

Titanic Lifeboat Identification Plates

By Bob Read, D.M.D.

Introduction

Titanic's 16 wooden lifeboats had identification plates fixed to the exterior of the boats. It would seem that these identification plates and where they were applied would be a fairly simple matter. However, when the identification plates are examined closely there are a considerable number of subtleties about them. Each of the separate types of identification plates will be discussed separately.

Boat Numbers

Titanic's lifeboats were numbered from 1 through 16. The forwardmost boat on the starboard side was numbered 1. Boat number 2 was the forwardmost boat on the port side. The numbering of the boats continued aftward alternating from starboard to port. All the starboard boats have odd numbers and all port boats have even numbers. The boat number plates were applied to both outboard and inboard sides on both forward and aft ends of the boats. Figure 1 shows a boat number on one of Olympic's boats.

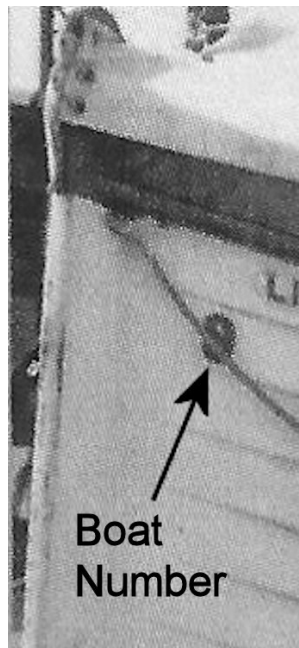


Figure 1

Boat Number

The boat numbers were applied to the second planking strake below the gunwale.

Vessel Nameplates

The vessel nameplates were applied to the first planking strake below the gunwale on the outboard side only on both the forward and aft ends of the boats. There are a couple of subtleties which need to be noted on these vessel nameplates. In Figure 2 it can be seen that there are two variations of the vessel nameplates.



Figure 2

Titanic Vessel Nameplates

One type has the letters tilted toward the right. The other type has the letters tilted toward the left. Whether the plate is a forward or aft plate, the direction of the letter tilt is toward the end of the boat where the nameplate is applied. A second subtlety is that the vessel nameplate has two different shaped ends. One end is rounded and the other has a flat side with rounded corners. Just as the direction of tilt of the letters is toward the end of the boat where it is applied, the flat end of the nameplate is oriented toward the end of the boat where it is applied.

Port of Registry plates

For White Star Ships like Titanic, the port of registry was Liverpool. The port of registry plates were applied fore and aft on the inboard side of the boats. They were applied to the first strake below the gunwale. The aspects discussed in the vessel nameplate section such as the letter tilt and shape of the ends of the ends of the plates are the same for the port of registry plates. Figure 3 shows an original port of registry plate.



Figure 3

Port of Registry plate

House Flag plates

The house flag plates are a red swallowtail field with a white star. The flagstaff is painted but it is not clear what color it was. In this article I have colored them dark mast but they could possibly have been black. The flag plates were applied to the second strake below the gunwale. An original flag plate can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4

White Star Line house flag plate

There are four unique configurations of the house flag plate. These can be seen in Figure 5.

Go to next page

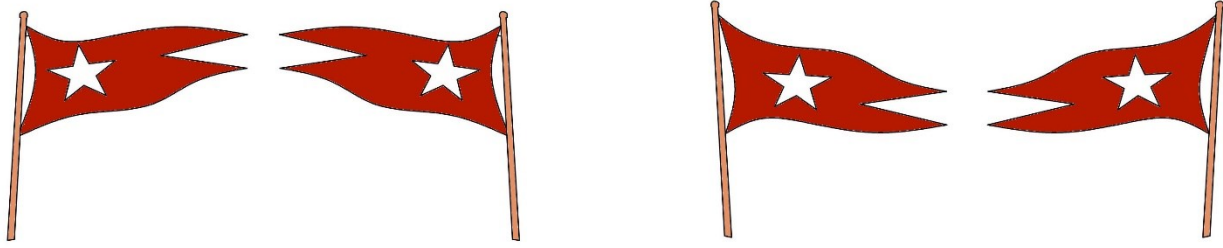


Figure 5

Four unique types of White Star Line house flag plates

There were several rules for the house flags:

- All flags had the flagstaff forward with the flag flying aft
- The flagstaffs were parallel to the stem and sternposts
- The flags followed the planksheer direction. This means that on the forward flags the flag was directed slightly downward with respect to the flagstaff. The aft flags were oriented slightly upward with respect to the flagstaff.

