

On April 21, 1912, the crew of the CS *Mackay-Bennet*, a British cable ship operating out of Halifax, Nova Scotia, discovered a small figure floating in the North Atlantic. The sailors pulled aboard the body of a small, blonde child and made note of his appearance:

“Male. Estimated age, 2. Hair – fair. Clothing – Grey coat with fur on collar and cuffs; brown serge frock; petticoat; flannel garment; pink woolen singlet; brown shoes and stockings. No marks whatsoever. Probably Third Class.”

This unknown child had been the fourth body recovered by the *Mackay-Bennet* since it anchored near the last reported location of the RMS *Titanic* the evening before, but one that deeply moved the crew charged with their somber task. Clifford Crease, the 24-year old crewmember who drew the child into his arms from the water, described the moment as one of the worst in his life.

The *Mackay-Bennet* had been contracted by White Star Line days earlier in order to recover the bodies of the *Titanic* disaster. Additionally, Vincent Astor, the eldest child of John Jacob Astor IV, offered a reward of \$100,000 for the recovery of his father's body. So, with a Canon of the church, a local embalmer, 100 coffins, and a crew of sailors on double salary, the *Mackay-Bennet*, helmed by Captain Frederick H. Larnder departed Halifax on April 17.

While the recovered bodies of First and Second Class passengers were most often preserved for identification and burial upon the *Mackay-Bennet's* return to Halifax, the bodies of most of *Titanic's* crewmembers and Third Class passengers were weighted and buried at sea. An exception to this was the tiny body of the Unknown Child, who remained in the hold until the *Mackay-Bennet's* recovery mission was complete.

The crew did manage to find J.J. Astor's remains – which were not, as is frequently claimed, crushed beyond recognition by a falling funnel and only identified by his wads of money and jewels. Rather, the embalmer aboard the *Mackay-Bennet*, John Snow (no relation to Westeros) remarked that Astor's body was in pretty excellent condition considering he'd spend more than a week floating in the North Atlantic, and he was identified by his initials which were stitched into his collar and etched into a pocket watch which was returned to Vincent Astor.

As promised, Captain Larnder and his crew were rewarded with \$100,000 (more than \$3 million in today's money). They split the reward money evenly, setting aside some to buy a headstone for the body of the infant boy, which read: “Erected to the memory of an unknown child whose remains were recovered after the disaster to the *Titanic*. April 15, 1912.” The Unknown Child was laid to rest on May 4, 1912, and the sailors placed in his coffin a copper pendant which read “Our Babe”. When Clifford Crease passed away in 1961 at the age of 73, he was laid to rest in Halifax's Fairview Cemetery – meters away from the Grave of the Unknown Child.

My name is Amanda Hootman and today we're talking about bodies. Why were so few recovered, what happened to the ones that were, and what exactly happened to the victims “After *Titanic*”?

Oddly enough, the morning after the sinking of the RMS *Titanic*, the crew and passengers aboard the rescue ship, RMS *Carpathia*, reported seeing few bodies amid the wreckage. More peculiar still, when the SS *Californian* and SS *Mount Temple* arrived at the location of the disaster later that morning, they reported spotting no bodies at all. Over 1500 people had perished overnight. So, where the hell did they go?

First, let's have a little chat about Cold Water Immersion Syndrome – and by chat I do just mean me explaining to you what that is and you listening, because this is a podcast.

When we talk about Cold Water Immersion, we're typically talking about a human being going into any water below about 77 degrees Fahrenheit or 25 degrees Celsius, but hypothermia can technically set in when someone is exposed to temperatures anywhere below the typical human body temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit or 37 degrees Celsius. Sidebar – look out for your unhoused neighbors, and consider donating warm layers of clothing either directly or through clothing drives, even in the warmer summer months!

Cold Water Immersion Syndrome, however, typically involves sudden accidental or intentional submersion at those 77 or below temps – you jump into a cold lake after an intense sauna session; you break through thin ice while sledding near a pond and your older brother has to save you, resulting in an ear infection that changes the trajectory of both of your lives; or you're involved in a boating accident and go overboard.

We know based on the testimony from *Titanic's* surviving officers and the crew of the *Californian* that the temperature of the seawater on the night and location of the disaster was somewhere around 28 to 29 degrees Fahrenheit or -2 to -1.6 degrees Celsius. (It was sort of a standard operating procedure at the time to regularly dip a can into the sea and then log the temperature of the water. Nowadays, our ships can gauge the temperature based on hull-mounted sensors.) So, the temperature of the water the *Titanic's* passengers and crew were subjected to was well below that 77 degree threshold and the effects of Cold Water Immersion would have been rapid and severe.

