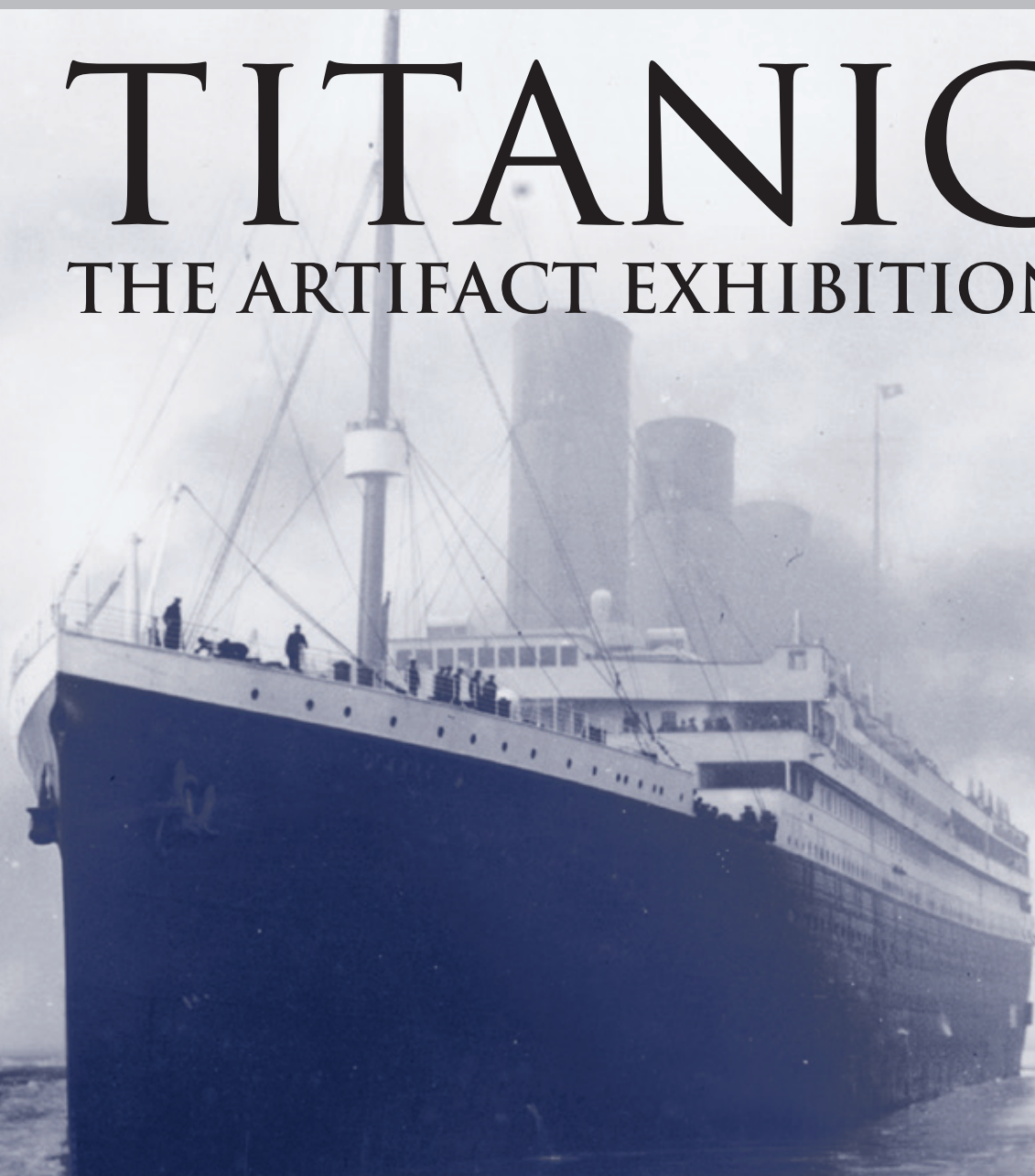




TITANIC

THE ARTIFACT EXHIBITION



MINISTRY THROUGH TRAGEDY:
SPIRITUAL HEROES OF *TITANIC*

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INTRODUCTION

Church attendance often increases in the wake of a large-scale tragedy and the sinking of *Titanic* was no different. As the news that the “unsinkable” sank, people seeking solace filled pews on both sides of the Atlantic.

