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RMS Titanic

Apr 20 2012

Stamps

RMS Titanic

By Stephen Goldsmith

Historical objects often strike chords that resonate within the hearts of collectors. This is especially true of objects that relate to the 1912 sinking of RMS Titanic, arguably the most compelling maritime disaster of all time.

At Spink, three extraordinary Titanic-related items have recently come to light. The first relates to the early part of the Titanic's story, conveying the excitement and optimism that surrounded the debut of world's largest and most luxurious moving object. The second reminds us that Titanic was more than just a single purpose passenger ship, and the third chronicles in real time the sudden and tragic end of the great ocean liner for those who were wealthy enough to have had access to the most advanced mass communication technology of that era.



In December of 1911, five months before Titanic was launched, there was a widespread feeling of excitement and optimism relating to the great ship. White Star Lines began to print and distribute plans of the First Class

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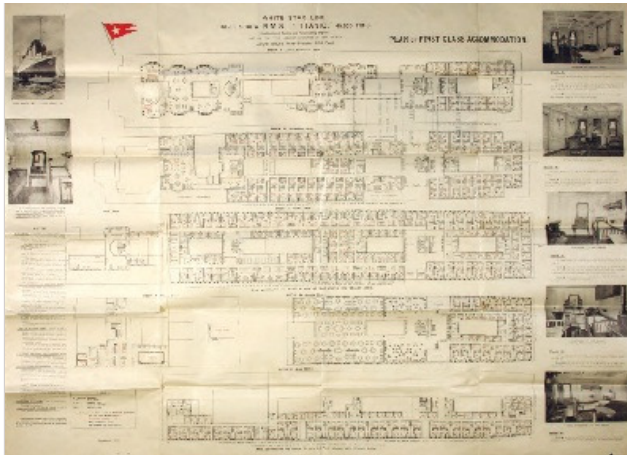
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accommodations. These room plans silently, but very effectively, convey the promise of world class luxury aboard what was then considered to be a virtually "unsinkable" ship. Photographs of staterooms and maps of Deck A through F are illustrated. A safe and enjoyable crossing seems to be a certainty, but for many, the act of selecting a cabin from deck plans like this one proved to be the equivalent of signing their own death warrant.



As postal historians know, many ocean liners were more than just ships ferrying people from destination to destination, they acted as transportation for the mail. In fact, "RMS" stands for "Royal Mail Steamer". The stamp and cover illustrated were not actually aboard the Titanic, but they should have been. In March of 1912, "TITANIC" was hand stamped on the front, indicating which vessel the stamp and cover were to travel on. The "TITANIC" stamp was probably applied in transit in Paris. The stamp and cover were then transferred to Cherbourg where they were to have been taken by the Titanic. Due to unforeseen complications and building delays, the maiden voyage of the great ship was moved from March 20 to April 10. Rather than hold back the mail, the stamp and cover were placed on to an alternative ship, and they arrived safely at their destination



On April 10, 1912, Titanic departed South Hampton, England commencing its maiden voyage. She made a scheduled stop at Cherbourg, France, and then proceeded to Queenstown, Ireland. On the evening of April 14, she was on her way to making a record breaking run across the Atlantic, steaming along at 22 ½ knots.

The wind was light, and the sea was calm. The moonless night was clear and cold. In response to iceberg warnings, lookouts were posted forward, and maintained a constant watch. Suddenly, a large object loomed ahead in the darkness. The lookouts rang a bell, and contacted the bridge by phone, reporting an iceberg dead ahead. The

Chief Officer gave the order to turn Titanic to port, and to back the engines. Slowly and majestically Titanic started to turn, but the starboard side of the ship grazed the massive mountain of floating ice, resulting in a wound that would soon prove fatal.

Most of us have seen and heard Herbert Morrison's dramatic 1937 broadcast of the Hindenburg disaster, or watched Walter Cronkite's tearful televised report of the death of President Kennedy. In 1912, news travelled in an entirely different manner.

Titanic had a powerful wireless radio on board, and her radio operators transmitted the news of her sinking to other ships. They relayed the news elsewhere. Broadcast radio was not available to the general public in 1912, and most people got the news of the sinking through the next morning's newspaper. There were some people who received the news almost as it happened, from ticker tape machines in their offices and homes. Fortunately, one individual recognized the importance of the Titanic sinking, and he saved a reel of ticker tape printed on that historic day. The tape begins with the terse and chilling words ""11.45 AND THE TITANIC WENT DOWN." The remainder of the tape records the aftermath.



None of us can actually go back in time, but we can all admire, and sometimes even get the chance to purchase remarkable objects that have the power to make the past come alive for us. This is, perhaps, the very best part of the Spink auction experience.



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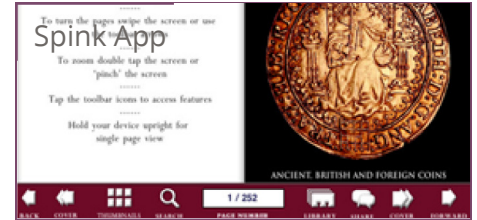
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