

Tombstone 227 most popular at cemetery where Titanic passengers are buried

DiCaprio is not buried here, really

BY MARC YABLONKA
in Halifax

When film director James Cameron was seeking inspiration for the blockbuster film *Titanic*, he went to the Fairview Lawn Cemetery on the outskirts of Halifax.

It is no surprise to learn the songwriters of Celine Dion's lilting rendition of the movie's theme song, *My Heart Will Go On*, did the same. It is to Fairview that 150 bodies were taken after the April 15, 1912, oceanic demise of what was thought to be the unsinkable *Titanic*, after it struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic.

A visit to any cemetery calls for reverent quiet, but the Fairview even more so. Tour groups come and go, yet a hush seems to radiate from the section of the cemetery devoted to the *Titanic*'s dead. Visitors find most of the tombstones unmarked, other than a number assigned upon recovery, an eerie reminder of the fragility of life and the insignificance of personal existence.

Thanks to Cameron, by far the most visited tombstone is 227. The filmmaker had already decided on the name Jack Dawson for the film's male lead, played by Leonardo DiCaprio. When he arrived at the cemetery, he was quite taken aback by a tombstone bearing the inscription "J. Dawson, *Titanic* deckhand."

Fairview's management is equally astonished by the amount of movie star worshippers who, convinced that DiCaprio's character is one and the same, leave poems and flowers and hold candlelight vigils by the stone.

How the 150 came to rest in Halifax is not well known. According to Stephen King, manager of Halifax Parks and Natural Services, when the *Titanic* hit the iceberg, two Halifax-based cable ships, the Mackay-Bennett and the Minia, along with the Canadian government vessel *Montmagny* and the St. John's, Nfld.-based Bowring vessel *Algerine* were dispatched to the waters where she went down. "Once victims were returned to Halifax, a temporary morgue was set up," Mr. King says. "Identified bodies were shipped out to families or interred in Halifax, according to their wishes."

According to another Nova Scotia tourism official, most of the bodies recovered were too badly decomposed to merit anything other than burial at sea. However, "rescuers dealt first with those whose apparel obviously placed them in the upper-class levels of the ship. Those whose clothes gave the appearance of one quartered in steerage were dealt with last," the official said.

If a religion could be determined, that also played a part in where bodies were laid to rest. "If a person were found wearing a cross, he or she ended up in Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery across town," the official said, noting a person wearing a Star of David would be buried at the Baron de Hirsch Jewish Cemetery. Nineteen bodies were interred at Mount Olivet, while 10 are buried at Baron de Hirsch, separated from Fairview only by a string of black fence posts. In cases where a religion could not be ascertained, religious services in a multitude of faiths were conducted to cover all the bases.

If one goes looking for an example of irony in the tragedy, it can be found in the tale of a Scotsman named MacNamara who kidnapped his three children in an attempt to run away from his wife. To disguise his getaway, he took on a Jewish identity, bought four tickets on the *Titanic* and to this day, is buried among the nameless Jewish dead in the

Baron de Hirsch Cemetery, according to Fairview management.

Over the years, cold Halifax winters have taken their toll on the grey-black granite gravestones. The municipality has undertaken efforts to maintain them, hence, the like-new lustre to the near-90-year-old remembrances of a landmark disaster.

National Post

IF YOU GO

Location

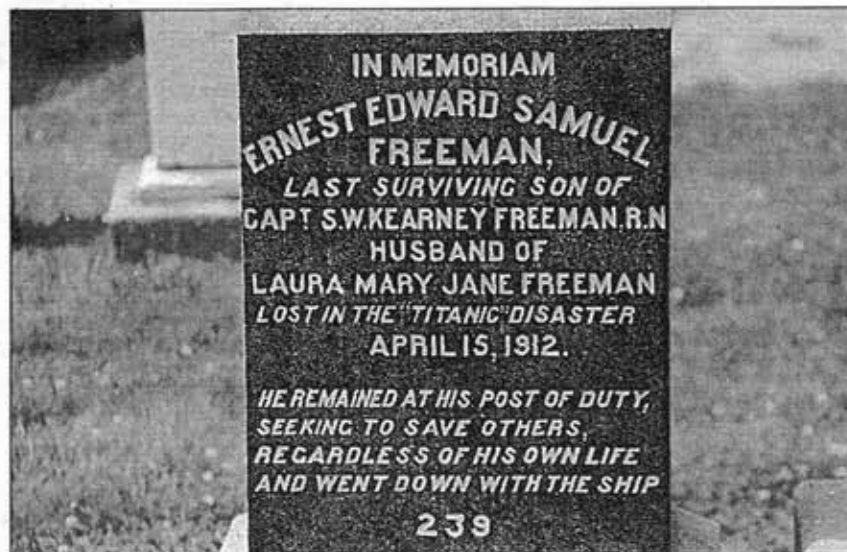
The Fairview and Baron de Hirsch cemeteries are on the corner of Windsor Street and Kempt Road, just off Barrington Street, Halifax's main thoroughfare. Mount Olivet is across town on the corner of Dutch Village and Mumford. Guided city tours are available.

Getting there

Air Canada and Canada 3000 fly directly to Halifax from within Canada.

Lodgings

Holiday Inn Select, 1980 Robie St., from \$139 per night. Prince George Hotel, 1725 Market St., \$139 to \$219 per night. Waverley Inn, 1266 Barrington St., \$95 to \$125 per night.



While most of the *Titanic* tombstones are unmarked, some have inscriptions.