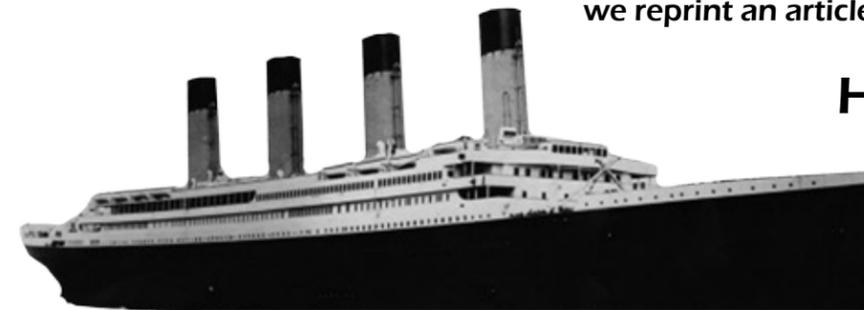




# Confluence

In commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic we reprint an article written by Scott Reichard in Spring of 2002



## He Has Reached the Place He Set Out For...

By: Scott Reichard

In 1912, a 27-year old Swiss farmer named Albert Wirz decided to come to Beloit, Wisconsin, where his stepaunt, Maria Brown, had found employment for him in a Beloit machine shop. Maria, whose sister Lina had married Albert's father after the death of his first wife, had come to Beloit with her son Adolf. She married Terrance Brown, and at the time of Albert's trip they resided at 1208 Fifth Street, near the intersection with Middle Street; the property is now a part of the parking lot across from the High School.

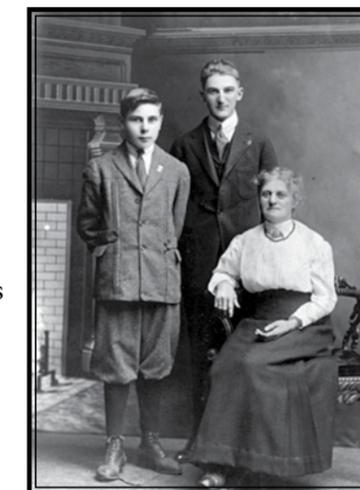
Albert's parents were very reluctant about his sailing to America, fearing a terrible accident according to one account. But he was determined, and on April 8, 1912, he boarded the train at Uster, Switzerland, and set out for Southampton, England. Albert was traveling with a friend, Anton Kink, and his family, who were emigrating to Milwaukee. They boarded the awaiting ship on April 10 as third-class passengers, surely impressed with what was then the largest ship in the world; Albert and his companions had booked passage on the Titanic for its maiden voyage.

Albert shared a cabin on G deck with Anton, Anton's brother Vinzenz, Leo Zimmermann, Josef Arnold (who was traveling to New Glarus, Wisconsin), and an unknown Bohemian passenger. Their cabin was seven decks below the boat deck, and near the bow of the ship. Anton's wife, daughter and sister were berthed in the stern; in third-class the men and women's quarters were separated, the men forward, the women aft.

As is well known, the Titanic struck an iceberg at 11:40 on Sunday evening, April 14. Most passengers barely noticed the collision, many having retired for the evening. But on G-deck near the bow Albert and his companions were close to the impact. Anton Kink and his brother rushed to the forward well-deck in time to see an iceberg (probably not the same iceberg that was struck), and then Anton went to the stern of the ship, where he rejoined his wife and daughter. They made their way to the boat deck where they entered Lifeboat 2; with women and children being put in the lifeboats, Anton might have perished, but was saved because he jumped into the boat when his wife and daughter cried out for him.

At 2:20 a.m. on the 15th the great ocean liner sank into the sea, claiming over 1500 lives. Anton's cabin-mates were all lost, including Albert Wirz. In interviews with survivors Albert was never mentioned, but he must have found his way to the boat deck with his lifebelt on, because he was one of the few victims recovered.

