

**Guide to the Mary Lines Letter
MS0435**

**The Mariners' Museum Library
at
Christopher Newport University**

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Processed 2009
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DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library

Title: Mary Lines Letter

Catalog number: MS0435

Physical Characteristics: 1 folder

Language(s): French, English

Creator(s): Mary Lines

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of a six page letter written in French by Mary Lines to her friend, Helen Iselin. Dated April 16, 1912, the letter was written aboard the R.M.S. *Carpathia* and recounts the experiences of Mary Lines and her mother, Mrs. Ernest H. Lines (née Elizabeth Lindsey James) during the sinking of the *Titanic*. Also included is the envelope addressed to Miss Helen M. Iselin in Paris, France, postmarked April 18, 1912 from New York. An English translation of the letter follows:

On Board the
CUNARD
R.M.S. "CARPATHIA"
Wednesday April 16

My dearest;

God has been so good to us. My mother and I have been saved. I'm writing to you from the ship that picked us up. Oh, my darling, it was a horrible night, and I hope you never have to pass one like it.

I'm going to try to tell you everything. First, at a quarter to midnight, my mother felt that the ship had received a terrible blow. She jumps from her bed and wakes me up, for I was still asleep. Then we hear the sound of steam escaping with a frightful hissing. We ring for the steward who reassures us and tells us to go to bed. Then our next-door neighbors (Hilma and Ragnihild's uncle and cousin) come down again and the father tells us there's no danger at all. Then we go to bed. Ten minutes later we hear Mr. White who comes down and shouts to his son: "Richard! Life boats!" You can imagine that we hurried to get up, we quickly grabbed some coats, then we rushed to the deck. As I'm leaving our cabin I hear Mr. White's son (he was just 21) shouting "Life belts!" I go back to look for them and there we are on deck. They tell us to go back down for a little while and since we weren't dressed, my mother runs to look for our things. Since she was slow in returning I got worried and rushed to our cabin. I beg her to come and we roll up all our things in a blanket. Then as we were going up again we see everybody hurrying, hurrying. We arrive on deck and jump into a small rowing boat. They lower the boat on ropes down to the water; and there we are, away. Meanwhile I'd thrown away all our clothing, since the bundle was too big to bring along in the little boat. WE pull away from the *Titanic* as fast as possible, and a half hour later it sank. Oh! My darling, what a horrible thing, this enormous ship engulfed in the little space of two hours. And the cries of the dying as it sank!!! For there are only 700 saved out of two thousand, I believe. Finally we drifted on the sea, which by the grace of God was calm like your pond at Brion, for three and a half hours. At four o'clock we made out a ship in the distance, and

the men started to row with all their might; and soon we were picked up by this ship. I'll never forget this sunrise; the sky clear as a glass of water, the sea calm as a mirror, and the enormous icebergs surrounding us, white as swans. Then all of a sudden on the horizon these two stars, but steady stars that didn't fade and that soon appeared as ship's lights. How happy we were. You can't imagine it. God has shown miraculous clemency and mercy towards us.

There are still lots of details of this frightful night that would interest you, but I'll write them to you later or I'll tell you about them when I see you again, if God grants that I see you again. We are now surrounded by a thick, thick fog, and I don't know when we'll see New York.

Oh! My darling, help me to thank God for his inexpressible goodness!

My mother isn't very well today. She's beginning to feel the fatigues of the other night.

Naturally we've lost everything. My dresses, my hats, everything is at the bottom of the sea.

Au revoir, my dear, write me soon. Our address will be:
158 Archer Avenue
Mount Vernon
New York

With heaps of love
Yours as ever - Mary

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession Number

n/a

Accession Date

2004

Restrictions

The collection is open to all researchers.

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Preferred Citation

Mary Lines Letter, 1912, MS0435, The Mariners' Museum Library

Note to Users

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL SKETCH

Mary Conover Lines was born July 27, 1895 in Mt. Vernon, New York, the daughter of Dr Ernest H. Lines and Elizabeth Lindsey James. She was educated in Paris and Italy, and lived in Paris. In 1919 Mary married to Sergeant Holbrook Wellman. They settled in Topsfield, Massachusetts and had a daughter and two sons. Mary Wellman (née Lines) died November 23, 1975, at her home in Topsfield.

