



Episode 5, 2012: Luxury Liner Picture Frame

Cathy: When I was about seven years old, I found, a photo picture frame on my grandmother's dresser.

Robert: It was thick and dark. It was carved

Cathy: It was heavy, it looked very old.

Robert: So I asked my grandmother what this was.

Cathy: And my grandmother told me it belonged to my great-grandfather, who was on the cable laying ships in the early part of the 1900s. he responded to a distress call in the area,

Robert: and he came to the aid of a shipwreck// and I always had a picture in my mind of my great grandfather in a row-boat, uh reaching into the water

Cathy: And he pulled the wood out of the water.

Robert: and he had it fashioned

Cathy: into this picture frame.

Robert: into this picture frame.

Cathy: That ship was called the *Lusitania*,

Robert: This ship was called the *Titanic*,

Cathy: and Robert in sync: I want to know if my great-grandfather's picture frame

Cathy came from the *Lusitania*.

Robert: came from the *Titanic*.

Elyse: This is a first for me: usually I'm investigating one mystery, not two. And an artifact from the Titanic or the Lusitania? That area is full of fakes. I'm a little bit skeptical, because it's family folklore, and usually family folklore doesn't pan out. But I'm interested to see what they can tell me.

Okay so this is the piece, oh nice. It's a picture frame. With two totally different stories about it. And it all came from where?

Robert: And it all came from my grandmother's stories.

Elyse: Okay, so you're feeling that the family folklore is that it's from the Titanic.

Robert: Absolutely.

Elyse: And you totally feel it's from the Lusitania?

Cathy: Yes.

Elyse: So, there's definitely some tension going on here, right?

Robert: A little. Just a little.

Elyse: And you totally feel strongly one way, and you feel the other way?

Cathy: It's our family feud.

Elyse: And how long have you felt this way, the two of you?

Robert: All my life.

Cathy: Yup. Pretty much from when I was a little kid.

Elyse: And you're not giving in to him, and you're not giving in to her?

Robert: Nope.

Cathy: Nope.

Elyse: Okay, Tell me a little bit more about your Great Grandfather, Francis Tierney. Cathy and Rob are cousins. In the early 1900s, their great grandfather worked on ships out of Halifax, Nova Scotia, laying and repairing cable between Canada and England. They heard that cables were some of the first on the scene after both the Lusitania and the Titanic disasters.

Robert: He could have been there when the call distress call came.

Elyse: Who's in the pictures?

Cathy: Here we have, this is Jean Tierney, our great grandmother, who was Francis Tierney's first wife.

Elyse: Okay, and who's this?

Cathy: This is William Tierney, his son.

Elyse: Okay so what else do we have to go on?

Cathy: Well, the one thing that we do have is a World War I medal also from my great-grandfather.

Elyse: Cathy suspects that her great-grandfather got this medal for going to the aid of the Lusitania.

It's missing its ribbons though right?

Cathy: it is missing its ribbon.

Cathy: My aunt Jean, Robert's mother, during high school decided to make a necklace out of it. She cut the ribbons off and put it on a necklace.

Elyse: Tell me what you're hoping for.

Robert: Confirm everything I've always believed.

Cathy: I would say the same. And then I would be right.

Elyse: And what if she is right? Are you going to be upset if it's from the *Lusitania*?

Robert: Find the Truth.

Elyse: Looks like I am in the middle of a mystery family feud. Even one hundred years after it sank, it's hard to think of a ship more iconic than the Titanic. And the Lusitania is almost as famous. 128 Americans were among the almost 1200 who died when that British ship was torpedoed in 1915 by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland.

That ship had been carrying large quantities of ammunition, news of the attack and the public anger helped spark America's entry into World War One.

Elyse: If it did come from either two of these ships, it would be a pretty valuable piece of memorabilia. Titanic memorabilia today is selling anywhere up from tens of thousands of dollars.

Elyse: I'm gonna try to take out the back of one of the photographs.
The oxidation and browning of the paper suggests this is a period piece.

Elyse: It's definitely been in there for quite a long time.

The wood appears hand-carved, and was almost certainly *something* before it was a picture frame.

There's these grooves here that were definitely a part of the original piece.

