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## **TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS**

**By Kendall C. Sanford**

In the June & September 2008 issues, there was an article "Titanic Covers That Missed the Boat" by Tom Fortunato. That article dealt primarily with covers that left the ship during its stop at Queenstown, Ireland. An addendum to the article showed various facing slips which were recovered from the body of Oscar Scott Woody, one of the ship's mail clerks. One of these facing slips was supplied by our member David Morrison and it was for mail to Minnesota. Also shown were facing slips in the National Postal Museum in Washington, DC, which were for mail to New York, New Orleans, Washington, DC, San Francisco, and Washington State & Alaska. The facing slips seem to keep "coming out of the woodwork". In researching for this article, I have identified many more of them.

The following is from the National Postal Museum website at:

<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=73396&img=1&pg=1>

"The Titanic was more than the largest and most luxurious vessel of her time. She was also a Royal Mail ship (RMS). The ocean liner included a crew of five sea post clerks and a cargo of 3,364 sacks of mail. The facing slips were found in the suit coat of mail clerk Woody when his body was recovered at sea. Clerks placed facing slips on the top of individual bundles of mail to indicate their destination. Because sea post clerks were required to stamp their names on the slips, any errors in distribution could specifically be charged to them. Some historians agree that Woody stuffed as many facing slips as possible in his pockets with the hope that, if his body was found, rescuers would have a way of knowing which mail bags went down with the ship.

Sea post clerk Woody, a native of Roxboro, North Carolina, earned about \$1,000 a year. This salary was considered a small fortune by the standards of the time. In addition, sea post clerks travelled aboard luxurious vessels, took their meals in a separate dining room with the wireless operators, and were allotted an allowance for their board while in a foreign country. Woody was happily celebrating his 41<sup>st</sup> birthday when the Titanic struck the iceberg. He perished with over 1,500 other passengers and crew members when the ship sank on April 15, 1912.

"I urged them to leave their work. They shook their heads and continued at their work. It might have been an inrush of water later that cut off their escape, or it may have been the explosion. I saw them no more."

*Albert Theissinger, Steward aboard R.M.S. Titanic and survivor*

Although the drama of one of the greatest maritime disasters, the sinking of R.M.S. Titanic, was played out over the course of just a few hours, the tragic event has captivated our imaginations for decades. What few remember, however, is that Titanic was more than the largest and most luxurious vessel of her time. She was also a "R.M.S." – a Royal Mail Ship.

During Titanic's frantic final hours on April 15, 1912, Titanic's postal clerks, along with steward Albert Theissinger and several others, desperately tried to save the 200 sacks of registered mail by dragging them to the upper decks and possible safety. Theissinger was the only survivor to recall



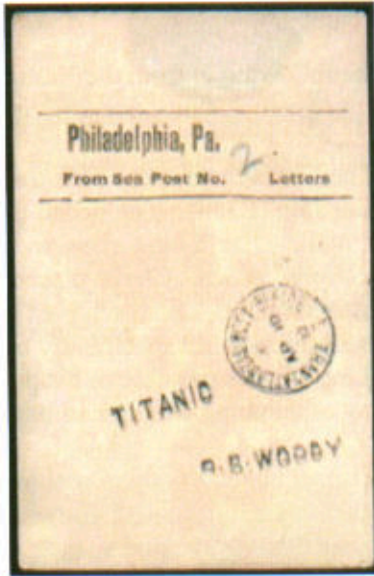


## TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS (continued)

seeing the mail clerks alive. When he finally abandoned the seemingly suicidal task, the five mail clerks – Americans Oscar Scott Woody, John Starr March, and William Logan Gwynn, and British postal workers James Bertram Williamson and John Richard Jago Smith – were still frantically at work, sloshing waist-deep in freezing water. Robin Gwynn points out that the life jackets had cork in them, which meant that the people rode rather high in the water. This may explain why there is very little water damage to the facing slips which were in Woody's pocket.

Mail facing slips have been recorded from the following auctions.

Christie's, New York sale of miscellaneous ocean liner items – June 2008 - This slip marked mail going to "X New York (D.P.O.) N.Y./From Sea Post Letters", and bears the postmark of the "Trans Atlantic Post Office/AP 10/12 - TITANIC/O.S. WOODY". It sold for US\$21,250. There were also facing slips to Cleveland, Michigan, and New York, estimated at between \$10,000 and \$15,000 each. I don't know what they sold for. In a Christie's auction in June 2006, a facing slip to New York sold for \$14,400.

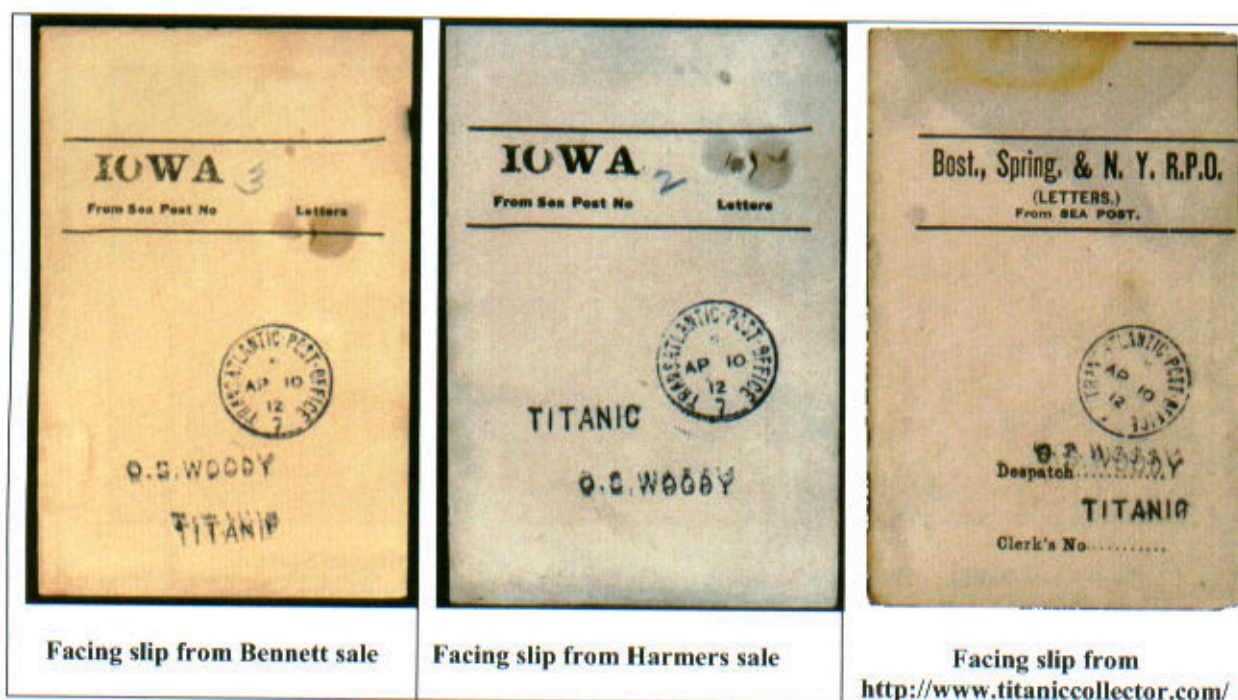
 <p style="margin-top: 10px;"><b>Facing slip from Christie's sale &amp; Bennett Oct. 2003</b></p> <p>Three other slips like this are known (submitted by Robin Gwynn), one of which is heavily smudged, probably by water</p>	<p><b>Oscar Scott Woody</b></p> 	 <p style="margin-top: 10px;"><b>Facing slip from Heritage sale</b></p>
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Heritage Auctions, February 5, 2004, Ron Scott collection. Facing Slip to Philadelphia. It sold for US\$9,350. It later sold in the John Woolfe sale, Spink, London, December 2006, lot 333 for UK£5,200.

Matthew Bennett International, sale 329, December 4, 2008, New York. Facing Slip to Iowa. It sold for US\$7,000.

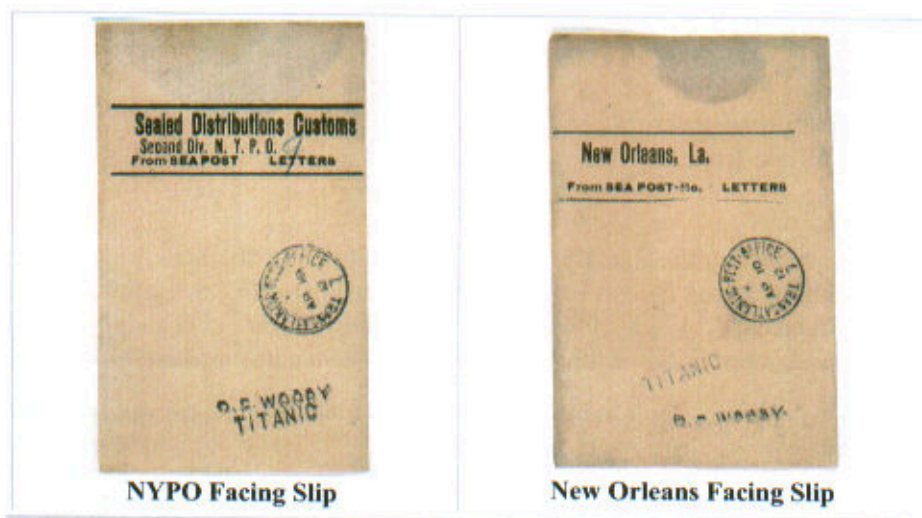
Harmers of London sale, October 22nd 2002, lot 2097 ex Gunter Hyde Collection, another facing slip to Iowa, estimate was £500, it sold for £11,763 (including buyer's premium).

# TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS (continued)



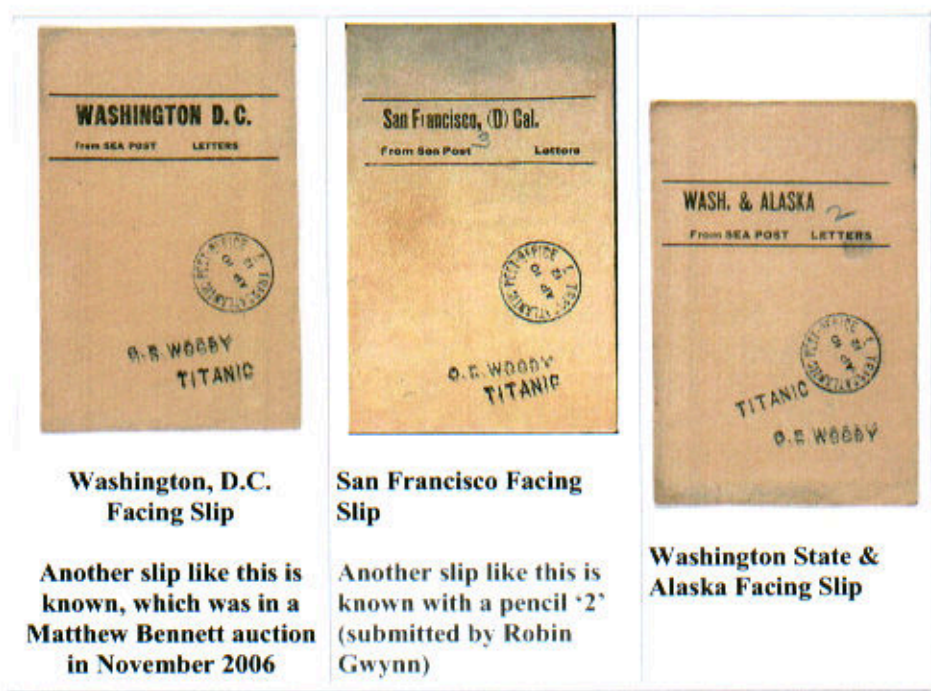
In the Spink, London, John Woolfe sale in 2006, lot 333 sold for UK£6,116.50, including buyer's premium. It was to Philadelphia, and was originally in the Heritage sale, as shown above.

