

## The Titanic McCoys

by Robert L. Bracken

### ***Titanic Research***

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**The story of the McCoy family from Ireland.**

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My story of the Titanic McCoys begins in the aftermath of James Cameron's blockbuster movie, Titanic, in February of 1998.

The call was from Alice Rodack, the great niece of the McCoys, descended from their sister, Mary McCoy Hekel, of North Bergen, New Jersey. She did not have much knowledge herself of Agnes, Alice and Bernard (Barney), but put me in contact with her mother, ninety year old Alice Both of Florida, who was a niece of the McCoy siblings. Alice then enlightened me by bringing her family alive in terms of facts, anecdotes, and stories about life within the McCoy clan between 1912 and the 1950's. The news media had brought a dead end to ripe fruition. The Titanic McCoys were now real identities. The faces to the identities came next. Shortly after the article was printed I received another call- this time from John Martin, a great nephew of the McCoys. John graciously offered pictures from a photo album that he had inherited from his Aunt Eileen, another daughter of Mary McCoy Hekel. The Titanic McCoys now had identities and faces. They had become real entities to this researcher. Their story follows in detail.



John McCoy and Bridget Cole were married in 1867 and settled on the McCoy family farm in the townland of Carrickathane near the small village of Ballinamuck in County Longford, Ireland. They proceeded to produce a fine family of thirteen - eleven of whom grew to

adulthood. The first child Bridget was born in 1869, followed by Margaret in 1870, William in 1872, and Mary in 1874.



Agnes and Alice McCoy stood on the steerage promenade deck at the stem of the vessel, and watched the spires of St. Colman's Cathedral in Queenstown gradually diminish and then disappear from sight. The fateful voyage had begun.

Agnes McCoy later gave an account to the New York Herald. She said- "Both my sister and I wanted to remain on shipboard when they would not allow poor Bernard to come into the lifeboat with us. He told us to go ahead, but we thought that if one was going to drown we might as well all go down. We were literally thrown into the lifeboat and while we fought and cried, it was lowered over the side. The boat bobbed around in the water for some time before the men got at the oars, and the first thing I knew I saw a form whirl through the air and splash into the water near our boat. When the form came up, I recognized it as Bernard. I cited to my sister, who was nearer to him than I, to help him. The poor boy took hold of the side of the boat and I staggered to his rescue. Several persons pushed me back and I saw a seaman strike Bernard's hands with an oar. Then he tried to beat him off by striking him on the head and shoulders. It was more than I could stand, and calling for Alice, I made for the seaman. With more strength than I thought I ever possessed, I threw the man to the bottom of the boat and held him there fast. Yes, maybe I did hit him once or twice, but I think I was justified under the circumstances. In the meantime, Alice helped the poor boy over the side and lifted him to safety. I think everyone on board

the lifeboat was highly elated and perfectly satisfied that our brother was safe with us. We need him here with us as any two sisters do."



Barney McCoy c.1915



Agnes McCoy in her maid's uniform c.1920

(Courtesy of John Martin, Bob Bracken Collection)



Misfortune and tragedy, however, hit the family many times in the years after Titanic. Shortly after the arrival of handsome dark haired John McCoy in 1914, he became restless and disappeared. His sense of adventure and recklessness lured him from the family, and despite much effort and money spent by Agnes to locate him, he was never heard from again. Agnes was distraught over his disappearance. In 1929, Agnes again faced tragedy when brother, Patrick, was killed in a freak accident in the chemical plant where he worked. Agnes was devastated over this second loss and never really recovered from it.



Alice, Colaine and Rasmus Jacobsen c. 1930



Colaine Gardner at home in Sharon, Connecticut c. 1935

(Courtesy of John Martin, Bob Bracken Collection)



Barney McCoy, who always stuttered as a result of his traumatic Titanic experience, worked as a motorman on the trolley line in West New York, New Jersey for several years until World War 1. His niece, Alice Both, remarked that he always remained apart at family gatherings embarrassed that he stuttered so badly. As a young girl, she used to sit next to him and spend time getting him to speak slowly and plainly to her. He never married. He served in the Army as a private with Company F, 309th. New York Infantry in Europe during the war. He experienced mustard gas poisoning during the war, and always had health problems in later life, resulting from the gassing experience. He was discharged from military service on June 12, 1919 and became a United States citizen on March 10, 1920. After the war, he worked for several years on the crews building the Lincoln Tunnel and finally as a laundry worker until his poor health required him to enter the Veterans Administration Hospital in the Bronx. He died there on July 19, 1945, and is buried in the Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale. He never really recovered completely from his Titanic experience (Photo: Barney McCoy c.1928 - Courtesy of John Martin, Bob Bracken Collection).

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