

# United States Senate Inquiry

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

## Testimony of Helen Bishop

*(The witness was sworn by the chairman.)*

Senator SMITH.  
What is your full name?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
[Mrs. Helen W. Bishop.](#)

Senator SMITH.  
And what is your address?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
Dowagiac, Mich.

Senator SMITH.  
You were on board the [Titanic](#) on this ill-fated voyage?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
Yes.

Senator SMITH.  
Did anything in particular occur to attract your attention to the ship or any special feature of the ship while you were en route from Southampton to the place of this accident?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
We thought of nothing at all except the luxury of the ship; how wonderful it was.

Senator SMITH.  
I wish you would tell the committee what you did after learning of this accident.

Mrs. BISHOP.  
My husband awakened me at about a quarter of 12 and told me that the boat had struck something. We both dressed and went up on the deck, looked around, and could find nothing. We noticed the intense cold; in fact, we had noticed that about 11 o'clock that night. It was uncomfortably cold in the lounge. We looked all over the deck; walked up and down a couple of times, and one of the stewards met us and laughed at us. He said, "You go back downstairs. There is nothing to be afraid of. We have only struck a little piece of ice and passed it." So we returned to our [stateroom](#) and retired. About 15 minutes later we were awakened by a man who had a stateroom near us. We were on B deck, No. 47. He told us to come upstairs. So we dressed again thoroughly and looked over all our belongings in our room and went upstairs. After being there about 5 or 10 minutes one of the men we were with ran up and spoke to the [captain](#), who was just then coming down the stairs.

Senator SMITH.  
Who was the man?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
[Mr. Astor.](#)

Senator SMITH.  
Col. Astor?

Mrs. BISHOP.

Yes. The captain told him something in an undertone. He came back and told six of us, who were standing with his wife, that we had better put on our lifebelts. I had gotten down two flights of stairs to tell my husband, who had returned to the stateroom for a moment, before I heard the captain announce that the lifebelts should be put on. That was about three or four minutes later that the captain announced the lifebelts should be put on. We came back upstairs and found very few people up.

Senator SMITH.

When you say upstairs, which deck do you mean?

Mrs. BISHOP.

We were on [B deck](#), and we came back up to [A deck](#). There was very little confusion; only the older women were a little frightened. They were up, partially dressed. So I sent a number of them back and saw that they were thoroughly dressed before they came up again. Then we went up onto the [boat deck](#) on the starboard side. We looked around, and there were so very few people up there that my husband and I went to the port side to see if there was anyone there. There were only two people, a young French bride and groom, on that side of the boat, and they followed us immediately to the starboard side. By that time an old man had come upstairs and found [Mr. and Mrs. Harder](#), of New York. He brought us all together and told us to be sure and stay together; that he would be back in a moment. We never saw him again. About five minutes later the boats were lowered, and we were pushed in. At the time our lifeboat was lowered I had no idea that it was time to get off.

Senator SMITH.

Tell me which lifeboat you refer to?

Mrs. BISHOP.

The first lifeboat that was taken off the *Titanic* on the starboard side. I think it was [No. 7](#). [Officer Lowe](#) told us that.

Senator SMITH.

All right. Proceed.

Mrs. BISHOP.

We had no idea that it was time to get off, but the officer took my arm and told me to be very quiet and get in immediately. They put the families in the first two boats. My husband was pushed in with me, and we were lowered away with 28 people in the boat.

Senator SMITH.

Was that a large lifeboat?

Mrs. BISHOP.

Yes; it was a wooden lifeboat.

Senator SMITH.

And there were 28 people in it?

Mrs. BISHOP.

Yes. We counted off after we reached the water.

Senator SMITH.

How many women were there?

Mrs. BISHOP.

There were only about 12 women.

Senator SMITH.

And the rest were -

Mrs. BISHOP. (*interposing*).  
Were men.

Senator SMITH.  
Yes; but I want to divide the rest into two classes, the crew and the passengers.

Mrs. BISHOP.  
There were three of the crew. The rest of them were passengers. We had no officer in our boat.

Senator SMITH.  
Three of the crew?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
Three of the crew.

Senator SMITH.  
And 13 passengers?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
Thirteen passengers; yes. Among those there were several unmarried men in our boat, I noticed, and three or four foreigners in our boat. After we had been out in the water about 15 minutes - the *Titanic* had not yet sunk - five boats were gathered together, and five people were put into our boat from another one, making 33 people in our boat.

