

La Catastrophe

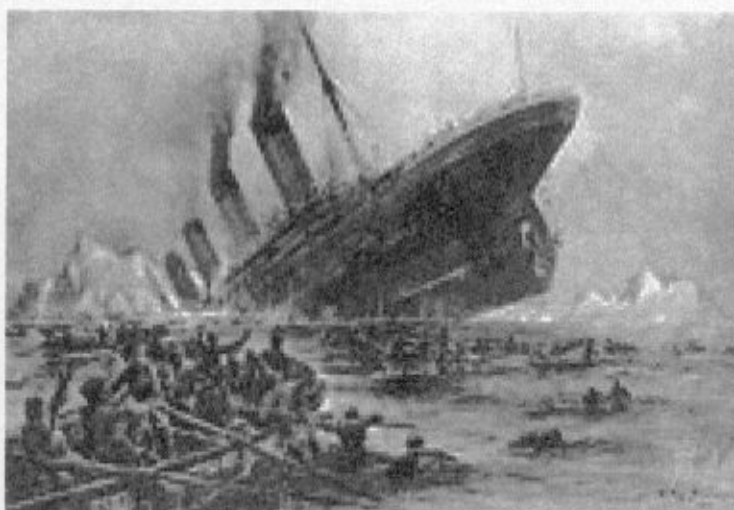
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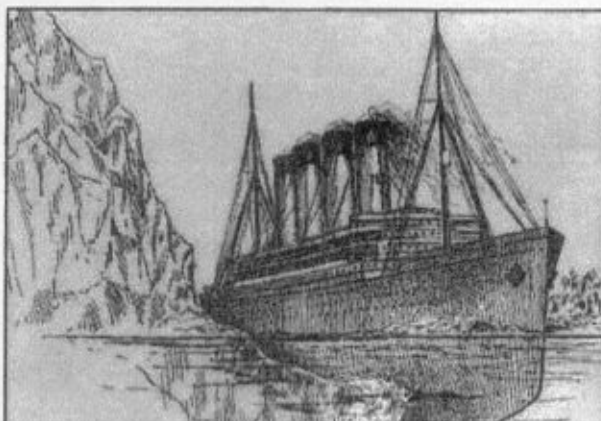
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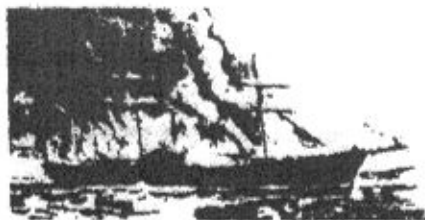
TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT" - see page 9



An illustration published a month after the *Titanic* disaster showed an iceberg ripping a huge gash in the ship, an erroneous but commonly held belief.

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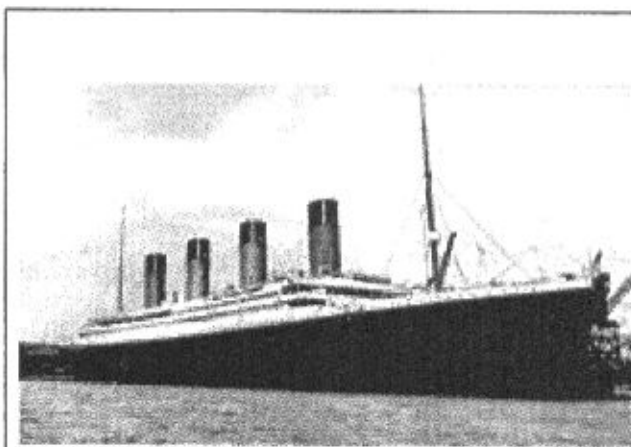
Position Vacant
Associate Editor, Ship Wreck Study Group



TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT"

By Tom Fortunato, Rochester, New York

Originally published in "The Titanic Commutator," publication of the Titanic Historical Society



