

United States Senate Inquiry

Day 9

Testimony of William Burke

Source : <http://www.titanicinquiry.org/USInq/AmInq01Indxa.php>

(The witness was sworn by Senator Smith.)

Senator SMITH.
What is your full name?

Mr. BURKE.
William Burke.

Senator SMITH.
What is your place of residence?

Mr. BURKE.
Fifteen Dodge Street, Southampton.

Senator SMITH.
What is your age?

Mr. BURKE.
Thirty.

Senator SMITH.
And your occupation?

Mr. BURKE.
Dining room steward.

Senator SMITH.
Were you dining room steward on the [*Titanic*](#)?

Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

Senator SMITH.
In what dining room?

Mr. BURKE.
First class dining room.

Senator SMITH.
Were you on duty in the first class dining room on Sunday, the day of the accident?

Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

Senator SMITH.
During what hours were you on duty?

Mr. BURKE.
During all meal hours and about an hour before the meal hours and an hour after; breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Senator SMITH.
What table did you have?

Mr. BURKE.
You mean the passengers?

Senator SMITH.
I mean which side of the boat?

Mr. BURKE.
I was on the starboard side forward.

26 Senator SMITH.
What passengers were you specially assigned to?

27 Mr. BURKE.
Mr. and Mrs. Straus. [[Isidor](#) and [Ida](#) Straus]

28 Senator SMITH.
Mr. and Mrs. Straus alone?

29 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

30 Senator SMITH.
What time did they dine on Sunday night?

31 Mr. BURKE.
It would be about a quarter past 7 when they came into the dining room.

32 Senator SMITH.
Did you ever see them again after that?

33 Mr. BURKE.
No; not after they left the dining room, I didn't see them.

34 Senator SMITH.
Did they dine alone?

35 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir; they had a table to themselves.

36 Senator SMITH.
Did you see the [captain](#) dine that night?

37 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

38 Senator SMITH.
Did you know [Mr. Ismay](#)?

39 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

40 Senator SMITH.
Did you see him dine that night?

41 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

42 Senator SMITH.
Where were you when the impact came?

43 Mr. BURKE.
I was in my bunk - in bed.

44 Senator SMITH.
Were you asleep?

45 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

46 Senator SMITH.
How many people were in your room?

47 Mr. BURKE.
I believe there were 28.

48 Senator SMITH.
All table stewards?

49 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir; all table stewards with the exception of one. One was on deck, assistant deck steward.

50 Senator SMITH.
Mr. Burke, I wish you would tell, in your own way just what you did from the time that impact occurred until you went aboard the *Carpathia*?

51 Mr. BURKE.
When I first felt the impact I did not know exactly what to make of it. I thought probably she had dropped her propeller, or something. I did not get up right away. I waited for probably a quarter of an hour. About a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes later the order came for lifebelts. The order came to get out lifebelts and get up on deck and take our overcoats. Mention was made of the fact that it was very cold. I immediately got up with everybody else. Everybody was taking a lifebelt. I did not at that time bother about a lifebelt. I put on my coat and dressed in the ordinary way. As we were going out one of the last men said, "There is a lifebelt near my bunk, if you want one." I went back and got this lifebelt, and carried it out and took it up on deck. I went to the boat deck on the starboard side?

52 Senator SMITH.
To your station?

53 Mr. BURKE.
I went to my station from there and found my boat had gone.

54 Senator SMITH.
What was the number?

55 Mr. BURKE.
[No. 1](#). I thought the next best thing to do was to assist with some other boat. I turned around, and I assisted in two boats on that side of the deck, and the captain gave the order to the sailors that were working with me to go aft and assist about the last boat which I thought was going to be launched on that side. The sailors ran down there to assist at this boat, and I did not go. I went to the port side from there. I assisted with [No. 8](#) boat. I saw her lowered down, full of women, and I immediately passed down to the next boat, which was [No. 10](#). As I got to No. 10 boat, the [chief officer](#) was there. I just heard him say, "How many seamen are in that boat?" The answer came back, "Two, sir." He turned to some man standing there and said, "Is there any man here can pull an oar?" Nobody answered, but a man who seemed to me like a foreigner got close to him, and I didn't hear what he said, but he simply pushed him aside, and he said "You are of no use to me." I went to him and told him I could pull an oar but was not anxious to go unless he wanted me to go. He said, "Get right in there," and he pushed me toward the boat, and I simply stepped in the boat and got in.

