

Chapter 1. April 18th, 1912

For three days she had been the ship of mystery, transmitting nothing but a list of survivors' names to the eager, news-hungry shores of the world. Ignoring all requests of information from the media, the *Carpathia*, under the command of Captain Rostron, was steaming westward toward New York and the baying journalists. The lack of news generated many rumours, most specious, none of them true. Just the bare bones were known; the iceberg and the immense loss of life. And that the mighty *Titanic*, proclaimed “unsinkable” by many authorities was now at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Upwards of 30,000 New York residents had arrived at Pier 54, North River to watch the homecoming. Pausing briefly to release the *Titanic*'s salvaged lifeboats at the White Star dock, the *Carpathia* was tied up by 9.35pm. To the survivors, the lightning flashes and grumbles of thunder must have reminded them of the useless attempt to summon help with distress rockets three days before.

The 700 survivors marched ashore, their class pedigree preserved: first class first, then second and finally third. The first class had relatives or cars waiting for them...at the other end of the class spectrum, the bewildered third class had finally arrived at their intended homes, many lost and alone, in many instances, their main dependants and guarantees of income now bobbing lifeless in the Atlantic Ocean with some 1500 companions. The pathetic throng were now reliant on human generosity and kindness, and the people of New York provided these in abundance.

The world demanded answers. But those answers only prompted more questions. And the source of the biggest questions of all would arrive in Boston early the next morning.

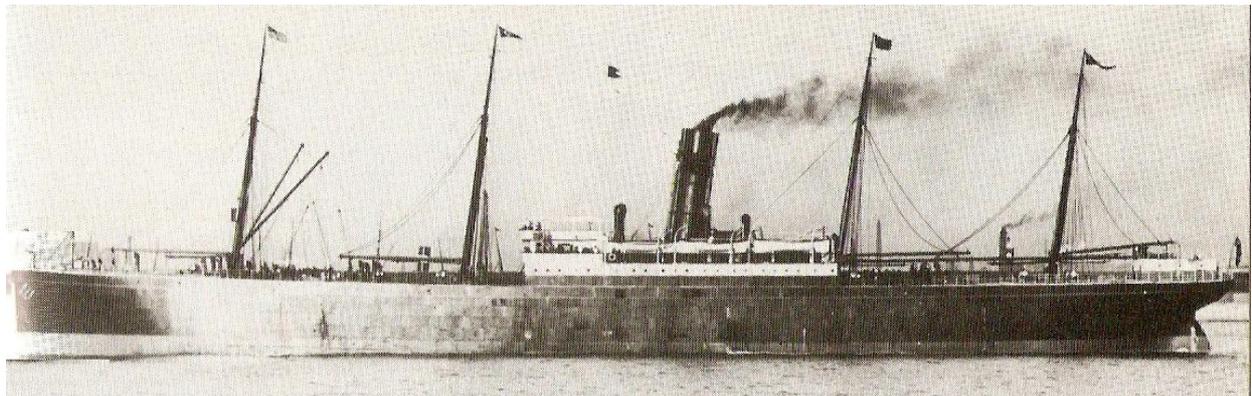


Illustration 6: The SS Californian of the Leyland Line

The SS *Californian* of Frederick Leyland & Co., Ltd (colloquially known as “The Leyland Line”) was a 13 ½ knot tramp steamer: in other words, transporting cargo to whichever port wanted it. She was a vessel of 6223 tons, was 447 feet long and a beam (width) of 53 feet. She possessed a single screw (propeller) powered by a triple expansion engine and dual boiler combination. She was launched on November 26th, 1901. At about this time, the Leyland Line became part of magnate J.Pierpont Morgan's shipping combine, the International Mercantile Marine, or I.M.M.; other members of this conglomerate were the American Line, the Red Star Line, the Atlantic Transport

Line and the White Star Line, whose later vessels would include, ironically, the *Titanic* herself. In April 1902, the Dominion Line chartered her for five voyages, which she completed in December of that year.