The Titanic at Southampton before her maiden voyage

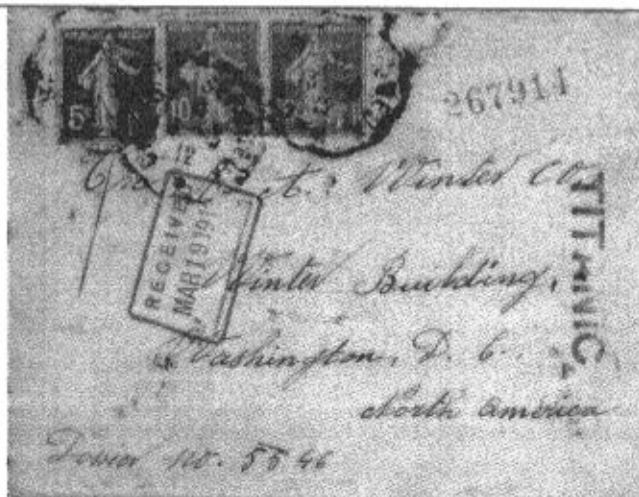


Figure 1- My "Titanic" cover

Would you pay \$10 for the cover above (Figure 1)? I did. I ran across this gem in a dealer's box marked "Better Junk" back in 1986. If you're like me, you're probably a bit of a history buff and at first glance are puzzled at this piece of postal history. And now, the rest of the story...

The story of the White Star's unsinkable "RMS Titanic" is both well known and well documented, sinking on its maiden voyage at 2:20 AM the morning of April 15, 1912 in the North Atlantic after striking an iceberg. Over 1,500 passengers and crew lost their lives as a result.

Philatelists realize that the ocean liner was more than a passenger ship, for its RMS initials stand for "Royal Mail Steamer." Mail was loaded on the doomed vessel at three points: Southampton, England (1,758 bags), Cherbourg, France (1,412 bags) and Queenstown, Ireland (194 bags). It was the job of the five postal clerks onboard to sort and prepare these for arrival in New York City. All 3,423 bags were lost at sea, a total of some 7 million pieces of mail and parcels. The only surviving postal items were a number of letters that left the boat during its stop in Queenstown and a handful of cancelled facing slips used for sorting errors found in a pocket on the body of Oscar Scott Woody, one of the clerks.

Titanic was built at the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, Ireland, with work beginning on March 31, 1909. The White Star Line announced its 1912 sailing schedule on September 25, 1911 with the Titanic scheduled for a March 20, 1912 departure from Southampton, England. As time progressed it became apparent that the maiden voyage would need to be delayed. Outfitting the 46,328-ton Titanic took longer than expected as her sister ship, the Olympic, was undergoing repairs at the same time. That ship had a

TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT" (continued)

collision with the cruiser HMS Hawke on September 20, 1911, and suffered propeller damage on a subsequent voyage in February. A propeller shaft from Titanic was needed for the first incident and a propeller blade was used for the second to repair her Olympic twin. These repairs all had to be done at the Belfast shipyard causing delays to Titanic's completion.



Figure 2- Postmark

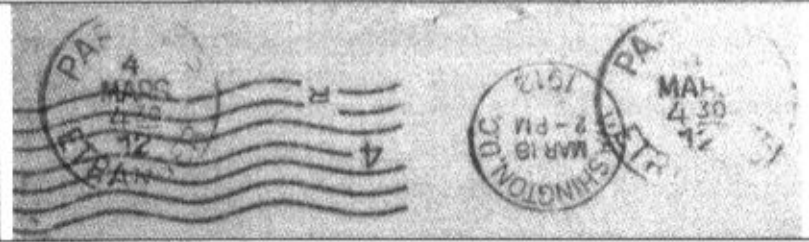


Figure 3- The cover's backstamps

This brings us back to the "junk box" cover. Three identical smudged black postmarks date from March 3, 1912, with the scalloped rim designating a train letter cancelled onboard the Chars to Serqueux route that day (Figure 2). The envelope bears registration number 267914 stamped in blue and the appropriate 25-centime postage for this service. Two identical "ETRANGER" (foreign) backstamps confirms its transit through Paris the following day at 4:30 (Figure 3).

Mail was docketed or stamped with the name of the trans-Atlantic ship that it would have sailed on as per the custom at the time. In this case, it is assumed that the 37 mm x 6 mm brown "TITANIC" marking was applied in Paris and the letter then placed in a bag destined for the city of Cherbourg, the Titanic's only continental port-of-call 16 days later. Both the White Star Line and North German Lloyd had major facilities in that port with ships running the New York route on roughly a weekly basis. The alternative port of Le Havre about 100 miles east serviced ships of the French Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (CGT) Line, among others. Mail contracts were primarily with the US, British, French and German lines.

