

COLLETT TELLS HIS STORY

The Auburn Citizen

Tuesday 23 April 1912

Says He Heard No Music as the Titanic Went Down.

STILL SUFFERING FROM EXPERIENCE

Visibly Nervous as He Told the Tale of His Journey, Which Contained Many New Details of the Wreck of the Leviathan Ship – Mildly Indignant When He Recites the Statistics of Passengers and Crew Members Who Escaped Death.

The first complete story of the sinking of the Titanic from the lips of Rev. Sidney C. Stuart Collett, a survivor, was told to the Citizen this afternoon at the home of Rev. Mr. Collett's parents, Rev. and Mrs. Mawbey E. Collett, in Port Byron. The young man, nervous, pale and still suffering from his harrowing experience was forced at times to drop his narrative when it entered into the more tragic aspects of the disaster. Nevertheless he pulled himself together as the story unfolded and by sheer determination told the tale that his parents and others have been waiting to hear.

It was the first time since the wreck that he has been able to tell a continuous story, and seated in the little parlor of his father's parsonage, surrounded by his parents, his brother, Thomas Collett, and the newspaper men he was the central figure in the group. His nervousness, at times reaching the point where interruption was made, was calmed somewhat by the kind ministrations of his father and mother, and he constantly brushed his hands through his brown hair as he signed and recalled the horrible picture of that eternal night.

Some of his descriptive statements were remarkable in their vividness and they stamped the picture indelibly on the minds of all who were assembled about him. While in general his narrative followed the chief account given thus far as to the important details of the wreck his story contained new details that differed with stories that have been printed.

While not declaring positively that no music was heard on board, he stated that he, himself, did not hear any music as the liner sank, nor so far as he could learn on the Carpathia had he heard anybody else say anything about the singing of Nearer My God to Thee. He added, however, that it was possible that he could not have heard the music, for there was much noise during those terrible last hours. He rose at one time to a point of mild indignation when he recounted that 206 members of the crew had been saved, and regarded this high percentage

as not very credible in view of the fact that only a few over 500 passengers were saved, and of those 80 per cent were women. Taking up his narrative at the point where he decided to come to this country because his mother and father had been settled here for two years he said:

The Start for America.

“Well I might say in beginning that I was just an hour too late to book on the St. Louis of the American line, and was unable to sail on the Philadelphia because of the coal strike. Then I transferred to the Titanic and so, of course, I came here on the Carpathia. We left Waterloo station and I was accompanied by my uncle Sidney. At the very start there was trouble. The train stopped because somebody had interfered with the brake valve. We reached Southampton and there I met my aunt, so you see I had my aunt on my mother’s side and an uncle on the paternal side to see me off.

“Just as we were aboard and after it was impossible for me to go ashore again I saw my aunt beckoning rigorously to me and turned in the direction she indicated. I saw a young lady looking at me and I looked at her. It was Miss Wright and she was coming to New York to meet her lover and in this manner she was as it were, put into my charge. Then we sped on our way and there was more trouble. The suction of our boat drew the stern of the New York toward us and her stern and our stern were rushing together when a tug caught the New York and towed her to her moorings. We passed Cherbourg and Queenstown and on Thursday afternoon I took my last look and bade farewell to the old country. Everything was going finely. On Sunday morning we had our first service, an Episcopalian service and the chaplain read from the 13th Corinthians, I believe.

Hymn Service on Board.

“On Sunday evening a few of us thought that we would like to have a hymn service and Miss Wright, myself, three other young men joined Rev. and Mrs. Carter of East London and urged them to hold the meeting. I went about and announced that if anyone was interested in a song service to come into the saloon. Miss Wright, and I may say here that since I became her protector she playfully suggested that in order that I might not make love to her she got another friend (probably Miss Kate Buss, mentioned in Saturday’s paper) as our companion, and they joined us in the service. She sang: There Are Green Hills Far Away, and For Those in Peril At Sea. At the request of Mr. Carter we also sang Now the Day Is Over and in closing sang: Stand Up For Jesus. I remember that because we had no music so I led the singing. ‘Now give us five minutes of the Gospel,’ I said to Rev. Carter and so the meeting closed, and I am sure that everybody enjoyed it.”

Very Cold on Deck.

“I had supper with a young fellow from Guernsey and he said that it was very cold on deck, so I went up to see, and it was very cold. There was much joviality before we went to our berths. Before we went to sleep I recited prayers, and it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. They heard my prayers and one of the young men thanked me.

Felt Two Throbs.

"I had been in bed about 10 minutes and all that I can say is that I felt two heavy throbs, just as if we had hit something, rebounded and then hit it again by going forward. I jumped up, put on light clothing and went up on deck. The steam was blowing with a deafening noise. I did not see the iceberg myself. I talked to the officers and the Captain ordered us to get the ladies. I ran down, got more clothing and went to Miss Wright. She had got up and was out on the deck.

"I went up and saw them getting the lifeboats ready. I ran down again and told many women that I thought it was only right to let them know that they were getting the boats out and that the accident was serious. They did not seem to believe it. Then I saw them putting on the life belts. There was one boat filled and one had gone. I think I was amongst a lot of foreigners at that time. After the boats were filled I asked my friend, the young man from Guernsey who had played for us, whether he was going in.

In Third Boat from Last.

"He went over to the other side and I never saw him again. There were no more women to go and I asked the officer if there was any objection to my going in that boat. He said 'No, get in' and I was the last one in. I think it was the third from the last to go on that side. It was No. 9 and we had to get away fast. Besides other boats going down there was danger from the sinking boat. I cannot describe the sinking in any other way than to say that it was like the noise from a football field, not loud like a shout of victory, but hushed as though there was canvas over it.