Albert's body was found on April 24, identified and assigned number 131 by the cable ship MacKay-Bennett, employed by the White Star Line to search for and retrieve victims of the sinking. Following is the description recorded of Albert and what was found in his possession:



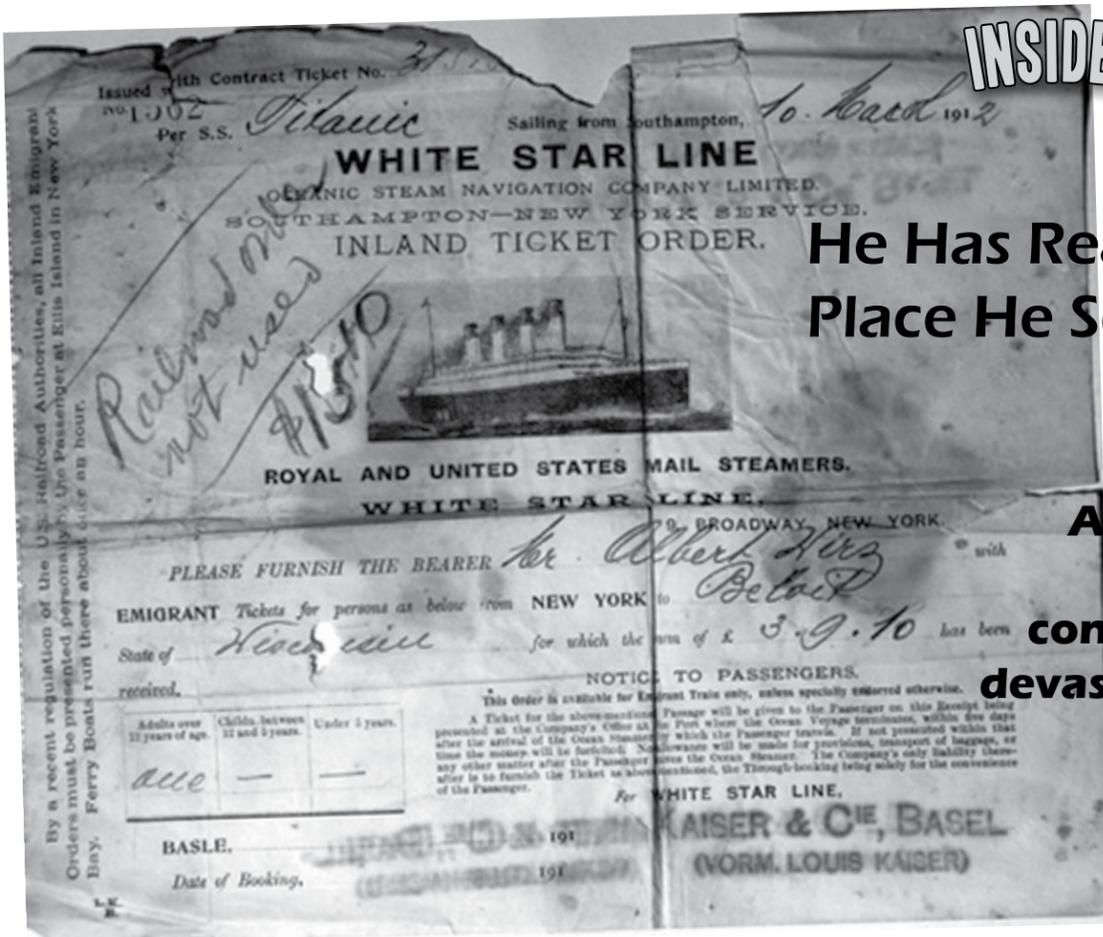
Continued inside

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

## He Has Reached the Place He Set Out For...

By: Scott Reichard

**The story of Albert Wirz and Beloit's rare connection to the devastating sinking of the Titanic, 100 years ago.**



Beloit Historical Society  
Confluence  
845 Hackett St.  
Beloit WI 53511  
Address Service Requested

The Vision of the Beloit Historical Society is to make history a focal point of community pride and to serve as a constant reminder to the community of its great and diverse heritage. Visit our web site at [beloithistoricalociety.com](http://beloithistoricalociety.com)

Non Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Beloit, WI  
Permit No. 87

## Beloit Historical Society

Founded 1910

### Officers

Craig Mellem, President  
Nancy Alseth, Vice President  
Maggie Janke, Treasurer  
William Bolgrien, Secretary

### Board of Directors

David Collins  
Teri Downing  
Mary Herrmann  
Mike King  
Sue Kurth  
Nancy Wallace

### Lincoln Center Staff:

Paul Kerr,  
Executive Director  
Dwight Alton,  
Facilities Manager

### Newsletter Contributors:

Paul Kerr, Dwight Alton,  
Madeleine Krass, and  
Scott Reichard; layout by  
Jen Scott.

Board meetings are the third Thursday of every month at 4:15 p.m. and are held at Lincoln Center, 845 Hackett Street.

