

## Woody, Oscar Scott <sup>[1]</sup>

### Oscar Scott Woody

by T. Mike Childs

NC Government & Heritage Library <sup>[2]</sup>, 2012.

**April 15, 1871-April 15, 1912**



photograph of Oscar Scott Woody,  
date unknown

Oscar Scott Woody was a postal clerk from North Carolina on board the ocean liner R.M.S. *Titanic* when it sank April 15, 1912. He was likely born in Holloways Township near Roxboro <sup>[3]</sup>, on April 15, 1871. His birth year is usually given as 1868, but both census records and his marriage license application support the later date.

He worked at the Third division of the Railway Mail Service for 15 years on the trains running between Greensboro, N.C. and Washington, D.C. before getting transferred to the Sea Post about about 1910. A Sea Post position aboard a ship was a choice assignment; mail clerks made the considerable sum of about \$1,000 a year.

He sailed from New York City on the SS *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* to Plymouth, England, and then traveled to Southampton to board the SS *Titanic*. The ship had five postal clerks aboard, two British and three American. R.M.S. stands for Royal Mail Ship, and the *Titanic* had 3,364 sacks of mail aboard for the clerks to sort during their journey. Originally the mail clerks' sleeping cabins were in Third Class, but were moved following complaints about the noise, and they were also granted permission to dine in a private area.

#### On The Titanic.

Mr. O. S. Woody son of Mrs. John F. Woody, a native of this County, was on the illfated steamer *Titanic*. His mother has not been able to learn anything definite as to his fate but it is feared that he was lost. ~ He was a mail clerk on this vessel.

Woody was a day from celebrating his 4<sup>th</sup> birthday when the disaster struck. Woody and the other four mail clerks worked diligently to save the mail in their care. They opened the registered mail cage of the ship's post office below decks and attempted to drag some 200 sacks of registered mail upstairs to the decks, in the hopes that it could be saved. *Titanic* steward Albert Theissinger assisted the clerks before he abandoned the task, leaving them slogging through some two feet or more of rising water:

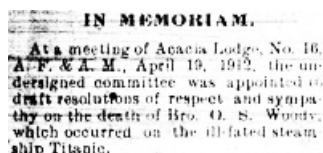
"I urged them to leave their work. They shook their heads and continued at their work. It might have been an inrush of water later that cut off their escape, or it may have been the explosion. I saw them no more."

Woody's body was recovered a week later by the CS *Mackay-Bennett*, wearing a cork life jacket. In his pockets were

facing slips, used by the clerks to sort, identify, and route the mail. They were stamped with his name, so any errors or problems could be traced back to him. Also recovered were his pocketknife, pocket watch, cuff links, a key and chain, and Freemason dues cards. His body was identified by a letter to his wife in his pocket. Due to its poor condition, Woody's body was buried at sea on April 24, 1912.

Woody had married his wife, Leelia M. Bullard of Dallas Texas, only 18 months earlier. Born February 20, 1879, she was 31 when they applied for their marriage license on October 5, 1910, in Washington, D.C. She graduated Valparaiso University in 1912 and was a secretary. They had a home in Clifton, Virginia, but Woody also occasionally stayed in New York City to board different ships with the Sea Post. His wife never remarried, and sued the White Star Line for \$50,000 but did not receive compensation. U.S. Postmaster General Frank H. Hitchcock recommended Congress authorize a \$2,000 payment to each of the postal clerks' families:

"The bravery exhibited by these men in their efforts to safeguard, under such trying conditions, the valuable mail entrusted to them should be a source of pride to the entire postal service [4] and deserves some marked expression of appreciation from the government."



Woody was also a member of the Freemasons at the Acacia Lodge No. 16 in his hometown of Clifton, Virginia. He reached the level of Master Mason, a title awarded him on August 30, 1903. His lodge had a memorial printed in the May 5, 1912 *Fairfax Herald*.

Woody's memory has been honored several times:

- North Carolina governor Mike Easley declared November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2003 "Oscar Scott Woody Day [5]."
- Roxboro Mayor Steve Joyner proclaimed July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 as "Oscar Scott Woody Day [6]."
- Clifton Mayor Thomas Peterson declared April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 as "Oscar Scott Woody Day [6]."
- The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences released a commemorative envelope with a cancellation stamp honoring Woody in 2003.
- There is a plaque memorializing the five postal workers of the *Titanic* in Southampton, England.
- Raleigh Congressman Brad Miller introduced a bill to honor Woody, H.R. 3740 [7], which designated the post office on 223 South Main Street in Roxboro, North Carolina as the "Oscar Scott Woody Post Office Building [8]." This bill was passed into law on June 24, 2004.

## References:

Boatwright, Phyliss. 2006. *Person county past: tales from the central Piedmont* [3]. Charleston, S.C.: The History Press.

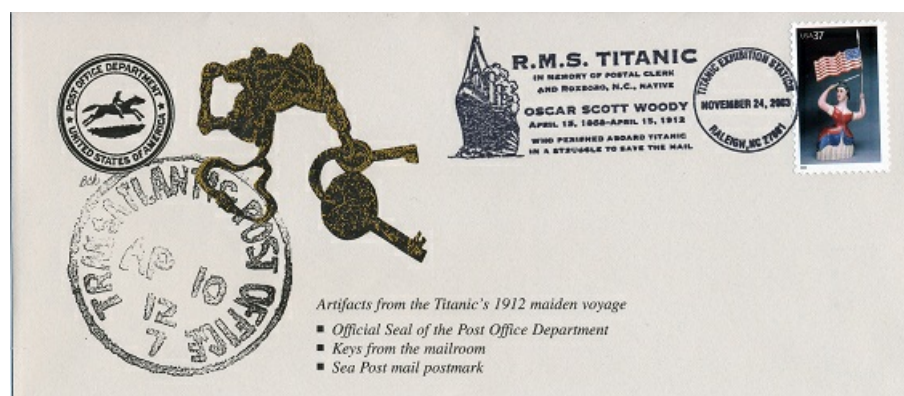
"Posted Aboard R.M.S. Titanic." Smithsonian Institution National Postal Museum. Washington, D.C. Accessed March 28, 2012. [https://www.si.edu/object/yt\\_RxpSCY0KWb8](https://www.si.edu/object/yt_RxpSCY0KWb8) [9]

Baumbach, William J. , II. "Oscar Scott Woody." <https://sites.google.com/view/oscarscottwoody> [6] Accessed March 28, 2012.

"For the Sake of the Dead: The Hearts of the Whole Country Touched by Titanic." *Augusta Chronicle*. April 21, 1912.

"Mail Clerk O. S. Woody Was Loyal to the Last." *Evening Star*. April 22, 1912. <https://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/mail-clerk-o-s-woody-was-loyal-last.html> [10]

Personal information about Leelia M. Bullard courtesy of Valparaiso University Archives [11].



Commemorative envelope honoring Oscar Scott Woody issued by the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, 2003.

[12]

Miller, Brad. 2004. "Roxboro's Oscar Scott Woody Post Office Bill Passes U.S. House" press release, May 18, 2004.

## Image Credits:

"On The Titanic." *The Roxboro Courier*. April 24, 1912.

"In Memoriam." *The Fairfax Herald*. May 5, 1912. Courtesy of the Fairfax County Public Library's [Virginia Room](#) [13]

Commemorative envelope courtesy of the [North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences](#) [14].

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