active in the Red Cross for the remainder of her life, but she never lost her desire for traveling, despite the Titanic disaster. The final Titanic passenger buried at Laurel Hill is William Crothers Dulles, a prominent Philadelphia attorney who had been traveling in Italy to purchase breeding horses for his farm in upstate New York. His was among the 328 bodies recovered from the frigid waters of the Atlantic. His remains are entombed in the Dulles Mausoleum.

Charlotte Drake Cardeza, another prominent Philadelphian, survived the shipwreck. Cardeza, the daughter of Thomas Drake, a wealthy British textile manufacturer who helped co-found the Union League of Philadelphia, had booked

the most luxurious suite on the ocean liner.

Although Cardeza is not buried at Laurel Hill, she lived in a grand estate in Germantown called Montebello. In 1940, it was sold and demolished. The new owners con-



Lily Potter, who with her daughter Olive survived the Titanic, lived at The Evergreens mansion in Chestnut Hill. Photo courtesy of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy

verted Montebello into an apartment complex, at Washington Lane and Morton Street.

Cardeza was accompanied on the Titanic by her son Thomas, who also survived. He settled with his wife at 305 W. Chestnut Hill Ave. which they named Parkside Manor. After Thomas’ death in 1952, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia purchased Parkside Manor, which then served as living quarters for teaching priests.

For information, call 610-668-9900, email info@laurelhillphl.com, or visit laurelhillphl.com.

Additional upcoming tours at Laurel Hill include “Liberty or Death: Revolutionary War Soldiers of Laurel Hill East,” and “For the Bees: Apiary and Candle Workshop” at Laurel Hill West, both on April 16. “Welcome to Franconia, A Slice of Philadelphia,” on April 30, will highlight prominent musicians, sports figures and civil rights activists buried in an important section of the cemetery.

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