The Newsletter, *Confluence*, is published quarterly for the membership of the Beloit Historical Society to inform readers of Society activities as well as educate them on the history of Beloit. The Beloit Historical Society manages two sites, Lincoln Center Museum with main offices at 845 Hackett St. and Hanchett-Bartlett Homestead, 2149 St. Lawrence Ave. For further information please call (608) 365-7835 or e-mail us at [Pkerr@beloithistoricalsociety.com](mailto:Pkerr@beloithistoricalsociety.com). Or see our web site at [beloithistoricalsociety.com](http://beloithistoricalsociety.com).

## Thank You

Last 16 March 2012 at La Casa Grande we had our biggest fund raiser of the year: the Gala Auction. With a St. Patrick's Day theme, the Society celebrated that Friday evening with food, drink and auction. Attended by 100 enthusiastic people who bought silent and live auction items, the evening was a big hit, with earnings, after expenses, of \$10,000. We have to thank for this marked success Nancy Wallace, the Chairman of the committee, Nancy Alseth, Mike King, Teri Downing, Vicki Johnson, Craig Mellem and Rich Ranft. Auctioneer for the evening was Rich Ranft of the Beloit Auction Service. Other supporting cast members were Pat Ranft and Brian Heikkinen of the Beloit Auction Service. **We tip our hats with sincere respect and thanks to this hard working team who gave so generously of their time and talent.**

## Up-Coming Events

### Volunteer Brunch & Annual Dinner

The **Volunteer Brunch** of 12 April 2012 promises to be an enjoyable time. It is our big thank you to all of you great volunteers out there who keep the Historical Society rolling. This year in honor of you good people we offer some delicious food from Knute's Bar & Grill in Orfordville and a great program on hats provided by **Heather Edgington**. Please join us for a good time on the 12th of April. We'll start the festivities at 11:30 a.m. and go until we run out of food and hats.

The **Annual Dinner** is slated for 25 May 2012. We will have a brief business meeting at which a new President will be elected along with other officers. Then we will be entertained by award winning columnist and author **Rochelle Pennington** who will present a program about the good old days entitled "A Walk Down Memory Lane". Members and non-members alike please join us for a trip back in time, fellowship and brief Society meeting.

Cost for members is \$35 and for non members \$40. Fill out the enclosed form making checks payable to the Beloit Historical Society and mail to 845 Hackett St. Beloit, WI 53511. Phone 365-7835 for more information.

## TITANIC TURNS 100

### Some interesting happenings to commemorate the 100th

The History Press, a prominent UK historical publisher, has opened a Twitter account, @TitanicRealTime, which will send out "live" tweets about what's happening on the Titanic from March 10- April 15. The tweets will describe events just as though it were 1912. The goal is to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the ship's sinking, and to help people understand what actually happened on that fateful voyage.

History Press, along with The Firsty Group, has created an application for the iPad that will tell the story of the Titanic, drawing from some of the world's leading experts on the Titanic. Its features include interactive deck plans, detailed biographies of the ship's key figures, a film, survivor accounts and photographs from every stage of the ship's life.

The site of the Titanic's sinking, off of Cape Race, Newfoundland, will be the gathering place for people from all around the world to commemorate the disaster during April 14-15, 2012. Events will include a dinner and reception, worldwide radio commemoration, and an Ecumenical Service, along with other things.

Halifax, Nova Scotia is home to twenty-four Titanic sites, three graves, a well known exhibit at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, and was where much of the 1997 movie was filmed. Halifax will be commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the ship sinking at their World Trade and Convention Center, including films, exhibits, and other events.

The Balmoral, a ship operated by Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, will be symbolically following the route of the Titanic this April. The parent company of Fred Olsen Cruise Lines is Harland and Wolff, the same company which constructed the Titanic. The ship accommodates 1,309 passengers, the exact same number as the Titanic.

The 1997 Oscar winning film, "Titanic," will be re-released to theaters in 3-D on April 12, 2012; the one hundredth anniversary of the ship setting sail.

## He Has Reached the Place He Set Out For... (continued)

No. 131- Male - Hair Dark. Mustache, Fair.

Clothing - Dark suit; woolen socks; buckle shoes

Effects - Two watches; brass chain; one ink pot; match box; knife; memo book; insurance book; passport; keys; empty purse; purse containing 36¢

Third Class Ticket No. 315154

Name - Albert Wirz

The MacKay-Bennett was heading to Halifax, Nova Scotia, but before arriving, the mark of identification on Albert was somehow lost. A description to re-identify his body was needed, so the Beloit representative of the White Star Line, Ernest C. Dahlberg, was contacted. A jeweler by trade, Dahlberg's shop was on Grand Avenue just west of the bridge. He sent a description of Wirz, presumably obtained from Mrs. Brown; in the meantime, Albert's body lay unidentified in the morgue at Halifax. Finally, on May 7 the New York White Star office communicated the following:

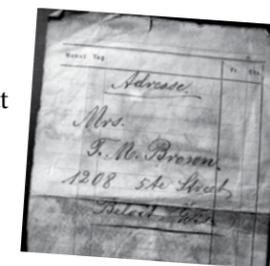
The White Star office at New York wires that the identification of Albert Wirz is positive. Will forward body to Beloit at our expense. Wire us immediately to whom body should be addressed.