The facing slips shown below are in the National Postal Museum, and are shown with permission.





## TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS (continued)



The first three facing slips are on loan from Dr. Jeanette Cantrell Rudy. The San Francisco slip is on loan from the Miottel Collection of San Francisco, through W. John Miottel, Jr. The Washington State and Alaska facing slip was acquired by the museum as a gift from the American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO.

The N.Y.P.O & Washington slips shown above each sold for US\$6,750 in a Shreves Philatelic Galleries, Inc. Sale – #95, July 2007, lots 994 & 995.

A memorial to the five postal workers aboard *Titanic* was installed in the Southampton High Street Post Office. It was forged from a spare propeller donated by shipbuilder Harland and Wolff. The plaque reads:

"This tablet is erected by the Postal and Telegraph Service to the honor and memory of John R. Jago Smith, James B. Williamson, British Sea Post officers, and their American colleagues William H. L. Gwinn, John S. March, [and] Oscar S. Woody who died on duty in the foundering of S. S. Titanic April 15, 1912 – 'Steadfast in Peril'".

Peter Day has commented as follows:

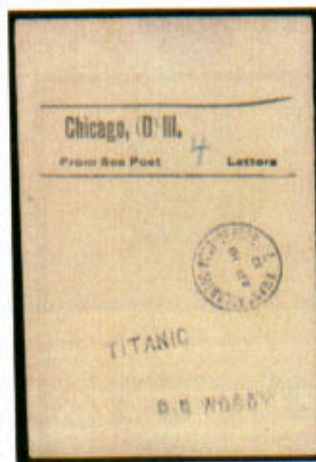
"I have seen references that 11 facing slips were found in the pocket of Mr. Woody when his body was recovered. If this is true then you illustrate 9 of these. Member David Morrison had number 10 (MINNESOTA) in his sale stock. This would leave one other.

You mention a CLEVELAND label, as well as references to NEW YORK (the latter could be the single one you illustrate). CLEVELAND would make eleven labels. Are there more out there? The 11 label theory already seems invalid unless forgery is rearing its ugly head."

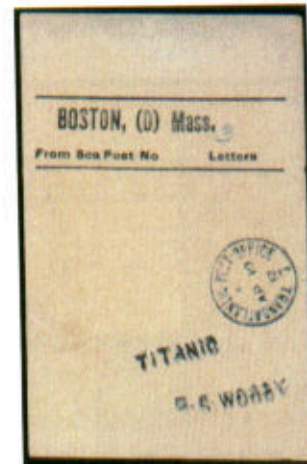
**TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS (continued)**



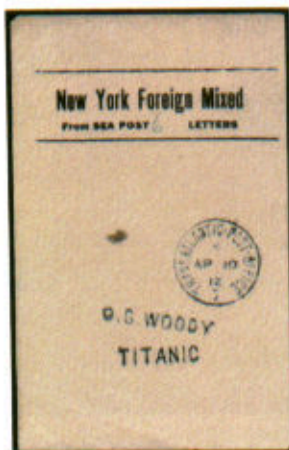
**Minnesota Facing Slip**  
Matthew Bennett auction  
May 2007



**Chicago Facing Slip**  
Matthew Bennett auction  
November 2006



**Boston Facing Slip**  
Matthew Bennett auction  
May 2007  
Another slip like this with a  
pencil '2' is in the Steven  
Berlin collection



**New York Foreign Mixed  
Facing Slip**  
Matthew Bennett auction  
October 2003, now in Robin  
Gwynn collection  
Another slip like this was in a  
unknown auction of November  
1999



**Ship Bag Letters From Sea Post  
Facing Slip**  
Unknown auction of November  
1999. Steven Berlin collection



**N.Y. & Chic. W. States  
Facing Slip**  
Unknown auction of  
November 1999

Our survey above now identifies 23 different labels.



### TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS (continued)

In its January 21, 2012 auction, the Irish auction house Macdonnell Whyte, Ltd, had a postcard which was written by a Titanic passenger and posted in Queenstown, Ireland. The estimate was €5000.00 and it sold for €8,500 plus 15% buyer's commission.



The following article from the Irish Times of January 18, 2012, explains the postcard:

#### **'Titanic' postcard expected to make €5,000 at auction, by Michael Parsons**

A POSTCARD sent from a passenger on the *Titanic* to his father in Scotland has turned up in a Dublin salesroom and will be auctioned later this month.

It had been stamped and put in the mail box on the ship and taken ashore at Queenstown, now Cobh, in Cork. It is expected to make €5,000 – or more given the worldwide interest generated by centenary commemorations of the maritime disaster.

In a brief, poignant message Andrew Johnston wrote to his “Dear Father” to apologise that he “had not time to write before we sailed” and that “we don’t get to New York till Wednesday next so I will write when we get there”. He never did.

Johnston (35), a master plumber living in Thornton Heath, Croydon, London – and originally from Aberdeenshire – who was emigrating to America, perished when the ship sank, along with his wife, a son and a daughter. He had been scheduled to take up a job in Connecticut.

They had boarded the ship at Southampton on Wednesday, April 10th, 1912. The next morning, the *Titanic* stopped in Cork to pick up passengers from Queenstown. Johnston wrote the name of the ship on the blank message area on the reverse of the plain white card, and the day and time.

The postcard was addressed to William Johnston, Newmachar, Aberdeenshire, and signed “your affectionate son, Andrew”.

The Johnston family had planned to emigrate the previous year and had booked on another ship, the *Philadelphia*, but the sailing was cancelled, due to a coal strike, and they all rebooked passage on *Titanic*. The auction, organised by MacDonnell Whyte, takes place in the Hilton Hotel, Charlemont Place, Dublin, on January 21st at 1 p.m.



## TITANIC MAIL FACING SLIPS (continued)

My thanks to the following people for help and input on this article: Peter Day, Robin Gwynn, Steven Berlin, David Morrison, David Macdonnell,

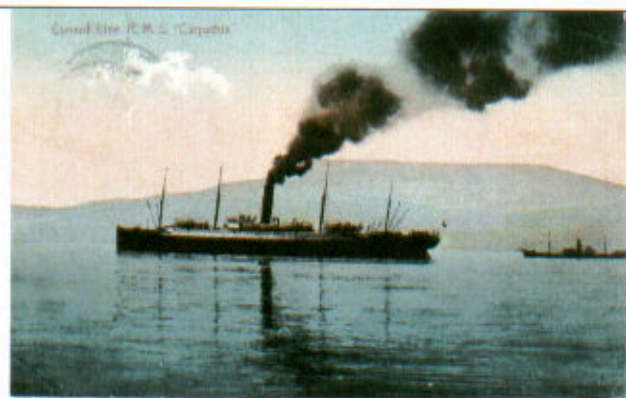
### References:

1. Website: <http://www.stampsofdistinction.com/>
2. Website: <http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=73396&img=1&pg=1>
3. Website: <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/titanic/>
4. Website: [http://www.titaniccollector.com/recovered/2\\_24.html](http://www.titaniccollector.com/recovered/2_24.html)
5. Website: <http://www.titanic-titanic.com/>
6. "La Catastrophe", journal of the Wreck & Crash Mail Society, June 2008 – whole no. 50, pp. 9-11
7. "La Catastrophe", journal of the Wreck & Crash Mail Society, March 2009 – whole no. 53, pp. 17-19
8. Linn's Stamp News, November 2, 1998

## TITANIC POSTCARDS & OTHER ITEMS



Rescue Ship "Carpathia"



Rescue Ship "Carpathia"



Chelsea Brewing Company Beer Labels