Almost as soon as she slipped beneath the North Atlantic, *Titanic* became an analogy for the sinfulness of man’s excessive pride.

Reverend Dr. Charles Parkhurst, a Presbyterian preacher in Manhattan, saw the luxury of *Titanic* as a symbol of all that was wrong in America at that time. He preached “Grand men, charming women, beautiful babies, all becoming horrible in the midst of the glittering splendor of a \$10,000,000 casket!” A week after the sinking, a Methodist preacher in Chicago, Reverend James O’May, rallied against the lifestyles of *Titanic*’s pleasure-seeking passengers: “It was a huge ocean joy ride and it ended where joy rides generally stop.” In Southampton, England, the Bishop of Winchester declared that “*Titanic*, name and thing, will stand as a monument and warning to human presumption.”



Minister and social reformer Charles Henry Parkhurst, in 1892. *Library of Congress, Napoleon Sarony*

Days after the sinking, Swiss theologian Karl Barth argued that the sinking was God’s judgment on a society that allows a few individuals to “compete with each other at the expense of everyone else in a mad and foolish race for profits.”

Religion also played a role in the Ship’s story before it became fodder for moralizing sermons. The faith of over 2000 individuals was surely put to the test on the night of April 14–15, 1912. Some passengers and crew may have found religion while others lost it. We know of eight individuals who not only clung to their faith, but used it to help others that night. Five Protestant ministers and three Catholic priests went down with the

Ship but not before leaving their mark on both the survivors and victims of *Titanic*.



The purpose of this guide is to look at the significance of religion on the Ship’s last day. First, read about the lives and deaths of the eight clergymen on *Titanic*. Next, learn about the religious services held onboard and the hymns that were sung. A list of discussion questions and books for further reading follow.

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BIOGRAPHIES



Captain Arthur Henry Rostron and the officers of the rescue ship *Carpathia* are also heroes in *Titanic's* tale. *Library of Congress, Bain Collection*

There is no lack of accidental heroes surrounding the *Titanic* tragedy. Some stories and names are better known than others. For example, while the adventures of the “unsinkable” Molly Brown have been told many times, Miss Annie Funk was an inconspicuous hero. Annie, who was returning from years of missionary work in India to visit her sick mother, gave up her seat on the lifeboat and her chance for survival to a woman with children. Jack Philips, a wireless operator, continued to send messages until the very end. His last transmission was three minutes before the Ship disappeared.

The 1997 film *Titanic* depicts a priest on the deck of the foundering Ship, surrounded by praying passengers. This scene is not too far from the truth. Passengers and crew turned to clergymen for comfort and guidance as the reality of their fate became clear. In those moments, eight men became the religious heroes of *Titanic*. All of them sailed as second class passengers, none of them survived the sinking, and only one of their bodies was recovered and identified.

Robert James Bateman

Reverend Robert James Bateman became a Baptist minister at age 21. Although he was born in Bristol, England, he actually lived in Jacksonville, FL. Before settling in Florida, Jackson had lived in Baltimore, MD, and Knoxville, TN, as well as Wales, Ireland, and England. In Jacksonville, he put his early career as a stonemason to work as the literal and spiritual founder of the Central City Mission. As a minister, Bateman was known as a champion for the poor and disadvantaged.

In April 1912, he was returning home to Florida after visiting his mother's grave in England. He was also escorting his wife's sister on a visit to the States. As the Ship sank just hours after he held a service for second-class passengers, he helped his sister-in-law into a lifeboat and gave her his coat. Reverend Bateman's body was recovered by the *Mackay-Bennett* and identified by the objects found in his pockets. The next month, his body was forwarded to his wife and seven children in Florida. He was buried in the Evergreen Cemetery in Jacksonville on May 12, 1912.



