

Titanic Aquatic: Treasures from the deep

By Travis Hudgons
Photos by Travis Hudgons

Many of us know the story, or perhaps saw the movie, *Titanic* or other movies about the luxury liner. But how many of us have been mere inches from a piece of the ship? Or have seen the china that the passengers ate from or an actual sink from a Titanic bathroom? The *Titanic Aquatic* exhibition at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta gives visitors this chance and much more.

~ The History ~

On March 31, 1909, a two-year construction began. The Royal Mail Steamer (RMS) *Titanic*, designed by **Thomas Andrews** for the White Star Line, began its maiden voyage April 10, 1912 at noon. The *Titanic* had three propellers that weighed 98 tons. *Titanic* had four funnels, three of which were exhaust vents for the boilers that ran the engines. The fourth funnel was added to balance the ship and make it look grander. The ship was built from 2,000 1-inch thick steel plates held together by more than 3 million rivets. The hull weighed 26,000 tons. The grand staircase featured a contemporary **Louis XIV** balustrade that was paneled in oak and included a wrought-iron and glass skylight. The style of the décor included Louis XIV, Empire Italian Renaissance, Georgian, Regence, Queen Ann, and Old Dutch. It took 10 months to decorate. *Titanic* was the largest ship built prior to 1912 and the largest moving object built by man. On April 15, 1912 at 2:20 a.m. the *Titanic* sank.

~ The Salvage ~

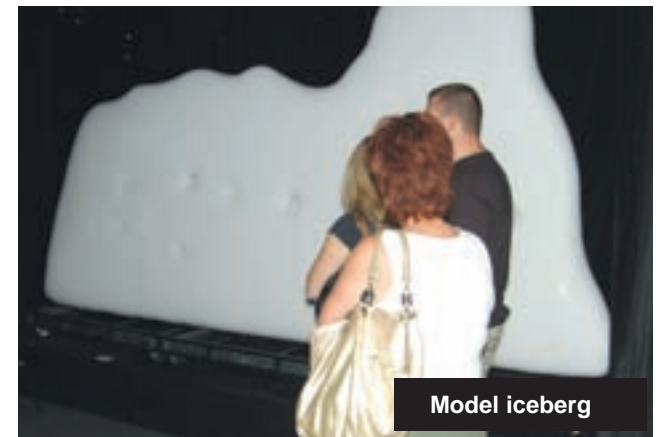
RMS *Titanic* Inc. is the only company permitted by law to recover objects from the wreck of the *Titanic*. The company was granted salvor-in-possession rights to the wreck by a United States federal court in 1994 and has conducted seven research and recovery expeditions, rescuing more than 5,500 artifacts. Premier Exhibitions, a wholly owned subsidiary of RMS *Titanic* Inc, brought this exhibit to Atlanta.

Titanic's artifacts were collected from the wreck site 963 miles northeast of New York and 453 miles southeast of the Newfoundland coastline by submersibles *Nautile* and *MIR*. These machines are equipped with mechanical arms capable of scooping, grasping and recovering the artifacts, which are then either collected in sampling baskets, or placed in lifting baskets. It takes more than two and a half hours to reach the *Titanic* wreck site. Each dive lasts about 12 to 15 hours with an additional two hours to ascend to the surface.

About 200 pieces from the *Titanic* collection are on exhibit at the Georgia Aquarium. Some of the more interesting finds include: the china that still boasts the intricate rope and porthole pattern and the White Star Line logo—a flag with a single large star in the middle, a green bottle that still has champagne in it, and sealed jars containing spices. There are even articles of clothing that were recovered along with shoes. But, one of the most remarkable recoveries was a leather case of perfume vials, which contain oil that gives off a sweet odor.



Visitors view the wall, which lists every person—passengers and crew—who was aboard the ship.



Model iceberg



A replica of third-class quarters



"When I look at this, I think of who would be eating off of these pieces and it really helps me to connect to the *Titanic* on a personal level," said Cheryl Mure, director of education for Premier.

~ The Exhibit ~

The *Titanic* exhibit is not just a room full of artifacts. Visitors will have a chance to connect with the past. Upon entering visitors are given a replica boarding pass. On the pass they find information about an actual passenger. This information details the person's name, age, place of residence, to where they were traveling, who accompanied them and a brief bio. As visitors wind through the exhibit, they will also see re-creations of first- and third-class cabins. Visitors will also find a timeline, actual recovery footage and a video-game-like simulation that allows visitors to steer the 50,000-ton ship. Oh! And there's a realistic 10-foot-high iceberg—which you can touch!

Perhaps the most moving part of the experience is the wall of names which lists every person—passenger and

crew—who was aboard the ship. Visitors can search the wall to determine the ultimate fate of the person whose name appears on their boarding pass. Some visitors might take time to reflect on the great tragedy of the sinking of *Titanic* while surrounded by the names and personal effects of the people who are aboard the ship.

On the day of my visit, I was given a boarding pass with the passenger information of Mr. **Arthur Larned Ryerson**. According to the boarding pass, Ryerson had traveled with his family to Europe to find suitable husbands for his older daughters. Shortly after arriving in Europe, however, the Ryersons received horrible news: one of their sons had been killed in an automobile accident. The family hurried back on the first ship available. Once I reached the wall, I searched for Ryerson's name. I found that his wife, his children and his maid all survived—Mr. Ryerson did not.

And as visitors leave they may see and read a quote on the wall from Irish philosopher **Jack Foster**: "We are all passengers of the *Titanic*."

The *Titanic* exhibit will be on display through spring 2009. Aquarium tickets include admission into *Titanic Aquatic*. Advance pricing: adults-\$31.50, seniors \$26.25, children -\$23.50, members-\$6. For more information visit www.titanictix.com or www.georgiaaquarium.org.