

The Railway
Historical
Southeast



& Locomotive
Society, Inc.
Chapter

Newsletter No. 48, August 1998

TITANIC Survivors Buried in Jacksonville

by Mike Mulhern

[Editor's note: This is the second half of an article which appeared in Evergreen Cemetery's booklet. This is the story of the three survivors.]

The reminiscences of this brother and sister are recounted by Edward A. Mueller in his article, "TITANIC Passengers in Jacksonville, Florida," in Vol. 12, No. 1 of the TITANIC Commutator (1988). In addition, Louis Garrett's memoir of his experiences aboard the ship appears in an article entitled, "I Survived the Sinking of the TITANIC," in the October 22, 1981 issue of *Awake!* magazine; this story was posthumously ghost written by his nephew, Nicholas Garrett.

Before Anglicizing their names after settling in the United States, Amelia and Louis Garrett were known as Jamilia Nicola Yarred and Elias Nicola Yarred. They had been born in Hakoor, Lebanon, a mountain village approximately 85 miles north of Beirut, back in the days when Lebanon was still a part of Syria. Their father Nicolas was the village miller; he operated a water-powered stone mill which pulverized wheat until it became flour.

The family journeyed to the United States in a very staggered migration. The mother and two of the daughters left Lebanon in 1904, then brother Isaac left in 1906, and lived in Venezuela before joining his mother and sisters in New York. The four of them then moved to Jacksonville in 1907.

The father Nicolas decided to complete the family exodus by moving to the United States with his last



Amelia Isaac



Louis Garrett

two children, Jamilia (Amelia) and Elias (Louis), in the spring of 1912.

There is some question as to how old the children were at the time. Both their tombstones say 1900 was the year of their birth, but it is known that Amelia was the older of the two by two years. According to Amelia's surviving kin, the children were 12 and 10 when they came to America, meaning that Amelia was born in 1900 and Louis in 1902. But Louis's descendants put their ages at the time as 14 and 12 and their birth years as 1898 for Amelia and 1900 for Louis.

"The truth of the matter is that nobody knows their birthdates because accurate records were not kept back in those days," says Kenneth Garrett, Louis's son and a former Jacksonville resident who now resides in Canton, Ga. "I remember my father just arbitrarily deciding to celebrate his birthday on April 15, the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, because he said that by surviving the sinking, he had been 'born again.'" His sister also chose April 15 as her birthdate.

The controversy over their ages is the first of a number of minor inconsistencies in the remembrances of the two survivors. In fact, anyone making a detailed analysis of their accounts who didn't know how lovingly this brother and sister felt toward each other might conclude that some sibling rivalry existed, because each chose to remember embarrassing things about the other that the other did not make mention of him- or herself. Amelia's recollections portray her to be the protective big sister playing the role of "mother hen" watching out for her little brother. Louis's reminiscences, meanwhile, present him as the chivalrous knight in shining armor ensuring the safety of his weaker sister.

In any event, there is no disputing the fact that the father, Nicolas, traveled to Cherbourg, France with the two children and three Lebanese couples, all of whom were intending to board the TITANIC during its stopover there in order to

travel to America. The Yarreds spoke no English. Not only that, but each of them had to pass a physical examination before being allowed onto the ship, and the father, Nicolas, was denied passage aboard the liner because he had an eye infection, a condition that probably saved his life. He entrusted the children to the care of one of the Lebanese couples and bade them adieu, promising that he would join them in America at a later time as soon as his eye malady cleared up. They were to travel third class, which is also known as gisteerage."

"There were 2,200 people on board (the ship), including some of the wealthiest and most influential people of that time," said Louis Garrett in a quote attributed to him in the *Awake!* magazine article. "Many were on the TITANIC to celebrate its maiden voyage. It was the 'in' thing to do for the socially prominent."

All went well until their fifth day at sea when the weather suddenly turned bitterly cold. On Sunday night, April 14, Amelia had just donned her nightgown and nightcap and climbed into her bed in the upper bunk above her pajama-clad brother when — at 11:45 p.m. — she felt a big bump, after which the lights went out. She later said she jumped out of bed and went out of the cabin, where she encountered people screaming and a man running down the corridor shouting, "Everybody out!" So she grabbed Louis by the wrist, but he resisted because he was seasick and didn't want to get up. "We had a terrible time getting him out of the room," she recounted.

Louis's recollections are of course quite different. After the bump, he remembered her screaming, "Something's wrong!" and having to calm her down by saying, "Go back to sleep! You worry too much!" Not long after that, he contends, an elderly man knocked on their door and told them, "Come out of your cabin and go to the upper deck. Don't bother taking your belongings for now. You'll get them later."

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But after they departed from the room, Amelia allegedly left her brother's side and returned to the room to retrieve \$500 her father had entrusted to them before they left France. But water was already neck-deep in the corridor and was exerting so much pressure against the door to her cabin she was not able to open it. So she rejoined her brother and they began searching for a way to get to the first-class passenger area where the lifeboats were located.

The only direct access to that deck was through a guarded gate that second-class and steerage passengers were not allowed to pass through, so the two siblings had to find an alternate route via a rickety iron ladder. Amelia recollected that Louis wanted to jump from the ladder into the water, and that she had her hands full as she tried to keep him from following through with this intention. Louis conveniently made no reference to any such notion in his own memoirs. But there are numerous inconsistencies in Louis's account. He originally said that an old man saw them ascending the ladder and climbed on it himself to grab him and place him in the last available lifeboat before climbing the ladder a second time to retrieve his sister. He later changed his story and said that both of them actually did make it to the deck, but that his sister had difficulty climbing the ladder and needed help from others in order to get there. Once they had arrived, a man Louis later identified as John Jacob Astor IV snatched him out of the waiting crowd and put him on that last lifeboat. "I screamed for my sister who had frozen from fright," he said in the *Awake!* article, once again portraying himself as the hero whose sister wouldn't have been able to survive without him. "With the help of others, she also was pushed into the lifeboat." But apparently she didn't get all the way in. As the lifeboat against the side of the ship and my right leg was squeezed between the ship and the boat," she later said. "However, my leg was only bruised." Once aboard the lifeboat, a blanket was wrapped around her body, which was still wet as a result of her efforts to retrieve the money.

Louis recalled hearing the TITANIC band playing "Nearer My God, To Thee" as the great ship went down and as all the lifeboats were frantically trying to put some distance between them and the sinking ship for fear that the suction would

take them to the bottom with it. There was also fear that there would be an explosion, blasting the lifeboats to kingdom come along with the remains of the ship. Amelia later remembered that there was an explosion — presumably caused when the cold sea water hit the still hot boilers, and added, "My ears hurt with the noise."

"I spent many hours listening to my mother-in-law tell her TITANIC stories in the broken English that she spoke," says Mona Isaac, who is married to Amelia's son Fred. "I remember her saying that people in the water swam to her lifeboat and tried to hold onto the sides, and that some of the people in the boat pushed them away, and even pushed their heads under water to keep them from capsizing the boat. It's doubtful these people would have survived anyway, having been in the water for as long as they had been and with the continued exposure to the cold they would have experienced once they were aboard the lifeboat."

"On the rare occasions when Dad would talk about the TITANIC, he would always say what a terrible ordeal it was once they were aboard the lifeboats," says Louis's son Kenneth. "It gave him a terrible feeling when he looked back and saw all those people in the water. He also said it was so cold that those in the lifeboat with him had to slap one another to keep their blood circulating to keep from freezing."

In the article in *Awake!* magazine, Louis said that the people in the water screamed for help for about 45 minutes, then there was silence. He added that those in his boat all had to huddle together to stay warm, and that one of the passengers in his lifeboat died from the cold. "The body was wrapped in a sheet and slipped overboard," he reported.