The first stage of Cold Water Immersion Syndrome is that initial “cold shock” of hitting the water. That can cause panic, hyperventilation, vertigo, even heart attacks and death. Fans of New Jersey's Action Park water park will recall that guests allegedly suffered heart attacks or a sudden inability to swim due to cold shock at the park's “Tarzan Swings” attraction.

Stage two of Cold Water Immersion Syndrome is “swim failure”, which is the stage occurring within three to thirty minutes of immersion at which the victim loses muscle control. At the stage (which probably would have set in very quickly for the *Titanic* victims) anyone not wearing a life vest would have slipped below the waterline and drowned.

Stage three is “long-term immersion hypothermia” which would have set in for anyone floating in the water in life jackets in around 30 to 45 minutes. This is where the core temperature of the

body is brought down by prolonged exposure to the water, resulting in loss of consciousness and death.

The final stage is “post-immersion collapse”, which was likely the cause of death for the handful of victims who died after being submerged or pulled out of the water still alive. This is a sudden drop in blood pressure that often results in cardiac arrest. Among these were the four men buried at sea following a service aboard *Carpathia* on April 16th: William Hoyt, David Livshin, Sidney Siebert, and William Lyons.

William Hoyt and David Livshin were First and Third class passengers respectively. Hoyt was picked up by Lifeboat 14, the only lifeboat that returned to the wreckage to search for passengers. Livshin was possibly also picked up in Lifeboat 14, or he may have been the unconscious or possibly dead body who was reportedly transferred from the overturned Collapsible B to Lifeboat 12. Sidney Siebert and William Lyons were both crew members who leapt from the ship and swam for Lifeboat 4. Of the four men, only Lyons was still alive when the *Carpathia* picked them up. He remained unconscious for several hours of the day on Monday April 15, before passing away.

By the time *Carpathia* arrived and the sun had begun to rise on the morning of April 15, 1912, the bodies of anyone not wearing a life vest had either begun to rain down upon the wreckage of *Titanic* or were otherwise entombed within. But those floating in their life vests were largely unseen by the rescue ship or other ships in the immediate vicinity. So, where were they?

The U.S. Inquiry concluded that many of them were hidden or carried away from the scene of the wreck by an extensive ice floe which moved into the area of the wreck not long after the ship went down.

It is odd, though, that several of *Carpathia*’s passengers and *Titanic*’s survivors reported seeing a great deal of wreckage when dawn broke on the wreck site; described by some as appearing like a great, brown gash in the North Atlantic. Would the wreckage not also be carried away by ice? Perhaps this mangle of floating wood and leather simply disguised many of the people floating within – their wetted heads and dark coats camouflaged amid the debris, the white of their life vests appearing as nothing more than chunks of ice. Then by midmorning, all remains of ship and person alike were scattered by the ice and tides.

The bodies of *Titanic*’s dead flocked together in grisly clumps, described as appearing at a distance like “flocks of seagulls” or “black objects” bobbing up and down in the water. But as the passing oceanliners and recovery ships drew closer, they were startled to discover that the strange masses were made up of human beings that looked like “swimmers asleep”, some with eyes closed and others “wide open, staring straight ahead.”

Three ships, the CS *Mackay Bennett*, the CS *Minia*, and the CS *Montmagny*, recovered the majority of the 330-odd bodies that were found. All three were cable ships – normally charged with the task of laying and repairing the trans-Atlantic telegraph cables that played such a vital role during the sinking of the *Titanic* and the rescue of its survivors.

The *Mackay-Bennett*, chartered by White Star Line and most prepared for its mission with embalming supplies and coffins, recovered 306 of the bodies. The *Minia* found 17, and the *Montmagny* only 4. Of these, 119 were buried at sea and only around half of those were identified.

Class, which was such a major determinant of a person's likelihood of survival the night of the disaster, also determined how a person's remains were treated after death and recovery. For practical reasons, First Class corpses were embalmed and prepared to be identified and repatriated, whereas poorer victims were more likely to be buried at sea. The *Mackay-Bennett* and other recovery ships only had so much space aboard, and priority was given to bodies that might have left behind an inheritance or otherwise be the subject of legal disputes. Of the total Third Class passengers recovered, 42 percent were wrapped in canvas, weighted with irons, and thrown back overboard. Compare that to 22 percent of Second Class passengers and only 6 percent of First Class. About a third of the recovered crew were buried at sea, as well. This was done as much out of respect for the crewman as out of space efficiency aboard the ships. The presumption being that sailors preferred their bodies be confined to the deep.