The *Californian* left London on April 5th and although she was certified to carry up to 47 passengers, on this infamous voyage she carried none. She had a crew of 55 men.

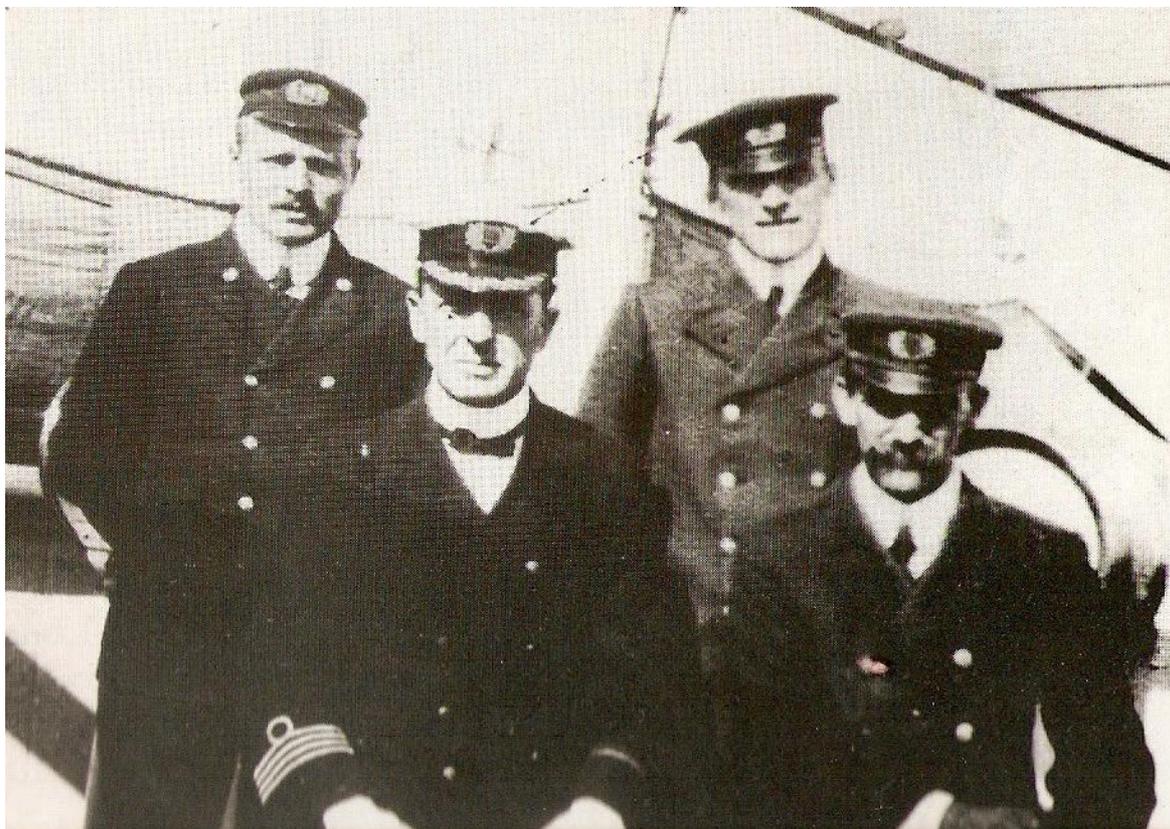


Illustration 7: The Californian officers, from the trip preceding her infamous voyage. Front row, left to right: Captain Lord, Chief Officer Stewart. Back row, left to right: 2nd Officer Stone, 3rd Officer Groves

In command was Stanley Lord, a native of Bolton⁵. He had gone to sea at the age of 13 ½, first finding placement as an Apprentice on board sailing vessels; he had then proceeded rapidly “through the ranks”, first in the West India and Pacific Steam Navigation Company, and then in the Leyland Line, after it had absorbed the former company. Lord attained the rank of Captain of the SS *Antillian* in 1906 and for the next 6 years he commanded a variety of Leyland steamers, before taking charge of the *Californian*. Now 35, he was commanding her on his 6th voyage on that ship, which comprised routine trips to American and European ports. During his assignments, he left behind a wife, Mabel, and a three year old son, Stanley Tutton Lord⁶.