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| March 1912 calendar | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |

Figure 4- March 1912 calendar

Here is where the story gets murky in determining what vessel actually transported this letter. Ship schedules from Britain and France around this time were subject to delays due to a coal strike. Crossings also took longer as coal allocations were cut back and ship speeds at sea were reduced to conserve fuel. A March 1912 calendar may be helpful in the following discussion of dates (Figure 4).

TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT" (continued)

It would not have been unreasonable for French postal officials to hold the cover from March 4 until the Titanic's anticipated March 20 sailing date. But how could they have not known of Titanic's postponement to April 10, announced by White Star back on October 11? Holding mail in Cherbourg for nearly a month at the docks would have been unthinkable and mail was sent on another ship. Of course it was always possible to transfer mail from the docks at Cherbourg to those in Le Havre, although it is uncertain whether the post office or the contracted shipping line would have done that.

Thankfully my Titanic cover was well marked to allow some supposition about its movement. Since the letter arrived in Washington, DC on Monday, March 18 at 2 PM, it is safe to assume that the ship carrying it would have arrived at New York either the day before or early that morning. A review of the "Shipping and Mails Incoming Steamship" listings in the New York Times was especially useful in the search, as was an Internet site hosting the "Morton Allen Directory of European Ship Arrivals." Four boats arrived in New York on Sunday, March 17. North German Lloyd's steamship "Main" traveled the Bremen-Southampton-Cherbourg-New York route making it the most likely candidate. If the mail was re-routed through the Port of Le Havre instead, the carrier may have been the French Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (CGT) "S.S. Espagne" via its Le Havre-Bordeaux-New York route. The New York Times reported that ship's arrival on the 17th, but the directory lists it as the 18th. From there the cover was loaded onto a mail train to Washington. The purple "Received Mar 19, 1912" mark must have been used by the M. A. Winter Company as a way of noting its arrival.

A twenty-year search for covers bearing a similar "Titanic" mark has turned up six others. Interestingly, they all were registered and mailed to the M. A. Winter Company in Washington, D.C., a recording graphophone manufacturing business that later became known as the Dictaphone Company. A chemist by the name of Mahlon Alphens Winter was there at the time. In April 1912 the building began renovations and the entire first floor and part of the second eventually became the U.S. Post Office's Station F sub-station. Today the building is a multi-company office park.

To be continued in the September 2008 issue

Dr. Steven Berlin

Unusual & Dangerous Interruptions Study Group

Email: drstevenberlin@yahoo.com

Hijackings, Robberies,
Insurrections, Earthquakes,
Floods, Volcanic Eruptions,
Fires, Avalanches, Terrorism,
Wars & Post Office Delays

THE IRISH TROUBLES – RAIDED MAIL – A Followup

By Graham Mark

In the December 2006 issue of *La Catastrophe*, pages 25 & 26, there was a short article by Robert Johnson regarding covers which were raided, stolen and opened by IRA raiders in 1920 & 1921, and he asked for further information. The late Fred Dixon conducted a survey of such covers and published his findings in *Random Notes* of the Irish Philatelic Circle in November 1966. More recently, in 1992, the late Cyril Dulin wrote *Ireland's Transition, the Postal History of the Transition Period 1922-1925*, in which he referred briefly to these events, because they have happened before the beginning of the transition, but he speculated that a particular marking may have been used again during the civil war. He stated "All I.R.A. censor covers are scarce, but many

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**RARE AQUILA AIRWAYS
CRASH COVER
DISCOVERED - see page 3**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE WRECK & CRASH MAIL SOCIETY
The AGM will be held on Saturday 20 Sep. 2008 from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m

