

Titanic Coat making trek from Cottage Grove to nation's capitol

By Caitlyn May
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Marion Woolcott's coat had already made its way across the sea on the Titanic to New York before landing in Cottage Grove. But earlier this year, it made another journey.

The coat is currently on loan from the Cottage Grove Museum to the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C. as part of the institution's exhibit, "Titanic, the Untold Story."

"We were told the coat was a main item," said Cottage Grove Museum board member Mary Jo O'Fallon who made the trip to D.C. with fellow board members and volunteers Becky Venice, Cathy Bellavita and Tara Sue Hughart.

When Woolcott landed in New York in 1912 as a Titanic survivor, she had already sent a letter home to her parents detailing the events of the catastrophe that would catapult its way through history, to the big screen and settle in the imagination of a generation.

What made Woolcott's voyage on the doomed ship unique wasn't the journey, but the destination. She wasn't headed for California or an extended stay in New York like the majority of the passengers.

She was headed for a small town in the Willamette Valley to join her future husband Arthur where they would eventually buy an orchard, have children and be buried. But not before finding a bit of local celebrity and subsequently, handing down history.

In the middle of the Cot-



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STAFF

Local museum board members and volunteers Cathy Bellavita, Tara Sue Hughart, Mary Jo O'Fallon and Becky Venice traveled to D.C. to see a Cottage Grove Titanic artifact displayed at the National Geographic Museum.

tage Grove Museum there's an empty glass case that usually houses the coat Irish tourists and movie-watching children come to see. It's the coat Woolcott wrote of in letters home as she made the journey from the sinking Titanic to New York. It's the coat she had in her possession when she landed on dry land again and the coat she passed on to her sons and eventually, the Cottage Grove Museum.

"When her sons went to war, she cut pieces from the coat and wrapped bibles in them," said Bellavita previ-

ously told *The Sentinel*. All three sons made it home but the bibles have never been found and in 1967, Woolcott's oldest son, John, donated the coat to the museum.

The evidence left behind on the coat from where Woolcott cut scraps to save her sons is a big draw in D.C., according to the local group that made the trip. So, is the coat itself.

"On the metro, on the way to the hotel, we looked over and there's a couple with the catalog for the exhibit," Bellavita said. The groups

struck up a conversation and soon the couple realized Bellavita and company had traveled to see their hometown exhibit. "They said, 'Oh, are you from Cottage Grove?'"

The exhibit, on display through Jan. 1, was developed through a collaboration between the National Archives and the Ronald Regan Presidential Library. In addition to the Woolcott coat, it also includes an 8,000-pound module that famed explorer Robert Ballard used to survey the Titanic on the ocean floor.

The coat is expected to make its way back to Cottage Grove in January. In exchange for allowing the coat

to be displayed, the museum will receive a new dress form and case to house the coat when it returns home.

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