

# Courage of the *Titanic* Band

An article in *Worldscope Electronic Magazine* in August 1999 tells the story of Robert Bateman, the founder of Central City Mission in Jacksonville, Florida. His commitment to the spiritual rescue of the drunken sailors who frequented the tattoo parlors, bars and brothels (not to mention the countless women those establishments employed) is of no question.

Of less certainty is what role he played in the final moments of the sinking of the legendary ship *Titanic*.

The magazine reported that Bateman, a 51-year-old Baptist minister, had returned to London to study methods of Christian social work in order to improve the efforts of the Jacksonville mission. It was upon his return trip to America that he found himself a passenger, along with his sister-in-law, Annie, on the *Titanic*.

After colliding with an iceberg and the ship taking on water, *Titanic's* lifeboats were being lowered. Bateman escorted Annie to a boat. It was reported that Bateman threw his overcoat over her shoulders and said, "If I don't meet you again in this world, I will in the next."

He gathered some 50 men on the stern of the ship and told them to prepare for death. He then led them in the *Lord's Prayer* and singing the hymn *Nearer My God to Thee*.

Other stories abound, saying that it was the ship's band leader, Wallace Hartley, who, desiring to keep the masses calm as they abandoned ship, led the band in playing music on deck right up until the last moment when they could no longer keep their balance. Many reported *Nearer My God to Thee* as the song they last heard from these valiant musicians.

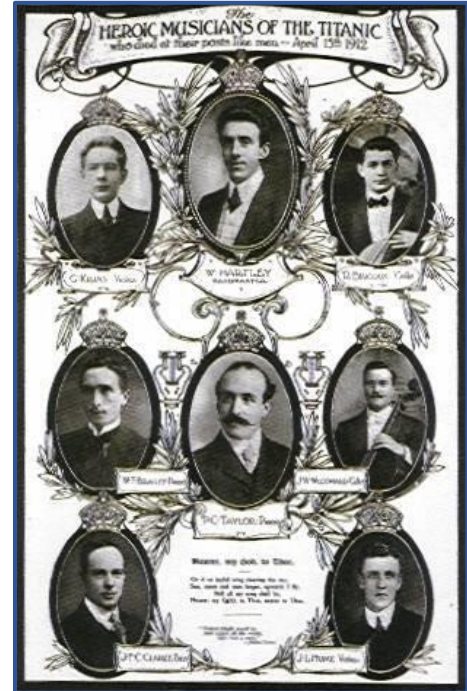
One man, Harold Bride, a wireless operator on the *Titanic* who was washed off the deck by rising water just moments before she sank, reported hearing the band playing a song he called *Autumn*.



(more)

Whether inspired by Bateman or Hartley, or whether they played *Nearer My God to Thee* or *Autumn*, one irrefutable fact remains, wrote John P. Eaton and Charles A. Haas in their book *Titanic: Destination Disaster*, “the musicians stayed until all hope of rescue was gone. Who can say how many lives their efforts saved? The final moments of how many were cheered or ennobled by their music? *Songs d’Autuomne – Horbury* or *Bethany* – both alternate melodies for *Nearer My God to Thee*. What difference? The memory of those bandsmen and their courageous music will never die.”

Eaton and Haas make a good point. We split hairs over the song, and forget the heroes who played it. These band members sacrificed their lives to bring a measure of calm and comfort in the midst of chaos. Peace in the midst of fear. Dignity in the midst of despair.



We may never find ourselves on the deck of a sinking ship, but life provides ample opportunities for us to follow their lead. While others are panicking around us, let us be courageous ministers of calm amidst the mayhem.

Jesus give us His assurance: *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid* (John 14:27 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter