scene of the disaster was too far away from the U.S. coast. But after several scoldings from the newspapers, the fund changed its collective mind and placed a gold medal in the National Museum in Washington, D.C. The medal was dedicated to “the sublime self-sacrifice displayed by the passengers, officers and crew of the Titanic.”

The Carnegie medal was one of a steady stream of monuments, statues, and proclamations designed to ensure the legacy of Titanic and its victims. And while the ship itself has entered our culture’s permanent myth pool, the 1,500 lost are increasingly more difficult to hear over the din of crass exploitation. The T-shirts, plastic models, and greeting cards in local gift shops keep alive the symbol of Titanic, but few Western Pennsylvanians probably realize the direct impact the ship’s sinking had on numerous families in the region.

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**THE SADDEST TOWN**

**By Cassandra Vivian**

**SEVENTEEN PEOPLE LISTED MONESSEN AS**

their final destination on the SS Titanic’s original manifest. That made the small mid-Mon Valley community of 12,000 souls the most devastated victim of the Titanic tragedy in Pennsylvania, and arguably the most devastated community in the entire United States.

In Monessen, the Titanic story belongs primarily to the Finnish community. Situated about 25 miles south of Pittsburgh on the banks of the Monongahela River, Monessen in 1912 was a boomtown that had one of the largest Finnish communities in the United States. They lived in Finn Town, an area of the city dominated by Knox, Motheral, and Clarenton avenues and crossed by Chestnut, Fourth, and Sixth streets. The Finns gave the community the famous Louhi Band, a Nobel scientist, and an opera singer. Of the 17 Titanic passengers, 13 of them were Monessen Finns.

Monessen’s Titanic passengers sailed from Finland on the ship Polaris on April 3, 1912, and were all scheduled to sail on the Titanic on April 10.

Pekka and Elin Hakkarainen’s tickets were from Hanko, Finland, to Monessen, Pennsylvania. They paid 315 Finnish marks for each ticket. The Hakkarainens’ listed their exact destination as 401 Motheral Avenue, the home of their friend Mrs. John
Elkhorn. Pekka Hakkarainen was 28 years old. He had immigrated to Monessen several years before the disaster. He had been living in one of the many Finnish boarding houses, at Motheral Avenue and Fourth Street, and worked as a tinsmith in the local tin mill.

In August 1911, he and his friends Mr. and Mrs. Frank Mahl, also of Monessen, had returned to Finland for a visit. Before they sailed, he met Aurora Dolck Laatu at the Finnish Temperance Hall on Fourth Street and she suggested Pekka look up her sister, Elin, while he was in Finland. He did.

Elin, too, had been in the United States before. Along with four other girls, she had lived in Boston, where she had worked as a domestic. But in July of 1911, she had returned home to Finland. Pekka and Elin met, fell in love, and were married January 15, 1912; not long after, they decided to sail for America. They were originally scheduled to sail aboard the RMS Mauritania, but they heard the new luxury liner Titanic was making her maiden voyage in April, so they changed their plans.

Helga Lindquist Hirvonen, age 22, and her 2-year-old daughter Hildur only paid 230 Finnish marks for their tickets. They also sailed on the Polaris. They were to meet Helga’s husband Matt, who listed his address as 400 Motheral Avenue, directly across the street from Elin and Pekka’s destination.

Eino Lindquist, brother of Helga Hirvonen, was headed for the same place. He was a 20-year-old laborer from Dahlsburk, Finland.

Erik Jussila was 32 when he boarded the ill-fated steamer. His wife Helmi Jousula (Jussila) was left behind in Kiristankyla, Jalasjarvi, and he was headed for another Finn Town address—482 Motheral Avenue.

The tragic Panula family (discussed at length in the main article) are also part of the Monessen story. Maria Panula, her five children, and a traveling companion were really bound for Coal Center, though they also listed Monessen as a final destination on the Titanic’s manifest.

That makes 13 Finnish citizens traveling the North Atlantic on the Titanic. What of the other four? Catherine Torkos and her three children Mary, Michael, and Elizabeth were scheduled to sail on the Titanic too. They were headed for Monessen, where Catherine’s husband worked for the Pittsburgh Steel Co. Due to a series of unexpected events, Catherine and her children ended up on a different ship and spent a fretful voyage crossing the Atlantic while her husband, back in Monessen, suffered what he thought was the loss of his family.

Cassandra Vivian, a photographer and writer, wrote about Italian foods at Christmas in the Winter issue.