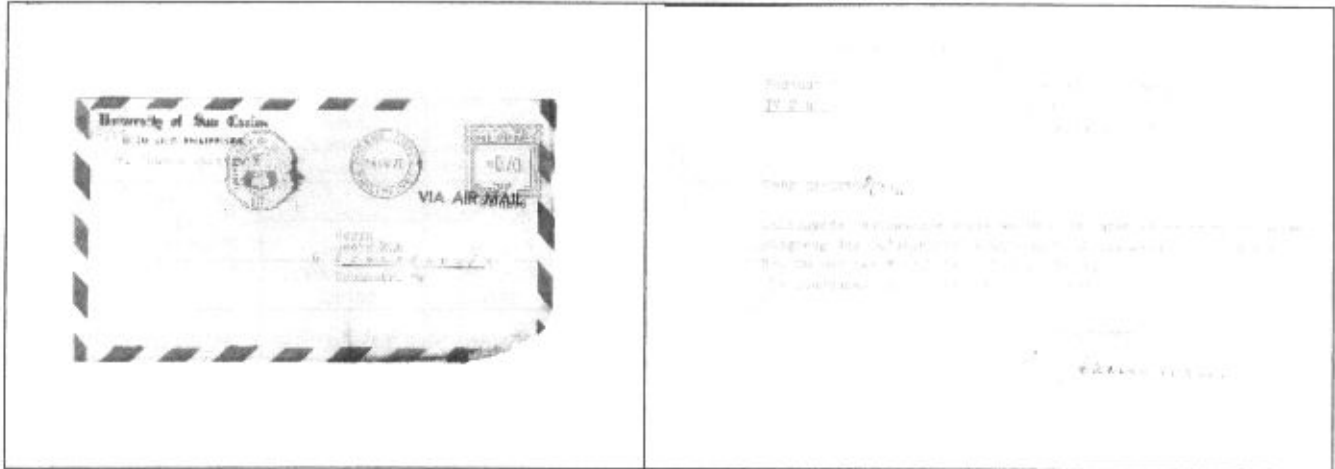
Member Steven Berlin receives the United States Stamp Society - Barbara R. Mueller Award for the best article in The American Philatelist for 2007. The article was "Early Mail Robberies in the United States"

Barbara Mueller, Jim Milgram, Roger Brody & Steven Berlin

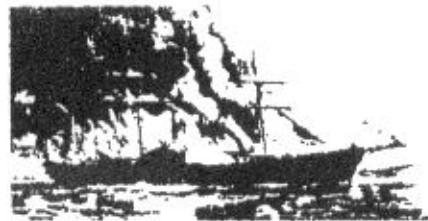


SAS Aircraft Fire at Rome
By Gunnar Zetterman

On 19 April 1979, the Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) Douglas DC-8 "Anund Viking", on a flight from Manila & Bangkok to Copenhagen, caught fire at Rome's Fiumicino airport just before start. No one was hurt due to the fact that the plane was still on the ground. The greatest damage was caused by the inefficient Rome fire brigade, as it took 12 minutes for the first fire engine to arrive. This is listed by Nierinck as 700419, and this mimeo explanation from Frankfurt, Germany is unlisted.



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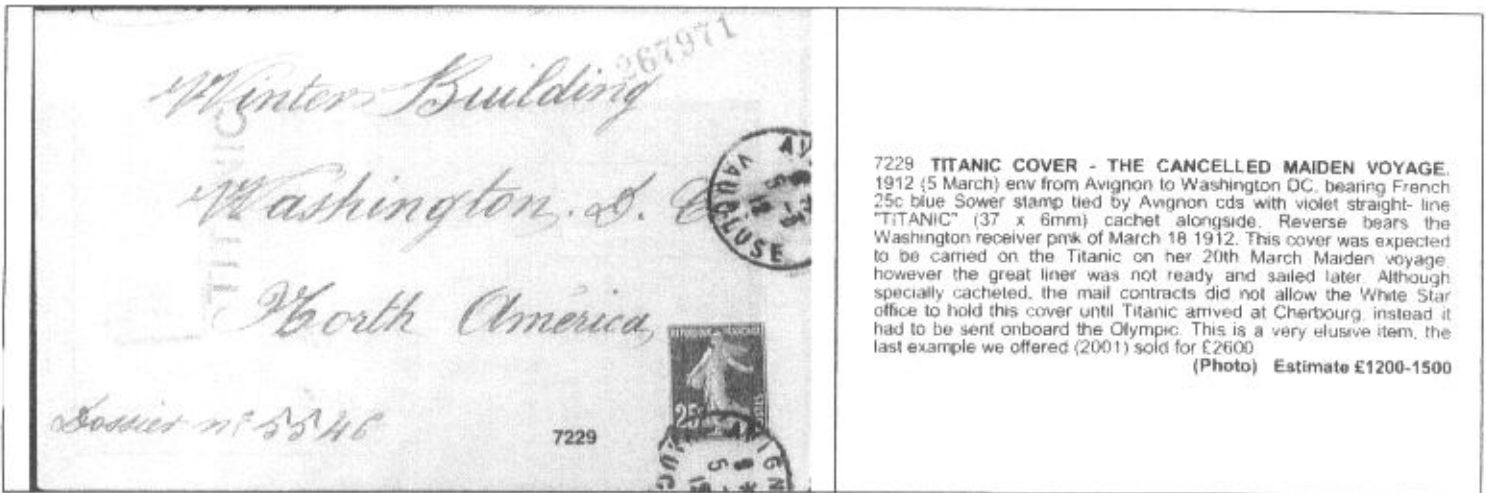
TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT" (continued from June 2008 issue)