Mrs Ernest H. Lines (Elizabeth Lindsey James), was born in 1861, in Burlington, New Jersey, the daughter of Benjamin L. James and Anne Langstrom. Mrs Lines' husband, Dr Ernest H. Lines, was President of the New York Life Insurance Company. They had lived for many years in Paris, France. Mrs Lines husband predeceased her. She passed away at her home in Essex County, Massachusetts, on December 17, 1942 at the age of 81.

Helen Marthe Iselin was a schoolmate with Mary Lines at Cours Fènelon, a girl's school in Paris and is to whom the letter Mary wrote is addressed. Helen was born April 29, 1895 in Paris, the daughter of Henry Sigismund Iselin, formerly of New York City, an American citizen living in France, and Célestine Eugénie Deroubaix Iselin, a French citizen. She had four sisters and two brothers. In 1920 she married Louis P. Hall, Jr of Ann Arbor, Michigan, whom she met during WWI when he visited the Iselin country residence, "Manoir de Brion" at Dragey in southern Normandy. She died a resident of Morristown, New Jersey in 1974.

In April 1912, Elizabeth and her daughter, Mary, were traveling to the United States to attend her son's graduation from Dartmouth College. They boarded the *Titanic* at Southampton as first class passengers and occupied cabin D-28. Dr. Lines was to accompany the women to see his son graduate but was prevented by business at the last moment. On Saturday April 13th, the two ladies had just finished luncheon in the first class dining room on D Deck, as they had made a habit to stop for coffee in the adjoining reception room. After she had taken a seat, Captain Smith and Bruce Ismay came and sat at a table nearby, and began discussing the possibility of having the last boilers lit. Mrs Lines recognized Mr Ismay from when they had both lived in New York several years prior, and she confirmed his identity with her table steward. During the sinking, an officer tied lifebelts on Mrs Lines and her daughter, saying: "We are sending you out as a matter of precaution. We hope you will be back for breakfast." The two ladies were rescued in lifeboat 9.

The *Titanic* was a British regulated four funneled ocean liner built for the transatlantic passenger and mail service between Southampton and New York. Constructed at Harland and Wolff Shipyard in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1911 she was, at the time of her voyage, the largest vessel afloat. On April 10th, 1912, *Titanic* set sail from Southampton with 2,200 passengers and crew. Four days later *Titanic* collided with an iceberg and sank. Of the entire population aboard, 1500 people died and only 700 survived the tragic event. It was the sinking of the *Titanic* that started stricter regulations for public safety and rescue procedures aboard civilian vessels.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This collection is organized into a single series

FILE GUIDE

BOX 1

Folder 1 Envelope, 6 handwritten pages of Letter

MATERIALS REMOVED

None

SOURCES CONSULTED

Beavis, Debbie. *Who Sailed on Titanic? The Definitive Passenger Lists*.
Ian Allen Publishing: Surrey, 2002

Hoyt, Henry, M. "Background notes regarding Helen Iselin and Mary Lines". 2003

Lengyel, Dr. Árpád. "Titanic and Carpathia" *Titanic Communicator*,
vol. 25, no. 155, p146-151

No listed author. "Encyclopedia Titanica Passenger Biographies: Mary Conover Lines"
http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/bio/p/1st/lines_mc.shtml

No listed author. "Encyclopedia Titanica Passenger Biographies: Mrs. Ernest Lines"
http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/bio/p/1st/lines_eh2.shtml

SUBJECTS

Carpathia (Steamship : 1902)

Iselin, Helen, 1895-1974

Titanic (Steamship : 1912)

Survival after airplane accidents, shipwrecks, etc

Lines, Mary Conover, 1895-1975

James, Elizabeth Lindsey, 1861-1942

Shipwreck victims