

ENT and the Titanic

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One otolaryngologist who perished on the ill-fated voyage of the RMS Titanic on 15 April 1912 was Dr Ernest Moraweck, a prominent physician with an interest in ENT (and ophthalmology), living in Frankfort, Kentucky, USA [1]. Moraweck was an inventive and enterprising physician. As a regular visitor to the United Kingdom, he was a contemporary of such luminaries as Sir Morrell Mackenzie and Sir Felix Semon. He published widely, notably in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* where he had written about the use of nasal splints in septal surgery [2]. He was also an inventor and patented several surgical instruments including a complex ratchet device, which he recommended for tonsillectomy [3]. He was firmly opposed to the then fashionable technique of 'partial' tonsillectomy, arguing that "no surgeon would consider the partial removal of the appendix [3]."

Kate Buss, a young woman from Kent was a fellow second-class passenger, who survived the disaster [1]. She remembered spending time with Dr Moraweck on board the RMS Titanic [1]. In letters she wrote home, she described him as "very agreeable" and recalled the time during which he removed a piece of soot from her eye, and offered to show her the sights of New York on their arrival [4].

Moraweck was a widower at the time of his death, his wife having died suddenly of heart failure in 1904 [5]. He was a regular visitor to Europe and it was during a previous transatlantic trip in 1909 that he met Frau Magdalena Hasse, a wealthy German widow [1,6]. She was greatly taken with the handsome doctor and visited him in his native Kentucky in 1910. Sadly, it was during this visit that she became ill and died while being looked after under Dr Moraweck's care. However, before doing so, she had altered her will, leaving Moraweck a valuable villa in Freiburg,

Germany, worth some \$30,000, as a token of her gratitude for his kindness [6]. Following her death, Hasse was cremated and Moraweck brought her ashes back to Germany. When Hasse's family learned of the contents of her will, they became suspicious that undue influence had been brought to bear and contested it [4]. A legal battle ensued and it was decided that the value of Moraweck's inheritance was to be reduced [5]. His Titanic voyage was the return from his trip to Germany.

It has been suggested that Hasse's death, far from being an unexpected event, was part of a grisly pattern. Several other elderly and wealthy ladies who died in mysterious circumstances soon after coming under the medical supervision of Dr Moraweck, who then became the beneficiary of their wills.

Had the Titanic docked in New York, Dr Moraweck might have had some difficult questions to answer from the NYPD in connection with a series of unexplained deaths! As it was, he died in the sinking and any secrets now lie at the bottom of the North Atlantic.

References

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