Lord's Chief Officer was George Frederick Stewart, a 24 year old Liverpudlian. Herbert Stone, 24, from Devon, was the 2nd Officer, and Charles Victor Groves, again 24, and hailing from Cambridge, was the 3rd Officer. The *Californian* had one wireless telegraphist, Cyril Furnston

5 Biographies of Captain Lord can be found in “A Titanic Myth” and “The Ship That Stood Still”.

6 “Tutton” was his wife's maiden name.

Evans, and one Apprentice, James Gibson.

The media knew that the *Californian* had been in the vicinity of the *Titanic* disaster, as several Marconi messages (“Marconigrams”) from other ships had been overheard by shore stations. Roy W. Howard, a passenger on *Titanic*'s sister, *Olympic*, and News Manager of the United Press, issued a message saying that the *Californian* had victim's bodies, to be unloaded at Boston⁷.

Now the reporters wanted to know if any survivors or bodies were aboard the ship; the *New York American* asked, 'Have you Astor's⁸ body or any others'; the *Boston Globe* enquired, 'Have you any survivors or bodies of *Titanic* victims? Please rush answer at our expense Will repay wireless charges on your arrival in port'; 'How many bodies of *Titanic* victims on board men and women any survivors any bodies identified wireless at our expense,' signalled the *Boston American*; and J. Fitzpatrick of the *Boston Post* had the following message transmitted: 'Send collect any news even if slight and survivors aboard relieve worlds anxiety.'

Lord's reply, published in *The Boston Post* on April 19th, simply stated, “Captain Lord, upon receiving the distress signal [of the *Titanic*], forced the slow-going freighter to the limit of her speed and reached the scene six hours after the *Titanic* had gone to the bottom. According to his message, he cruised around but saw no signs of bodies of the passengers who went down in the whirlpool caused by the suction as the *Titanic*'s massive hulk sank.”

The Leyland Line itself sent a few dispatches, 'Press reports you were near *Titanic* and have remains victims on board have you anything to report' and then later, 'Understand press representatives on board *Winnissimnet* you may permit them aboard steamer unless in your judgement this is undesirable'.

The *Californian* docked at the Clyde Pier in Boston at 4a.m. on April 19th. No-one could guess the controversy that would ensue, for she was a ship in turmoil, possessing an indignant crew. The scrutiny of the press was an intrusion that Captain Lord could easily have done without. But even so, although he was within his rights to refuse them admission to his ship, he welcomed the reporters on board to regale them with great tales of courage.

Early the next morning, a throng of relatives and friends of *Titanic* passengers and crew had congregated at the dockside, desperate for news, no matter how faint, and a representative of the shipping firm that owned the *Californian* was willing to allow reporters on board the ship. Before this impromptu press conference could start, Captain Lord had a private meeting with a representative of Leyland's in his cabin.

It was now time to meet the press. What transpired during the sinking of the *Titanic*, the reporters must have wondered?

Although the Marconigram to shore the previous day had sought to allay any hopes that survivors, or bodies were on board, Captain Lord's first pronouncement simply confirmed this news. Several people in the audience, hopeful of better news, left sobbing. The inevitable questions from the press followed.

A typical story, from the *Boston Traveller*, appeared the next day, the headline proclaiming

7 Daily Herald April 18th 1912

8 John Jacob Astor, the richest man on the ship, who had perished.

“Leyland Liner Rushed to Scene of *Titanic* Disaster but Found Only Wreckage”. The piece said, “My wireless operator, C.F. Evans, received the SOS message at 5:30 Monday morning when we were 30 miles north of the scene of the frightful disaster. This message was sent from the steamship *Virginian*. I do not know where the *Virginian* was at the time.

