Born into a wealthy and successful family, and orphaned at the age of 12, Gretchen Fiske Longley survived the icy waters of the North Atlantic when the un-sinkable Titanic sank.

Gretchen Fiske Longley

Gretchen Fiske Longley was the original reason that I picked up the genealogical work that my father and grand-father had begun. Having seen her name as a survivor of the Titanic at a Titanic exhibition at the London O2, I was fascinated, and wanted to learn more.

Hudson, Columbia, NY, USA

Hudson is a relatively small city (population a little under 7,000) located on the Western boundary of Columbia County, New York, New York.

The native Mahican people had occupied this territory for hundreds of years before European encounter, preceded by thousands of years of indigenous cultures. Dutch colonists began to settle here in the 17th century, calling it “Claverack Landing”.

After the English took over New Netherlands, this area was settled largely by Quaker New England whalers and merchants hailing primarily from the islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard in Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island. They capitalized on Hudson being at the head of navigation on the Hudson River and developed it as a busy port. Hudson was chartered as a city in 1785, soon after the United States achieved independence from Great Britain.

Hudson grew rapidly and by 1790 was the 24th-largest city in the United States. During the 19th century, considerable industry was developed in Hudson, and the city became known as a factory town. It attracted new waves of immigrants and migrants to industrial jobs. Wealthy factory owners and merchants built fine houses in the Victorian period. Hudson obtained a new charter in 1895. It reached its peak of population in 1930, with 12,337 residents.

As a result of industrial decline, the population has steadily reduced since its peak of over 12,000 in the 1930’s, with much of the economy now based around tourism.

In the late 19th and first half of the 20th century, Hudson became notorious as a centre of vice, especially gambling and prostitution. These rackets were mostly broken up in 1951, after surprise raids of Hudson brothels by New York state troopers.

John Langley (bxxxx)

John Langley was Gretchen’s paternal 3 x Grand-father.

Captain Jonathan Langley (b1754)

Jonathan Langley and Abigail Leathers were Gretchen’s paternal great-great-grand-parents.

Samuel Langley (b1774, d1858)

Samuel Longley and Comfort Chesley were Gretchen Fiske’s paternal great-grand-parents.

Samuel was born and died in Bingham, Maine, USA.
Samuel Munson Langley (b1802, d1874, m Lydia Ann Fisk b1804)

Samuel Munson Langley and Lydia Ann Langley (nee Fiske) were Gretchen Fiske’s paternal grand-parents.

Early life

Samuel was born in Nottingham, New Hampshire, USA at some point in the early 1800s – circa 1803. His parents were Samuel and Comfort Langley (nee Chesley).

His declared age in the various census records shows a birth date of anything between 1802 and 1812. I have currently settled on 1803, based on a report that lists his death in 1874, aged 72. I’m assuming that reporting in later years is more reliable.

At some point, prior to getting married to Lydia Ann, Samuel changes his name to Longley.

Samuel’s profession is recorded generally as a physician, and records show that he was referred to as Dr Samuel Longley.

Life and career

On the 25th April 1828 Samuel Munson Longley marries Lydia Ann Fisk, of Providence, Rhode Island. Lydia Ann is a daughter of Sheldon Fiske.

Providence, Rhode Island is some 160 miles East of Hudson City – not a trivial distance given the era we’re looking at – and some distance south of New Hampshire, where records indicate Samuel was born. I wonder what brought them together.

Their confirmed children were:

- Anne Frances Longley (b1828). Ann marries a Lemuel Hotchkiss, being his second marriage. They raise 3 children.

- John B. Longley (b1836) was one of the most prominent and able lawyers of the Columbia bar for many years, who served twice as district attorney of the county of Columbia, as recorder of the city of Hudson, and for three terms as member of Assembly from one of the districts of Kings county. He practiced law in Brooklyn, New York New York, NY located at 204 Montague. He died on the 30th April 1892 at his home on 413 6th Avenue in Brooklyn, New York, NY.

- Lewis Raymond Longley (b1841) lives only 8 months, passing away in Jul 1842.

- Maria Louisa/ Louise Longley (b1836) marries Henry W Race – a dealer in crockery. They don’t appear to have raised children.

- Louis S/ F Longley (b1844).

