

From the first time I did some searches for information about my house's heroic and interesting occupant, Lucy Polk Carter. Many years ago to now, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster the amount of new information that is available is astounding! Searching many sites and links to news reports I have pieced together an account of one family's *Titanic* experience.

## About Lucile Stewart Polk Carter

She was born on October 8, 1875 in Baltimore. The stylish Mrs. Carter was a Baltimore socialite of impeccable social pedigree that linked her with President James Knox Polk and the Peale family of painters. Her father was William Plunkett Stewart Polk, prominent in the insurance business in Baltimore for more than half a century. Her mother was Louisa (Lou) Ellen Anderson, a native of Kentucky.



*Sketch of Lucile Stewart Polk in the social pages of a Baltimore newspaper in 1892 when she was aged 17.*

Coming from wealth and pedigree, Lucile was universally described as one of the most beautiful young women in Baltimore social circles. “Miss Polk for two seasons in Baltimore and at Narragansett has been a great belle and noted beauty”.

Lucile's 1896 Baltimore marriage to William Ernest Carter, the scion of an old Philadelphia industrial family, was described in *The Sun* as being “one of the social events of the season”. William Ernest Carter was the son of William Thornton Carter who had made a vast fortune in the coal industry and was said to be “one of the most extensive and successful coal operators in America”. Mrs. Carter's husband inherited much of this fortune and the couple lead an extremely privileged lifestyle. William Ernest Carter, whose major avocation in life, in addition to the relentless pursuit of pleasure, was playing polo for the Bryn Mawr Benedicts. His older brother was the owner of the Pennsylvania Railway and the Carters were famous during that time.

The marriage at Franklin Street Presbyterian Church in Baltimore on 29 January 1896 was described as:

*... The Bride wore a handsome Princess gown of heavy white satin with train, a Marie Antoinette point lace collar and tulle veil, and carried a bouquet of white orchids. There were no bridesmaids, and Miss Alice Carter, sister of the groom, was the maid of honor. Edgar Trotter Price, of Philadelphia, acted as best man... A wedding breakfast followed at the Mount Vernon Hotel, after which Mr. and Mrs. Carter started for Florida for a short trip, when they will return to Philadelphia. In the spring they will sail for Europe.*

—*Philadelphia Times*, 30 January 1896

A popular member of Philadelphia society, she was described as a stylish woman with an “hourglass figure and Gibson Girl hair.” Known for her vivacity and style, Mrs. Carter was not afraid to shock her peers with the “most bizarre modes of the moment.” She was the first woman in Philadelphia to wear a harem skirt, and created a sensation at Newport when she appeared at a costume ball in the guise of a fairy, with filmy costume and gauzy wings. She surely was traveling on the *Titanic* with many of her fashionable and trendsetting purchases from Paris.



*Lucile Carter in Newport.*

After their marriage, the couple was mentioned frequently in the social pages. Lucile was often noted for her striking clothes. The following is an extract from one of the newspapers.

*“Mrs. William E. Carter of Philadelphia, a beauty of pronounced type, has been startling Newport with flaming costumes. In an accordion plaited Eton suit of red and with a red hat, a red parasol, red slippers and silk stockings of the same shade her Dresden china colouring seems even lovelier than when she wears less striking costumes.”*

*In Newport Mrs Carter was declared to be the most perfect type of blonde in American Society. Withal, she was as vivacious as the most sparkling-eyed brunette. She was rival of her husband in the matter of smartly driving a four-in-hand.*

*—Times Dispatch on 16 May 1911*

Her glamorous and often audacious fashions were also frequently noted, one example:

#### **SOCIETY WOMAN IN GREEN TIGHTS**

*Mrs “Willie” Carter Startles Fashionable Hotel Crowds by Daring Costume Philadelphia, May 15—the harem is a shrinking violet of a costume compared to that worn by Mrs Willie Carter, the famous golden-haired Philadelphia beauty, on an evening recently in the corridors of the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in this city. The wealthy young matron, who is well-known in New York, Newport and London society, herself appeared nonchalant and unconscious of the surprise, sensation, to say nothing of consternation, that she was causing in her stroll around the thickly carpeted lane of the hotel, and she seemed equally unaware that word had passed outside, so that men and youths pressed in from the street to have a look for themselves at the “lady wearing tights.”*



*Lucile Carter a stylish woman with Gibson Girl hair.*

*Tights, obviously, Mrs Carter was wearing. They were of glossy silk, and they were green—a vivid if tempered green. She was accompanied by a woman friend during her rambles in the hotel corridors. When she alighted from her motor car and entered the big, brilliantly lighted lobby nothing unusual was noticed regarding her costume.*