The cousins said that Francis Tierney sailed out of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Was he anywhere near either shipwreck?

Okay, so here's his obituary. And it says he was born in Halifax,
Ahh this is interesting 'the late Mr. Tierney brought the Lord Kelvin to Halifax from England during World War I. Well that's when the Lusitania was torpedoed.

He was an engineer on the cable ship Minia, which was one of the ships sent to pick up the bodies from the Titanic disaster.

But it's not clear if he was on the cable ship during the recovery. What about the medal Cathy gave me? I'm able to pull up some information from a naval research website. The Order of the British Empire was awarded to Tierney for his service on cable ships during the war, but there's nothing about the Lusitania.

Colin Laroque is a dendrologist at the Mount Allison Dendrochronology lab in New Brunswick.

Elyse: Ok, so here's the artifact. Could it have come from the Titanic what kind of wood was being used there, what kind of wood was used there, what kind of wood was being used for the Lusitania?

Colin: Right off the bat I can look through the magnifying glass and see some of the longer rays that are very characteristic of Oaks.

Elyse: Colin says rays are nutrient lines that cut through the tree rings. I couldn't see them at first, but under the microscope, the tell tale markings are clear. But now I see it. Yeah okay so that's telling us now that we know we have oak.

Colin had done some research and learned that both ships had oak fittings.

Colin: If we could establish if this wood was from Ireland or Scotland that might tell us which shipyard it went to.

Elyse: Why Ireland or Scotland?

Colin: Well that's where the Lusitania was built in Scotland and the Titanic was built in Belfast, Ireland.

Elyse: Even though our artifact is small, incredibly, Colin says he might be able to figure out which forest in what country it came from.

Colin: If one was growing in Ireland, uh, the environments there would be slightly different than the environments growing in Scotland. And so the ring patterns might have a slight difference.

Using image scans of the frame, Colin measures the width of the tree rings. Each ring reflects the amount of growth in a year, and the series of measurements create a pattern.

Colin: In a better growing season it'll make a wider ring that will go up higher. In a poorer growing year it'll make a narrower ring and it'll be down below.

Elyse: Colin compares our tree ring pattern with profiles for the Irish and Scottish forests, drawn from the international tree ring databank. He says with these profiles or fingerprints, we can find our forest.

Alright, so explain to me what I'm looking at.

Colin: Well this is our first image of the Lusitania or the Scotland oak chronology in the blue and the picture frame measurements we have in the red. And you can see that there is some similarities.

Elyse: Ok. Now what about the Titanic in Ireland?

Colin: If we go on to the next part of the puzzle - the Titanic and Ireland -- again the long chronology is the blue and the red here is the picture frame once again. And now we have a lot more of the peaks and the valley are starting to match up a lot closer. Statistically it's a better match and visually it's a better match.

Elyse: Ok. So you're leaning towards the Titanic now.

Colin: Definitely. I find stronger evidence for that.

Elyse: He says it's not a sure thing, but in the battle of cousin vs. cousin, it looks like Rob and the Titanic are pulling ahead.

I'm headed to the ghostly shores of Halifax, Canada, which became the final resting ground for so many Titanic victims. I'm meeting Ken Marschall, a visual historian, who was a consultant on James Cameron's movie.

Elyse: This is a piece that, the people who own it believe it was either part of Lusitania or it was from the Titanic.

Ken: Well I've done a lot of work on Lusitania. I've dived down the wreck, twice And, as far as Lusitania goes, uh, the appearance of the wood, the contours of the carving don't appear to match the photographs that I have.

Elyse: So Cathy's story is almost certainly wrong. But that doesn't mean Rob's is right.

Okay. What about the Titanic? Ken says to figure that out, it's important to know some specific details of how the Titanic sank.

Ken: She smashes into a towering iceberg in a very unusual way—not straight on—but slicing along the side, causing the worst possible damage. She could float with any three of her first compartments flooded, and she went one compartment beyond that.

Elyse: As the Titanic filled with water, it put incredible pressure on the center section.

Ken: As the ship was sinking, the bow was going deeper and carrying that weight down. The stern was rising higher and Titanic kept tipping and tipping and it eventually had to fracture.

