



THE name of Titanic survivor Nora Keane from Castleconnell made news around the world a fortnight ago when a watch said to be hers was auctioned in the US for more than €19,000. **NORMA PRENDIVILLE** has been researching Nora Keane's story with members of her family

Nora Keane and a night to remember

IT was terrible that wreck. It cannot be described in all its horror and detail. I think of it with the terrible fear upon me again.

These are the words of Castleconnell woman Nora Keane who made her own small place in history as one of only 705 people to survive the sinking of the Titanic. More than 1500 others perished in the early hours of April 15, 1912, less than three hours after the world's biggest and most luxurious liner struck an iceberg.

Nora's recollections of that disastrous night, told to a reporter at The Patriot-News of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, resonate down the generations.

"I was ready for bed as were most of the passengers who had not already gone to sleep when the officers came and told us to leave the ship. They told us to put on life preservers as the vessel was in bad shape. We did this; then we went on deck," she said.

Prior to the steward's announcement, there had been no indication of trouble, Nora said, although she recalled sensing a "slight shock".

The night was cold and clear. On deck, Nora found that "the officers had perfect control of everything. There was some excitement amongst some of the people but not what you would expect under the circumstance".

The officers called out who was to go in the lifeboats and the crew "showed every courtesy in lowering the women and children into the boats".

Nora Keane was fortunate. She got on in the



Titanic watch: the watch belonging to Nora Keane of Castleconnell which fetched €19,000 at auction in America

"The men passengers stood back. Without doubt, they sacrificed their lives to give women and children the preference," she said.

One man, however, made it into their boat. "No one saw him go. When we got into the boat, we tramped over him for some time but didn't see him or even know we were stepping on a human form," said Ms Keane.

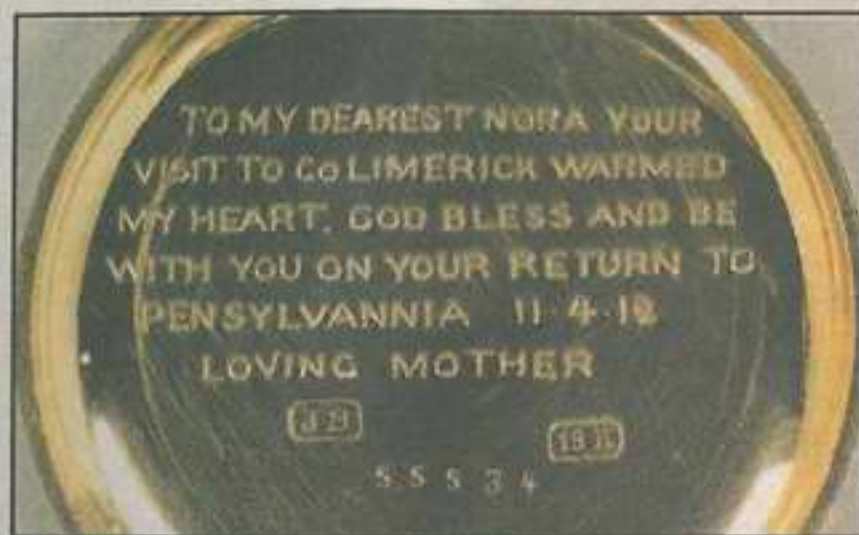
But the man afterwards proved useful, being able to handle the boat which contained 55 passengers.

"The sea was calm. It was not a large boat and we were much crowded," she said.

Had the sea been choppy, the lifeboat would surely have capsized, Nora told the reporter, because the "sides of the boat were nearly to the water".

She recalled, too, the horror of being unable to help victims in the water.

"Two men floated by us. Both of them had life preservers. One of them drooped low in the water. He did not call. The other called to us: 'take me on'. It was almost an impossibility to do anything. Our boat barely floated. 'Good-bye' the man in the



head went down a little later. He disappeared out of sight. That was the case with many others. It was a terrible sight to witness. It cannot be forgotten. The sight of men in the sea was awful," she recalled.

From the lifeboat, Nora saw the Titanic go down, at approximately 2.20am on April 15.

"The ship seemed to go down forward and raise to an awful height, all at once. There was a roar and a deafening sound. The cries and moans of those passengers and crew in the water were awful. Very soon, there was nothing seen or heard. The ship went down about 100 yards from where our boat was. Bodies drifted past us. Pieces of the wreck were around," she said.

Nora also recalled the band playing.

"And that band played, I don't know how the men did it, while we were getting on the boats. It played when we drifted away. Men jumped into the sea but the band played. Some of them must have stood in water that was then over that part of the deck while they played for we were on

board the same level

"They played Nearer my God to Thee till the ship rose and they went out of sight. They must have been playing when it went down," said Nora.

Nora and the 704 other survivors were picked up by the Carpathia about daybreak.

And it was The Patriot who told her brothers in Harrisburg that she was safe, having previously reported their anxiety about her.

At 9.15am on April 18, the Carpathia docked in New York where Nora was met by her brothers, Dennis, William and Patrick and John Keane.

Dennis described the scene for The Patriot.

"The ship made a beautiful appearance as she came almost silently up. There was no sound. I believe that a pin could have been heard fall up to the time the gangways were lowered for the passengers. Down the planks came the survivors. The big lines of police stood silent and we stood silent too. Then people would break out of the ranks and take their loved ones in their arms," he said.

Nora then returned to Harrisburg where she had made her home with another brother, Michael, who was with

Her name continued to appear in local directories until 1919. According to her grand-niece, Sr Noreen Keane, Nora returned to Castleconnell in the 1920s and lived with her brother, Peter, and his family until her death on December 20, 1944, at the age of 80.

"She was a tall woman who walked with a very straight back," Sr Noreen said of the grand-aunt who was part of her family.

She was also a very religious woman and she often told them the story of the Titanic.

Born on March 30, 1864, Nora was one of a family of seven boys and two girls born to John and Honora Keane. She emigrated with five brothers to the US in the 1890s and they settled in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Nora had been on an extended visit to her mother in 1912 when she booked her passage back on the Titanic. She had, it seems, intended to return on an earlier boat, but believed she would be more comfortable on the Titanic where she was a second-class passenger. She was just 48 at the time.

Nora, recalls Sr Noreen, lost her rosary beads when she was on the tender bringing her out to the Titanic in Cobh, then Queenstown.

She considered this a terrible augury and kept repeating to her cabin-companion, Edwina Trout, (later MacKenzie) that she felt something awful was going to happen.

Mrs MacKenzie told Sr Noreen when they met in 1983 that on the night the Titanic sank, Nora's response to the stewards' pleas to hurry up to deck was "I am not

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