Senator SMITH.  
Do you know from what boat these persons were transferred to your boat?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
No; I can not say. The man in charge was an officer with a mustache. I have never seen him since.

Senator SMITH.  
Did the boat from which these people were transferred seem to have more people than yours?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
Yes, sir; they had 39, I believe, or 37, or something like that.

Senator SMITH.  
Do you remember the number of the boat?

Mrs. BISHOP.  
No; I do not.

Senator SMITH.  
Go ahead.

Mrs. BISHOP.  
We had been rowing for some time when the other people were transferred into our boat. Then we rowed still farther away, as the women were nervous about the suction. We waited out in the water perhaps three-quarters of an hour after we had rowed this distance when we saw the *Titanic* sink. For some time after that we were separated from all of the boats except one; that tied to us and stayed with us. We found we had no compass, no light, and I do not know about the crackers or water; but we had no compass and no light. We were out there until just before daylight, I think it was, when we saw the lights of the [\*Carpathia\*](#) and rowed as hard as we could and arrived at the *Carpathia* 5 or 10 minutes after 5 o'clock in the morning.

Senator SMITH.  
I suppose your experience was the same as that of the others as to the presence of ice and your proximity to icebergs?

Mrs. BISHOP.

Yes; we saw a number of icebergs.

Senator SMITH.

Is there anything else you care to say which will throw any light upon our inquiry as to the causes of this catastrophe or the conduct of the officers and crew of the *Titanic*?

Mrs. BISHOP.

The conduct of the crew, as far as I could see, was absolutely beyond criticism. It was perfect. The men in our boat were wonderful. One man lost his brother. When the *Titanic* was going down I remember he just put his hand over his face; and immediately after she sank he did the best he could to keep the women feeling cheerful all the rest of the time. We all thought a great deal of that man.

Senator SMITH.

What was his name?

Mrs. BISHOP.

I do not know. He was on the lookout immediately after the boat had struck.

Senator SMITH.

Was it [Fleet](#)?

Mrs. BISHOP.

No; it was not.

Senator SMITH.

Was it [Lee](#)?

Mrs. BISHOP.

I do not think I ever heard his name. I know the name of one man in the boat was Jack Edmunds; I think it was.

Senator SMITH.

That was this lookout?

Mrs. BISHOP.

No; the man at the other end. They were great friends, I remember.

Senator SMITH.

Is there anything else you care to say?

Mrs. BISHOP.

No; that is all.

Senator SMITH.

Very well; you may be excused.

(Witness excused.)

## BISHOPS GO BEFORE SENATE BOARD OF INQUIRY TO GIVE STORY OF TITANIC DISASTER

*Dowagiac Daily News*

Friday 26 April 1912

Both Are Called to Stand At Washington on Tuesday

PUSHED TO SAFETY

Mrs. Bishop Tells How They Were Hurried Aboard the Lifers When the Titanic Struck Huge Berg

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Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Bishop were before the Senate Board of Inquiry into the Titanic disaster yesterday, and related the story of their rescue and what they saw aboard the big White Star liner and on the lifeboats after leaving the ill-fated ship.

The story of their testimony is related by Associated Press in the morning newspapers, and it varies somewhat from the published interview with Mr and Mrs. Bishop sent out from New York shortly after they landed.

Mrs. Bishop was on the stand first. She related a conversation she had with Colonel and Mrs. John Jacob Astor just before the sinking of the boat, and stated that she and Mr. Bishop were literally pushed to one of the first lifeboats launched. Nothing was said about "brides and grooms first."

The testimony of Mr. Bishop related largely to the failure of the sailors to get the locks of the water tight compartments to work.

It was told on the stand by Mrs. Bishop that she stood in conversation with Mr. and Mrs. John Jacob Astor when Captain Smith came along and spoke in undertone to Colonel Astor. The latter at once told a group of them to put on life belts. They did so and went on deck.

"An officer took me by the arm and told me to get into the boat quietly," she said, "and my husband was pushed in with me. There were 12 women, 13 men, and three members of the crew. There were a number of unmarried men aboard"

"What have you to say about the conduct of the officers and crew?" asked Senator Smith.

"Their conduct was excellent. All of the men behaved splendidly. On our lifboat was a man whose brother was on the Titanic. When the ship sank this man buried his face in his hands until the ship disappeared, carrying his brother down. Then he did everything he could to cheer up the women, who were very nervous."

