

# LOST AND FOUND

*The incredible story of the Titanic musicians' plaque, and who owns it now – legally speaking*

**RECENTLY HAD THE** unique experience of attending the unveiling of the recently discovered 101-year-old plaque commemorating the musicians who lost their lives on the Titanic. The ceremony took place at “Titanic: the Experience,” an exhibition in Orlando.

In April 2010, Allegro published an article regarding this plaque after we were contacted by John P. Eaton, historian of the Titanic International Society. Mr. Eaton was interested in learning the whereabouts of the plaque. The article beseeched anyone knowing of the whereabouts of the plaque to contact Allegro’s editor, Mikael Elsila.

Well, the plaque was found, partially as a result of our article.

Florida resident Douglas Turner, a law enforcement officer who enjoys visiting scrapyards looking for items of value, found and purchased the Titanic plaque as well as another plaque commissioned by Local 802 memorializing musicians who had lost their lives in World War II.

Upon reading the Allegro article, Mr. Turner contacted the Titanic society and inquired as to where the plaque could be publicly shown. Ultimately, a six-month license was awarded to “Titanic: the Experience,” where the beautiful plaque currently hangs. Pictures truly do not do it justice.

During the unveiling ceremony, local musicians played “Nearer, My God to Thee,” the same composition that many believe the musicians on the Titanic played while the ship was sinking.

As I listened, I wondered what the musicians were thinking and feeling while the ship was sinking. Were they absorbed by the music and solely focused on it? Did they play to soothe themselves knowing of their impending doom? Did they realize that they were heroes, who – through the calming



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strains of their music – saved many lives and helped keep order while the life-boats were boarded? It was hard for me not to get choked up.

How did the plaque wind up in the scrapyard? Charles Haas, president of the Titanic International Society, tells this amazing tale on page 28.

Two additional points are worth mentioning. First, the plaques were Local 802’s property for many decades. They last hung on the wall at the Roseland Ballroom, which was formerly the union’s headquarters. However, when Local 802 left Roseland in 1982, both the Titanic plaque and the World War II memorial plaque were inadvertently left behind.

Having been abandoned for more than 25 years, the plaques became the legal property of Mr. Turner when he purchased them in Florida. Under common law rules, the individual who purchases



Above, musicians perform “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” a hymn believed to be the last music played by the Titanic band members before they went down with the ship. The performance was part of an unveiling ceremony at the “Titanic: The Experience” exhibition in Orlando to show off the newly-discovered plaque (left), honoring the Titanic musicians. Local 802 used to own the plaque before it was abandoned and later recovered at a scrapyard.

or takes possession of abandoned property becomes its rightful owner. (Hence, the partially true maxim: “possession is nine-tenths of the law.”)

However, we are very fortunate that Mr. Turner salvaged these plaques, since it is clear that they would have been destroyed. The hand of fate definitely played a role in this incident.

The other point is one I learned directly from Mr. Haas after the ceremony. The Titanic’s musicians were not employees of the White Star Line (Titanic’s owner), which had recently begun contracting musicians via an

outside agency. Thus, these musicians were independent contractors who had been supplied by a third party. Because of this, they were listed as second-class passengers, and not crew. This meant that they were free to evacuate the ship with the passengers. They chose not to, and remained on board. They met their death doing what they loved to do: performing music for others.

We hope that at the end of the six-month lease, Local 802 can enter into an arrangement with Mr. Turner so that we can return both plaques to where they were meant to be: at Local 802.