According to Amelia's account, it was foggy as morning arrived, but she was still able to view the full magnitude of the disaster and waters that were filled with bodies, trunks, driftwood and assorted odds and ends.

The TITANIC went down at 2:20 a.m., and although the CARPATHIA arrived to begin rescue operations at about 4:30, the siblings' lifeboat was among the last to be rescued. They did not board the CARPATHIA until around 8:30. There, according to Louis, a woman from his lifeboat was reunited with her husband, who was dressed as a woman while aboard one of the other lifeboats

carrying the couple's baby. Louis also said the captain of the CARPATHIA called the TITANIC survivors together to show them the iceberg the ship had allegedly struck, and that it was about two stories high with a wide visible base and a chimney of ice extending upwards from it. He added that once they reached New York the immigration procedures were waived at Ellis Island because of the trauma of the ordeal, and that he and his sister were turned over to the Red Cross to be reunited with their families.

But according to Amelia's account, she was hospitalized and there was doubt she was going to live because of the effects of her exposure. In fact, her family believed that neither she nor her brother survived this disaster. "Their brother Isaac went to New York to search for them, not knowing whether they were alive or not," Mona Isaac points out. "They hadn't been listed among the survivors. Remember, they didn't speak English, and in the list of survivors, their names apparently hadn't been recorded right."

"My uncle Isaac was up in Canada on his honeymoon at the time of the sinking and came down to New York to find his brother and sister," says Kenneth Garrett. After he located them, Isaac telegraphed his family in Jacksonville, "BROTHER AND SISTER SAVED," and the other family members came up to New York to be with them. When Amelia was well enough to travel, they all set out for Jacksonville, but her complete recovery was going to take some time. It wasn't until three months later that she regained the use of her voice. Around the time she was once again able to speak, their father, Nicolas, now recovered from his eye affliction, secured passage from Europe and arrived in Jacksonville to join his family.

Life in the years following their TITANIC voyage proved relatively uneventful for Amelia and Louis. Amelia married Isaac Abraham Isaac in 1916 and bore him four sons and three daughters. Four of the children — Susan Kozak and Margaret, Sophie and Fred Isaac — survive today and all reside in Jacksonville. "Her husband's real family name was Saoud," says Mona Isaac, "but for some reason a number of people of Arabic origin changed their names to those of famous people in the Bible when they came to the U.S. That being the case, with a name like Isaac Abraham Isaac,

he couldn't go wrong!

"As far as occupation went, Mr. Isaac ran a grocery business and produce market, and owned rental property as well," she continues. "He died young — at the age of 46 — and after he passed away, his wife and the older children took over the management of his businesses."

Amelia enjoyed the celebrity, which being a TITANIC survivor, later brought to her. "Every year on the anniversary of the disaster, she would usually be interviewed on TV and there would be a write-up about her in the paper," Mona Isaac points out. "People used to call her on the telephone just so they could say they had spoken to someone who had been aboard the ship. And when the original movie 'TITANIC' premiered in 1953, there was a private showing of it downtown at the Florida Theater just for her and her brother Louis. But the memory of the event did take its toll on her. She was afraid of the water and would never go swimming or sail aboard a ship again."

Mona Isaac adds that whenever any of her seven children got the best of her, Amelia would express her frustration by exclaiming, "I should have died on the TITANIC!" Amelia's oldest son Albert died young j .

Kenneth Garrett presents an equally undramatic picture of his father Louis's post-TITANIC years. "Dad went to school for a few years — really just long enough to master the language," he says. "He married my mother Elizabeth in 1926 and I was born two years later. I was their only child.

"My parents got into the grocery business together, a mother died in 1951 due to complications from diabetes." Following the death of Elizabeth, it seems Louis managed to hit a few marital icebergs. He went to the altar three more times. He outlived one of his new wives, but the other two marriages ended in divorce. Louis was single at the time of his death.