Lifeboat Capacity Plates

The lifeboat capacity plates were round plates that were two planking strakes in diameter placed on the forward inboard end of the boat. The plate was placed on the fifth and sixth strakes below the gunwale and vertically below the port of registry plates. Figure 6 shows one of the plates on a 30 ft. lifeboat on Olympic.



Figure 6

Lifeboat capacity plate on Olympic

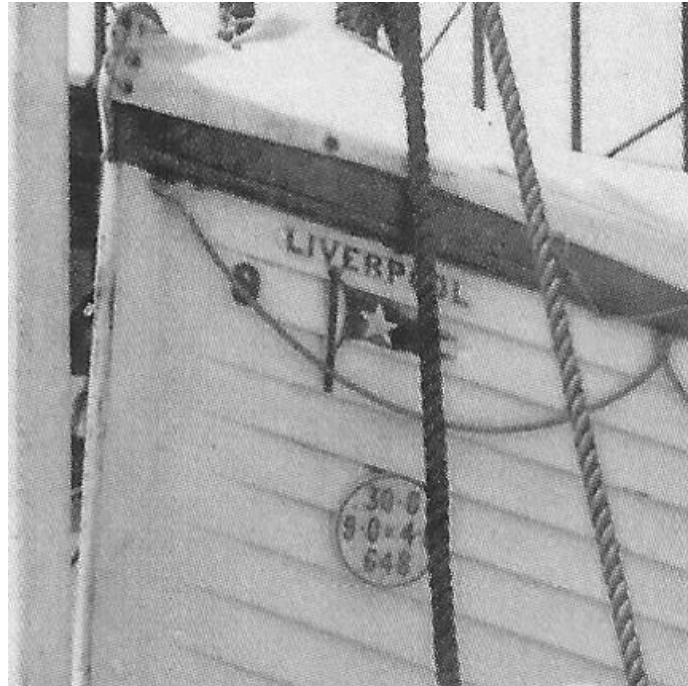
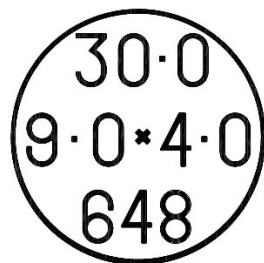


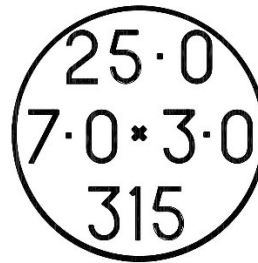
Figure 7

Lifeboat capacity plate on Olympic

The plates had three lines of text. The top line had the boat length in feet and inches. On the middle line is the boat breadth in feet and inches on the left and the boat depth in feet and inches on the right. The bottom line is the cubic foot capacity of the boat. All of the figures are “nominal”. That means the measurements to which the boat was designed. For Board of Trade purposes, the capacity could be different because the dimensions might be a few inches larger resulting in a larger capacity. However, the capacity plates always used nominal measurements rather “as measured” figures. Figure 8 shows the capacity plates for both the 30 ft. main lifeboats and the 25 ft. emergency cutters.



capacity plate
for 30 ft. boat



capacity plate
for 25 ft. boat

Figure 8

Capacity plates for 30 ft. and 25 ft. lifeboats

Collapsible Boats

There is no evidence that the collapsible boats had any identification plates applied on their exteriors. The positions where they were stowed had letter designations but these were not applied to the boats.

