

**Guide to the Helen R. Ostby Letter, 1912 May 13  
MS0475**

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

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Processed by Rita Scrivener, 2010

## DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

**Repository:** The Mariners' Museum Library  
**Title:** Helen R. Ostby Letter  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1912 May 13  
**Catalog number:** MS0475  
**Physical Characteristics:** 1 letter (correspondence)  
**Language:** English  
**Creator:** Ostby, Helen Ragnhild

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Helen Ragnhild Ostby was born November 30, 1889 in Providence, Rhode Island, to Engelhart Cornelius Ostby and Lizzie Macy Webster. After her mother's death in 1899, Helen was raised by her father and paternal grandmother.

In April 1912, the twenty-two-year-old Helen Ostby and her father were in Europe on one of her father's business trips. They decided to book first-class passage from Cherbourg, France to New York aboard RMS *Titanic* with two acquaintances they had met in Egypt, Frank and Anna Warren. *Titanic* was a British ocean liner of the White Star Line that was, at over 46,000 tons and 850 feet long, the largest vessel in the world at the time. It was on its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York on April 10, 1912, stopping at Cherbourg and Cobh (formerly Queenstown), Ireland for passengers. On the night of April 14, it hit an iceberg in the north Atlantic and sank in the early morning of April 15, killing 1,495 of the 2,207 people on board.

The evening of April 14, Helen was in bed when she felt the ship scrape against something, then noticed that the engines had stopped. She recalled that there was no panic, and as the stewards began to assist people into life jackets it seemed that they were doing so only as a precaution. The Ostbys and Warrens stayed together, but Engelhart Ostby returned to the cabin for warmer clothes. Helen never saw him again. His body was found by the *MacKay Bennett* and buried in May 1912 in Providence.

Helen Ostby and Anna Warren were rescued by the east-bound Cunarder *Carpathia* early in the morning of April 15. On the *Carpathia* they met two of Helen's friends from Providence, Howard and Hope Chapin, who were on their honeymoon. Helen and Anna stayed in their cabin as *Carpathia* during the trip to New York.

After the tragedy, Helen Ostby returned to Providence and, with her brother Harold and one of his daughters, managed the family jewelry business. Like her father, she was a frequent traveler to Europe and was in Germany when World War I began. She escaped to the United States but returned to Europe in 1930. She lived in Brussels, Belgium for the next ten years. In January 1941 she returned to Providence in response to the beginning of World War II. She lived in Providence for the rest of her life and volunteered at Rhode Island Hospital. She never married. She died on May 15, 1978 at the age of 88.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

This collection consists of a six-page letter written by Helen R. Ostby to her friend Hope Chapin. The letter thanks Mrs. Chapin and her husband for accommodating Helen and her friend Anna Warren on board the *Carpathia* after they were rescued from the *Titanic* disaster. She mentions her physical problems, and updates Mrs. Chapin on some of their mutual acquaintances. She also notes that her father's body had been recovered, though the body of her friend Anna's husband had not.

The letter is organized into 1 folder.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

### **Accession Number**

CA124

### **Accession Date**

unknown

### **Restrictions**

The collection is open to all researchers.

### **Publication Rights**

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### **Preferred Citation**

Helen R. Ostby Letter, 1912 May 13, MS 0475, 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.

## **RELATED MATERIALS**

The Library holds other collections directly relating to *Titanic*, to her sinking, and to the survivors of the disaster. Principal among them are the Frank and Leah Aks Collection (MS0140), the Mary Lines Letter (MS0435), and a deck plan of the vessel (MP01188). The Steamship Ephemera Collection (MS0015) and the Sheet Music Collection (MS0093) also contain individual pieces related to *Titanic*.

A transcription in Microsoft Word format of the letter is available for consultation in the Library. The transcription may be converted to a portable document file at patron request.

## **FILE GUIDE**

### **BOX 1**

**Folder 1**

Letter, 6 pages (two sheets of paper)

**SOURCES CONSULTED**

Beavis, Debbie. *Who Sailed on Titanic? The Definitive Passenger Lists*.

Ian Allen Publishing: Surrey, 2002.

Dziedzic, Shelley. "Several interview excerpts by Helen and family details."

<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/several-interview-excerpts-helen-and-family-details.html>.

Engberg-Klarström, Peter (contributor). "Basic Statistics of the Disaster."

<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/basic-statistics-disaster.html>.

Lamoreau, John. "Oregon's Only First Class Passengers: The Warrens."

<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/oregons-only-first-class-passengers-warrens.html>.

Spignesi, Stephen J. *The Complete Titanic: From the Ship's Earliest Blueprints to the Epic Film*. Carol Publishing Group: Seacaucus, N.J., 1998.

*Encyclopedia Titanica*, s.v. "Ostby, Engelhart Cornelius," <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-victim/engelhart-cornelius-ostby.html>.

*Encyclopedia Titanica*, s.v. "Warren, Frank Manley," <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-victim/frank-manley-warren.html>.

*Encyclopedia Titanica*, s.v. "Ostby, Helen Ragnhild," <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-biography/helen-ragnhild-ostby.html>.

*Encyclopedia Titanica*, s.v. "Aubart, Mme. Léontine Pauline," <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-survivor/leontine-pauline-aubart.html>.

**SUBJECTS**

Carpathia (Steamship : 1903)

Chapin, Hope C. Brown

Ostby, Helen Ragnhild

Shipwreck victims

Shipwreck survival

Titanic (Steamship : 1912)

Warren, Anna, 1851-1925