Robert James Bateman



Thomas Roussel Davids Byles

Father Byles came from a renowned family in England. His sister was a well-known missionary in China. His uncle was a member of Parliament and eventually knighted. His grandfather was the founder of the *Yorkshire Observer*. His father was an Anglican minister and pastor of a Congregational Church in Leeds, England. Father Byles wasn't even the first Catholic in the family. His conversion came in 1894, while studying at Oxford, after a younger brother had already converted. That brother, William, moved to Brooklyn, New York, and requested that Father Byles be the priest for his wedding in April 1912.

Byles is remembered for his words and actions in the early morning of April 15, 1912. In an article from the *Evening World* on April 22, 1912, three young Irish women from steerage recalled Father Byles' last moments:

"Be calm, my good people" he said and then went about the steerage giving absolution and blessings.... A few of us became very excited. When the priest again raised his hand, we instantly were calm once more. The passengers were immediately impressed by the absolute self-control of the priest. He began the recitation of the rosary. The prayers of all, regardless of creed, were mingled.... Continuing the prayers, he led us to where the boats were being lowered. Helping the women and children in he whispered to them words of comfort and encouragement.



Thomas Roussel Davids Byles

Their account also describes how one of the crewmen tried in vain to convince the priest to board a lifeboat. A door, a stained glass window, and a photograph at St. Helen's Catholic Church in Chipping Ongar, Essex, serve as memorials to Father Byles.



Ernest Courtney Carter

After several years as a deacon and school teacher, Ernest Courtney Carter was made an Anglican priest in 1889 (at the relatively old age of 31). According to an article in the May 2nd, 1912, issue of *Oxford Magazine*, Carter shone in his position of vicar at St. Jude's, in the Whitechapel neighborhood of East London. At the time, it was an impoverished area and home to many immigrants. St. Jude's became a social center of the neighborhood. The article also explains that although Carter "could not be called an exceptional preacher," he was known for his "infinite optimism."

Father Carter left his mark on *Titanic* lore as the host of a popular hymn sing-along held several hours before the Ship scraped the iceberg. Carter's previous experience as an educator was evident during this service as he introduced each hymn with a lecture on its history and author. According to witnesses, both Carter and his wife, Lillian, were given the opportunity to take a seat in a lifeboat as the Ship sank. Both refused, encouraging others to go in their place.



John Harper

John Harper's work as an evangelical Baptist preacher continued long after his death on *Titanic* as his story has been retold as an inspirational tale in the book *The Titanic's Last Hero*. Harper began preaching on street corners in Scotland. His first official job as a minister came at age 17, at the Baptist Pioneer Mission in London, England. In 1896, Harper founded the Paisley Road Baptist Church—now known as the Harper Memorial Church.

In 1912, Harper was the pastor of Walworth Road Baptist Church in London. He planned to visit Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, Illinois, as a guest minister. He traveled on *Titanic* with his six-year-old daughter, Nana, and a relative serving as her nanny, Miss Jessie Leitch. Both of the girls survived the disaster and Jessie provided this account of Harper's actions on his last day.

The last day we spent on the Titanic was Sunday. Mr. Harper asked me to read the chapter at our morning family prayers, and later we went to the Sunday morning services. The day was quietly and pleasantly spent, and when Nana and I went to look for Mr. Harper at about 6:00 to go to dinner I found him earnestly talking to a young Englishman whom he was seeking to lead to Christ...

Reverend Harper's status as a hero of his faith is reinforced by a story told at a survivor's meeting held several years later in Canada. A former crewman introduced himself as one of the six people pulled into lifeboats that night and said he was Reverend's Harper last convert. The minister gave him his own lifejacket and spent his remaining minutes comforting and converting other victims in the water.

Charles Leonard Kirkland

Charles Leonard Kirkland was a Free Will Baptist minister and evangelist. Kirkland was born in New Brunswick, Canada, into a Scots Presbyterian family. After successful careers as carpenters, both Kirkland and his brother were swept up in the Free Will Baptist movement spreading through the region in the 1870s. He became a minister and his presence was soon requested at churches throughout the Maine/New Brunswick area.