- Levi Fiske Longley – (b1846 - more of him later)

- Eugene Ashton Longley (b1848) is a merchant and salesman, who moves to St Louis.

At some point before 1870, Samuel hangs up his stethoscope, and transfers his energies into inventions and inventing, buddying up with another MD.
Doctor Samuel Longley was a man of much mental energy and force of character, who pursued many business and professional enterprises in various sections of the State. A later census record shows his profession as “inventor of labour saving equipment”, and city directories as a machinist.

In 1866 a patent is lodged in the UK for “hoisting apparatus”, alongside Andrew Conkey Getty, and this is reported in the Scientific American publication, Volume 15, Number 15 (October 1866). This is patented in the UK by Alfred Vincent Newton. AVN was the patent agent for Newton and Son.

He is granted three US patents (US41779A, US50607A, and US58849A) – 2 for hoisting apparatus, and one for a railroad joint.

In 1870 a S. M Longley is listed in the city directory as a “machinist” living at 282 Union – being the home of his son Levi Fiske.

In 1871 a Samuel M Longley is listed in the city directory occupation as “machinery” living at 282 Union – being the home of his son Levi Fiske.

Andrew Conkey Getty appears to have been an MD who gained his degree in 1837.

In addition to his patents, he uses his medical background to bring Longley’s Great Western Panacea medicinal compound to the world:

Samuel died at Hudson, Columbia in 1874, at the age of seventy-two years.

Lydia Ann dies at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Henry W. Race, in the city of New York, in 1888, aged eighty-four.

Having looked at various records, the full family is:

Samuel Munson Longley
Lydia Ann (Fiske)
   Anne Frances/ Francis (b1828)
   Levi Fiske Longley (b1846)
   John B (b1836)
   Harriet A (b1837)
   Lydia S (b1839)
   Lewis R (b1841)
   Louis S. F (b1844)

Levi Fiske Longley (b1846, d1902)
Early life

Levi Fiske Longley was born in Hudson, Columbia, NY on the 5th May 1846, the son of Dr Samuel Munson Longley (New Hampshire) and Lydia Ann Fisk (Providence, Rhode Island).

He was the 5th of 6 children, having 2 brothers and 3 sisters.

In his early years young Levi attended the state schools, before age 15 (approximately 1861) he started a 3-year course at Bradbury’s Classical Institute – a renowned preparatory school. The intention was that he would matriculate to Brown University, Providence.

Before commencing studies at Brown, fate intervened and he was offered the opportunity to study law at the offices of Robert Emmett Andrews, circa 1864.

Career and life

Upon reaching the age of majority (approx. 1867), he was admitted to the bar, and 3 days later entered into partnership with the Honourable Theodore Snyder, who was at this time the City Recorder for Hudson.

After Snyder left Hudson City, Levi went into law partnership with his brother John B. Longley - practicing under the name of J. B. and L. F. Longley.

In 1866 Levi was made Deputy County Clerk for Columbia, a post that he occupied until 1876, when he was in receipt of the Democratic nomination for County Clerk – a post that he held for some years.

In 1870 the city directory lists the firm of J. B. and L. F. Longley at 329 Warren.

In 1871 the city directory lists the Levi Fiske (deputy county clerk) at 282 Union.

In 1878 Levi and Lydia Ann are listed as living at 282 Union, with John B (District Attorney) at 208 Warren and living at 280 Union.

After his time as County Clerk, he once again struck up business in New York with his brother John B., practicing under the previous name for 3 years.
When John B. was elected to the assembly from Kings County, the partnership of J. B. and L. F. Longley was dissolved, with Levi returning to Hudson and John B. starting a law practice in Brooklyn, New York, NY.

On the 6th January 1885 he married Mary Deare Andrews, the daughter of his preceptor and partner, in Hudson.

In 1887 the firm of Andrews and Edwards was broken up when the Honourable Samuel Edwards is appointed to the Supreme Court.

In 1888 the firm of Andrews & Longley is formed, and almost immediately Levi takes a senior role in running the business due to the poor health of his business partner.

One child, Gretchen Fiske Longley, was born to them on September 1, 1890.

In 1891 and 1892 Levi holds the position of Mayor of Hudson City.

Nearing the end of his second term as Mayor, and having been married only 8 years, Levi is bereaved when Mary Deare passes away in December 1892 after a short bout of pneumonia.

