

Coat from A1

Upon arriving in New York, she quickly married her fiancé - while still wearing the coat.

Considered her "lucky coat," Woolcott later cut strips of fabric from it to make Bible covers for her three sons as they served overseas in the military during World War II.

As a testament to the coat's lucky charm, all three sons returned home safely.

Woolcott lived the rest of her life in the Cottage Grove area. After her passing on July 4, 1965, at age 80, her coat and blanket were donated to the Cottage Grove Museum by her oldest son.

Another Journey

Though an item of local note, the coat has remained in Cottage Grove for about four decades in the all-volunteer museum's care without much attention from larger historical entities.

In 2017, word of the coat's existence made its way down to California when museum improvements made press in the *Register-Guard*. Venice recalled someone from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library asking to include the coat in their own exhibition.

It was the first time the

little museum had considered loaning out the coat.

"We hemmed and hawed about it," Venice said, "whether we should let it go and whether it was going to be safe and whether they were going to take proper care of it."

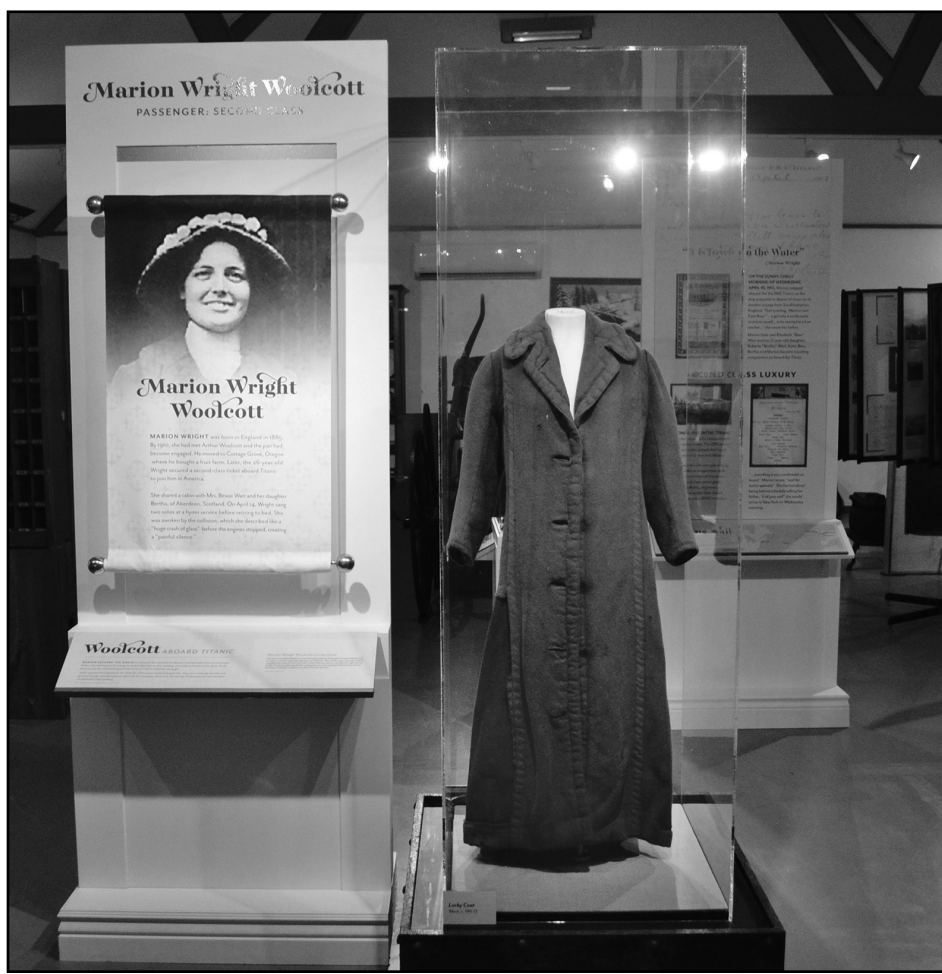
The museum board finally decided to give the coat some well-deserved publicity. Boxed in an acid-free container and special wrapping tissue, Venice and museum volunteer Cathy Bellavita took it upon themselves to drive the coat down to the California library.

Venice admitted to some nervousness on the trip down.

"I was thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I don't want anything to happen to this thing - especially under our care,'" she said.

As per its "lucky" moniker, the coat made it safely to the library where the exhibition, "Titanic," made use of a 10,000-square-foot area to display hundreds of original artifacts alongside movie set pieces from the James Cameron film. The library estimated more than 300,000 visitors came through the exhibit during its six-month display.

The library returned the coat by courier early in 2018, including an archi- vally-appropriate glass display case, which Venice es-



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Marion Wright Woolcott's coat is now displayed with a museum-quality display case and information board as a result of its exhibitions.

timated to be worth \$2,000, and a mannequin.

Before there was time to put the coat back on display, however, another inquiry came in - this time from National Geographic.

While in Eugene for a conference, Dr. Fredrik Hiebert, archaeologist and National Geographic Fel-

low, had heard about the coat and expressed interest in borrowing it for another exhibition, going as far as to gift the museum with a framed photo taken of the Titanic's bow when it was found in the 1980s.

"He was really trying to score points with us to get us to loan it to him,"

laughed Venice.

The museum board relinquished the coat again and Hiebert flew back with the coat in its acid-free box to Washington, D.C for display in the exhibit "Titanic: The Untold Story."

The exhibit revealed the long-classified story behind the Titanic's 1985 dis-

covery by Robert Ballard. Amid displayed stories of heroism and tragedy, Woolcott's coat stood in the middle.

"Our coat was the center of that whole area," said Venice.

The exhibit ran from June 2018 through the end of the year, though Venice could not guess how many visitors the coat received compared to its library exhibition.

"I would think more," she said. "It's a very popular museum."

When the coat came back in February this year it came with another mannequin as well as a payment of \$1,200.

"In retrospect we were thinking we should have asked for more," laughed Venice.

With the items the coat has picked up in its travels, the current display at the Cottage Grove Museum provides a first-rate improvement from its old glass case and bulletin board.

"It wasn't museum quality," said Venice of the previous display. "Now it's a real upgrade."

The exhibit also includes a display case with a contemporary Boston Globe newspaper headline of the Titanic's sinking and information on the coat's tour through California and Washington, D.C.

A new case and information board for Woolcott's blanket have also been built to match the coat's upgraded display, telling the story of Woolcott's rescue by the Carpathia.

"We decided it needed a case of its own. And a story of its own," said Venice. "It wasn't up to standards to keep it preserved correctly. The story has not really been told in an adequate way, we didn't feel. We thought it really deserved an exhibit of its own."

Funds for the blanket display came from the State Historic Preservation Office and the Faye and Lucille Stewart Foundation.

The exhibit was also made possible by support from an Oregon Heritage Grant from the Oregon Heritage Commission.

Museum exhibit consultants Chanin Santiago and Alice Parman along with Cottage Grove graphic designer and historian Alice Christianson partnered with museum staff and volunteers to create the exhibit.

Because the Cottage Grove Museum's name was included with the coat's display during its travels, Venice is optimistic the item's popularity will increase.

"People have come here specifically to see it," said Venice. "Hopefully word will get around that it is here in our museum."

Admission to the Aug. 10 opening, which is from 1 to 4 p.m., will be free and include light refreshments.

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