He retired from the grocery business in the mid-to-late '60s, then devoted much of his time to religious activities. "Religion played a dominant role in the latter half of his life," explains his son Kenneth. "He had an ideological falling out with the Greek Orthodox faith — the religion he was raised in — and began a serious study of the Bible around 1930. He was baptized as a Jehovah's Witness around 1933 and became very active in

the door-to-door ministry from that time right up until his death.”

Health problems began taking their toll on him, and he left Jacksonville to have prostate surgery at a hospital in Tucker, Ga., near where his son lived in June of 1981 just before he passed away. “It wasn’t the prostate problem that killed him though,” Kenneth Garrett points out. “While he was in the hospital, he suffered a heart attack and that was the cause of his death.” At the time of his passing, he was either 79 or 81, depending on which birthdate is used.

TITANIC MARITIME EXHIBIT

The Jacksonville Maritime Museum has a

TITANIC Room that contains a number of fine displays sure to whet the appetites of local TITANIC enthusiasts.

The exhibits include photographs and biographical material about the three TITANIC passengers featured in this report, and scale models of the TITANIC and her sister ship. Also, there is a one-of-a-kind, three-dimensional scale model of the TITANIC’S current condition at the bottom of the ocean. The latter display even includes an accurate presentation of the debris field surrounding the wreckage. “We are very fortunate to have this to show our visitors,” says the museum’s Curator and Executive Director, Edward A. Mueller. “It was made by Ocoee, Fla. resident Bud Hovestadt, an excellent modeler.”

Florida Live Steamers Northern Division Open House

The FLSND open house during the weekend of July 25 was great fun for my wife and I. They have a complete 7½" gauge dogbone railroad that was running through the woods south of Green Cove Springs near Bostwick, FL.

You could ride or watch the two trains that were operating. One of them used a two truck live steam shay that ran on coal. So there was plenty of smoke, steam and even cinders. The second train was headed up by a SW-9 (or 12) diesel. Both engines could pull a surprising amount of adults and children at speed. It was also interesting to see the rail, ties, frogs and the jigs they use to build track, quite a system.

FLSND President, Bruce Teerlink, even gave us a guided tour of the grounds that will include A LOT MORE TRACK! It will be quite a system when they get it done. And that’s just the 7½ gauge line. They are also going to build a 24" gauge line using rail and parts torn up from the old two foot gauge train from the Jacksonville Zoo. Turntables, water tanks, reverse loops, sidings, yards; this place will have it all!

The Northern Division meets on Saturdays for work sessions and has one planning meeting a month. Why not take a Saturday afternoon and give the Florida Live Steamers a hand. If you are interested, you can contact Bruce at the following address:

Florida Live Steamers Northern Division, Inc.
P. O. Box 8322
Jacksonville, FL 32239-8322

Minutes of the Southeast Chapter, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

The June meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society was held in the 13th Floor Conference Room of the CSXT GOB on Thursday, June 11, 1998 at 6:00 P.M. A quorum was present. Chapter Chairperson Jim Smith chaired the meeting.

Secretary's Report :

March & April with adjustments (see June 1998 *Southeast Limited*).

Treasurers Report:

Treasurer Jim Wilk reported that 31 members out of the former 65, members have renewed their membership, and contributed an additional \$88.00.

Request for \$50 each payments to Jim Smith & Bill Howes to help cover cost to attend Scranton Convention approved.

Second Notice for Dues to be included in June issue of *Southeast Limited*. Unpaid dues members will be dropped in August.

Old Business:

Jim Smith reported on the status of the reprint of FL Bulletins. Contract sent to printer. Sub Committee meeting to be held when blue-lines arrive to determine price, cover, ads, and future action.

Jim Smith gave a report on the Scranton Convention including the R&LHS Directors Meeting and Steamtown (Engines - Railcamp). We may help a high school student attend the Railcamp.