Long before we got to the scene we saw the *Carpathia* picking up all the lifeboats from *Titanic*, and were close in when the last of the boats were hauled on board the Cunarder. We steamed as close to the spot as we could, but there was no sign of life about. For three hours I remained steaming about the spot, hoping to be able to pick up something, or recover some body, but we saw nothing.

Running close to the *Carpathia*, the cries and wailings of the women and children could be heard in spite of the fact that they had been taken to the cabins and staterooms, where they were attended by those on board the rescue ship. The ocean was smooth and calm and the weather was fine, but there was a desolate aspect about the place that impressed us all on board the *Californian*. No other ship was in sight but the *Carpathia*. I do not know where the *Virginian* was then.⁹¹⁰

At the end of three hours¹¹, our search having been without result, we put on steam and headed for Boston."

The Boston Globe reported that the *Californian* was "separated from the scene of the catastrophe by great masses of ice, including a number of large bergs and field ice, which in places was two miles wide... We set about reaching the scene of the accident as quickly as possible.

"At best however, it was slow going. At times, nervous and anxious as we were, we hardly seemed to be moving. We had to dodge the big bergs, skirt the massed field ice and plow through the line of least resistance. For three full hours we turned, twisted, doubled on our course - in short, manoeuvred one way or another - through the winding channels of ice.

"Of course the waters were pretty well littered with wreckage, but we were really a bit surprised, considering the size of the wreck, that there wasn't more. We seamen would describe the amount of floating material as 'scant wreckage' but I suppose a landsman would have thought that the waters teemed with floating stuff. The wreckage consisted of cushions, chairs and similar things."

The Boston Advertiser added some more material on the vain and valiant rescue attempt, "I ordered more speed, but owing to the thick ice fields the *Californian* was only able to make about 10 knots, although [she was] a 13 knot vessel. Through the ice she plowed, and it was 8.30am when the *Californian* hove in sight of the scene of the wreck." And *the Boston Herald* added, "it was often necessary to slow down the engines to permit the ship to break her way through [the ice] without ripping off the plates."

Only one puzzle remained. *The Boston Evening Transcript* noted that "...the reporters were requesting what [Captain Lord] termed 'state secrets' and that the information would have to come from the company's office. Ordinarily when a steamer reaches port and has anything to report, figures giving exact positions reckoned in latitude and longitude have always been obtainable from the ship's officers..."

Trying to elicit further information, the *Transcript's* reporter wanted to obtain some

9 The *Virginian* was one of the first ships to inform the *Californian* of the *Titanic* disaster.

10 As noted by Leslie Reade in "The Ship That Stood Still", *Titanic* survivor Beesley and *Carpathia* passenger Joyce noted that the rescued members of the *Titanic* seemed stunned, unable to cry or even speak. The weather conditions at about that time had deteriorated; a wind had sprung up and the sea was described as choppy, putting some overloaded lifeboats in peril. Regarding the statement that "no other ship was in sight", it is highly likely that the *Mount Temple* (at least) was visible to the west, or north-west, although Captain Rostron claimed to have never identified her.

11 In *the Boston Globe* on April 26th, Lord was quoted, "We remained [at the wrecksite for] four hours, thinking we might find someone floating on wreckage."

information from Evans, but “he had nothing to say. So far as was apparent his vocal organs were not impaired.”

And that, seemingly, was that. The *Californian*, 30 miles north of the disaster scene, was immobile and, with her wireless set deactivated, unable to hear the desperate pleas for help so very near. When the distress calls were heard shortly after daybreak, the *Californian* raced to the rescue, dodging icebergs and navigating through the icepack, but arriving too late to help in the rescue effort. The story seemed to satisfy the press. It seemed that the *Californian* would simply become a footnote in history, along with ships such as the *Mount Temple*, the *Birma*, the *Virginian* and the *Frankfurt* who “did their best” but ultimately, were too far away to be of any assistance to the survivors of this great maritime disaster.

