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### **Collection of Rare Titanic-Related Documents Donated to the Penn Libraries**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA, February 19, 2014** - More than 100 years after the sinking of the Titanic, the Penn Libraries is honored to acquire the *John B. Thayer Memorial Collection of the Sinking of the Titanic*, an extensive archive based upon the personal experience of John B. Thayer III (known as Jack), a Penn alumnus who went on to serve the University as Vice-President of Finance from 1939 to 1945.

At the age of seventeen, Jack was among the first-class passengers aboard the ill-fated ship, in the company of his mother, Marian Longstreth Morris Thayer, and his father, John B. Thayer II. When the ship began to sink after striking an iceberg, the three became separated. While Marian was placed in a lifeboat wearing a lifejacket, son Jack jumped from the increasingly elevated stern of the sinking ship and clung through the cold night to an overturned lifeboat from which he was eventually rescued. He was reunited with his mother aboard the rescue ship *Carpathia*, but no trace was ever found of his father.

The *John B. Thayer Memorial Collection of the Sinking of the Titanic* was donated to the Penn Libraries by members of the Thayer family. The collection provides a fascinating record of an historically important world event. Items in the collection include the manuscript of Jack's memoir published in 1940, contemporary newspaper clippings documenting Jack's tale of survival, and correspondence between Marian Thayer and J. B. Ismay, CEO of the White Star Line which commissioned the Titanic. These materials will now be located in the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts for researchers to access.

On the evening of the Titanic disaster, J. Bruce Ismay had dined with the Thayers at a dinner hosted by the Widener family. Ismay survived the disaster, but resigned as Chairman of the White Star Line. In the aftermath of the disaster, Ismay sent Marian a dozen letters attempting to console the grieving widow.

"The Penn Libraries and the Kislak Center are humbled by this gift," shared David McKnight, Director of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library in the Kislak Center. He added, "These

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materials, which have not been made accessible publicly until now, will certainly bring new researchers to Penn and the Kislak Center. We feel fortunate that the family of Jack Thayer is making this rare documentation of their family's experience available to the broader public through our repository."

The family had a long history in Philadelphia. At the time of his death, Jack's father, John Thayer II, was just 49 years old and Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Railroad. He had attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he served as the captain of the baseball team. Following the ship's sinking, Jack joined the United States Army in 1916 and served as an officer in the Artillery Corp, where he saw duty on the Western front. After his discharge, he worked in the private sector for 20 years, before returning to his alma mater as the Vice-President of Finance.

Jack privately published his account of surviving the Titanic in 1940, a signed copy of which is available in the Kislak Center. Marian Thayer passed away in 1944, followed by Jack in 1945, who succumbed to a deep depression from the loss of his mother and his son, Edward, who was lost in the Pacific while serving as a bomber pilot.

### **About the Penn Libraries**

The Penn Libraries serve the world-class faculty and students of Penn's 12 schools. The collections comprise more than 7 million volumes, 1 million of which are in electronic form; over 100,000 journals; and extraordinary rare and unique materials that document the intellectual and cultural experience of ancient and modern civilizations. Today, the Libraries play an instrumental role in developing new technologies for information discovery and dissemination and are noted for groundbreaking work in digital library design. To learn more about the Penn Libraries, visit [www.library.upenn.edu](http://www.library.upenn.edu).

### **About the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts**

The Kislak Center is a vibrant space that brings together people, technology and unique content. Located on the top floor of the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library, it was redesigned in 2013 to allow several different groups to interact with objects of study simultaneously, increasing the use of primary resources in the University's curriculum and access to the Libraries' resources for the larger scholarly community. Today the Kislak Center encompasses the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Furness Memorial Shakespeare Library, the Edgar Fahs Smith Memorial Collection and the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies. To learn more about the Kislak Center, visit <http://www.library.upenn.edu/kislak>.

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