When Mrs. Bishop was excused Mr. Bishop was called to the stand. He testified briefly.

"The locks of the watertight compartments," said Mr. Bishop, "did not close properly when the sailors tried to shut them. I saw the sailors trying to turn them and heard them say 'We can't turn this. There's no use trying. Let's go to the other side.' Then they tried the other side and failed again."

Mr. and Mrs. Bishop were ordered to Washington from New York City shortly after landing from the Carpathia, and this fact has materially delayed their return home.

They determined to follow their original intentions and motor home in their Lozier car, and if a start had been made when originally planned they would have arrived last week.

As it is they will probably not reach Dowagiac for at least one more week.

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<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/bishops-go-senate-board-inquiry-give-story-titanic-disaster.html>

## Mr. and Mrs. Bishop Give First Authentic Interview Concerning Titantic [sic] Disaster

*Dowagiac Daily News*

Saturday 20 April 1912

THEY RECITE A GRAPHIC TALE OF THE GREAT SEA DISASTER OF A WEEK AGO.

"Ladies and Grooms First" Was Order They Obeyed and Both Left the Ship Together

TELL EXPERIENCES WHILE AFLOAT

German Baron Would Not Assist With the Rowing and a French Aviator Never Dropped the Monocle From His Eye Throughout the Trying Hours

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Mr. and Mrs. G. E. Bishop have today received telegraphic advices from Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Bishop in New York stating that they have decided to carry out their original intentions and motor home from New York in their Lozier car.

They will not, however, make the trip until next week. On landing from the steamship Carpathia they found themselves almost destitute of everything, all their personal belongings having gone down with the Titanic, and they will remain in New York City long enough to provide themselves with new wardrobes before starting west.

At first reports they had abandoned their motor trip and decided to come by rail, but on second consideration they will do as originally planned. Their chauffeur, Earl Patterson, is now in New York City with their Lozier car ready to make the drive through to Michigan.

Many supposed interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Bishop have been published since the Carpathia landed, but the only authentic one, according to Mr. and Mrs. G. E. Bishop, of this city, is the following one:

Mrs. Bishop's Narrative

"We had been in Europe since January," says Mrs. Bishop, "and had visited Egypt, Italy, France and Algiers. We sailed on the Titanic on the tenth and had had a most enjoyable voyage until the night of the disaster."

"I had retired when our ship struck the iceberg, but Mr. Bishop was sitting in our stateroom, reading. I didn't hear the shock, and it was several minutes before someone came to our door and told us to come on deck. I got up and dressed, then we went above. Officers told us we might as well go below and retire; that there was no danger. We did not do so for some time, however. Finally we did, and soon afterward we were again summoned. We dressed quietly and had plenty of time."

"The girl who occupied a stateroom across from us refused to get up and the stewards pulled her out of bed, she got back in and sank with the ship."

"When we got on deck there were few people there, but were tons of (unreadable) on the fore part of the ship. We were in the first lifeboat to be lowered over the side. Someone said, 'Put in the brides and grooms first.'

"There were three newly married couples who went in that boat. Altogether, there were 28 in our boat. There might as well have been 40 or so, but the half hundred men on deck refused to leave, even though there was room for them."

#### Astor at Foot Ladder

"John Jacob Astor was standing at the foot of the stairway as I started to go back the second time. He told us to get on our life belts and we did. Before our boat was lowered into the water, Mr. and Mrs. Astor were on the deck. She didn't want to go, saying that she thought we were all silly, that the Titanic couldn't sink. Because the Astor's stateroom was close to ours, we had had considerable to do with them on the voyage and I disliked to leave them on deck. As a matter of fact I believed much of as they did that there was little chance of being picked up in the lifeboats."

"The water was like glass. There wasn't even the ripple usually found on a small lake. By the time we had pulled 100 yards the lower row of portholes had disappeared. When we were a mile away the second row had gone, but there was still no confusion. Indeed everything seemed to be quiet on the ship until her stern was raised out of the water by the list forward. Then a veritable wave of humanity surged up out of the steerage and shut the lights from our view. We were too far away to see the passengers individually, but we could see the black masses of human forms and hear their death cries and groans."

#### Look Like Huge Whale

"For a moment the ship seemed to be pointing straight down, looking like a gigantic whale submerging itself, head-first."