#### **HER CLOAK FLUNG BACK**

*She wore a chic Parisian hat and a long opera coat, but as she strolled about the cloak*

*became a trifle oppressive and she flung it open and back upon her shoulders and continued strolling. Her sang-froid was decidedly piquant, considering that in throwing open her opera coat the full length of the green silk tights was displayed...*

—*Times Dispatch* on 16 May 1911

Mrs. Carter was also very athletic and quite daring. One newspaper commented “she was the first woman to play polo riding astride and the first woman to drive a four-in-hand (which is a heavy carriage drawn by four horses, a popular sporting activity of the rich) through crowded Thames Street in Baltimore”.

## 1912

Miss Lucile Polk Carter, 13, was born October 20, 1898, the daughter of William Ernest and Lucile Polk Carter. She traveled on the *Titanic* with her 11-year-old brother Master William Thornton Carter II (nicknamed Billy).

### On Board the *Titanic*

The family embarked the *Titanic* at Southampton on Wednesday, April 10, 1912 as first class passengers. They had 1st Class ticket number 113760 (£120) and occupied cabins B-96 and 98. Also traveling were Mrs. Carter’s personal maid Auguste Serreplan, Mr. Carter’s manservant Alexander Cairns and, traveling in second class, Carter’s chauffeur Charles Aldworth. Two family pets were also making the crossing, an Airedale terrier and Mrs Carter's Pekinese spaniel, probably named Me Too.



*Above, The Titanic had over 350 First-Class Staterooms. They offered the finest and most luxurious accommodations to be found on any contemporary ocean liner. The "special staterooms" on B and C-Decks were richly appointed in 11 different period styles.*



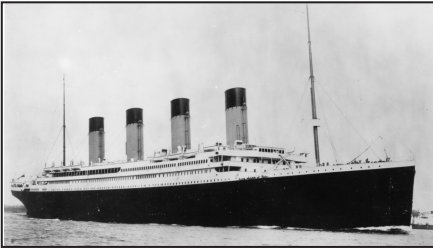
*Below, First-Class staircases on Titanic were identical to that of her sister ship Olympic. Much of the sister ships interiors were designed and fitted by the same teams of craftsmen and artisans, as the two ships were constructed at nearly the same time.*



*Above, The First Class Smoking Room, located on A-Deck aft of the Aft Grand Staircase, was a "late night" lounge. It was considered by many to be one of the grandest and most expensive rooms on the ship, decorated with dark mahogany wood with intricate carvings and inlaid mother of pearl patterns, red and blue lino tiles, and stained glass windows, with interior windows being electrically illuminated. At the center of the room was a large marble coal-burning fireplace, the only working fireplace on the ship. The room was exclusively for men, a place to socialize and discuss matters of business, smoke, drink, and play games of chance (except on Sundays).*

On the night of April 14 the Carters joined an exclusive dinner party held in honor of Captain Smith in the à la carte restaurant. The host was George Widener. Many notable first class passengers attended the party. Later, after the ladies had retired and Captain Smith had departed for the bridge, the men chatted and played cards in the smoking room.





As the *Titanic*, left, sped along in a clear, starlight night no one had any thought of danger.

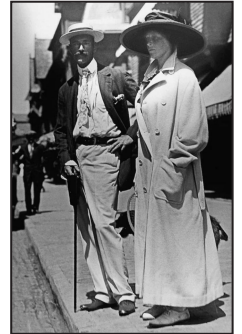
After the collision the Carters joined some of the other prominent first class passengers as they waited for the boats to be prepared for lowering.



*William T. Carter onboard the Titanic.*

Master William just managed to join his mother, sister, and his mother's maid in Lifeboat 4 but it was a close thing. After reluctantly allowing 13 year old John Ryerson into the boat Chief Second Steward George Dodd had demanded "no more boys," but Mrs. Carter put a hat on young William's head and together they boarded the boat.

William T. Carter, in his later years, never liked to discuss the *Titanic* disaster, but not because of the loss of life or the experience of it all. Rather, as an eleven-year-old boy, Carter never forgot the memory of having to leave behind his old Airedale behind on a leash. Second Officer Lightoller would not permit the dog to get on the Lifeboat 4 with the rest of the family. Young Carter cried but was reassured by Colonel Astor that he would take care of the dog and the last young Carter saw of his beloved Airedale was John Jacob Astor holding the dog's leash. This fact may have led to the rumor that Astor returned to the ship's kennels to release the dogs that were there so they would not die confined. Lifeboat 4 was launched at 1:55 a.m., capacity 65, total in boat 40.