No One Worried at First.

"The trouble was that at first all thought themselves safe. They were not worried about leaving the ship and it was not until there was no hope for them that they realized the danger. I heard the steward saying that there was no public bell ringing and the rockets that warned many passengers of the danger were heard only after the boats had all pulled away from the ship.

"There were two loud noises as she went down. It was like as if all the cargo went from one side of the ship to the other all at once. It may have been bursting of the boilers or the vessel breaking itself in two. I don't know. It seemed to me that we all should go down. As she sank I saw her looming up more clearly just as on a lantern slide when they are bringing a picture into focus.

"It must have been the suction, not the immediate suction, but the distant suction under the water that drew us toward the sinking ship. 'Why, it's coming toward us,' we said in our boat. Then it went down."

An Illustration.

With audible efforts of all to repress their emotion the young man took up a pointed lead pencil,

and showed how the giant liner had tipped, rose and dove in her final plunge to the bottom of the ocean. Resuming his narrative he said:

“Then we laid on our oars. It had been 20 to 12 that we struck the iceberg and it was 2:20 when she went down. The last of her was just a heavy volume of smoke.

Two Seamen in Boat.

“Out there on the water the only thing that frightened me was a green light that kept rising out of the water and sinking again. The boats were not filled up because the officers were afraid that in case the water became rough [indecipherable] down. We worked all night at the oars and Paddy McGuffe [sic] was master of our boat. He was a stoker or a sailor, rather, for he wore his oil clothes. One other seaman was in our boat and he had brought a bag of clothing which he distributed around among the women. Some of them had barely any clothing to protect them. We expected the Olympic although Paddy McGuffe [sic] did not expect her until noon.

“If some boat had not come I don’t know how we would have lived. Even out there the sailors tried to keep up our spirits. One of them actually said: ‘How would you fancy having a turkey for dinner?’ We lay there waiting all night and the first we saw of help was in the early dawn when there was a rocket. Then we laid hold of our oars and rowed like we were pulling for gold. It was 45 minutes before we reached the Carpathia and while they were picking up boats on one side we went around on the other side. First a woman started up the rope ladder but she slipped, probably from exhaustion, and hung there fully for 10 minutes before they got her aboard. It was so high that all the women were afraid to go up. We saw one boat load among which were a lot of dead. When we got on board we were nearly frantic, everybody was asking each other, ‘Did you see so-and-so,’ or ‘Do you know anything about such and such a person? One man had both his feet frozen and I got him a first-class berth.

Meeting on the Carpathia.

“On the Carpathia we held a meeting of a committee and it was decided to give a loving cup to the captain, a purse of gold to the crew of the Carpathia and a purse of gold to the crew of the Titanic, but they nearly decided that they should give nothing to the crew of the Titanic because they were saved. But I stood up and made a speech and argued that the pay of the poor fellows had stopped and that they had lost everything they had and so they included them.

A Bit of Indignation.

I would not have been so emphatic if I knew then what I know now. Think of it, 206 members of the crew saved! More than each of the first, second or third class. That makes an average of 13 crew to every boat picked up. Taking the rest of the passengers saved it makes 80 per cent of the saved passengers among the women. That was splendid, but why so many of the crew?”

A Defense of Ismay.

Mr. Collett was asked whether he believed the passengers had complained of the White Star management during the emergency. He said that they had not, that the officers had done all that they could possibly do under the conditions.

Turning for a few minutes to the criticism of Mr. Ismay he said: "I'd like to know why they are blaming Mr. Ismay. If he did not have a position like the captain why shouldn't he get away when there were no more women to go? I heard not a word against Mr. Ismay on the Carpathia. All that he did was to remain in the doctor's room and he sent word that he was ill and could not attend our meeting.

"He stated later that it was true that a sign had been placed on Mr. Ismay's door stating "Don't Knock." He praised Captain Smith highly, and in reply to a question about rumors that an officer shot himself said: "Yes, I think that one of the officers did shoot himself.

Speaking about Captain Smith being out of his course he said: "It will be proved whether he was out of his course by the longitude and latitude he gave the Carpathia. If the Titanic was too far north remains to be seen."

He Heard No Music.

Reverting to the band playing Nearer My God to Thee, he said: "I did not hear any music at all. I don't think there is any certain proof that there was any music. The chief quartermaster, who was one of the last to leave the Titanic, says that he did not hear the band. Still it was possible for us to have not heard," he declared.

As a Hymn Applied.

In closing his story he told of an interesting occurrence that had taken place at a farewell service given to Rev. Mr. Collett in North London. In taking farewell they had sung God Be With Us and Mr. C. F. Billson pointed out the line: "God will smite Death's threatening wave before him" in this hymn. Its application is apparent.

As an example of the sense of security that was held by passengers after the vessel had received her death blow he stated that he overheard one man resume his ordinary conversation and mention that he had won \$10 in a bet on something.

Didn't Recognize Hale.

Mr. Collett had asked to see a photograph of Mr. Reginald Hale, the Auburn man who was lost. The Citizen reporter showed him a picture and he examined it carefully but failed to recognize Mr. Hale as his fellow passenger.

Courtesy of Brandon Whited

Copyright Encyclopedia Titanica - **www.encyclopedia-titanica.org** 1996-2015 and third parties (ref: #19405), accessed 21st July 2015 09:58:22 AM)
<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/collett-tells-his-story-19405.html>