"One dining room steward, who was in our boat, was thoughtful enough to bring green lights – the kind you burn on the Fourth of July. They cast a ghastly light over the boat, but you know we had no light of any kind. I think all lifeboats ought to be equipped with lights, crackers and water and compasses. Whenever we would light one of these diminutive torches we would hear cries from the people perishing aboard. They thought it was help coming."



"We were afloat in the life boat from about 12:30 Sunday night until 5 o'clock Monday morning. Although we were the first boat to leave the Titanic, we were about the fourth picked up by the Carpathia . The scenes on that little craft adrift in mid-ocean with little hope of rescue were most heart-rending. Still the characteristics of the individuals appealed to me."

### Strange Acts Of Rescued

"For instance, there was a German baron aboard who smoked an obnoxious pipe incessantly and refused to pull an oar. The men were worn out with the work, and I rowed for considerable time myself. There was a little French aviator in our boat, Pierre Marschal, a partner of Paulhan, who never took his monocle from his eye all the time we were on the water, but he did assist in the rowing."

"It broke my heart to leave my little dog 'Freu Freu' in my stateroom. I had purchased her in Florence, Italy, and she was the pet of the ship. The steward wouldn't let me take her to the butcher. He said she was too pretty, and she was the only one allowed to stay in the cabin. I made a little den for her in our room behind two of my suitcases, but when I started to leave her she tore my dress to bits, tugging at it. I realized, however, that there would be little sympathy for a woman carrying a dog in her arms when there were lives of women and children to be saved."

"Whenever a light, however small, was flashed in a lifeboat those in the other drifting crafts were given false hopes of rescue. After we had been afloat for several hours without food or water and everyone suffering from the cold, I felt certain we should all perish. I took off my stockings and gave them to a little girl who hadn't as much time to dress as I had."

"When the day broke and the Carpathia was sighted, there were indescribable scenes of joy. After we had pulled alongside of the rescue ship, many of the women were lifted aboard in chairs, tied to a rope. I was sufficiently composed to climb the ladder alongside to the deck. When the last of the survivors were taken on, the recounting of the experience began."

### Gracie Proves A Swimmer

"Yes," said Mr. Bishop, "I think the story told us by Col. Archibald Gracie, of Washington D. C., was the most remarkable of any we heard. He remained on deck and clung to the rail until he struck the water. He must have been sucked under 50 or 60 feet, Col. Gracie told us. When he came to the surface he said he found himself among a mass of wreckage, but he is an excellent swimmer and finally succeeded in reaching a small collapsible which had a few passengers aboard. Imagine a man as old as Col. Gracie scrambling with 1,700 people in water two miles deep. It is remarkable that he succeeded."

"Col. Gracie was peevish, though," reminded Mrs. Bishop. "He did not want to tell of his experiences."

"Those on board the Carpathia did everything in their power for our comfort. They shared

everything with us and the captain of that boat was not like Capt. Smith of the Titanic. You didn't see him at fashionable dinners. He was always on duty."

"Mr. Lucien Smith of Huntington, W. Va., a dear little woman, who lost her husband in the disaster, said that before they parted on the deck he told her he had seen Capt. Smith at a dinner at 11 p.m. that night. When he left the dining room, the captain was still there, although he may have gone to the bridge before the collision, it doesn't seem likely. For some reason, for which we will probably never know, the bulkhead doors refused to work. I watched the men for several minutes endeavoring to turn the screws that would lower them and make the compartments water tight, but they were unsuccessful. It may be that the impact so wrenched them as to throw them out of line."

#### Waltons To Motor Home

Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Walton, of Sturgis, parents of Mrs. Bishop, will motor home with Mr. and Mrs. Bishop. They have been in Florida during the winter, but came to New York about ten days ago to meet their daughter and her husband.

They became almost frantic when they learned of the Titanic disaster, but it was only a few hours after the first news of the disaster that intelligence came that Mr. and Mrs. Bishop were saved. With this assurance they went to the theatre that night and there heard later news.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Walton, "that we bought one thousand newspapers in our anxiety to get assurance that our children were among the ones rescued."

As soon as they landed, Mr. and Mrs. Bishop hastened to the Waldorf-Astoria where Mr. and Mrs. Walton have been stopping, and there they are now established.

Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Bishop were married four months ago and they were returning from their honeymoon trip. The time of their arrival home is not definite, but it will be sometime the latter part of next week, so their Dowagiac relatives expect.

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