

MOURNING THE LOSSES

by Dan Maddalino

I preach “Dollar Box Diving” as proper conduct at philatelic shows and as a path to discovery. I have shown several of my (cheap) treasures in this publication during this year. Knowing that dealers do not have the time to do research on everything that is contained in that mixed-lot box of material they’ve just obtained, I keep my eyes open for the “sleepers”. While I admit, the cover featured in this article is not a “Dollar Find”, it comes pretty close.

What caught my attention was not the label on its plastic sleeve: “To England. 4c Rate”, but the inscription “Per S.S. Adriatic” on its face and a receiving stamp “May 11/(19)12 Lancashire” on the reverse. In fact, there are several things about this cover that called out to me. It was telling me it has a story worth researching. So, upon purchasing it (stealing it at a very low price), I hit the books and the internet.

Looking at the face side (**Figure A1, on front cover**) I see a brown 4c Washington (Scott #377, issued January 30, 1911). It is double the 2c Ship Rate in effect at that time (October 1, 1908 – September 30, 1932). In fact, it is scarce to see a 4c stamp used this way. The overwhelming majority of over-weight ship covers created at this time bore two 2 cent stamps. Most senders want to spend as little as possible on their mail, so they will put the base rate stamp on a cover, hoping that this will suffice. Here it seems, it was posted at the Boston Post Office and the correct rate was applied with a single stamp. This stamp resides on the upper right corner of a black bordered Mourning Cover, used to send condolences. The stamp is cancelled with a smudged “BOSTON/MASS./May 1/ 4 PM/1912 hand strike. There is a notation on its upper left corner that the sender requests it to be transported aboard the RMS Adriatic II (**Figure A2, on front cover**), incorrectly shortened to “S.S. Adriatic”. The RMS Adriatic II was scheduled to depart Boston for Liverpool, England the very next morning, May 2nd. Lastly, it bears the address of “Miss Elizabeth A. Driver/18. Calton [sic] Terrace/Morecambe/Lancashire/ England”.

Now, to the back side: Across the top flap is inscribed “Sender – James Driver – Wakefield Mass”. Then, there is the receiving mark: Handstamp “Morecambe/Lancashire /5PM/ May/11/(19)12” (**Figure A3**).



Without laying out for you all the avenues of research I traversed, I’ll tell you what I have learned.

I have a Death Letter Cover that was sent from Boston Mass to Lancashire England aboard the RMS Adriatic II. Having researched the sailing dates for this ship I have found that it departed Boston on May 2, 1912 and arrived at its destination in England on May 11, 1912. Its CARGO is what surprised me. Onboard this vessel was

many of the survivors from the sinking of the RMS Titanic on April 15 past (including: J Bruce Ismay, the managing director of the White Star Line and other Titanic’s surviving officers; Fredrick Fleet, who spotted the

iceberg, and Titanic's youngest survivor, Millvina Dean. Along with these survivors, the Adriatic was carrying many bags of mail: Letters of condolence (Mourning Covers). The cover in this article was for a condolence letter for the loss of a family member or friend.

But, not so fast. Mailed from Mr. James Driver to Miss. Elizabeth Driver? There is nobody named Driver to be found on any list of Titanic passengers (all classes), nor among the crew. However, I did find James Driver living in Wakefield Mass, as recorded on the 1900 and 1910 US Census. It appears that James Driver, along with a younger sister Elizabeth, were living with their elderly grandmother Sara Driver in 1900 (all stating England as their country of origin). James Driver appears on the 1910 US Census at the same address as in 1900. This time his grandmother is not listed, but an older sister, Mary J Chapman (born Driver) joined Elizabeth at this residence. Reviewing the 1920 US Census, I find James and Elizabeth still in Wakefield along with their sister Mary Chapman. So, why did James Driver mail a mourning cover to his sister, Elizabeth, in Morecombe, England, via the RMS Adriatic II, on May 1, 1912?

Prior to 1900, Mary J. Driver married into the Chapman family of Lancashire, England. She had been widowed by 1910 and moved to America to live with her brother James and sister Elizabeth. Just prior to December 1911, Mary and Elizabeth returned to their family home in Morecombe, England to attend a wedding. This wedding was for a relative of Mary by marriage: John Henry Chapman. The wedding of Mr. Chapman (37 years) and his bride Sarah Elizabeth Lawry (30 years) was held Monday December 25, 1911. The newly-weds boarded the Titanic on April 10 for a Springtime wedding trip to America, and to eventually reside in Spokane, Washington. Mr. Chapman had been to America and had purchased a homestead in the Spokane area. Elizabeth and Mary remained in England through the Winter, not wanting to return to America until late Spring of 1912. On April 15, 1912 Mr. and Mrs. Chapman were lost with the sinking of the Titanic. John Chapman's body was recovered. Sarah Elizabeth was never found.

James Driver mailed his condolences to Elizabeth and Mary, and his letter traveled aboard the RMS Adriatic II, along with hundreds of other messages of sorrow, and with many survivors returning home.

Special note: The last moments of John and Sarah Chapman were portrayed in the 1997 movie Titanic (starring DiCaprio/Winslet) where we see a couple entering a lifeboat. The woman is allowed a seat, but her husband is denied entry. She gets up and says she will not leave her husband, and fighting off tugs at her sleeves, rejoins her husband on board the sinking ship. This is a true and well-documented story, and the Chapmans have been identified as this couple. Of course, in the movie they are depicted as a much older couple. However, this is their true fate and is the link between James Driver and the purpose of his heavily weighted mourning letter to his sisters.

All of this from a very inexpensive and overlooked bargain box containing a jumble of used covers. At the next stamp show, take a dive and see what you'll discover.

[Editor's Note; Dan Maddalino is an active member of the Cresthaven Stamp Club and also has taken on the task of being the editor of the club's monthly newsletter. Dan recently completed a four-year term as the secretary of the Florida Postal History Society. Dan is highly detail oriented, and that quality comes through in his research for this article. His involvement in the hobby benefits everyone. He has graciously allowed for the one-time publication of this heavily researched piece in *The Philatelic Missive*. No other reproduction or duplication is granted beyond this one-time use.]