

# A Limerickwoman's Account of the Titanic Disaster

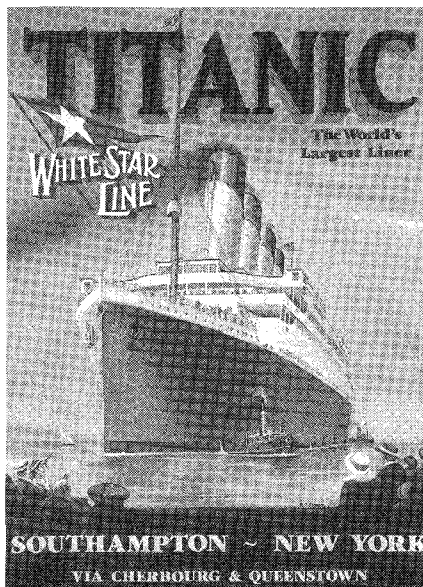
**T**he *Titanic* was built at the Harland and Wolff shipyard, Belfast. It was launched on May 31st 1911, and it took many more months to fit her out and give her her sea-trials. She, with her sister ship, SS *Olympic*, were the largest vessels afloat. After leaving Southampton on April 10th 1912, en route to Cherbourg, she narrowly avoided collision with the liner *New York*. She arrived at Cobh, then Queenstown, in Cork Harbour on the 11th to begin her transatlantic voyage. Not only was it her first, but she was determined to set a new transatlantic speed record, which was then held by the *Lusitania* at four days, twenty hours (116 hours). Cobh was the recognised starting point for such record attempts.

In all, 120 Irish passengers boarded *Titanic* for the trip to America. Those known to have been on board from Limerick city were: Miss Nora A. Keane, Daniel Keane, John Kennedy of Rosemary Place, Watergate, Patrick Lane of Clare Street, Miss Nellie O'Dwyer of High Street, and T. Morgan, a fireman and member of the crew. Those from County Limerick were: James Scanlan of Rathkeale, Patrick Ryan, Mary Madigan, Bertha Moran and Daniel Moran, all of Askeaton, Patrick Dooley of Patrickswell, Joseph Foley of Mountplummer, Bridget O'Sullivan of Glenduff, Ashford, and P. Colbert of Kilconlea, Abbeyfeale, who had worked as a porter in Limerick railway station. The names of about fifteen other Limerick people on board are not known. Most of these people would have travelled either in second or third class, and were lodged deep in the belly of the supposedly unsinkable ship.

Riordan's Travel Company handled the booking of Patrick Lane and the American consul, Mr. Ludlow of Glentworth Street, made the arrangements for John Kennedy and Nellie O'Dwyer. He also booked five from the county, one being from the Castleconnell area. There were other passengers who had their tickets paid by friends in America or elsewhere, and who would not have been registered at the local offices. There were others who had intended sailing on the *Titanic*, but not having their arrangements completed, travelled on the *Mauritania*, which left Queenstown the following Sunday.

Of the Limerick city and county passengers, the *Limerick Chronicle* reported as being saved Nellie O'Dwyer, John Kennedy, Bertha Moran, Mary Madigan and Nora Keane, and as being lost Joseph Foley, Bridget O'Sullivan, Patrick Lane, Patrick Colbert and James Scanlan.

by Des Ryan



Modern postcard after a Titanic poster.

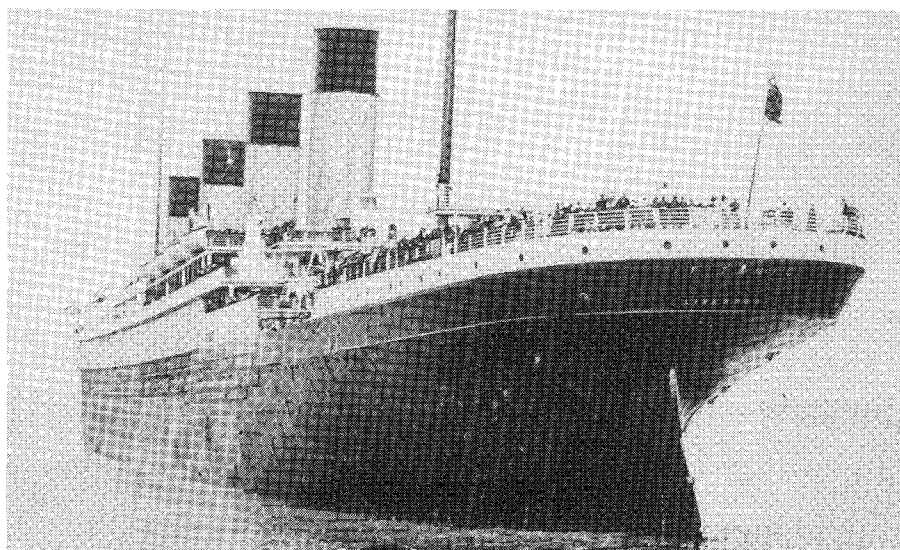
Nellie O'Dwyer was rescued from the sinking of the *Titanic* by the liner *Carpathia*. She had been living in Brooklyn, New York, for six years, and was returning to America after visiting her parents in Limerick. She gave a dramatic account of the nightmare to the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, and the *Limerick Chronicle* reprinted it at the time:

*"I was dozing off to sleep when the big ship seemed to jar," she began. "I was not frightened, but got up to ask the other girls what had made the vessel act so. Then it was still. You know, all day and*

*all night there was a whirr of machinery and when it stopped it was queer. For the longest while, none of us could find out what was the matter, but then some young men who were on the vessel with us from Queenstown told us to go back to sleep. It was nothing. 'Ye foolish girls, go back to your beds,' they said to us, 'Sure the ship struck an iceberg, but it would take a power of icebergs to harm her.' So we - well, most of us - started to go back, but the boys said they were going up on deck to see the berg, for the captain was going to bring it aboard. Of course 'twas fooling us they were. Some time later we could hear folk running around above and we went up the stairway to the upper steerage deck. Something was wrong, we could see that, but we were not frightened, really."*

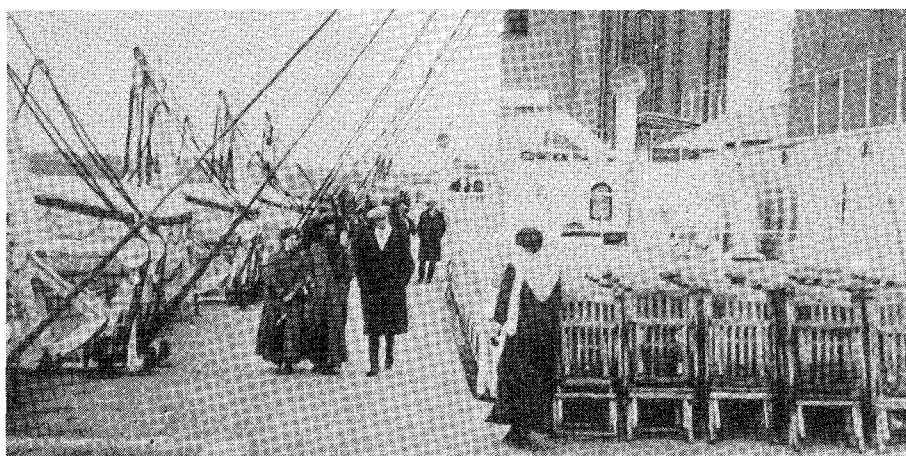
*"But then we could hear them shouting to get the life belts. We knew then something must be wrong. We girls and some of the women with us knelt down on deck and said the Rosary. Some ladies and gentlemen passed us from cabins and they looked at us curiously. Boats were being lowered and people were being helped into them. Some were almost thrown in."*

*"Poor Paddy Lane," murmured the girl, after a pause, "he was a fine young fellow, a little younger than I am, and when we were leaving the other side [Ireland], his folks asked me to please look after poor Paddy in America. When the boats were being lowered, Paddy knelt on the deck and prayed. Then he began to run around calling for the Priest. And he started for the other side of the ship. I never saw him again. Paddy went down when the ship sunk."*



The Titanic at Cobh, 11 April 1912.

Fr. Browne Collection.



On the Titanic at Cobh.

Cork Examiner.

*"The awful period of sorrow aboard the Carpathia was relieved by Nellie O'Dwyer, who was an angel of mercy. Her robust constitution had been disturbed but little by the trying privations of the night on the open sea, and she went among the suffering survivors tenderly nursing them, making tea for them, and with the characteristic buoyancy of her Celtic heart forcing a smile and cheering the forlorn with a word of comfort."*

The same issue of the *Chronicle* contains the following letter from Eddie Ryan, son of Mr. Daniel Ryan, Ballinareen House, Emly, Co. Tipperary, to his parents:

*"Dearest Father and Mother - I had a terrible experience. I shall never forget it. You will see all about it in the papers which I'll send on to you. I was the last man to jump into the last boat. I stood on the Titanic and kept cool, although she was sinking fast. She had gone down forty feet by now. The last boat was about being rowed away when I thought in a second if I could only pass out I'd be all right. I had a towel around my neck. I just threw this over my head and left it hang at the back. I wore my waterproof overcoat. I then walked very stiff past the officers, who had declared they'd shoot the first man that dare pass out. They didn't notice me. They thought I was a woman. I grasped a girl who was standing by in despair, and jumped with her thirty feet into the boat. An Italian and myself rowed away as fast as we could, and soon after the great liner sank. We were for seven long hours in the boat, and were nearly dead for the want of a drink. I attribute my safety to Almighty God. We were treated fine on the Carpathia and landed in New York on Thursday. I was released from St. Vincent's Hospital on Saturday, hale and hearty, even without having a cold, and went on to Troy on Sunday. I'll tell you more of my experience in my next letter."*

In the aftermath of the *Titanic* disaster, a fund for the survivors, known as the Lord Mayor of London's Mansion House Fund, was started. People contributed money or staged events for it. In Limerick, the owner of the Theatre Royal, George V. Fogarty, placed the hall and his staff, free of charge, at the disposal of any responsible committee of citizens who would stage a concert in aid of the sufferers. On May 4th, Fr. Devane, vice-president of St. Michael's Temperance Society, took up the offer, saying that they would put on a show. This took place on May 17th, *The Rebel's Wife* playing to a full house that night. After the first act, the Boherbuoy Band played a selection of Irish airs.

The *Chronicle* reported two of those rescued as claiming that they had been beaten about the head while in the water and had been pushed away from a lifeboat. Nearly three-quarters of the Irish passengers lost their lives on that fateful night.

*Then there was a sweet little boy. Oh! the grandest and most beautiful prayers that one could hear came from a child, do you know. I think he was lost, for I don't remember seeing him next morning in any of the boats."*

*"The captain treated everyone alike, whether they were from first cabin or the steerage. He acted angry only towards the men that were pushing forward. He kept us from panic, so he did. The Italian men were the worst. There was a poor fellow near where I was, and they could not get him back, and an officer shot him and he fell at my feet. I never heard the ship's band playing louder. Men were shouting, women were crying for their husbands and children to stay with them. I don't know how I got to the cabin above."*

*"I was among the last, and there was only one boat left. Yes, that is true about the old couple. I could hear her husband bidding her get into the boat, and the last I heard her say was 'No, no, no!'. As we came along, the last thing that I saw was the priest waving his arms towards, like as if it might have been absolving us all. The poor man was going toward the steerage."*

### Afraid to go into the boats

*"Do you know, we still had no notion that the ship was going down? We were a little afraid getting into the boats. That is all of them, men or women, were afraid, except the stewards. There was a queer look on their faces as they helped us along. I didn't understand then - none of us did. Now we who were saved know what that look meant. There was some trouble with the nurses. They were supposed to place lifebelts on the people. A few of them tried to escape. But the officers shouted at them, and they came back to their work."*

*"The poor girl that was to go into the boat just before me was afraid. She jumped and missed the boat all but one ankle, and a man at the oars grabbed her. She slipped from his hold and was drowned. I got afraid and an officer lifted me. Some one said 'Careful, there', and I was dropped into the boat. She was pulled away and I sat up to look at the big ship. It could not have been more*

*than seven minutes before there was a terrible explosion. O, God, be merciful to us all! The cries that came from the ship I'll never forget. I could see before the explosion just dimly the face of a woman who had six children with her on board. I think none of the little ones got up soon enough to be saved. The poor mother never left the ship."*

*"Then, those in charge began to give orders, keeping the boats a little apart. A little while after we could see one boat with a green light on it. Some man was giving orders in it. In our boat was a tall man with a moustache, and he seemed to have some giving of orders. We had sixty-five in the boat, and they started taking people out, and putting them in boats that had very few in them. Five or six Chinamen were found at the bottom of one boat. The way they were saved was by fixing their hair down their backs, and putting their blankets about them. They were taken for women when the boats were leaving the ship. When they took some of the people from our boat, we had a sailor and an Italian stoker to row us. It was awful, so it was. The Italian knew no English, and he didn't seem to understand the sailor's telling him 'back water.' There was no other man now. So, to try and save the people, I took the oar from the Italian and the sailor and I rowed about as best we could. Sometimes the green light I told you about on that one boat made me think now and then that a ship was coming and we were afraid it would run us down before we could be saved. We would often mistake a bright star, do you know, for the top light of the vessel. Towards morning we rowed over to the place where the Titanic went down, but there were only pieces of wreckage floating, except for the new life belts that poor souls had adjusted the wrong way before they left the ship."*

*"There have been varying accounts as to the air that the ship's band played as the vessel was sinking, but Nellie O'Dwyer declares without hesitation that it was 'Nearer, My God, to Thee.' She declares that her boat was equipped with neither water nor provisions of any kind. She knew the names of none of the persons in her boat."*