

Copyright Records Bear Witness to Fascination with *Titanic*

WENDI A. MALONEY

About 2:20 a.m. on April 15, 1912, the *RMS Titanic* sank into icy waters in the North Atlantic. The luxury liner, declared unsinkable, had struck an iceberg off Newfoundland several hours earlier. More than 1,500 of the ship's 3,000 passengers died.

Almost immediately, the *Titanic* disaster became the subject of public fascination, giving rise to countless newspaper headlines, poems, songs, movies, books, plays, and works of art. A hundred years later, the story of the *Titanic* continues to inspire.

Copyright records—as a gauge of the public imagination—reflect this enduring interest.

A keyword search for “Titanic” in 1912 and 1913 volumes of the *Catalog of Copyright Entries*, made possible by the volumes’ recent digitization, reveals a flurry of registrations, including from Washington, D.C.

Among them, the H. Kirkus Dugdale Company registered the musical composition “When the Titanic Went Down,” by M. C. Hanford and Kittie D. G. Rogers, on September 10, 1912.

In a recent blog post, Library of Congress music cataloger Laura Yust called the Dugdale

Company, located at 14th and U Streets, NW, a “song-poem” factory, noting that M. C. Hanford wrote at least 22 songs to lyrics about the *Titanic* for the company.

Other registered works were more heartfelt. On June 1, 1912, a drawing was registered for a women’s *Titanic* memorial. Fundraising began right after the sinking for a memorial honoring male passengers who remained on the doomed ship while women and children boarded lifeboats. A later design by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney now stands at Fourth and P Streets SW.

Among early books on the subject, *The Truth about the Titanic*, by *Titanic* survivor Col. Archibald Gracie, was registered on April 10, 1913. Gracie was submerged with the ship as it went down but swam to an upturned lifeboat, from which he was rescued. Gracie owned a home at 1527 16th Street, NW. He died on December 4, 1912, shortly after completing his account.

In subsequent years, *Titanic*-related works continued to be registered. Walter Lord’s 1955 best seller, *A Night to Remember*, based on interviews with *Titanic* survivors, was registered on November 21, 1955, and remains in print today.

The book reawakened interest in the *Titanic*, and other new works followed, including television and film adaptations of Lord’s book.

The discovery of the wreck of the *Titanic* in 1985 also spurred creation of new works, as did the phenomenally popular 1997 film *Titanic* by director James Cameron. The centenary of the disaster is having the same effect.

Recent titles registered include *Titanic: The Story Lives On!*, *Hero of the Titanic*, *Titanic Panic*, and *Murder on the Titanic*.

A keyword search of digitized records identified these titles; the Office does not maintain subject indexes. To find *Titanic*-related works that do not have “Titanic” in their titles, other details must be known. ©



PHOTO COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

“When the Titanic Went Down” is one of many songs composed about the Titanic’s sinking in the months following the disaster.