The minor point about the *Californian's* position overlooked as a seemingly trivial concern, the reporters left Captain Lord and his officers to file their reports for the next editions of their papers.

Chapter 2. “Sailors will tell anything when they are ashore”

April 19th – 25th, 1912

The first intimation that the United States intended to probe the causes of the disaster had come shortly after it was confirmed that the *Titanic* had gone to the bottom. Republican Senator William Alden Smith of Michigan, had telephoned Charles Hilles, Secretary to President Howard Taft and asked what action was to be taken, but was told that Taft had no intention of doing anything as he grieved over the loss of his military advisor, Major Archibald Butt on the *Titanic*, as well as being embroiled in a battle for the Republican presidential nomination with Theodore Roosevelt. To Smith, this was clearly unacceptable. Although the *Titanic* was a British ship, she was under the ultimate control of the I.M.M., an American conglomerate. The *Titanic* was carrying many American passengers and was bound for New York. To Smith, this was sufficient reason for an Inquiry to be ordered as important questions needed to be asked, and if he were the one to do it, so be it. For, by now, scandalous details had emerged of the disaster. Not only had the *Titanic* lawfully gone to sea with lifeboat coverage for barely half of her incumbents, she had proceeded at full speed into an area studded with ice, a fact that the doomed ship had known. Smith addressed the Senate on April 17th, proposing an Inquiry by a committee. His suggestion was approved, and he and his staff were given powers to subpoena whomever was necessary.



Illustration 8: Senator William Alden Smith

On the same day as the congregation of reporters were told of the *Californian's* belated heroics in Boston, the US Senate Inquiries into the *Titanic* disaster commenced at 10.30am at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York.

On this very first day, there were indications that the *Titanic's* death throes were seen by more than the 2200 passengers and crew stranded in mid-ocean by the useless, fractured hulk of the *White Star* giant. Bedroom Steward Alfred Crawford testified, “[The Captain] gave us instructions to pull to a light that he saw and then land the ladies and return back to the ship again. It was the light of a vessel in the distance. We pulled and pulled, but we could not reach it.” This statement failed to arouse any interest, but later, in response to a question by Senator Smith, Crawford returned to this point of a mystery vessel:

“[We] kept pulling and trying to make a light, and we could not seem to get any closer to it.

We kept pulling and pulling until daybreak. Then we saw the *Carpathia* coming up, and we turned around and came back to her.”¹²

This should have provoked some necessary questions. Was Crawford, and by inference, Captain Smith mistaken? How could a ship that was so close as to be visible, not have come to the *Titanic*? Did she hear the *Titanic*'s wireless pleas? If so, had she ignored them? But this tale failed to elicit any curiosity from Senator Smith or his staff.

The US Inquiry resumed on Monday, April 22, having relocated to the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. On that day, *The Washington Post*'s front page reported 1st class passenger The Countess of Rothes as saying that a vessel had been seen 3 miles away from the *Titanic*, and that Captain Smith had ordered her and the incumbents of lifeboat number 8 to row to the vessel and return to the sinking ship. That vessel slowly disappeared. Here was corroboration of Crawford's strange steamer. It is unknown whether Smith or the other senators knew of this detail in the newspapers, but if so, they were circumspect about it, and failed to mention it in their daily sittings. A prudent decision; for rival newspapers were printing a medley of fabricated stories to satisfy the public's thirst for drama, devotion and sacrifice. Not that the public knew that some of their daily intake of tales of woe from the *Titanic* were of dubious origin.

The *Titanic*'s 4th Officer, Joseph Groves Boxhall, the final Inquiry witness of the day, would contribute new details to the mystery of this neighbouring vessel.

During the interrogation, Boxhall said that he “was around the bridge most of the time, sending off distress signals and endeavouring to signal to a ship that was ahead of us.”