By 1912—when he went to Scotland to settle some family affairs—Reverend Kirkland had suffered through the deaths of his first wife, several of their children, and even several grandchildren. For his return trip on *Titanic*, Kirkland traveled with Mr. Frank Hubert Maybery, a friend from Saskatchewan. If Reverend Kirkland's body was recovered after the sinking, it was never identified.

William Lahtinen

Reverend William Lahtinen, 35, was the pastor of the Apostolic Lutheran Church in Cokato, MN, as early as 1905. An article in the April 25, 1912, issue of the *Cokato Enterprise*, calls him one of the best-known Finnish ministers in America. William was born in Finland but was an American citizen and called Minnesota home. His wife Anna Amelia, 34, was born in America to Finnish parents.

When the couple took a trip to Europe in 1912, they eagerly anticipated returning to their newly built home in Minneapolis. The purpose of their trip to Finland was to help Miss Lyyli Silvén, 17, a friend or relative, emigrate. Originally, the group of second-class passengers planned to return on an earlier ship but the tragic death of the Lahtinens' daughter Martha delayed their departure for a month.

Anna chose to remain with her husband on the sinking liner rather than escape in a lifeboat. Lyyli Silvén survived and reported that when she last saw the couple, Anna looked very nervous while William calmly smoked a cigar. Neither body was found. Lyyli died in California in 1974.



William Lahtinen

Juozas Montvila

Father Juozas Montvila was born and raised in what is now the country of Lithuania. At the time, the land and its people were under the control of Russia. Father Montvila was stripped of his priestly status for aiding and ministering to Ukrainian Catholics, a group forbidden by the Russian czarist government. Montvila remained in Lithuania for awhile as an author and illustrator at a Catholic newspaper but he realized he would never have religious freedom at home.

He planned to join family in America, where he could minister to the growing Lithuanian immigrant community. He booked passage on the Ship for the same reason as many of the second- and third-class passengers: immigration. Survivors recall Montvila turning down a seat in a lifeboat, saying he wanted to stay on board to provide solace, consolation, and absolution to the doomed passengers. At age 27, Father Montvila was the youngest of the *Titanic* clergymen.



Josef Peruschitz

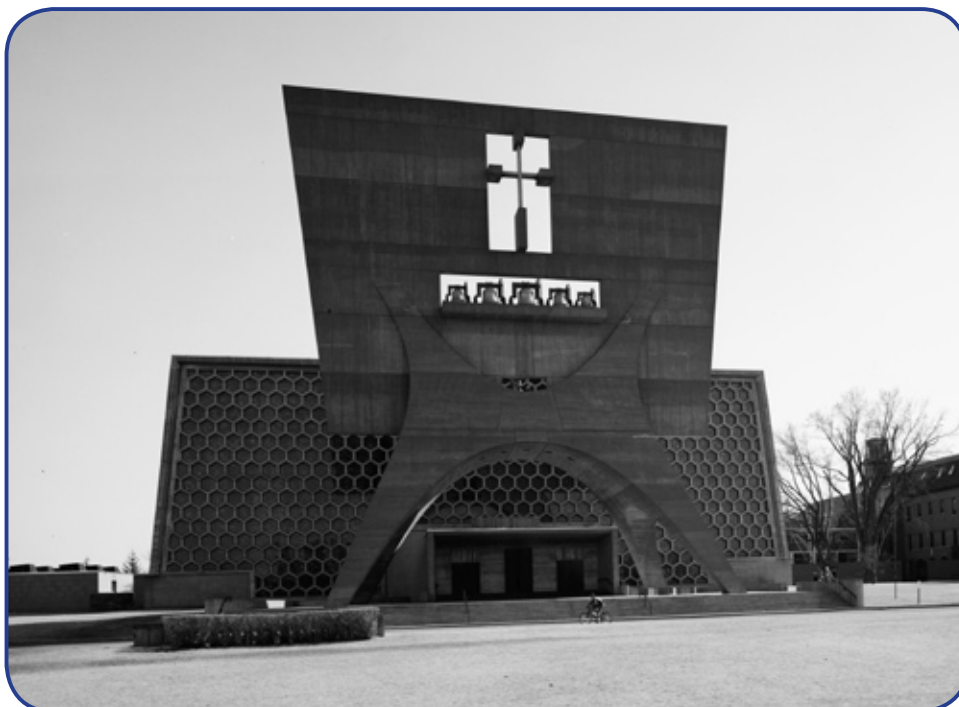
Of the three Catholic priests on *Titanic*, Father Josef Peruschitz was the only monk. Born in Bavaria in 1871 as Benedikt Peruschitz, he joined the Scheyern Monastery of, coincidentally, Benedictine monks in 1894. The