Conclusion

This article has described the identification plates applied to Titanic's 16 wooden lifeboats. To show all of these identification plates and where they were located, Figures 9-12 show the forward and aft, port and starboard identification plates for lifeboat #3 which was the first 30 ft boat on the starboard side aft of the 25 ft. emergency cutter #1.

Starboard Boat Forward Outboard

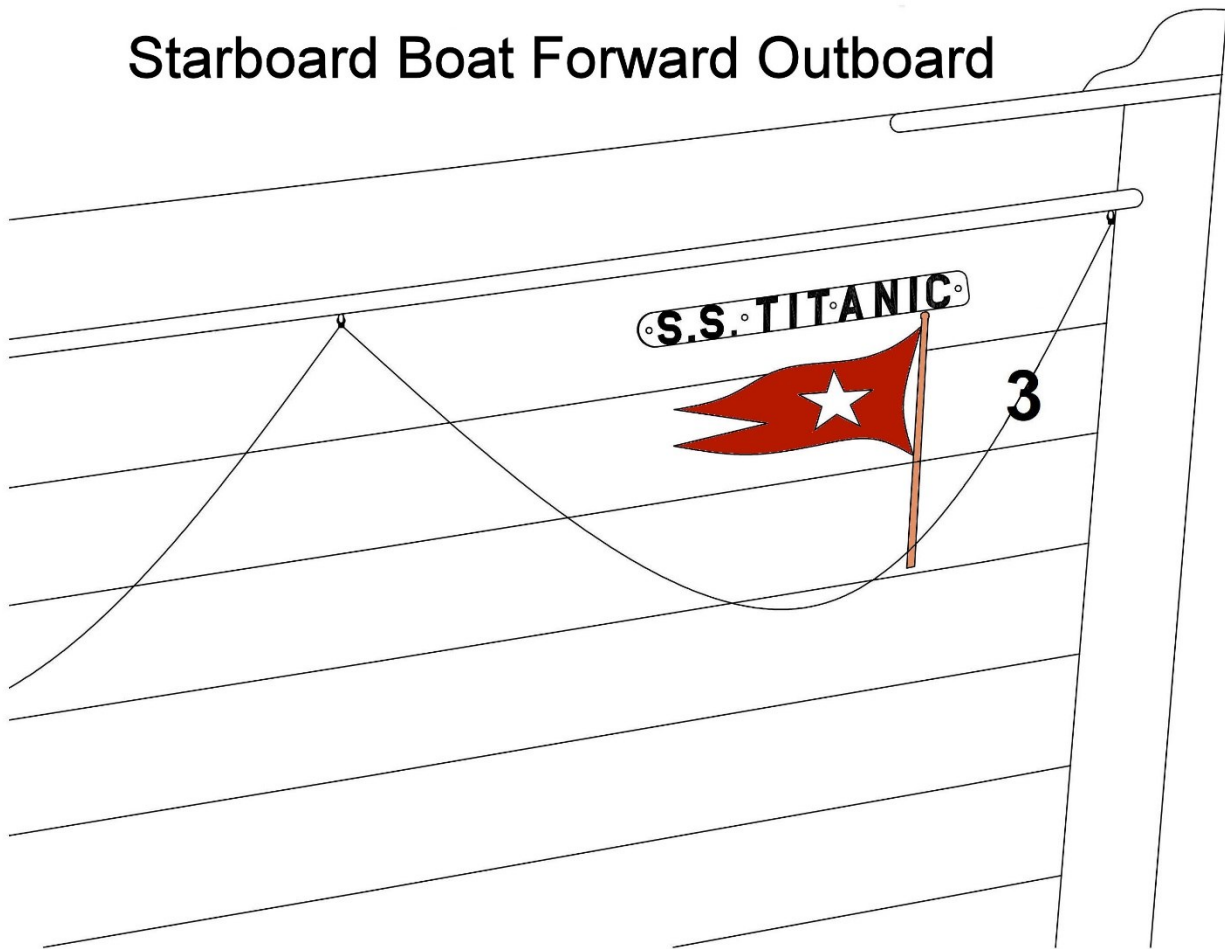