New Business:

Southeast photo book committee appointed: Mark Bennett, Barry Baines and Art Towson.

Jim to send letter about the slide donation by Bill McCoy and to estimate their value at 50 cents each for the 700 slides.

Committee Reports:

SOUTHEAST LIMITED - Editor Cliff Vander Yacht has article from Ed Mueller. June issue will contain a Pre-Registration Form, dues 2nd *Notice* - "Our First Loco's" - 40 page booklet, ad for Railroad History in Photographs, and Steamtown 'Rail Camp.

Trip Committee - No report.

October Photo Contest Committee - Discussed a need for total Chapter involvement.

Meeting Program:

Review of some of the slides from Bill McCoy.

Respectfully submitted,

Clifford J. Vander Yacht

Acting Secretary

Minutes of the Southeast Chapter, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

The August meeting of the Southeast Chapter was held in the CSXT GOB Building at it's regular 6:00 PM meeting time. There was a quorum present and the following topics were discussed.

Member Larry Brennan gave a brief report on his recent rail trip with his mother out to the Kansas City NMRA meeting.

President Jim Smith reported about a trip he and his wife made on the Seminole Gulf Dinner Train out of Ft. Myers.

Jim also gave a report on the recent Florida Live Steamers Northern Division open house near Bostwick, FL below Green Cove Springs. Although the weather was hot, he was pleased to see the great progress that had been made on their 7 1/2" gauge railroad. A live steam shay provided power for one of the trams running during the open house. The group even has plans for a 24" gauge line.

Treasurer Jim Wilk presented a monthly report.

Old Business -

President Jim Smith reported that arrangements had been made to upgrade the cover of the Bulletin #86/88 reprint and that the "blue book" copy had been mailed to the printer. Our book is scheduled for printing during the week of August 17th.

Jim Smith also reported that a thank you letter had been sent to Bin McCoy, acknowledging his gift to the Chapter of approximately 700 slides.

Art Towson advised that he contacted Steamtown and is awaiting literature regarding our 1999 sponsorship of a young adult to their "Scranton Rail Camp".

New Business -

Our September meeting will be held on the 24th, not the 10th, as part of a joint meeting with other Jacksonville railroad groups to hear Dr. E. K. Fretwell, Interim President of the University of North Florida speak on "A Look Down The Tracks". The meeting will be at CSXT Southpoint Bldg. #1.