following year he became a priest and changed his name to Father Josef. While at the monastery, he held several teaching positions including mathematics, music, and physical education. In April 1912, Father Peruschitz was on his way to join the faculty at St. John's, a school run by the Benedictines in Minnesota.

Father Peruschitz is the second priest mentioned in the memoirs of second-class passenger Lawrence Beesley:

In the middle of the room [Second Class Library] are two Catholic priests, one quietly reading—either English or Irish, and probably the latter—the other dark, bearded, with a broad-rimmed hat, talking earnestly to a friend in German and evidently explaining some verse in the open Bible before him...

According to an eyewitness report in the Catholic magazine *America*, Father Peruschitz was also offered a place in a lifeboat which he declined. A plaque in the cloister at the Scheyern Monastery is inscribed “May Joseph Peruschitz rest in peace, who on the ship *Titanic* piously sacrificed himself”.



Father Peruschitz's destination was St. John's University, whose abbey church is seen here in the 1930s. *Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey*

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

PASTORAL DUTIES

Titanic hit the iceberg late on a Sunday night. Earlier that day, church services were held for various denominations and classes. Captain Smith held a Christian service in the First Class Dining Saloon around 11:00 am. Music was provided by the Ship's orchestra and Captain Smith read prayers from the White Star Line's official prayer book. The assistant purser, Reginald Barker, led a Church of England service for the second-class passengers. That evening, the Anglican minister Reverend Ernest Carter organized a hymn sing-along in the Second Class Dining Saloon. It appears to have been a popular social event; witnesses recall seeing about 100 passengers in attendance.

The three Catholic priests also stayed busy during the voyage. Father Thomas Byles celebrated Mass in English and French twice on the Ship's final day, once for second-class passengers and again for third-class. In his sermon, he discussed the challenges to their faith that new immigrants might face. Father Josef Peruschitz celebrated Mass for the steerage passengers in German and Hungarian. Survivor Ellen Toomey later told reporters that Fathers Byles, Peruschitz, and Montvila each said a Mass every day

onboard *Titanic*. According to other witnesses, one of the two clergymen seen in the Ship's final moments—surrounded by passengers from all denominations while they prayed and recited the rosary—was Father Byles.



HYMNS

Each of the following hymns was sung onboard *Titanic*. Are any of them familiar to you?

There is a Green Hill Far Away

Reverend Carter's sing-along

Words by Cecil Frances Humphreys, 1847-1848

Usual tune is "Green Hill" by George Coles Stebbins, 1878

*O dearly, dearly, has He loved
And we must love Him, too,
And trust in His redeeming blood
And try His works to do.*

Eternal Father, Strong to Save ("Navy Hymn")

Reverend Carter's sing-along

Words by William Whiting, 1860

Usual tune is "Melita" by John Bacchus Dykes, 1860

*Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who biddest the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!*



Captain Smith led the Christian service for first-class passengers.