“How far ahead of you?” inquired Senator Smith, but Boxhall found it hard to provide an opinion;

“I saw his masthead lights and I saw his side light.” Boxhall had observed the lights almost ahead of him, seemingly heading towards, or “meeting” the *Titanic*.

“You say you fired these rockets and other- wise attempted to signal her?” asked Smith.

“Yes, sir,” replied Boxhall, “She got close enough, as I thought, to read our electric Morse signal, and I signalled to her; I told her to come at once, we were sinking; and the Captain was standing --”

“This was the signal?” Smith interrupted.

“Yes, sir ... I told the Captain about this ship, and he was with me most of the time when we were signalling.”

“Did he also see it?” asked the Senator.

“Yes, sir.”

“Did he tell you to do anything else to arrest its attention?”

“I went over and started the Morse signal [lamp]. He said, 'Tell him to come at once, we are sinking.'”

“And did you get any reply?”

Boxhall replied, “I can not say I saw any reply. Some people say she replied to our rockets and our signals, but I did not see them.”

“Did you see any signals from this ship at all?”

“No; I can not say that I saw any signals, except her ordinary steaming light. Some people say they saw signals, but I could not.”

“In referring to "some people," whom do you mean?”

“People who were around the bridge,” Boxhall said; stewards he thought, and people waiting in the boats.

12 Transcripts of all the testimonies can be found at <http://www.titanicinquiry.org>

Senator Smith again asked the question: "From what you saw of that vessel, how far would you think she was from the *Titanic*?"

"I should say approximately the ship would be about 5 miles."

"What lights did you see?"

"The two masthead lights and the red light."

"Were the two masthead lights the first lights that you could see?"

"The first lights," affirmed Boxhall.

"And what other lights?"

"And then, as she got closer, she showed her side light, her red light."

"So you were quite sure she was coming in your direction?" enquired Smith..

"Quite sure."

"Did they continue up to the time you assisted in clearing the lifeboats?"

"I would signal with the Morse and then go ahead and send off a rocket, and then go back and have a look at the ship, until I was finally sent away," replied Boxhall

"How are the rockets exploded?"

"The rockets are exploded by a firing lanyard."¹³

"They shower?"

"They go right up into the air and they throw stars."

Boxhall's testimony had obviously disturbed the committee, and the remarks about the unresponsive ship were discussed. Inspector General Uhler, Chief of the Bureau of Steamboat Inspection, was asked his opinion: "The account by 4th Officer Boxhall of a steamer near the *Titanic* the night of the disaster, and her failure to come to the help of the sinking steamship has impressed me. It is a strange story. He gives details that any experienced mariner would expect. He says he saw her lights at the masthead. There were two. He was not clear whether they were both on the foremast, or one on the mainmast as well as the foremast. In the first case it would have indicated that she had a tow. In the other that the lights were used that way as range lights simply ... but it is inconceivable that any vessel that could be seen from the *Titanic* should not have seen the rockets or the Morse signals from the *Titanic*. The rockets can be seen from ten to fifteen miles, and that was, from every account, a calm, clear night."

"I am inclined to think that in the latter fact lies the only sound explanation of the matter. Ordinarily the stars at sea disappear before they set below the horizon. But on a clear, calm, snappy night, like that the stars set in the water, as the old mariners say. I have been many times completely deceived by them and have thought I saw the lights of a vessel."

"I think that Boxhall must have seen two stars very close to the horizon, and their reflection in the still water added to the deception. I have tried to think of some method of discovering what ship could have been in that place at that time, and can think of no way except from the shipping offices in New York."

"But it would seem as if every shred of information available in that way had been brought out, and I have no hope that there will be any confirmation on the steamer. The navy could have none. Only the steamship companies themselves can help, and they have done all they could."¹⁴

Alden Smith agreed with Uhler that Boxhall and his fellows must have been mistaken about a ship in the vicinity. A vessel – any vessel - would have seen the rockets and assisted the stricken *Titanic*. Boxhall must therefore have been mistaken in his identification of the light. The reporters, their interest aroused by this whole matter, inquired whether Boxhall had seen the *Carpathia*, but Smith disagreed. The *Carpathia* was only seen hours after the *Titanic* had sunk. "No, the light – if

13 The socket signals ("rockets") were small metal cylinders, fired by attaching a lanyard to the shell, which, when pulled sharply, ignited the propellant charge forcing the pyrotechnic into the air, where the signals would ignite after a determined time, producing a thunderous explosion and a shower of bright stars.

14 *New York Times*, 24/12/12

there was a light – was not the *Carpathia*.”¹⁵

The New York Times presented a new theory: that the strange lights seen were from the *Titanic* itself – reflected back from some of the icebergs in the area. The paper reminded readers that some people on the deck thought they saw the lights of the other ship answering the *Titanic* back: “If the iceberg theory is correct, the Captain and the stewards simply deluded themselves in their great anxiety into believing the flashes reflected back from the icebergs to be a sympathetic response to their appeal for help.” This hypothesis is similar to that espoused by British Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge in the paper on April 25th, who remarked that this phenomenon is often seen in the ice regions, and indeed, had seen similar reflections many times himself.

But others were not so certain, and suspicions soon fell on a ship named *Hellig Olav*. She was a passenger steamer of over 10,000 tons plying her trade between New York and Copenhagen, and had docked in New York on April 17th. She had the latest Marconi apparatus and one operator.

The weekend break brought little new information on the story to Senator Smith.

But 400 miles to the North-East of where Smith was conducting his Inquiry, a new name, practically unknown outside Boston and its environs, would emerge. For, on the 23rd, the following headline appeared in *The Clinton Daily Item*: "CALIFORNIA [sic] REFUSED AID - Foreman Carpenter on Board this Boat Says Hundreds Might Have Been Saved FROM THE *Titanic*"

If true, the story would be scandalous, for its contents screamed of purported negligence on the part of a British seafarer.

“According to a story told by the foreman carpenter on board the steamship *California* [sic], that boat was within ten miles of the *Titanic* when that steamship met its fate, and but for the orders of the Captain could have aided the *Titanic* and probably saved hundreds of passengers. This story was told to John H.G. Frazier, but because of a possible outcome of these facts the name of the man is withheld. “

Mr. Frazier's cousin was in Clinton Sunday on a leave of absence from Saturday night until Sunday night while the *California* was docked at Boston. It is said the ship will probably never sail again under the same Captain as a result of his action on the night of the disaster. The story as told to Mr. Frazier is to the effect that the *California*, which belongs to the Leyland Line, which is under the same control as the White Star Line, was within 10 miles of the *Titanic* when she struck the iceberg. At this time the *California* was sailing just ahead of the *Titanic* but had seen a big field of ice and in order to avoid it turned south and went round the big mass. It is also said that the wireless officer on board the *California* notified the *Titanic* and all other vessels in that vicinity of the presence of the big ice field.

It was shortly after the *California* had gone by the ice field that the watch saw the rockets which were sent up by the *Titanic* as signals of distress. The officer on watch, it is said, reported this to the boat, but he failed to pay any attention to the signals excepting to tell the watch to keep his eye on the boat. At this time the two boats were about 10 miles apart. It being in the night the wireless operator on board the *California* was asleep at the time.

It is said that those on board the *California* could see the lights of the *Titanic* very plainly, and it is also reported that those on the *Titanic* saw the *California*. Finally the first mate on the *California*, who, with several of the officers had been watching the *Titanic*, decided he would take a hand in the situation and so roused the wireless operator and an attempt was made to communicate with the *Titanic*. It was then too late, as the apparatus on the *Titanic* was out of commission. The

15 “The *Titanic*: End of a Dream” page 149