The bodies that were not buried at sea were returned to Halifax and held in a makeshift morgue on a curling rink, where they would be held to be identified by loved ones. Only 59 bodies were eventually repatriated. The cost of transporting the bodies was a £20 fee, paid to the White Star Line. Many of the grieving families who identified victims were unable to pay the more than £2000 in today's money to their relatives' killers. But some did manage to pay for personalized headstones to be placed over their graves in Halifax.

121 people are interred in the *Titanic* victims sections of Fairview Cemetery, Halifax. About a third of the people buried there are unidentified, buried under grave markers with a number, a date of death, and, tragically, a blank space where their name would go should their remains ever be identified. For many of the unnamed victims, any hope of being known grows increasingly thin. But that isn't to say that *Titanic* researchers and historians have completely given up hope.

The Grave of the Unknown Child is located in Fairview Cemetery and as recently as 2007, he was finally identified.

Based on his initial description by the crew of the *Mackay-Bennett*, the Unknown Child was originally presumed to be a 2-year old Swedish immigrant named Gösta Leonard Pålsson. Pålsson's entire family perished in the disaster, save for his father who they were meant to be joining in Chicago. His mother, Alma's body was recovered with tickets for all four children tucked into her pockets, and she was buried directly behind the Grave of the Unknown Child.

In 2001, with permission from the Pålsson family, the Child's grave was exhumed. Only a small fragment of arm bone and three teeth remained, sheltered under the copper pendant placed in his tiny coffin by the crew of the *Mackay-Bennett*; "Our Babe."

Mitochondrial DNA, which is passed matrilineally, was compared to maternal relatives of Gösta Pålsson – and it wasn't a match. So, the researchers cast a wider net: boys under the age of 3 who died aboard *Titanic*. After comparing the DNA samples to 5 children, they narrowed their search down to only two: a 13-month old Finnish baby named Eino Viljami Panula and a 19-month old British child named Sidney Goodwin.

Both children were Third Class, both perished with every member of their family that was aboard *Titanic*.

Experts were called in to break the "tie" between the two infants by analyzing their teeth. The three remaining teeth belonged to a child between the age of 9 - and 15 - months. Eino Panula was, therefore, declared the identity of the Unknown Child. In 2004.

However, that ruling came to be questioned based on the existence of - of all things - a pair of baby shoes: tucked away, allegedly worn.

A Halifax police officer, Clarence Northover, had been charged with watching over the bodies laid out at the curling rink in 1912. Most of the clothing and personal effects of the unclaimed victims had been burned to discourage souvenir hunters – which is one of the more disturbing facts I had to learn about this tragedy that claimed more than 1500 lives, but that's neither here nor there. However, Northover allegedly couldn't bring himself to add the tiny leather shoes that had once been on the Unknown Child's frozen feet to the pyre. So, he took them back to the police station and squirrelled them away in a desk drawer. Fast forward 90 years and Northover's grandson, Earle, donates them to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic – a maritime museum in Halifax with a permanent *Titanic* exhibition.

Sidebar: huge shoutout to maritime museums. The Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon (Astor family mention not intended) has gotta be one of my favorite all-time museums.

After Earle Northover's donation to the museum in Halifax anyone who'd ever seen a baby before was like... "those shoes are pretty big for a 13-month old".

So, in 2007, the DNA was examined again, this time using a different section of DNA with the help of the US Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory. Here, they found a small difference – but one that proved within 98 percent certainty that the Unknown Child was, in fact, Sidney Goodwin. The body 4 marker that sits beneath the headstone erected by the crew of the *Mackay-Bennett* now reads: "Sidney Leslie Goodwin September 9, 1910 - April 15, 1912".

Just shy of a month after the sinking of the RMS *Titanic*, on May 13, 1912, White Star Line's RMS *Oceanic* came across a grisly scene about 200 miles away from *Titanic*'s wreck. *Oceanic* had been making her westbound route from Southampton - the same transatlantic shipping route that *Titanic* never completed - when she came across a small craft floating in her path. It was Collapsible A - one of *Titanic*'s Engelhardt-style lifeboats - and in it were the bodies of three men.