The summary table (Figure 5) describes each cover's characteristics. All bear 25 centimes postage, a unique light blue registration number, and a purple dated receiving mark on the front. Mine is the only cover with a brown-colored "TITANIC" mark. The others are all reported as being in violet. They were posted between Monday, March 4 and Wednesday, March 13 from different parts of France. A manuscript "Dossier" number was written by the sender on the face of each, some of which are identical. All seven were received by the company between Monday, March 18 and Thursday, March 28.

TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT" (continued)

| Figure 5 Summary Table Owner/Source | Owner: Tom Fortunato, Rochester, NY | The Mystery Box | Sandafayre's Hunters Feb 15, 2005 Mail Bid Sale 7105, Lot #7229 | Jay Baum, Titanic Hist. Society Mbr, Staten Island, NY | Das Kleine Little Titanic Museum (Germany) | Sandafayre's January 30, 2001 Mail Bid Sale #550 | Titanic Museum Indian Orchard, Massachusetts | Owner: William R. Simon, Bowie, Maryland | Early American History Auctions |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| Postmark Date | March 3 (Sunday) | March 3 (Sunday) | March 5 (Tuesday) | March 6 (?) (Wednesday) | March 7 (Thursday) | unreadable | March 8 (Friday) | March 13 (Wednesday) | unreadable |
| City/Town (cancel type) | CHARSA SERQUEUX (Train pmk) | LAGRASSE/AUDE | AVIGNON/VAUCLUSE | LA CROISILLE [sur Briance] | PLOURRETA BREST (Train pmk) | BORDEAUX/GIRONDE | PARISA ORLEANS (Train pmk) | RAUL XLOIRE-INFRES | x/LOIRE-x |
| Sender/ Return Address | none | none (unless on reverse) | none | BROUILLOU (company's purple oval rubber stamp mark on the back, rest unreadable) | none | ...ARNIE, 23 Rue Bardinean, BORDEAU | none (unless on reverse) | none | L. NOUAILLE SAINT-NAZAIRE SUR LOIRE (coal importers) |
| "Paris - R.P. Etranger" Postmark Date | March 4 4:30 (Monday) | March 4 4:30 (Monday) | unknown | March 7 6:30 (Thursday) | unknown | none | Unknown | March 14 4:30 (Thursday) | March 14 (time unk.) (Thursday) |
| Registration Number | 267914 | 267957 | 267971 | 267922 | 267925 | 267942 | 267909 | 273938 | 273937 |
| Manuscript Dossier# | 5546 | 5546 | 5546 | 5542 | 5542 | 5536 | 5536 | 5549 | 5549 |
| "TITANIC" 6x37mm mark | brown | violet | violet | brown | brown? | violet | Violet | violet | violet |
| Possible Crossings | <p align="center">Most likely via Cherbourg: North German Lloyd's "Main," Bremen-Southampton-Cherbourg-New York City, unknown departure date, arrived on March 17 (Sunday)</p> | | | | | | <p align="center">Most likely: White Star's "RMS Olympic," Southampton-Cherbourg-Queenstown-New York City, departed March 13 (Wednesday), arrived March 20 (Wednesday)</p> | <p align="center">Most likely via Cherbourg: Hamburg American Line's "Batavia," Hamburg-Cherbourg-Southampton-New York City, unknown departure date, arrived on March 26 (Tuesday)</p> | |
| | <p align="center">Less likely via Le Havre: French CTG's "SS Espagne," Le Havre-Bordeaux-New York City, departed March 9 (Saturday), arrived on March 17 (Sunday)</p> | | | | | | | <p align="center">Less likely via Le Havre: French CTG's "La Bretagne" or "Rochambeau," Le Havre-Bordeaux-New York City, unknown departure dates, both arrived on March 26 (Tuesday)</p> | |
| Washington, DC Transit Postmark Date | March 18, 2:00 PM (Monday) | March 18, 2:00 PM (Monday) | March 18 (unk. time) (Monday) | March 18, 5:30 PM (Monday) | unknown | March 18, 7:00 PM (Monday) | unknown (cover is sealed in a display case) | March 27, 11:30AM (Wednesday) | unknown |
| Purple Winter Company Received Date | March 19 (Tuesday) | March 19 (Tuesday) | March 1x (assume 19) | unreadable | March 19 (Tuesday) | March 19 (Tuesday) | Unreadable | March 28 (Thursday) | March 28? (Thursday) |
| Misc. information | Bought in 1986 for \$10 at the STEPEX stamp show in Elmira, NY | Seen online: http://www.the-mysterybox.com/Features/titanic/index.html . I. Owned by someone named Emily. Auctioned by Henry Aldridge & Son, lot 298, April 8, 2005, unsold. | Lot estimate £1200-1500. Description claims the cover crossed on the RMS Olympic (impossible per shipping schedules). Unknown if sold at that time. | Reported after publication of the Titanic Historical Society's publication of Tom Fortunato's article on the subject, Volume 32, Number 18, 2008 (April) | Seen online at: http://www.titanicmuseum.de/Titanic_Concepts_inc/Titanic_Umschlag_Envelope/titanic_umschlag_envelope.html . Believed auctioned by Christie's East | Seen online: http://www.sandafayre.com/html/titanic.htm . Supposedly sold for £2600 and was one of three such recorded covers at the time. | "REGISTERED MAIL FOR TITANIC" seen online at: http://www.titanichistoricalsociety.org/museum/21-reg-letter.asp | Corresponded with Tom Fortunato on 9/2/98, mentions letter from dealer Mark Wessel remembering Tom's cover and offering to buy his for \$25. | From Early American History Auctions, seen online at http://www.priced4antiques.com/items/summary/34877.htm |