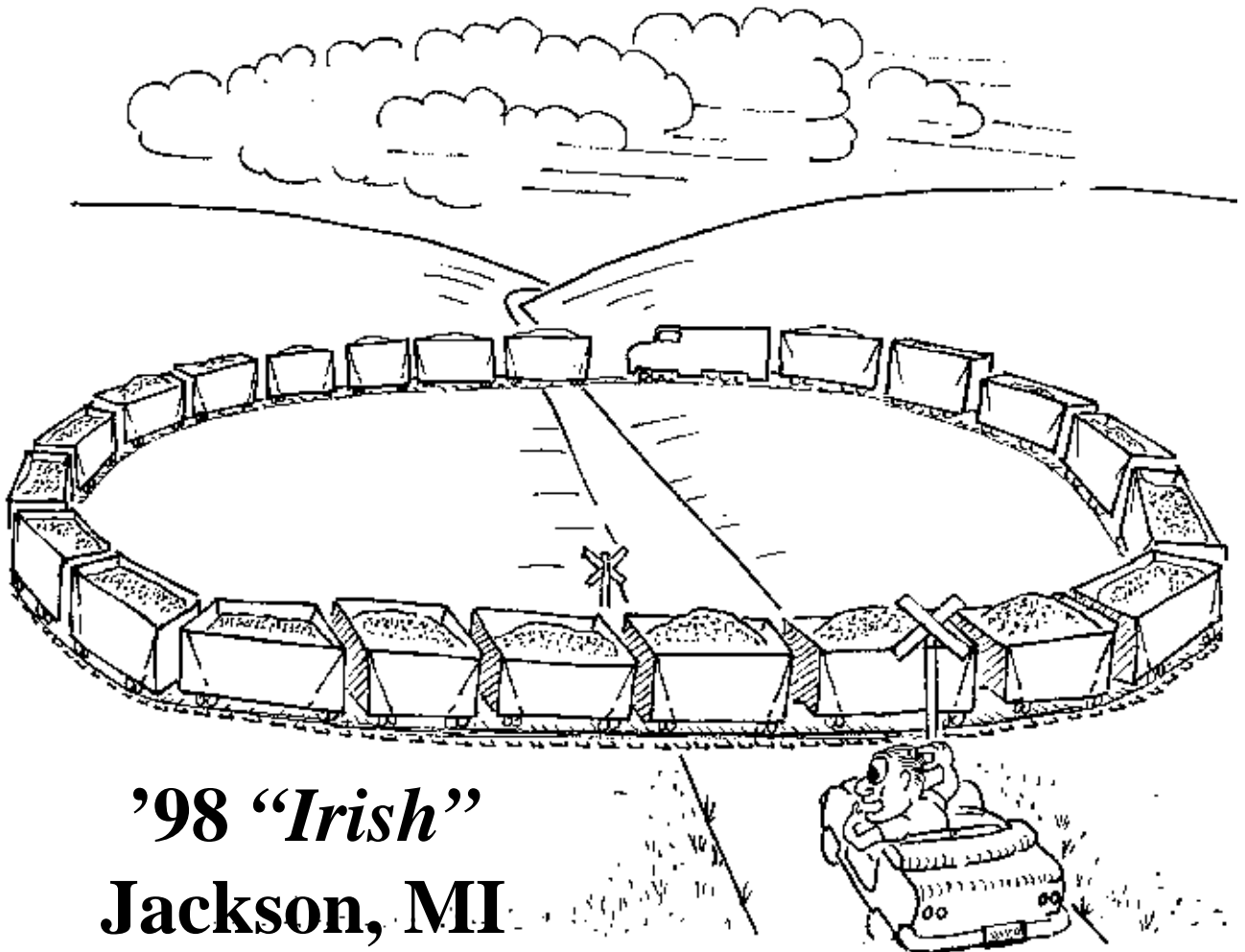
Richard Dickenson made a donation to the Southeast Chapter library of a video on 4-4-0 American Standard Locomotives.

The program for the evening was the sale of some of the slides donated by Bill McCoy. Proceeds will help offset the cost of printing our first book.

Respectfully submitted

Paul Newston

Acting Secretary



**'98 "Irish"
Jackson, MI**

THE KID IS RUNNING A TRAIN AGAIN !!!

Next Meeting - September 24th, 6:45 PM, New Location!

The Southeast Chapter of the R&LHS has been invited to attend a joint meeting of local area railroad groups to hear a special speaker. As a result, we have cancelled our regular September 10th meeting.

The joint session will meet at CSX Building # 1, 6737 Southpoint Drive, South, just off the J. Turner Butler, East of I-95. The speaker for the evening will be Dr. E. K. Fretwell, Interim President of the University of North Florida. He is also Chancellor Emeritus of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Dr. Fretwell is on the North Carolina Governor's Transit 2001 Commission, a Board Member of the Spencer North Carolina Transportation Museum and a longtime NRHS member. He has been closely involved with North Carolina passenger service and is interested in Florida plans for state and local rail service. His speech for the meeting is "A Look Down The Tracks."

The Southeast Chapter will hold a special meeting at 6:46 PM on the 24th in a first floor conference room and then attend the joint meeting at 7:30 PM. Please mark your calendars for an enlightening topic and entertaining joint meeting of local rail groups. Remember to bring 10 slides for the Southeast Chapter Annual Photo Contest.

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