Under the shadow of the great sorrow that had fallen upon his life, he pressed steadily forward in the path of duty, devoting himself to the care and education of his daughter and to the labours of a constantly widening and increasing practice.

In 1895, Levi is elected as County Judge, a post that he holds for 6 years until 1901.

In the spring of 1902 the firm of Longley & Brownell is formed, though by now Levi’s health is starting to decline.

Passing

In 1902 Levi has been ill for some time, and on Sunday 6th July his health deteriorates rapidly, while at his property overlooking Copake Lake. He finally succumbs to neuralgia of the heart at 01:45 on the morning of Tuesday 8th July 1902, accompanied by his only child, Gretchen Fiske Longley and his sister Maria Louise (Mrs W. Henry Race).

His home overlooking much of Copake Lake was built to his specification, and it seems entirely reasonable to assume that Longley Drive is named after him.

In his will, he appoints his sister-in-law Kornelia T. Andrews as Gretchen’s guardian. This is an understandable decision, given that she is the sister of his wife, and the daughter of his long-time mentor and friend Robert Emmett Andrews. Levi grants $1,000 to his sister Maria Louise, $100 to his sister Ann Francis, $100 to his brother Eugene Ashton, and everything else to his daughter Gretchen.

Children

John B. Longley, who was one of the most prominent and able lawyers of the Columbia bar for many years, who served twice as district attorney of the county of Columbia, as recorder of the city of Hudson, and for three terms as member of Assembly from one of the districts of Kings county, and who died at Brooklyn, New York in 1892

Eugene Ashton Longley - a merchant of St. Louis.

Anne Frances Longley, who marries Lemuel Hotchkiss.

Maria Louisa/ Louise Longley, who marries Henry W. Race, of Albany.
Gretchen Fiske Longley (b1890, d1965)

Early life

Gretchen was born in Hudson, Columbia, NY on the 1st of September 1890, the daughter of Levi Fiske Longley (former mayor of Hudson) and Mary Deare Andrews.

In 1892, when Gretchen was 2, her mother died, so she and her father moved in with her maternal grandparents Robert Emmet Andrews (1819-1901) and Matilda Scudder Fonda (1821-1911) and her extended family in Hudson, New York.

In 1902 her father also now passes away, with his will naming her Aunt Kornelia Andrews as her guardian. Now, as an orphan at the young age of 12, she lived with her grandmother and maternal aunts at 751 Warren Street, Hudson, Colombia, NY - a house that no longer stands.

She was educated at Boston Ladies school. Given the distance from Hudson to Boston, she presumably boarded.

She had brown hair, blue eyes, and at the age of 21, stood five feet eight inches tall.

Titanic

Records from her life indicate that Gretchen enjoyed transatlantic travel throughout her life, as a child with her Aunts, with her husband, and later in life as a widow with her own children.

One of her earliest sea trips was returning home from Europe on the maiden, and only, voyage of the ill-fated White Star Line Titanic.
Interviewed on the opening of the first “Titanic” movie, A Night to Remember” (1958), Gretchen told a reporter that her aunts, Louisa Hogeboom and Kornelia Andrews, had taken her to Europe. After traveling in France and Italy, they booked a first-class return on the maiden voyage of the Titanic.

Aged 24 Gretchen, on the 10th April 1912 the three ladies boarded the Titanic in Cherbourg under ticket number 13502 (£77). Miss Longley occupied cabin D-9. D Deck was located about 10m above the water-line, and while not as expensive as some of the other 1st class decks, still represented significance expense, and provided great opulence.

Shortly after boarding, Gretchen opened a farewell letter when she arrived in her cabin. It was a good wish for every day of the voyage:

- Good weather
- Refreshments
- Every desire
- Tommies to burn
- Chocolate ice-cream
- Heavenly evenings
- Entire meals
- No regrets

The note spells out “Gretchen”.

At 11:45 on the night of April 14, Gretchen was awakened by a terrific crash. In the hall outside her room she found ice crystals, which had come in through a porthole. “No danger,” a steward said, and the women went back to bed. But after midnight, a commotion broke out in the hall.

Her aunt Cornelia was nervous however and it was at her insistence that the trio made their way up to the boat deck.