TITANIC COVERS THAT "MISSED THE BOAT" (continued)



7229 TITANIC COVER - THE CANCELLED MAIDEN VOYAGE. 1912 (5 March) env from Avignon to Washington DC, bearing French 25c blue Sower stamp tied by Avignon cds with violet straight-line "TITANIC" (37 x 6mm) cachet alongside. Reverse bears the Washington receiver pink of March 18 1912. This cover was expected to be carried on the Titanic on her 20th March Maiden voyage, however the great liner was not ready and sailed later. Although specially cacheted, the mail contracts did not allow the White Star office to hold this cover until Titanic arrived at Cherbourg, instead it had to be sent onboard the Olympic. This is a very elusive item, the last example we offered (2001) sold for £2600

(Photo) Estimate £1200-1500

Figures 6a & b - Sandafayre Mail Bid Sale 7105, Lot number 7229

Several covers have been offered for sale over the years. The most recent was one through Britain's Sandafayre Hunters Mail Bid Sale 7105 of February 15, 2005. Lot number 7229 (Figure 6a) featured an envelope postmarked on March 5 in Avignon that would have traveled with my own. The lot description (Figure 6b) contains a major error by stating that it was carried on the Olympic, as that ship did not arrive in New York until Wednesday, March 20. The "RECEIVED" marking is faint but appears to have arrived at the M. A. Winter Company on Monday, March 18, again at the same time as mine. It is not known if this cover was sold.

Many questions remain about these covers and the circumstances around them, but I hope this article brings new information to the philatelic world. All covers may be viewed online in a PDF document through this Internet link: <http://www.wrestlingsbest.com/titanic.pdf>. I would be happy to hear from anyone with additional details.

What really caused the sinking of the Titanic? Here is the explanation from the website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinking_of_the_RMS_Titanic. "At 11:40 PM while sailing south of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, lookouts Fredrick Fleet and Reginald Lee spotted a large iceberg directly ahead of the ship. Fleet sounded the ship's bell three times and telephoned the bridge exclaiming, "Iceberg, right ahead!" First Officer Murdoch ordered an abrupt turn to port (left) and full speed astern, which stopped and then reversed the ship's engines. A collision was inevitable and the iceberg brushed the ship's starboard (right) side, buckling the hull in several places and popping out rivets below the waterline over a length of 300 ft (91 m). As seawater filled the forward compartments, the watertight doors shut. However, while the ship could stay afloat with four flooded compartments, five were filling with water. The five water-filled compartments weighed down the ship so that the tops of the forward watertight bulkheads fell below the ship's waterline, allowing water to pour into additional compartments."

The author can be contacted at: stampmf@frontiernet.net

Editor's Notes:

A number of post office facing slips are known. The following is courtesy of David Morrison.