56 After I arrived in the boat the chief officer seemed to be joined by another officer, and they were shouting the decks, and as they came along they made room, cleared the men away, and passed the women along. Each one, as they were passed along, was put in the boat. I remained where I landed in the boat and helped to pass them in. There were also about three children passed in at the same time.

57 When there were no more women to be had around the deck the chief officer gave the order for the boat to be lowered. I might say that about the last woman that was about to be passed in slipped, and was about to fall between the ship and the boat when I caught her. I just saved her from falling. Her head passed toward the next deck below. A passenger caught her by the shoulders and forced me to leave go. It was my intention to pull her back in the boat. He would not let go of the woman, but pulled her right on the ship.

58 Senator SMITH.
Do you know who the woman was?

59 Mr. BURKE.
No sir; I did not know her.

60 The boat was lowered then into the water. One of the sailors took an oar, and I took an oar, and the only other member of the crew, a fireman, got an oar. The sailor steered the boat, and we rowed away from the ship. We got probably about a quarter of a mile away, and remained there. We saw pretty well the last of the ship - the *Titanic*.

61 We remained drifting about practically all night. At one time we were tied up with three boats together, until I gave the order myself in that boat to cut us adrift that we might go to a collapsible boat that was in distress. When they cut our boat adrift I found an officer in another boat had come to the aid of this collapsible boat, so we remained there for some hours, drifting about. At daybreak, we made fast to another officer's boat, and we arrived alongside of the *Carpathia* with these two boats tied together.

62 Senator SMITH.

Who was the officer in charge of boat?

63 Mr. BURKE.
There was no officer in that boat, sir.

64 Senator SMITH.
Who was in charge of boat No. 10?

65 Mr. BURKE.
When the boat was first launched there were two seamen.

66 Senator SMITH.
What other man?

67 Mr. BURKE.
The only other man I recognized at that time was the fireman, a member of the crew named [Rice](#).

68 Senator SMITH.
Were there any other men on her?

69 Mr. BURKE.
Yes; but I did not recognize those people.

70 After the two seamen left that boat some of the women in the forward end said to me: "There are two men down here in the bottom of the boat."

71 I said "Are there so?" I made down in the bottom of the boat and got hold of those two men and pulled one out. I found he was, apparently, a Japanese and could not speak any English. I explained to him and put him on an oar. The other man appeared to me to be an Italian, about 18 stone. I tried to speak to him in Italian and he said, "Armenian." That was all he could say. I also put him on an oar.

72 We done what we could with the boat in the meantime and made fast to an officer's boat later on.

73 Senator SMITH.
What officer's boat?

74 Mr. BURKE.
I could not say what officer's boat. I think it was [Mr. Lowe's](#).

75 Senator SMITH.
Lowe?

76 Mr. BURKE.
No; it would be the second officer; I think [Mr. Lightoller](#). I think it was his boat.

77 Senator SMITH.
How many people were in lifeboat No. 10, all together?

78 Mr. BURKE.
I did not count the people, sir, but the boat was packed to the utmost capacity. I should say there would be close to 60 people and about four children.

79 Senator SMITH.
Four children?

80 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir; if I were to guess the number at all.

81 Senator SMITH.
Did you know any of the women that were in that boat by name?

82 Mr. BURKE.
I did not know them by name. I knew their faces, and afterwards had their names and addresses on board the *Carpathia*.

83 Senator SMITH.
Can you give us the names and addresses of the women on that boat?

84 Mr. BURKE.
[Miss Andrews](#) and [G. Longley](#).

85 Senator SMITH.

Give the address.

86 Mr. BURKE.
Both the same address 751 First Street, Hudson, N.Y.

87 Senator SMITH.
Is that all you can give?

88 Mr. BURKE.
That is all. We got aboard the *Carpathia* and everything was in perfect order.

89 Senator SMITH.
That is the only name that you could get of any women on board, or of men?

90 Mr. BURKE.
That I could recognize; yes.

91 Senator SMITH.
Did you know any women or men in lifeboat No. 8?

92 Mr. BURKE.
I knew the steward that got away in No. 8; that is all.

93 Senator SMITH.
No. 1 departed before you arrived?

94 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

95 Senator SMITH.
Did anyone get into your boat after you had left the *Titanic*?

96 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

97 Senator SMITH.
Who?

98 Mr. BURKE.
I should say about 12 men and three or four children.

99 Senator SMITH.
They were helped in from the -

100 Mr. BURKE.
They were helped in by the officers; and I was in the side of the boat taking them from the officers.

101 Senator SMITH.
How did they happen to be put in?

102 Mr. BURKE.
They were called for on the deck and as they came along, one by one, they were passed into the boat by me.