The women were told to don life preservers “as a precaution.” They topped their nightdresses with fur coats and rushed on deck. The crew was filling lifeboats. The third boat had room for Gretchen, but she refused to go without her aunts. The family left in Lifeboat 10 - the fourth and last lifeboat on that side of the ship.

Lowered 75 feet into the icy water, the women found only one able-bodied seaman in their boat. Gretchen pulled an oar until she was exhausted. At about 2 a.m., they saw the Titanic’s boilers explode. The ship’s lights went out. Then the Titanic broke in two and disappeared. The shrieks were blood curdling, Gretchen said, as more than a thousand people drowned.

About dawn, the RMS Carpathia appeared on the horizon. After seven hours in the water, Gretchen’s lifeboat reached the rescue ship. The women were assisted up the rope ladder – their frozen hands and feet unable to get them to the deck. They had ropes tied around their waists. Fingers and feet frozen, their throats hoarse with cold, the Hudson natives refused a stateroom; other survivors were in even worse shape.

A report in the Allentown Leader dated October 23rd 1913 covers the marriage of Gretchen and Raymond, noting that Gretchen lost $2,500 worth of jewellery, in addition to “valuable Paris gowns”.

Eight days after boarding the Titanic, Gretchen and her aunts reached New York.

What appears clear is that Gretchen survived the sinking largely due presence of mind, resolve, strength and, wealth. The accounts suggest that she was instrumental in rowing the lifeboat, while able-bodied men seemingly declined to do so. Whether this is the case I cannot tell. Her insistence that the Captain shot himself is at odds with other accounts, so it may be that a degree of embellishment has occurred through time and retelling.
Family life

In December 1912, Gretchen and her Aunts hosted a charity ball in aid of the hospital, and a newspaper report describes them as “local social leaders”.

Little more than a year after surviving the world’s worst peace-time maritime disaster, on 21 October 1913 Gretchen married Pennsylvania-born Dr Raymond Sylvester Leopold (b. 21 March 1884). They were married in the Dutch Reformed Church in Hudson, with a reception later at her home. A report notes that Gretchen’s family have been members of this church for generations.

In 1913, whether this is before or after the wedding I don’t know, she sells a property located at 50 Worth Avenue, Hudson. The property is relatively modest and non-descript. I assume that this was as the result of her marriage to Raymond.

Two-and-a-half years after the Titanic disaster, Mrs. Leopold sailed to Bermuda, “just to see if I could do it.”

The couple had three children:

- Gretchen Leopold (1914-2005, later Mrs Robert Hamilton)
- William Leopold (1917-1965)
- Barbara Leopold (1920-2001, later Mrs William Walton)

Gretchen and Raymond move from Hudson to Germantown, Philadelphia, living at 5401 Wayne Avenue – a centrally located detached property.
She was widowed when her husband died on 30 June 1957 and she lost her son William in his early 40s in 1965.

Gretchen had run an antique shop at 8127 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia – now occupied by a toy shop:

She was later a resident of the Emlen Arms, 6733 Emlen Street, Philadelphia – where she had been living since her husband passed away in 1957. This very substantial, brick-built 9 story building was built in 1925, and now provides community housing for older residents. Viewed from the front, it’s a relatively non-descript building, with really only the portico above the main door providing any architectural appeal or interest. That said, it is a substantial building, taking its name from the Emlen family – a notable name in the city.

Passing

The traumatic events aboard Titanic had not dimmed Gretchen’s passion for sea travel, and she continued to travel extensively, crossing the Atlantic no less than 13 further times. Her sea travels read like a who’s who of ocean liners including RMS Baltic (the world’s largest ship until 1905), RMS Mauretania (the world’s largest ship until 1911), RMS Queen Elizabeth, and Titanic (the world’s largest ship at the time of her voyage).
It was on one such trip aboard the SS Constitution that she died peacefully in August 1965, aged 75, in her stateroom on a Mediterranean cruise.

Like many of the other ships on which Gretchen travelled, the SS Constitution was a wonderful vessel. At over 200m in length and powered by 2 steam turbines she had over 1,000 cabins - small by today's leviathan standards. One of the ships most famous guests was Grace Kelly, who was on her way to Monaco with her entourage of over 50 friends and family.