Elyse: The pride of the white Star line was virtually snapped in two.

Ken: This whole section, sort of in a V-shape is where the fracturing all took place and pieces came apart.

Elyse: As Titanic plunged beneath the waves, the guts of the ships---especially wooden items---burst to the surface.

Ken notices something about our fragment-which he thinks might be a clue.

Ken: Does this look straight and normal to you?

Elyse: Um, It did?

Ken: Cause I'm seeing an arc.

Elyse: Ah I see it now, right here. I never noticed that!

Ken: It is distinctly curving; you can see it bowing. It's not warped, there's thought involved, this is not an accident.

Elyse: Ken's not sure, but says we may have a piece of something extraordinary: the Titanic's grand staircase.

Ken: We've got these wide routing lines, the way the lower part of the oak connected with the top handrail.

Elyse: To you it does look like a railing?

Ken: It's, uh, very much a candidate.

Elyse: Ken says there were actually two grand staircases on the Titanic. Unfortunately no photos of them exist, but he does have an image from the Olympic---the Titanic's sister ship---that was almost identical.

Ken: The Grand Staircase simply is the most attractive, appealing, impressive space on Titanic. Gold plated highlights, the uh bronze cherub statuette; you know uh if this were from Titanic, there's a possibility that it would be from this location. I would be very psyched if this were real

Elyse: Was Kathy and Robert's great-grandfather Francis Tierney on the Minia when it went to the aftermath of the Titanic disaster? And did the Minia recover pieces of Titanic wood? One person who may be able to help is Pat Teasdale. Her grandfather was a Minea crewmember, and had arrived at the disaster site 12 days after the sinking.

Pat: I remember hearing him say, the old Minia, the old Minia I was on the old Minia that sticks in my head from childhood.

Elyse: Here's the piece. Have you ever seen anything like this before?

Pat: Oh my goodness.

Elyse: Oh my goodness, why?

Pat: This is amazing. I have something to show you which is very similar to this this resurfaced in the family about 1959 when my grandfather moved in with my parents and I. This little picture frame appeared on his bedroom wall in our home.

Elyse: He claimed it was from the Titanic. The frame is smaller and appears to be from different wood, but the circular openings are a similar size and style, and the cardboard backing is virtually identical.

Wow. That's very similar.

Pat: That is a picture of my Grandfather when he was studying wireless.

Elyse: As her family story goes, Francis Dyke, a radio operator, had heard communications between the Minia and another recovery ship, the Mackay Bennett. But Pat never knew the details of his experience until after Francis died. Pat discovered a grim letter at the Dartmouth Heritage museum in Nova Scotia, written by none other than her grandfather.

Pat: (reading letter): April 27th 1912, 2:20am

I am on watch now in the wireless room. This is the most remarkable trip the old Minia has ever been on as we are looking for bodies from the Titanic wreck. We were up north on a cable repair when we heard she had sunk. We found that the Mackey-Bennet had picked up over 200 bodies. JJ Astor's body and some other well known people. Astor had \$10,000 dollars and another man had a bag of Diamonds hung around his neck. We have been looking for bodies for the last four days and have only picked up seventeen. The doctor and I are sleeping in the middle of 14 coffins.

The Titanic must have blown up when she sank as we have picked up pieces of the Grand Staircase and most of the wreckage is from below deck.

Elyse: Wait, he picked up Grand Staircase wood?

Pat: That's what the letter says.

Elyse: This is Francis Tierney and that's his son John. Have you ever seen him before?

Pat: He looks a little familiar, I have some photographs that I brought of my Grandfather with some of his crew members on the Minia

Elyse: Okay, so let's see if we can find Francis.
One photo has an image that looks like Tierney.

Pat: Very similar facial features. Aren't they?

Elyse: Look at the nose, the eyes, the ears. To me it looks like it's the same person.
It appears Francis Dyke and Francis Tierney shared a life altering experience on the Minia.

But do they *both* have Titanic relics from that day?

Pat has never authenticated her piece. My office has learned that the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax has a collection of Titanic artifacts and documents. Dan Conlin is a Maritime historian and wreckwood expert. He has seen all types of wreckwood from the disaster—real and imagined.

