

Molly Brown - Biography

Margaret Tobin was born on 18 July 1867 to Irish immigrants John and Johanna and attended a grammar school run by her aunt Mary O'Leary.

Tobin attended school until she was 13 years old and then went to work in a tobacco factory to help with the family expenses. When she was 19, she moved to Leadville, Colorado and lived with her brother Daniel, where she got a job at a dry goods store, sewing carpets and drapes.

She soon met James Joseph Brown, a mining engineer. They married and a son, Lawrence Palmer, was born in 1887. Their second child Catherine Ellen 'Helen' arrived two years later.

In 1891, Brown purchased stock in a mining company that soon struck gold and he suddenly became very rich. They moved to Denver in 1894 and Margaret filled her house with expensive furniture and decorations from around the world. She enjoyed being in the local spotlight and an important part of Denver society.

When her children were young, she was involved in the early feminist movement in Leadville and aided the establishment of the Colorado chapter of the National American Women's Suffrage Association. Brown also worked in soup kitchens to assist the families of miners.

Her husband soon became one of the most important and wealthiest mining men in the state as he turned his silver mine over to producing gold in 1893 to combat the 90 per cent unemployment rate in Leadville.

Margaret often travelled to Europe to study drama, music, literature and languages. She had also become a founding member of the Denver Woman's Club, which advocated literacy, education, suffrage and human rights in Colorado and the US. Brown raised funds to build the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception as well as St Joseph's Hospital by the turn of the century.

In 1909, Margaret and her husband separated, but they never divorced.

On the morning of 14 April 1912, Margaret Brown was aboard the giant cruise ship, Titanic. She had been vacationing in Europe with her daughter Helen when she was informed that her grandchild was ill. She travelled to New York while her daughter stayed behind in London, meaning hardly anyone knew Brown was aboard the 'unsinkable ship'.

At 11:40 pm on 14 April a crewmember spotted an iceberg, but it was too late. Three hours later the Titanic sank to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. Of the more than 2000 passengers on board only seven hundred survived, as the Titanic did not have enough lifeboats for all the passengers and crew.

Margaret was one of the lucky ones who survived. When they were rescued by the Carpathia, she worked tirelessly, helping the other survivors by handing out food, drinks and blankets. As the ship arrived in New York, everyone had already heard about her bravery and good deeds.

By the time the Carpathia reached New York, she had established the Survivor's Committee, been elected the chair and raised almost \$10,000 for those who had lost everything. In a letter to her daughter, Brown wrote:

"After being brined, salted, and pickled in mid ocean I am now high and dry ... I have had flowers, letters, telegrams-people until I am befuddled. They are petitioning Congress to give me a medal... If I must call a specialist to examine my head it is due to the title of Heroine of the Titanic."

Margaret then used her fame to promote women's rights, becoming active in politics and, in 1914; she became the first woman to run for the US Congress. She also helped erect the Titanic memorial in Washington and continued to serve on the Survivors Committee but was annoyed that as a woman she wasn't allowed to participate in the Titanic hearings.

When World War I broke out, Margaret travelled to France and helped establish a relief station for the soldiers. She was awarded the French Legion of

Honour in 1932 for her work for Titanic survivors, her organisation of the Alliance Francais and her relief efforts during the war.