Gretchen was buried alongside her husband in Bala Cynwyd on the 23rd August 1965. Bala Cynwyd is a community on the North-Western fringe of Pennsylvania.

Raymond Sylvester Leopold

Gretchen married Raymond Sylvester Leopold.

Raymond was initially educated at the Allentown schools until he was 15, when he matriculated. He graduated from Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital in the early 1900's, and went into medical practice with his brothers. He had offices at Chelton Avenue and Morris Street, specialising in general surgery, have trained extensively in Germany and France. He was later Chief Pathologist and then executive vice president of Hahnemann.

Hahnemann was established as the Homeopathic Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1848, to provide standardised training in the emerging system of medicine called homeopathy, linked to a foundation in orthodox medical science and practice. It was renamed Hahnemann Medical College in honour of Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathic medicine. By the late 1920s, the homeopathic focus was gone, but the attention to excellent student preparation lived on. Hahnemann became a nationally known academic medical centre and a leading provider of sub-specialty care, particularly for cardiovascular disease.

At this time, medicine would have been a respected and well-paid profession, allowing Gretchen and Raymond to indulge their passion for travel. The Leopold surname appears to have links back to Germany, which, coupled with his surgical training helps explain the frequent trips to Europe. Does this link their residence – being Germantown?

Conclusion

Gretchen was born into a wealthy, successful and respected family with its roots in noble professions including her grand-father as a physician, her father as a lawyer and judge, and her husband a successful and wealthy surgeon.

The above said, it’s not clear that life was always easy for her, despite her apparent wealth. By the age of 12 she was an orphan, and had no siblings – living instead with her Aunts. While I have no doubt that they provided love, support and encouragement, the lack of parental support must have had its impact.

Her continuing transatlantic travels on prestigious ships suggest that her wealth continued, through her marriage presumably.

Although the line from Gretchen continues onwards, the Longley surname is lost through her marriage, carried only by William Longley Leopold (b1917) and then by William Longley Leopold Jr (b1946). I imagine that I might find more Longley references if I look (WLL Jr appeared to have been alive in 2002 in Pennsylvania).

Samuel Munson Longley is from New Hampshire, and given the proximity to Boston, New Netherlands/ New England, a connection back to the UK is almost certain.

The Fiske line appears to hail from Norfolk and Suffolk (UK), so I’m confident that with time I could trace Gretchen’s lineage back to England.
The possibility of a genetic connection is slim, but I like the family and it’s impact on Hudson, Columbia, NY, USA.

Account of Kornelia Andrews

On the night of the disaster, Gretchen and Anna were asleep. Miss Andrews, who had apparently been ill, was reading when the Titanic struck the iceberg. Gretchen, who was awakened by the impact, asked her aunt what happened. Interestingly, Miss Andrews seemed to know without having been told. "We must have struck an iceberg. Go and ask the steward if we are in danger." Gretchen went out three times to ask if there was danger, but was reassured by stewards that everything was fine.

Kornelia did not believe what the stewards were saying so she went out to find their day-steward who informed her that the Titanic was in danger and that they were to report to the boat deck with lifebelts. The ladies dressed, put on fur coats, and headed to the Boat Deck.

Miss Andrews related that the first three boats they tried to enter did not contain room for them. They waited for the fourth boat, which turned out to be lifeboat 10, and were helped aboard. She told of how annoyed she was with many of the crew who were in her boat. 'When we got out on the water,' she said, 'we realized that the crewmen had only claimed they could row only for the purpose of saving themselves. My niece had to take an oar. In a boat alongside of ours, a sailor lighted a cigarette and flung the match carelessly among the women in our boat. We screamed with protest to which he replied, "Ah, we're all going to the devil anyway, and we might as well be cremated now as then."'

In describing the Titanic's final moments, Miss Andrews explained, "We were a mile away from the Titanic when there was a great explosion. It appeared to me as if the boilers had blown up and the Titanic had been lifted up amidships and broken in half. This is the way it appeared to me."

All three ladies were rescued by the Carpathia, and eventually reached their homes in Hudson, New York. Miss Andrews later filed a $480.50 claim against the White Star Line for lost possessions including such items are fur coats, numerous dresses, 3 brass antique lamps and "one velvet hat with ostrich plumes.'