103 Senator SMITH.
I guess you do not understand me. I mean after you left the *Titanic*, and before you reached the *Carpathia*, did anyone get into your boat?

104 Mr. BURKE.
Yes.

105 Senator SMITH.
Who?

106 Mr. BURKE.
There were several passengers. An officer's boat came alongside during the night and gave us about 12 or 15 passengers. He took our two seamen away, with the intention, I presume, to go back to the wreckage.

107 Senator SMITH.
Was that Mr. Lowe?

108 Mr. BURKE.
That was Mr. Lowe, I believe. I thought I recognized his voice.

109 Senator SMITH.
Did anyone try to get into your boat after you left the side of the *Titanic*, and before you reached the *Carpathia*, that did not succeed in getting in, to your knowledge?

110 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir; not to my knowledge.

111 Senator SMITH.
Or getting out of it?

112 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir; only those two sailors.

113 Senator SMITH.
Only those two sailors that were transferred to boat No. 15?

114 Mr. BURKE.
Yes sir. I do not know the number of the boat.

115 Senator SMITH.
It was Mr. Lowe's boat? [Lowe's boat was No. 14]

116 Mr. BURKE.
Yes.

117 Senator SMITH.
Did all the passengers in lifeboat No. 10 reach the *Carpathia* alive?

118 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

119 Senator FLETCHER.
With reference to the woman who you say fell and was taken in at deck A, did she come back and get in the boat?

120 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir; the boat was in the act of lowering then, and was being lowered at that time, and we kept right along. This passenger pulled the woman in.

121 Senator FLETCHER.
Do you know whether she succeeded in getting into another boat or not?

122 Mr. BURKE.
I could not say. I supposed she got into another boat.

123 Senator FLETCHER.
Because you thought No. 10 was one of the last boats lowered?

124 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

125 Senator FLETCHER.
There were [No. 12](#), [No. 14](#), and [No. 16](#) yet on that side of the ship. Were they lowered after No. 10?

126 Mr. BURKE.
I could not say. I saw the boat next lowered - probably No. 12. I think that got away about the same time. That was the only boat I saw left.

127 Senator FLETCHER.
You did not see No. 14 and No. 16 lowered?

128 Mr. BURKE.
No; I did not see them lowered.

129 Senator FLETCHER.
Or see them after they got into the water?

130 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

131 Senator FLETCHER.

How many people were there in No. 8?

132 Mr. BURKE.
I could not say.

133 Senator FLETCHER.
What proportion were male and what proportion female?

134 Mr. BURKE.
In my boat?

135 Senator FLETCHER.
In No. 8? You helped to load No. 8, and No. 10, also?

136 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir; I saw most of the women in No. 8. I did not see any men.

137 Senator FLETCHER.
Were there any women on the deck when No. 10 was lowered?

138 Mr. BURKE.
Not after the officer had finished passing those women to me I have just mentioned. I saw no more.

139 Senator FLETCHER.
You had not anything to do with arousing the passengers on the ship?

140 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

141 Senator FLETCHER.
These boats that you assisted in loading, and the one you got away in, were all lifeboats?

142 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

143 Senator SMITH.
Not collapsible boats?

144 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

145 Senator SMITH.
Or emergency boats?

146 Mr. BURKE.
No, sir.

147 Senator FLETCHER.
There was an emergency boat alongside of or near No. 1, or under No. 1, was there not?

148 Mr. BURKE.
No. 1, I believe, was an emergency boat.

149 Senator FLETCHER.
No. 1, itself, was an emergency boat?

150 Mr. BURKE.
I believe so.

151 Senator FLETCHER.
And that had gone when you reached the deck?

152 Mr. BURKE.
Yes, sir.

153 (Witness excused.)