*Mr. John Jacob Astor & his wife Madeleine, before boarding the Titanic. Mr. Astor the richest man aboard perished in the tragedy while Mrs. Astor survived.*

Mrs. Carter gave details of what happened. Her statement was as follows:

*"When I went over the side with my children and got in the boat there were no seamen in it. Then came a few men, but there were oars with no one to use them. The boat had been filled with passengers, and there was nothing else for me to do but to take an oar. We could see now that the time of the ship had come. She was sinking, and we were warned by cries from the men above to pull away from the ship quickly. Mrs. Thayer, wife of the vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, was in my boat, and she, too, took an oar. It was cold and we had no time to clothe ourselves with warm overcoats. The rowing warmed me. We started to pull away from the ship. We could see the dim outlines of the decks above, but we could not recognize anybody".*

She rowed through the night wearing on her blouse a diamond horseshoe stickpin. The rest of her jewels went to the bottom with the ship.



*Left, The RMS Titanic lifeboat 6 being rowed toward the RMS Carpathia similar to lifeboat 4, the one rowed by Lucile Carter, the fashionable heroine, above.*



On the night of the sinking Mr. Carter awakened his wife, advising her to get dressed and head up top; she claimed she never saw him again after that and she eventually left in lifeboat 4 with her children. A slightly different sequence of events was given in a tale related in the press:

*Mr. and Mrs. Carter had such a horrible experience that it is a wonder they are alive. Mrs. Carter was aroused from her midnight slumbers by the jar of the vessel as it struck the iceberg and hastened with others to the decks. She stood by her husband and two children, Lucile and William, and only at the last minute would she consent to get into one of the lifeboats with her children. The maid had become separated from the family. Kissing her husband good-bye, she climbed into the lifeboat with her children. There were no seamen in the lifeboat and Mrs. Carter courageously seized an oar and bent her back under the strokes as she aided in pulling the small lifeboat away from the threatened suction.*

—*The Evening Star*, 19 April 1912



*William Ernest Carter*

That was the original story told in the press.

William Carter joined John Thayer and Harry Widener and advised them to try for a boat before they were all gone. But Harry replied that he would stick with the big ship.

Widener might well have taken Carter's advice, for he lost his life while Mr. Carter was eventually able to escape. Before 2 a.m. he was standing near the officer's quarters. Collapsibles A and B remained lashed to the roof but boats C and D had been freed and were being loaded. At one point a group of men desperately tried to rush boat C. Purser Herbert McElroy fired his pistol and the culprits were removed. Loading with women and children progressed but eventually no more could be found and as the boat was released for lowering Carter and another man stepped in. The other passenger was Joseph Bruce Ismay, chairman and managing director (president in some reports) of the White Star Line of Steamships, being the only two first class passengers in the very last lifeboat. His conduct was highly controversial; London society ostracized Ismay and labeled him one of the biggest cowards in history. He was later driven from the company and died in exile in 1937. It came as no surprise that Carter quickly became his great defender, as his own behavior came into question. Collapsible C was launched at 1:40 a.m. Capacity 47, total in boat 39. Interesting time discrepancy... If correct his boat left before Carter's family in Lifeboat 4. Carter and Ismay were the only first class passengers. There were 10 third class passengers, 3 crew and 3 firemen, 4 Filipino stowaways, a foreigner "who didn't speak English", and others, unnamed.

William Carter arrived at the *Carpathia* ahead of his family and waited on the deck straining to see Lifeboat 4 which held his wife and two children. When it finally arrived William did not recognize his son under a big ladies hat and called out for him.

Pulling up alongside the *Carpathia*, Mrs. Carter was shocked to see her husband waiting for her, hanging over the railing. From that moment their relationship took a downward spiral.

Arriving in New York, Mrs. Carter told a reporter, "I kissed my husband goodbye and as he stood on deck I went down the side to a lifeboat. There were no seamen there. It was life or death. I took an oar and started to row."

She was acclaimed by the press later to have been one of the heroic women who rowed the heavy lifeboats.

There were raised eyebrows about William Carter's behavior, too, and speculation increased when Mrs. Carter sued for divorce in January 1914. Every effort was made to keep the sealed details secret, but it was rumored that the *Titanic* played a part in the case, that Lucile could not stand being married to a coward.

