

A native went down with the Titanic

Benjamin Guggenheim began life as a resident of Green Lane

By NICK MYERS

Much has been spoken and written in the past year on the sinking of the White Star Line's Titanic that struck the jagged underwater bulk of the iceberg that ill-fated day on April 15, 1912, at 2:20 a.m.

In fact, so much attention was given to this ill-fated disaster, that Hollywood produced a film starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet grossing millions and millions of dollars garnering many Oscar Awards for the film, director, actors, and crew.

Of the 1517 people who drowned in the 27-degree weather was a former Roxborough resident, 47-year-old Benjamin Guggenheim, who was the grandson of Simon Meyer Guggenheim and the sixth child of Meyer Guggenheim, the patriarchs who had immigrated from Europe in 1848.

It took over two months at sea for Simon and Meyer to reach Philadelphia after departing from Hamburg in Europe. When they finally settled in Philadelphia, father and son went to work as peddlers, going from door to door selling their small goods. Fifty-six-year-old Simon peddled the streets in Philadelphia, while his son Meyer peddled his goods in the Pennsylvania anthracite country.

Meyer married his childhood sweetheart, Barbara Meyer, and as they prospered they moved to a small house on Green La., in suburban Roxborough where the couple opened a grocery store and Barbara gave birth to their first child, Isaac., one of 11 children to be born to the Jewish immigrants.

Benjamin, born in 1865, was born in Roxborough to Barbara, her sixth child. Other siblings born in Roxborough at Green La., were Daniel in 1856, Murry in 1858, and Solomon in 1861. Jeannette was their first born daughter in 1863, and the twins, Simon and Robert, followed in 1867.

After moving from Roxborough, the Guggenheims moved to a better house on Franklin St. in Philadelphia where William was born in 1868, Rose in 1871, and Cora in 1873. From Franklin St., the family moved to North 17th St., and finally to North 16th St.

It was at this time in the growing empire of the Guggenheims that they moved to New York, in 1888 and 1889, when New York had replaced Philadelphia as the financial capital of the nation.

After a very poor and persecuted beginning in Europe, the Guggenheims were becoming the equal to the Astors, Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers as wealthy and influential American families. The world famous Guggenheim Museum in New is named for and houses the collection of Solomon R.



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GUGGENHEIM HOME...On this site was the house that Meyer and Barbara Guggenheim raised eight of their 11 children and ran a small grocery store. Their sixth child, Benjamin, was one of the victims in the sinking of the White Star Liner Titanic in 1912.

Guggenheim, Benjamin's brother.

Additionally, the collection of Peggy Guggenheim, Benjamin's daughter, is housed in by the Guggenheim Museum in a palazzo on the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy.

Meyer instilled in his children, especially his sons, that "Roasted pigeons do not fly into one's mouth." He told his sons, in order to

gain in the financial world one has to go out and pluck the pigeons first before the roasting.

Another of Meyer's teachings to his seven sons was giving each son a single stick to break, a task done with no effort by the seven; then giving each son seven sticks they were instructed to break them. None of his sons were able to accomplish the second test.

Meyer then mentioned that single sticks can be broken easily, but by sticking together, the world could be theirs.

For the daughters, their education was to be the best possible. As for religion, Barbara Guggenheim had the children brought up in Judaism. On the other hand, Meyer was to give his children the very best in an education. The Hebrew schools were not very good in those early days, so they were sent to the better Catholic day schools. The girls were sent to Sacred Heart Convent in Torresdale with a trip to Paris for finishing school.

At 51, Meyer after leaving the Lengnau ghetto in Europe, was now about to become a millionaire as were five of his seven sons who followed his advice also to become millionaires.

Benjamin did not take to higher education and dropped out of college after two years and his father sent the future Titanic victim of 1912 to Colorado to put his efforts into mining ore. Ben worked his way up, becoming manager of the family smelter business at Pueblo that became the key step in building the family empire.

Ben was brought back to New Jersey and was in charge of the metals refinery. This position put Benjamin in near range of New York City where he began chasing the most beautiful and richest Jewish girls in Manhattan. He was becoming known as a playboy. It was here he met and married Florette Seligman, the daughter of a very wealthy, prominent and successful New York businessman. The couple had three children: Benita, Marguerite (Peggy), and Barbara Hazel (Hazel).

In 1912 Benjamin was away from his wife and children for some eight month's time and was in Paris looking after the affairs of International Steam Pump when he decided to return to New York and his family.

On the Titanic's maiden voyage that was eventually bound for New York to return Benjamin to his family, the event that was to follow was to be his last trip. The playboy was to perish with the sinking of the Titanic.

Benjamin and his gentleman's gentleman, Giglio were asleep when the disaster struck. Awakened by his room steward they were told the sinking ship had struck an iceberg. Like gentlemen, Benjamin and Giglio decided they would give their life jackets to women and children and go down with the ship. Before going topside, Benjamin combed his hair, put on cologne and his best evening clothes, and gave his life jacket to a woman. He went about the deck helping women and children

(Continued on page 18)

Guggenheim...

(Continued from page 17)

into lifeboats.

While some men pushed women and children aside to gain their way to the lifeboats, the heroic Benjamin went to the officer in charge and handed him a note for his wife, Florette that read, "Tell her I played the game straight to the end and that no woman was left on board because Benjamin Guggenheim was a coward."



Benjamin Guggenheim

When the news of the sinking reached New York, word was received that many survivors had been picked up. Daniel Guggenheim had asked if Benjamin was among those saved, but Benjamin was not among the survivors. The news was relayed to his daughters that their father was not among the survivors.

At that time, his daughters, Peggy and Hazel, never fully recovered over the disaster of losing their father. One of the daughters, Hazel still had some very bad nightmares about her father sinking in the Titanic. Peggy, on the other hand, who later became a patron of the arts, had thoughts every day of her father's drowning.

Benjamin Guggenheim's death at age 47 was a sad day for his little family when they were informed that the former resident of 443 Green La., in Roxborough, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was not among the 705 survivors of the ill-fated Titanic.

Credits for the above article are given to the writer's sister-in-law Anne Catagnus from Lower Providence whose input from a book on the Guggenheims and Linda Greaves from Roxborough, writer of an article for the Germantown Crier newspaper in the spring of 1998 on Charlotte Cardeza, a Titanic survivor.