Their condition was ghastly: strewn about the bottom of the boat and laying limbs akimbo across the boat's benches, skin and hair bleached by exposure to salt and sun, flesh decomposing and partially consumed by seabirds. When the crew of the *Oceanic* transferred them aboard, the arm of one of the corpses was said to have been pulled off and out from inside the sleeve of his jersey.

Sensationalist papers at the time - and sensationalist TikTok and YouTube influencers today - reported that the three men made it to the lifeboat from *Titanic*, only to float undiscovered for days before finally starving to death. An issue of *The Evening World* even went so far as to publish an article stating that there was evidence that the men "chewed" the cork from their lifevests to "appease" their hunger. That was a Joseph Pulitzer-owned newspaper, by the way. We now give journalists prizes with his name on it for doing their jobs well.

So, obviously there is no evidence that anyone chowed down on their lifevests, and we know for a fact, as the crew of the *Oceanic* knew in 1912, that the three men whose bodies were found on Collapsible A were dead by the time the sun rose on the wreck site on April 15, 1912.

Collapsible A was one of the last boats launched from the *Titanic* and "launched" is doing a lot of work in this sentence. It's more accurate to say it floated off the deck of the foundering vessel, itself partially submerged. As such, there were no officers in charge of it, and it quickly became overloaded as anyone in the vicinity (now standing or swimming in 29 degree water) climbed into or on the tiny waterlogged boat. Throughout the night, several people aboard Collapsible A succumbed to the cold and were tossed overboard. After more than an hour in the boat, submerged in ice cold water, and unable to raise its canvas sides, the living occupants of Collapsible A spotted Fifth Officer Harold Lowe in Lifeboat 14, towing Collapsible D beside his boat and started screaming for help. Officer Lowe successfully transferred fourteen people from Collapsible A, but three more people had died of hypothermia before rescue. Rather than toss them overboard, he left them behind in Collapsible A where they'd remain undiscovered until the *Oceanic* found them on May 13th.

But the bodies of the two crewmen and one First Class passenger were not all that was found aboard Collapsible A. Famed American tennis player, R. Norris Williams' fur coat was also found at the bottom of the boat. R. Norris Williams survived the disaster, going on to win the U.S. Tennis Nationals in 1914 and 1916, and surviving active duty in World War I, before dying of emphysema at the ripe old age of 77. But apparently when he transferred out of Collapsible A and into Lifeboat 14, he decided that he didn't need a waterlogged fur coat.

The crew of *Oceanic* also found a wedding ring, which was identified as having belonged to Elin Lindell, a Swedish Third Class passenger. Elin and her husband, Edvard, made it to Collapsible A by swimming from the sinking *Titanic*, but Elin was too weakened by cold shock to climb into the boat. Edvard clasped onto her hand until he too lost strength and she was washed away, leaving nothing but her wedding ring behind in his palm. According to one of the survivors, after losing Elin, Edvard's hair turned grey over the course of about 30 minutes. Not long after, Edvard succumbed to hypothermia and was lowered into the sea, leaving Elin's wedding ring sitting at the bottom of the boat. Elin and Edvard's bodies have never been positively identified, but her wedding ring was eventually repatriated to Elin's family in Sweden.

By the end of May, 1912, the recovery missions following the *Titanic* disaster had begun winding down, but with over 1200 bodies still missing, had not concluded entirely. A Canadian seal-hunting ship, SS *Algerine* was contracted by White Star Line to continue the search for remains.

They found only one. On May 26, 1912, *Algerine* came upon the body of a saloon steward that was so badly decomposed, he was initially described as appearing around 50 and balding. He was later identified as 27-year old James McGrady and his body was the last of those to be interred at Fairview Cemetery.

After discovering McGrady, *Algerine* continued to scour the area but found no signs of any other remains. But in June of 1912, two more bodies would be found – the last of *Titanic's* dead ever to be recovered.

On or around June 6, the oil tanker SS *Ottawa* discovered the body of second class Assistant Saloon Steward William Thomas Kerley which had drifted 543 miles from the spot where *Titanic* went down. After more than a month in the elements, Kerley was identified by his personal effects which, according to the officer that recorded his description, included a wallet bearing his initials and containing a love letter. He was buried at sea.

Two days later, on June 8, the cargo ship *Ilford* would discover the body of saloon steward William Frederick Cheverton, the last *Titanic* victim ever to be recovered. Like Kerley, his body was in poor condition, but he was identified by the papers and items that remained in his pockets.