Albert Wirz's body arrived in Beloit on May 11 and was met at the train by Mr. & Mrs. Brown. The hermetically sealed zinc casket was immediately sent to Meehan & Son's undertaking parlor, coincidentally located across from Dahlberg's shop on Grand Avenue. The funeral was held Sunday, May 12, in City (Oakwood) Cemetery, and conducted in German by the Rev. Peter Pichler of the German's (St. Paul's) Lutheran church. Interestingly, two papers of the day had conflicting views on the size of the group that attended the service: The Beloit Daily News states that "a large crowd of people witnessed the funeral services for Albert Wirz," but the Beloit Daily Free Press said that "only a handful were in attendance upon the last rites for the young man."

The Browns presumably couldn't afford a marker for their nephew, so the grave remained unmarked for over 80 years. Gunter Babler of Switzerland, founder of the Swiss Titanic Society, rekindled the memory of Mr. Wirz's story. Through Gunter Babler and Floyd Andrick's efforts, Albert's grave received its long overdue marker, which was dedicated in a ceremony held September 5, 1996. Rev. Charles Larson of St. Paul's Lutheran church led the memorial service, just as his predecessor Rev. Pichler had 84 years previously.

Of the many lives lost in the Titanic sinking, only 336 bodies were recovered, and of those 100 were buried at sea. The rest were taken to Halifax, where most were buried in three local cemeteries. Only 59 of the victims were buried outside of Halifax, and only 3 in Wisconsin (the other two are buried in Green Bay and Milwaukee.) This April 15 will mark the 90th anniversary of the Titanic's sinking and the death of a young man coming to Beloit. Summing up the tragedy of Albert Wirz's death, the May 11, 1912 Daily News had the following to say:

"His journey is finished. He has reached the place he set out for. But no ruddy cheeked [Swiss] lad will add his wealth of energy and labor to the industries of Beloit. Instead a little mound in the city cemetery marks the consummation of his life's hopes and incidentally brings home to the people of Beloit, the great ocean tragedy that shocked the entire civilization of the present day and will go down in history as one of the [great] disasters of [all] time."



# A Peek into the Past

This year's featured speaker will be Wisconsin author Rochelle Pennington who will walk us down Memory Lane to the "good old days" of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.

Audience members will be invited to take a nostalgic glance backward to a period of time when rotary-dialed telephones, canning jars lining the pantry shelves, hat boxes, mothers in aprons, and hand-me-down clothes were part of everyday life.

In addition to Pennington's historical PowerPoint presentation, featuring vintage photographs and images, a collection of antiques will be displayed.

If you remember Howdy Doody, doctors who made house calls, and suppers made from scratch, then come on by for an evening which promises to be a heartwarmer!

ROCHELLE PENNINGTON is an award winning newspaper columnist and bestselling author of ten books including Highlighted in Yellow (available in four languages; co-authored with H. Jackson Brown), Christmas Gifts: Ten of the Greatest Ever Given (newly released), The Historic Christmas Tree Ship (as featured on national television), An Old Fashioned Christmas 2009 Midwest Booksellers Choice Award nomination for outstanding non fiction, and more. Her work has been included in multiple bestselling series over the past two decades.

Pennington is both a lively storyteller and an entertaining lecturer who expertly weaves the perfect balance of humor, charm, and riveting facts into her captivating performances.



## I'd like to attend the Annual Dinner

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, ST zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please list names and addresses of any non members.  
Use additional paper if more space is required.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Payment is included for:

A \_\_\_\_\_ tickets at \$35 per member - \_\_\_\_\_ s  
B \_\_\_\_\_ tickets at \$40 per non member - \_\_\_\_\_ s  
Add together lines A and B for total \_\_\_\_\_ s

*Mail this form with payment to Beloit Historical Society  
Lincoln Center, 845 Hackett St., Beloit, WI 53511 by Friday,  
May 18. For those who wish to drop their reservations off,  
the Center is open 12 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday.*