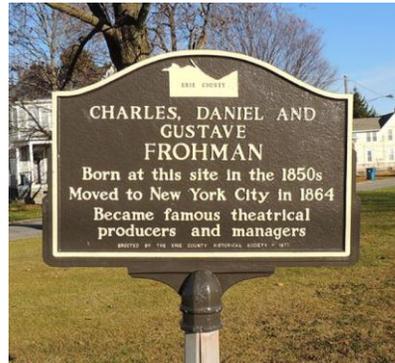


# Famous theater producer from Sandusky died when the Lusitania sank

5/5/2017 5:00 Tom Jackson, Sandusky Register



A historical marker on Poplar Street, near the intersection of West Jefferson Street and Lawrence Street, gives the location of Charles Frohman's birthplace. -- Courtesy Erie County Historical Society

SANDUSKY — The sinking of the ocean liner Lusitania on May 7, 1915, by a German submarine during World War I killed 1,198 people.

Among the dead: Famous theater producer Charles Frohman, a Sandusky native who produced hundreds of shows in New York, London and Boston. When he died, he was a world-famous figure. After he died, funeral services were held for Frohman in New York City. But according to "Charles Frohman: Manager and Man," a 1916 biography of Frohman, services also were held in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Tacoma, Providence and London. Many of the memorials were organized by the actors Frohman had made into stars, such as Maude Adams, John Drew and Billie Burke. (You may not recognize Burke's name, but you've seen her. She was Glinda, the "Good Witch of the North," in "The Wizard of Oz.")

The Sandusky Register ran page one articles about the tragedy 102 years ago today, in the May 8, 1915 issue, under the headline, "ONE THOUSAND THOUGHT LOST WITH LUSITANIA." (See the replica page in today's newspaper.)

Frohman was born on July 15, 1856, in Sandusky, into a Jewish family, the youngest of three brothers (Gustave and Daniel also were in the theater business, and Daniel also was a movie producer). The Frohman family moved to New York City in 1864.

Frohman went to work when he was 12, and began producing plays by 1886. He was the producer for the New York premiere, in 1895, of "The Importance of Being Earnest," by Oscar Wilde. He developed many stars and owned many theaters in the U.S. and in London.

Frohman was horrified by the outbreak of World War I. The British began a naval blockade of Germany, while the Germans used submarines to attack shipping serving Great Britain. On Feb. 4, 1915, Germany declared the waters around Great Britain a war zone and said ships could be sunk without warning.

Every year, Frohman would make a trip to London, and the dangers of the war did not persuade him to cancel his 1915 trip. According to the book "Charles Frohman: Manager and Man," available at the Internet Archive, he refused to listen to friends who told him sailing to England on the cruise liner "Lusitania" wasn't a good idea. When Frohman asked an old friend, Al Hayman, if the trip was dangerous, Hayman said yes, it is. "Well, I am going, anyhow," Frohman said. "Well, Al, if you want to write to me, just address the letter care of the German submarine U 4."

At 2:33 p.m. May 7, within sight of the Irish coast, the Lusitania was hit by a submarine torpedo and sank within a half hour. According to "Charles Frohman: Manager and Man," Frohman, 58, had just finished lunch and was on the upper promenade deck when the explosion rocked the ship. A witness who survived, actress Rita Jolivet, remembered Frohman calmly smoking a cigar.

According to the witness, Frohman remarked, "Why fear death? It is the most beautiful adventure of life." The line is from the play "Peter Pan," one of Frohman's biggest hits. Frohman and three people he was with held hands. When the four were swept overboard, only Jolivet survived. Frohman's body was found the next day and brought to New York.

Actor Dustin Hoffman portrayed Frohman in the 2004 movie, "Finding Netherland." In the movie "Somewhere in Time," actor Christopher Plummer played a character based upon Frohman.