Figure 9

Starboard boat forward outboard

Starboard Boat Aft Outboard

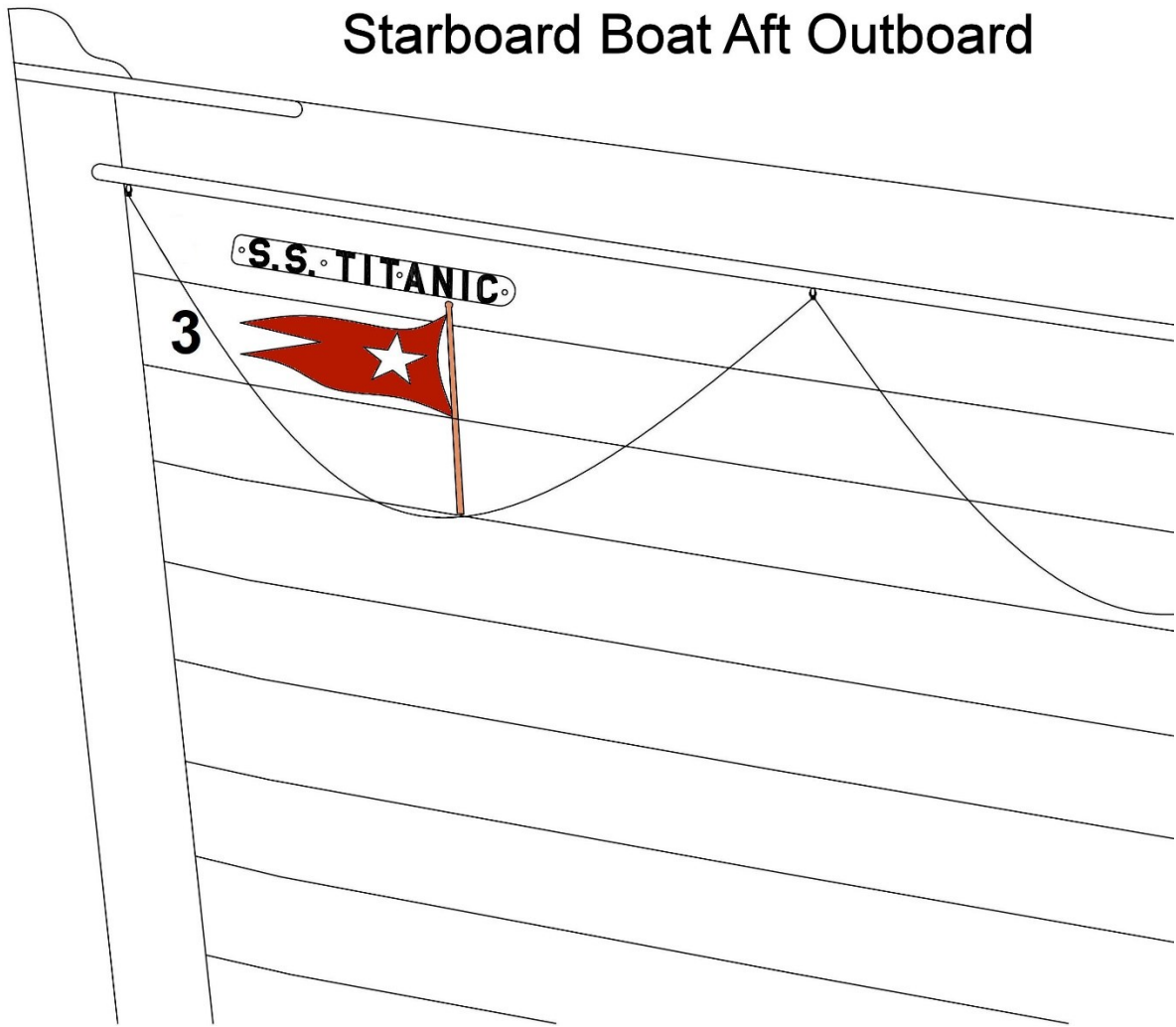


Figure 10

Starboard boat aft outboard

Go to next page

Starboard Boat Forward Inboard