Our God, Our Help in Ages Past

Captain Smith's morning service,

Words by Isaac Watts, 1719

Usual tune is "St. Anne" by William Croft, 1708

*Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal Home!*

On the Resurrection Morning

Reverend Carter's sing-along

Original words by Sabine Baring-Gould, 1864

Usual tune is 'Resurrection Morn' by Ira David Sankey, 1887

*On the resurrection morning,
Soul and body meet again,
No more sorrow, no more weeping,
No more pain.*

Now the Day is Over

Reverend Carter's sing-along

Words by Sabine Baring-Gould, 1865-1867

Usual tune is "Merrial" by Joseph Barnby, 1868

*Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky.*

290 **Now the Day is Over.**
SABINE BARING-GOULD. <http://breadsite.org> JOSEPH BARNBY.

1. Now the day is o - ver, Night is draw-ing nigh,
2. Je - sus, give the wea - ry Calm and sweet re - pose;
3. Grant to lit - tle chil - dren Vis - ions bright of thee;
4. Thro' the long night-watch-es, May thine an - gels spread
5. When the morn - ing walk - ens, Then may I a - rise;

Shad - ows of the ev - 'ning Steal a - cross the sky.
With thy ten-d'rest bless - ing May our eye - lids close.
Guard the sail - ors toss - ing On the deep blue sea.
Their white wings a - bove me, Watch-ing round my bed.
Pure and fresh and sin - less In thy ho - ly eyes.

Steal a - cross the sky.

Lead, Kindly Light

Reverend Carter's sing-along

Original words by Father John Henry Newman, 1833

Usual tune is "Lux Benigna" by John Bacchus Dykes, 1865

*Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom, lead
Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead
Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.*

284 **Lead, Kindly Light.**
JOHN H. NEWMAN. <http://breadsite.org> JOHN B. DYKES.

1. Lead, kindly light, amid th'encircling gloom, Lead thou me on; The night is
2. I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that thou Shouldst lead me on; I lov'd to
3. So long thy pow'r hath blest me, sure it still Will lead me on; O'er moor and
dark, and I am far from home, Lead thou me on; Keep thou my feet; I
choose and see my path; but now Lead thou me on; I lov'd the gar - ish
fen, o'er crag and torrent, till The night is gone, And with the morn those
do not ask to see The distant scene; one step e-nough for me.
day; and, spite of fears, Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.
an - gel fac - es smile, Which I have lov'd long since, and lost a-while.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and let your faith be like theirs.

Hebrews 13:7

1. Do the men highlighted in the first section deserve to be called heroes? Why or why not? What qualities did they have that qualify them as heroes?
2. What role do you think their faith played in their actions and decisions?
3. How much of their actions and decisions do you think were based on what the people around them expected them to do? Should that matter?
4. Research other passengers, officers, and crew members on the Ship who you think deserve to be called heroes.
5. Find examples in the Old and New Testament of ordinary people who rose to the occasion under extraordinary circumstances such as Moses and Aaron, Joshua, Sampson, Samuel, Abraham and Sarah, Esther, Isaac, David, Apostle Paul. What qualifies each of these people to be a hero?
6. Who do you consider your own personal spiritual hero?
7. Can you be a spiritual hero without being perfect? Is there anyone to whom you may be a hero of faith?
8. Do you find any special significance in the hymns sung on *Titanic*?
9. Research whether the denominations of the eight ministers were representative of the people on *Titanic* or of society in general in 1912.
10. What other events since *Titanic* have created heroes out of ordinary people?



FURTHER READING

There is no shortage of books on *Titanic*. The books on this list look specifically at the position *Titanic* holds in our cultural identity and what it reveals about society's priorities and values.

Titanic: A Night Remembered
Hambledon and London, 2004
by Stephanie Barczewski

Titanic: Victims and Villains
The History Press, 2009
by Senan Molony

The Myth of the Titanic
Palgrave Macmillan, 1999
by Richard Howells

Titanic in Myth and Memory: Representations in Visual and Literary Culture

I.B. Taurus, 2004
by Tim & Sarah Street Bergfelder

Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster

W.W. Norton & Co., 2003
by Steven Biel

Titanica: The Disaster of the Century in Poetry, Song, and Prose

W.W. Norton & Co., 1998
by Steven Biel