Elyse: So Pat and I are now on a mission together. We both have artifacts that we believe may have come from the Titanic.

Dan: Well, um, the background of the men involved is really important.

Elyse: Dan shows us who exactly had signed on to the Minia for that historic voyage.

Dan: This is a crew agreement we generally call a crew list. You had to sign this or you didn't get paid so it lists every man aboard the uh Minia. It's a very precisely dated document too so we know this is Minia during the time of Titanic.

Pat: Number 7, F.R. Dyke.

Dan: Traditionally the Engineers sign on last, so they're usually buried further...

Elyse: Tierney!

Dan: Crucial date January the 1st when he is signing on and June the 8th when he is signing off so that tells us he was there when it made its epic Titanic voyage.

Dan explains what an emotional toll the recovery work took on the crew---and the entire community---of Halifax. The fishing and shipbuilding town was no stranger to loss of life at sea, but the scale of the Titanic disaster left a deep scar.

The Minia and other ships worked over a week on the recovery effort.

Dan: These guys had worked really hard hauling these frozen corpses out of the water. // Some would make their own wreckwood keepsakes and they all wanted to keep a little piece that would their oral history prop in generations to come to talk about what they did

Elyse: Here is my piece I'm hoping to prove that it came from the Titanic.

Dan: Just flip it over again please.

Elyse: The grooves and markings on both picture frames catch Dan's eye. Dan says he has something to show us...

Elyse: We promised at the end of this what?

Rob: The truth.

Elyse: I explain how a dendrologist believed the oak had come from Ireland, not Scotland.

Elyse: What's does that mean?

Cathy: It's not the Lusitania.

Elyse: Sorry Cathy, It's NOT the Lusitania.

Rob: It doesn't prove it's the Titanic? It just rules out ----

Elyse: No not at all, but I met this incredible woman named Pat. She had this. This is her Grandfather.

Rob / Cathy: Oh WOW!

Elyse: And do you recognize the man next to him?

Cathy: Yes!

Rob: You found...

Cathy: That's Francis Tierney. I just got goose bumps. That's pretty wild.

Rob: How on earth did you find that!?

Elyse: Then Pat shows me this. Do you know what that is?

Cathy: It's another frame.

Elyse: Have you ever seen another one before?

Cathy / Rob: No no. It's very distinctive.

Cathy: It's not quite proof enough yet.

Elyse: So we turned to the Maritime Museum in Halifax.

Dan: This belonged to another cable ship crewman, a similar use of tools ,laith work.

Elyse: That's exciting.

Pat: That's very exciting.

Dan: I smell the handy work of William Parker. We call him a wreckwood artist aboard the Minia. Parker had a nice machine and carpentry shop on Minia so he had the tools and the equipment to do this.

He wasn't making them to sell as souvenirs. Mariner's had done this for generations. Parker knew this tradition and he knew his shipmates who had done a hard difficult job of finding Titanic bodies would want some sort of personal keepsake.

Elyse: Dan thinks all the evidence points to a conclusion.

Dan: It has all the hallmarks of the guy who carved them. And it fits the pieces of wood that we know were aboard titanic. So I would have no doubt that these are from Titanic.

Rob: That's astounding. I'm pretty blown away.

Cathy: You were right, you were right!

Rob: What part of the Titanic was it?

Dan: Um, in my opinion, one can just easily imagine passengers gripping this as they rush up to the lifeboats on that fateful night.

Dan: This is a piece of the Grand Staircase from Titanic, all the evidence points to it.

Elyse: It's the railing from the Grand Staircase.

Rob: That's amazing! It's not a myth that my Great Grandfather pulled that out of the ocean and it was from the Titanic.

Rob: To be from the Grand Staircase is a whole different level. It's humbling.

Elyse: It's amazing!

Cathy: Yes.

Elyse: Although Cathy and Rob say they would never sell it, William Parker's wreckwood pieces have sold for close to \$20,000. This piece of grand staircase could be worth much more.

Rob: You know he got a distress call and he answered. And that to me is what's important to him, is being heroic.

Yeah, I'm very proud. I'm very thankful. And that is a great feeling, thank you.