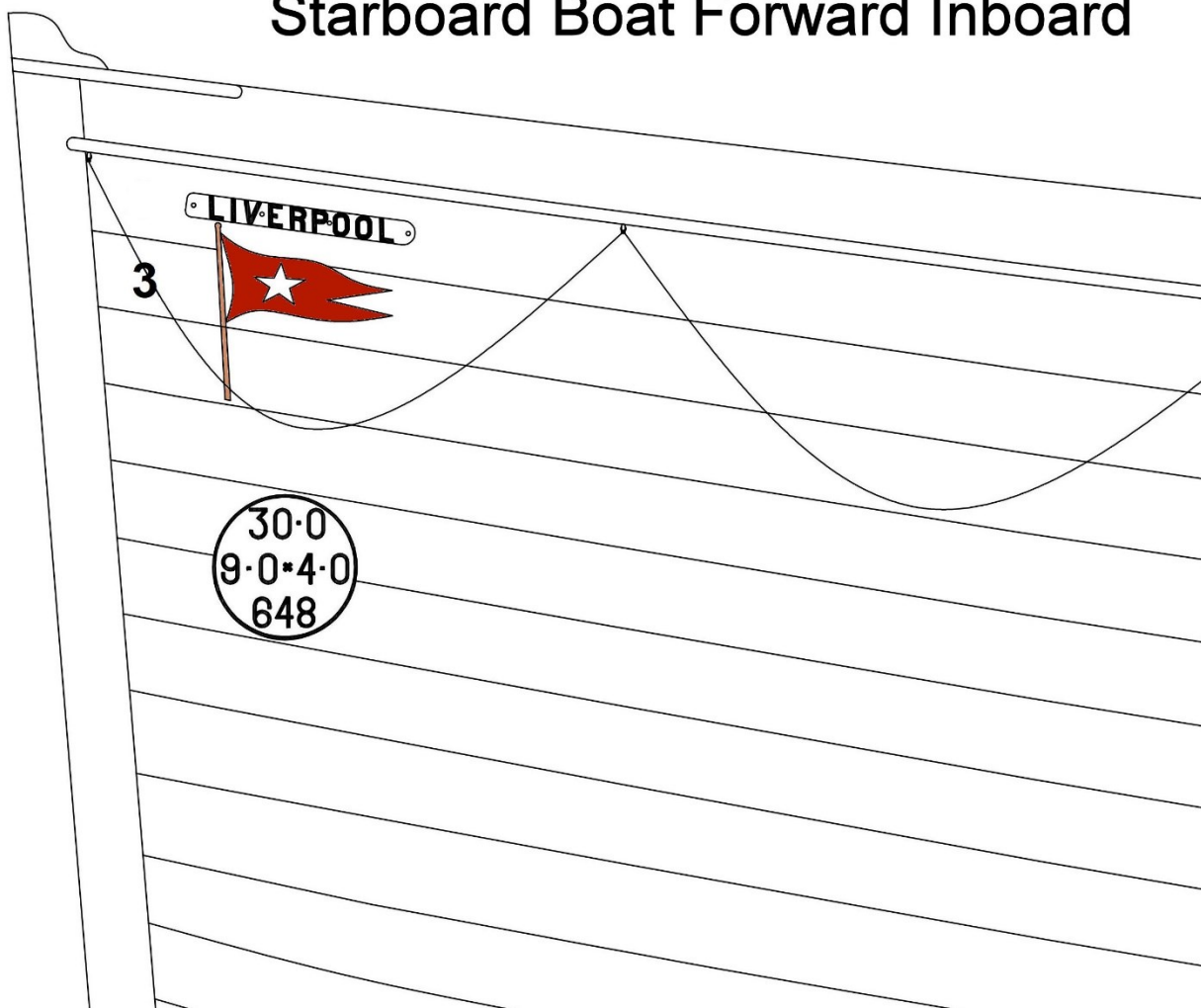


Figure 11

Starboard boat forward inboard

Go to next page

Starboard Boat Aft Inboard

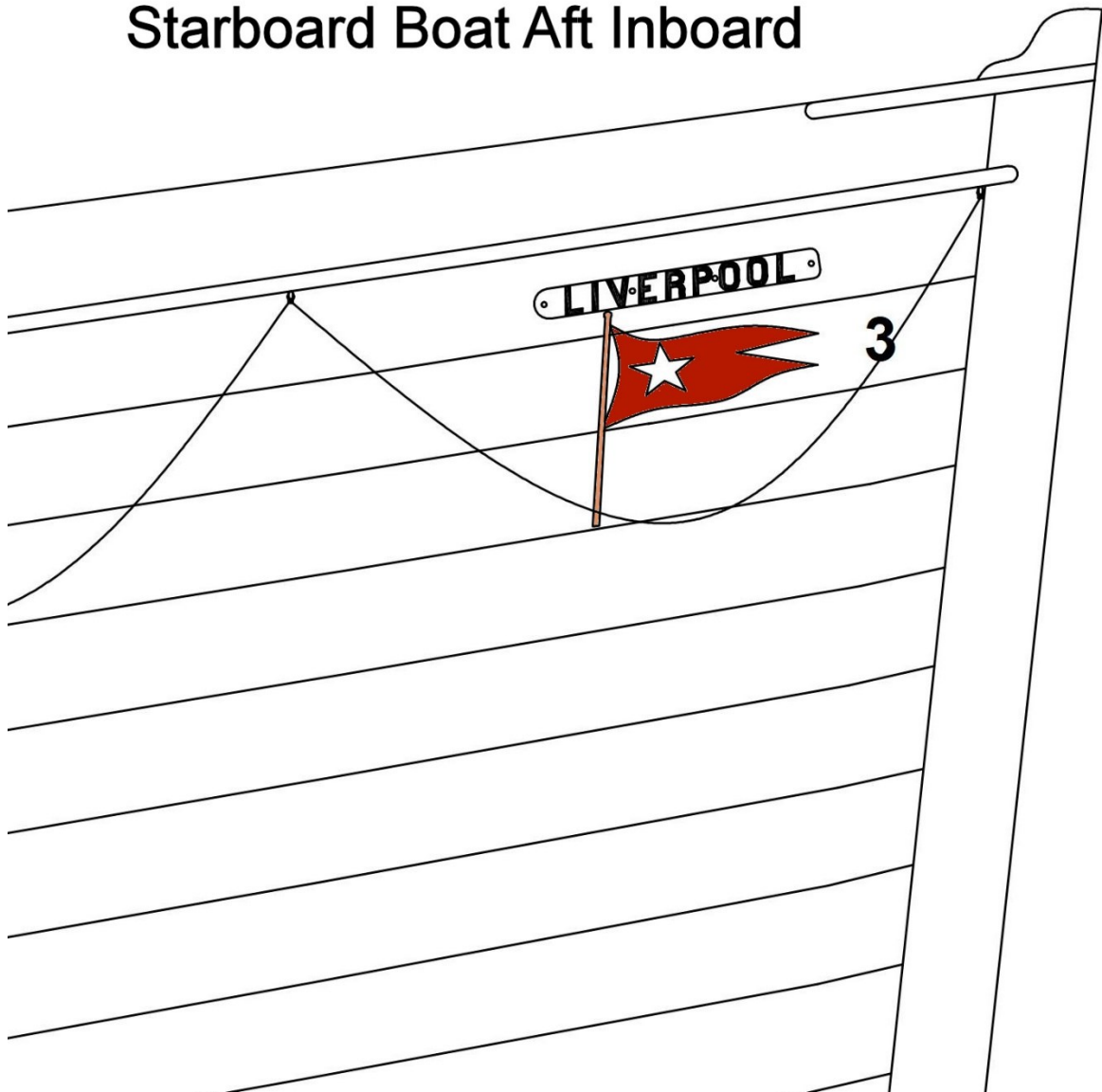


Figure 12

Starboard boat aft inboard