With there being some suggestion that the Carters were already in an unhappy and ill-matched marriage, in January 1914 Mrs. Carter filed for divorce, the reasons for which were initially impounded. By early the next year details emerged that Mrs. Carter applied for proceedings on the grounds that Mr. Carter had deserted she and their children aboard *Titanic* and that he had since shown signs of unpredictable behaviour and physical and mental abusiveness:

*"When the Titanic struck," declared Mrs Carter in her testimony, "my husband came to me and said, "Get up and dress yourself and the children." I never saw him again until I was put aboard Carpathia at 8 o'clock the next morning. He was leaning over the rail as we climbed up from the boats to the deck, and all he had to say to me was, "I have had a jolly good breakfast, but that he never thought I would make it."*

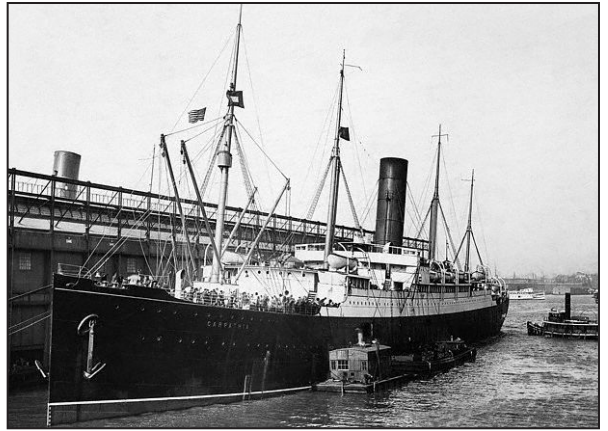
In addition, Mrs Carter said her husband had subjected her to cruel treatment and barbarous treatment to the person in devising ways and means to abuse her.

The divorce was granted on May 30, 1914, although no details were made public at the time.

In 1915, someone— no one knows who— released her testimony.

Mr. Carter had left her and their children to fend for themselves after the crash.

Mrs. Carter's sworn statement revealed that William Carter had not accompanied



*The RMS Carpathia arriving at Pier 54 in New York City with Titanic survivors. Carpathia was 58 miles from Titanic. At 14 knots it would take her over four hours to get there. The chief engineer was ordered to turn off all the heat and hot water so that every ounce of steam could be used to drive the engines. All off duty stokers were raised from their beds to shovel coal into the furnaces as fast as they were able. As a result, Carpathia saved more than 700 Titanic passengers. The ships that returned to the area of the wreck site later only found bodies and debris from the Titanic that had floated up from the depths.*

her and the children to Lifeboat 4 to ensure their safety.

Mr. Carter defended his actions and said that he had entered Collapsible C to help with the rowing.

“A shadow of doubt hovers over this version, since the British Inquiry established that Collapsible C left the *Titanic* some 15 minutes before Mrs. Carter and the children went in Boat 4”, wrote Walter Lord, author of *A Night to Remember*, about the sinking of the *Titanic*.


In his testimony, Mr. Carter said this:

*“Mr. Ismay and myself and several officers walked up and down the deck crying, “Are there any more women here?” We called for several minutes and got no answer. One of the officers then said that if we wanted to, we could get into the boat if we took the place of seamen. He gave us preference because we were among the first-class passengers. Mr. Ismay called again, and after we had no reply we got into the lifeboat. We took oars and rowed with two seamen.”*

Mr. Carter's manservant and chauffeur did not survive.

Resting in the forward hold of the *Titanic*, and listed on the cargo manifest, was Carter's 25 horsepower Renault automobile purchased in France. It is listed as a case so perhaps the car was not fully assembled. Mr. Carter was a car enthusiast. He would later claim \$5000 for the car and \$100 and \$200 for the dogs. There have been other reports that Carter also had his polo ponies on board, but they aren't listed on the manifest that is available. There are references that Carter brought polo ponies to England the year before.

## Movie Connection

It has been suggested by local reporters that character of Rose in the movie *Titanic* was based on Lucile Carter. Possibly someone's imagination was at work, knowing that a *Titanic* survivor was from Baltimore and lived at some point at 2900/02/04 Saint Paul Street (the property is 3 lots, built as a summer home to escape the City heat). While the character of Rose is a wealthy young woman, she is a composite and clearly not Mrs. Lucile Polk Carter. “Lucy” was 36 in 1912. She had a daughter, age 13, who also survived, they never lived in Baltimore after the elder Lucile left to marry the wealthy Philadelphia William Carter in 1896. Perhaps the association may also be director James Cameron's creative use of William Carter's Renault in the cargo hold in the movie. Shown complete in the movie, where the lead characters have a romantic interlude. The automobile actually was crated per the official cargo manifest. The movie Renault was restored based on the Lloyds of London insurance claims made by Mr. Carter. 



2900 Saint Paul Street before 1900.  
Unknown man.