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Exploring Northern Ireland **Titanic's "Little Sister"**

By Kathy McGorray Dougherty

This is the story of the S.S. Nomadic, known as the Titanic's little sister and an amazing ship in its own right. While the story of the Titanic is tragic and filled with loss, the Nomadic's tale is one of survival.

The Nomadic was "born" at the Harland and Wolff shipyards in Belfast at the same time the Titanic was being built. The Nomadic's purpose was to ferry or "tender" first and second-class passengers from small ports out to the great ocean liners of that time. At 233 feet long, the Nomadic could carry up to 1,000 passengers and reach a top speed of 12 knots. (For comparison, the Titanic was 883 feet long and could hold up to 3,500 passengers.)

The Nomadic was launched in April 1911 and immediately sent to Cherbourg, France to begin its duties ferrying passengers. Its date with destiny was April 10, 1912, when it carried 142 first-class passengers to the Titanic during its stop in Cherbourg. Among those passengers were Benjamin Guggenheim and the soon-to-be-known-as "unsinkable" Molly Brown. While the Titanic's story ended just two days after that, the Nomadic was just getting started.

It became a war veteran in 1917 when it served as a troop ship for the French in World War I. After the war, the port at Cherbourg was updated, allowing large ships better access and putting "tender" ships like the Nomadic out of work. On the verge of heading to the scrap heap, the Nomadic was called into service again in 1940 as a troop ship for the British during World War II. Ironically, the Nomadic was able to return to its ferrying duties after the war, because the Nazis had destroyed the new port at Cherbourg.

The Nomadic was officially retired from ferrying in 1968 and was once again headed to the scrap yard when it was purchased, renovated and positioned in the River Seine in Paris. It opened as a restaurant in 1977 and remained there





for 22 years. In the late 1990's, new safety regulations forced it to close. After several failed attempts to find a new use for the old ship, in 2003, for the third time in its 92 years, the Nomadic was destined for the scrap heap.

Fate stepped in once more to save the Nomadic. In late 1997, Hollywood gave us "The Titanic" movie, making all things related to the Titanic much more interesting. Around this same time a small group of Belfast boosters and Nomadic enthusiasts began efforts to bring the Nomadic "home" to Belfast. A "Save the Nomadic" campaign began and supporters from around the world lobbied British government officials to purchase the run-down ship. The campaign was successful and on July 12, 2006, the Nomadic arrived in Belfast.

Extensive renovations were completed and in 2007, visitors were allowed on board the Nomadic once again. During the six months that the Nomadic was open at Queens Quay in Belfast this year, over 18,000 people toured this amazing boat. At the end of October the Nomadic was moved to a different location so additional restoration work can be completed. A "Nomadic Preservation Society" has been established, to raise funds to continue work on the ship, recruit volunteers to serve as tour guides and raise awareness about the Nomadic and its incredible story of survival. It sounds like the Titanic's little sister is home to stay.

Kathy McGorray Dougherty is owner of Northern Ireland Travels, which specializes in creating personalized, self-guided trips to Northern Ireland. For more information, visit their website at www.nirelandtravels.com.