Of the 1500 souls who perished on the night of April 15, 1912, only 334 were recovered, and far fewer than this positively identified. Some went down with the ship in it's most literal sense – trapped within the bowels of the ship, or confined to her staterooms. Others simply slipped beneath the waves when they lost the ability to swim and drifted quietly down before coming to rest somewhere in her debris field.

Dr. Robert Ballard, the marine archeologist who discovered the wreck in 1985, points to the many pairs of shoes that rest side by side in *Titanic's* debris field as evidence of a body's final

resting place. Deep sea tides, corrosive salt water, and ocean carrion have long since eaten away at the flesh and bone that once lay in repose, but the tanned leather of their boots will serve as a sturdy grave marker for many centuries to come.

And what of the others? Those buoyed by their lifevests who did not sink to the bottom? 334 were found but it's hard to believe that less than half of *Titanic's* passengers were wearing lifevests that night. What happened to the rest?

It's most likely that they floated for many weeks or months, undiscovered and unseen, perhaps over many hundreds of miles. They weathered storms, their hair was bleached with sun and salt, their flesh and hair found its way into fishes' bellies and seagulls' nests. Until one day, their softened muscles and weakened joints gave way just enough to free them from the cork that carried them, and they drifted down to some dark and quiet place. At long last, their journey was at an end.

This episode was about the remains of the human victims of the *Titanic* disaster, but stay tuned after the credits and find out what happened to her last remnants – her 20 lifeboats.

"After *Titanic*" is a podcast by Bash Back Productions. Written, recorded, and edited by Amanda Hootman. Theme music by Neilly Farrell. Artwork by Paul Scott Canavan. Full cast list, transcripts and sources are available on aftertitanic.com. "After *Titanic*" is supported by our generous Indiegogo backers and patrons. Help support the podcast by heading to Patreon.com/AfterTitanic where you'll get exclusive access to our Discord server, and join an entire community of fellow Titanophiles to hang out with between episodes. I've been your host, Amanda Hootman. Thanks for listening.

Titanic had 16 wooden lifeboats and 4 collapsible Engelhardt-style boats, which had canvas sides that could be drawn up or pulled down to save deck space.

We know that Collapsible A was set adrift and later found by the RMS *Oceanic*. But what of the others?

When *Carpathia* arrived to rescue the survivors on the morning of April 15, 1912, it took on 13 of these boats along with the survivors: Lifeboats 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 16.

Collapsible B, which spent the evening of the disaster floating upside down, was also set adrift. It was later spotted by the *Mackay-Bennett* and likely sank some time after the recovery effort. Collapsibles C & D were likewise set adrift by *Carpathia* and never seen again.

The addition of 13 lifeboats rather crowded *Carpathia's* decks and davits. As *Carpathia* approached New York on April 17th, 1912, J. Bruce Ismay wired a request to White Star Line to send a tug to collect *Titanic's* lifeboats, as he feared they might make it more difficult for *Carpathia* to come to port. This request was denied, and when she finally made it to New York

on the evening of April 18th, 1912, she was forced to overshoot her pier and head to the White Star pier to unload the lifeboats before she could fit into the Cunard pier. And her passengers, eager to get ashore and meet their loved ones after their ordeal, had to endure the agonizing delay of waiting for *Titanic's* lifeboats to be unloaded.

After being unloaded from *Carpathia*, *Titanic's* lifeboats remained in New York until December of 1912 and then, suddenly, any record of them vanished. There were rumors in the press of the threat of souvenir hunters, but to this day no one has come forward claiming to have found a *Titanic* lifeboat their grandpappy had stored away in a shed somewhere. It seems most likely that they were either quietly distributed to other ships in the rush to refit ships with more lifeboats following the disaster, or otherwise left to rot in a discreet part of Chelsea Harbor.

It remains, like so many things about this most famous shipwreck, one of *Titanic's* mysteries...

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[Encyclopedia Titanica](#)

[Titanic - Description of recovered bodies](#)

[Bodies in the sea: Halifax recalls Titanic sinking | Reuters](#)

[Victims recovered by the MacKay-Bennett are laid to rest](#)

[The Strange Persistence Of Shoes At Sea : Krulwich Wonders... : NPR](#)

[The Four Stages of Cold Water Immersion—Stages 1 and 2](#)

[The Long, Strange Trip of the Titanic Victims Whose Remains Surfaced Hundreds of Miles Away, Weeks After the Ship Sank](#)

[Titanic's unknown child is finally identified](#)

[The Evening World. May 16, 1912.](#)

[Last Remnants of the Titanic](#)