

Text One: Informative Text

from *Titanic*, The History Channel Website

Titanic Sets Sail

The wealthiest passenger was John Jacob Astor IV, who had made waves a year earlier by marrying 18-year-old Madeleine Talmadge Force, a young woman 29 years his junior, not long after divorcing his first wife. Other millionaire passengers included the elderly owner of Macy's, Isidor Straus, and his wife Ida; industrialist Benjamin Guggenheim, accompanied by his mistress, valet and chauffeur; and widow and heiress Margaret "Molly" Brown, who would earn her "unsinkable" nickname by helping to maintain calm and order while the lifeboats were being loaded and boosting the spirits of her fellow survivors.

The employees attending to this collection of First Class notables were largely traveling Second Class, along with academics, tourists, journalists and others who would enjoy a level of service equivalent to First Class on most other ships. But by far the largest group of passengers was in Third Class: more than 700, exceeding the other two levels combined. Some had paid less than \$20 to make the crossing. It was Third Class that was the major source of profit for shipping lines like White Star and Cunard, and Titanic was designed to offer these passengers accommodations and amenities superior to those found in Third Class on any ship up to that time.

Disaster Strikes Aboard Titanic

That encounter took place roughly four days out, at about 11:30 p.m. on April 14. Titanic was equipped with a Marconi wireless, and there had been sporadic reports of ice from other ships, but she was sailing on calm seas under a moonless, clear sky. A lookout saw the iceberg dead ahead coming out of a slight haze, rang the warning bell and telephoned the bridge. The engines were quickly reversed and the ship was turned sharply, and instead of making direct impact the berg seemed to graze along the side of the ship, sprinkling ice fragments on the forward deck. Sensing no collision, the lookouts were relieved. They had no idea that the iceberg's jagged underwater spur had slashed a 300-foot gash well below the ship's waterline, and that Titanic was doomed. By the time the captain toured the damaged area with Harland and Wolff's Thomas Andrews, five compartments were already filling with seawater, and the bow of the ship was alarmingly down. Andrews did a quick calculation and estimated that Titanic might remain afloat for an hour and a half, perhaps slightly more. At that point the captain, who had already instructed his wireless operator to call for help, ordered the lifeboats to be loaded.

A little more than an hour after contact with the iceberg, a largely disorganized and haphazard evacuation process began with the lowering of the first lifeboat. The craft was designed to hold 65 people; it left with only 28 aboard. Amid the confusion and chaos during the precious hours before Titanic plunged into the sea, nearly every boat would be launched woefully under-filled, some with only a handful of passengers. In compliance with the law of the sea, women and children boarded the boats first; only when there were no women or children nearby were men permitted to board. Yet many of the victims were in fact women and children, the result of disorderly procedures that failed to get them to the boats in the first place.

Exceeding Andrews' prediction, Titanic stubbornly managed to stay afloat for close to three hours. Those hours witnessed acts of craven cowardice and extraordinary bravery. Hundreds of human dramas unfolded between the order to load the lifeboats and the ship's final plunge: Men saw off wives and children, families were separated in the confusion and selfless individuals gave up their spots to remain with loved ones or allow a more vulnerable passenger to escape.

Titanic, nearly perpendicular and with many of her lights still aglow, finally dove beneath the icy surface at approximately 2:20 a.m. on April 15. Throughout the morning, Cunard's Carpathia, after receiving Titanic's distress call at midnight and steaming at full speed while dodging ice floes all night, rounded up all of the lifeboats. They contained only 705 survivors.