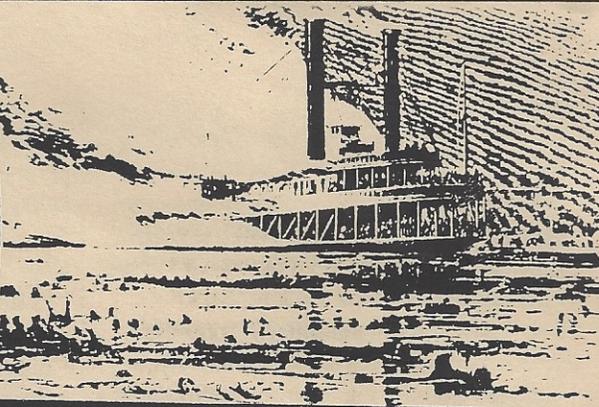


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# SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

WINTER 1997

## To Die in the Icy April Waters: Mississippi River or Atlantic Ocean?

By Gene Eric Salecker

The passengers knew that the April waters would be icy cold but taking to the water might be their only salvation. The vessel they stood on had met with disaster and in a short time would be beneath the water itself. There was not much choice. It was either stay with the vessel and perish, or take to the freezing waters and tempt the hand of fate.

The year: 1865. The vessel: the *Sultana*. Or was it? Perhaps the year was 1912 and perhaps the vessel was the *Titanic*. The above paragraph could be a description of either disaster. Although there are overwhelming differences between the *Sultana* and the *Titanic*, there are enough similarities to raise a few eyebrows. In 1912, when the great ocean liner struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic and went to the bottom, even the survivors of the *Sultana* saw the similarities.

Date and time is very similar in both the loss of the *Sultana* and the sinking of the *Titanic*. As the Toledo (OH) Blade pointed out in the April 27, 1912 edition, "The hour of the accident was also similar, being about 2 o'clock in the morning and both great disasters were in April." The *Sultana's* boilers exploded close to 2 AM on April 27, 1865 and the boat finally burned to the waters edge and sank at about 9 AM. The *RMS Titanic* struck an iceberg at 11:40 PM on April 14, 1912, and went to the bottom at 2:20 AM, April 15, 1865.

Both vessels carried roughly the same amount of people. The *Titanic* carried 2,227 passengers and crew and the *Sultana*

carried between 2,250 and 2,300 people. While the *Titanic* had 705 people saved from a watery grave, initially, approximately 783 people were rescued from the flood waters of the Mississippi. (However, over 200 of those rescued from the *Sultana* would eventually die in Memphis hospitals, leaving only 550 survivors, and a much greater loss of life than the *Titanic*.)

The *Titanic* struck the iceberg largely through the negligence of her skipper, Captain Edward J. Smith. Smith's voyage on the *Titanic* was to be his last; he was to retire when the great ship returned to England. Perhaps wanting to go out in grand style, Smith was pushing the *Titanic* to the limit, racing through the Atlantic at full speed, trying to beat the time spent crossing the ocean by the *Titanic's* sister ship, the *Olympic*. In doing so, he repeatedly ignored or disregarded telegraph messages of icebergs and iceflows until it was too late. Although Smith acted with dignity and bravery as the ship sank, even giving his life in the disaster, he nevertheless must take most of the blame for the sinking of the *Titanic*.

Likewise, the captain of the *Sultana*,

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**More people died in  
the *Sultana* disaster  
than did in the sinking  
of the *Titanic*.**

Captain J. Cass Mason, must shoulder most of the blame for the loss of so many lives on his boat. For almost a year prior to the disaster, Mason had let the *Sultana* fall into disrepair. The boat needed a general overhaul, as is quite evident in the picture of her taken at Helena, Arkansas, and her boilers were badly in need of repair. As over 2,000 paroled prisoners were marched aboard his boat, he stood by and watched, making only a feeble attempt to halt the overcrowding once the decks began to sag and the men began to protest. It was sheer negligence for the safety of all aboard that Mason allowed so many men to be placed on a boat that, even while being loaded, was having a boiler repaired. Additionally, Mason can be held somewhat accountable for allowing the ballast (240,000 pounds of sugar) to be removed from the hold and not replacing it, and for the *Sultana* to be moving at her normal rate of speed against a flood swollen river in spite of her heavy load and ill-repaired boiler.

Like Smith of the *Titanic*, Captain Mason acted with courage and dignity once the boilers exploded. He moved from top deck to bottom deck, helping people out of the wreckage and throwing floatable items into the river to be used by others. And, like Smith, he perished with his vessel.

Another similarity between the two disasters lies with the first rescue vessels to arrive at either scene. The private steamboat *Bostona II* was the first vessel to reach the *Sultana*, arriving while coming down river towards Memphis. Seeing the blazing boat before her, and the water literally filled with human beings, her captain, John T. Watson, gave orders for the engines to be stopped and for all floatable items to be thrown overboard. As the *Bostona II* floated with the current, the crew went

out in rowboats or tossed out lines and eventually rescued more than 150 people. After speeding down river to Memphis to report the disaster and drop off the people he had rescued, Captain Watson turned his boat around and went back up river, eventually rescuing another 100 people. Recognizing his heroics, the United States Congress passed a special act granting Captain Watson \$3,962 for property thrown overboard and lost during his unselfish attempts at rescue.

The first rescue vessel to reach the *Titanic* was the *Carpathia*, commanded by Captain Arthur H. Rostron, when first informed that the *Titanic* was in trouble, the *Carpathia* was about fifty-eight miles away and headed for the warm waters of the Mediterranean. Responding to the urgent plea for help, Captain Rostron posted extra lookouts, turned his ship northwest and began racing towards the *Titanic*. Immediately Rostron ordered the ships' doctors to stand by and readied the dining rooms to be used to handle the rescued. Lines, chair slings and ladders

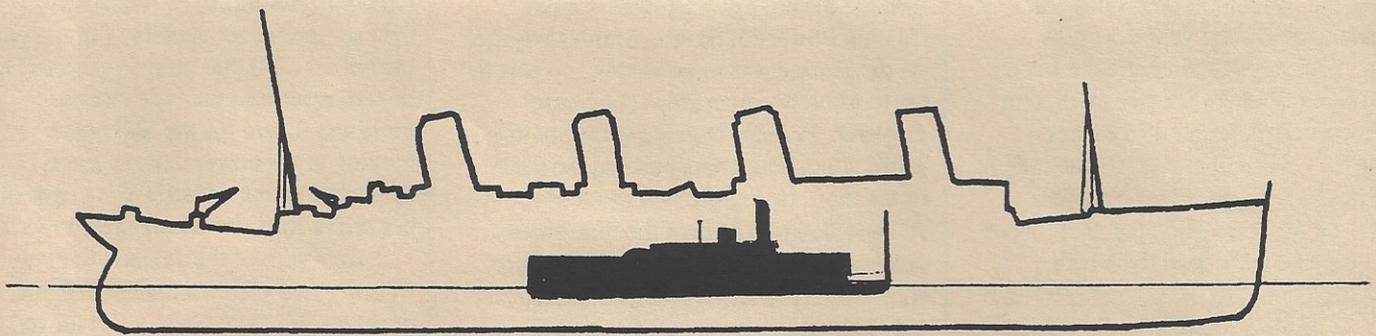
*Carpathia*. In time, as more and more people and businesses contributed, the funds would grow to over \$15,000. Using the money wisely, the survivors presented a silver loving cup to the *Carpathia* and commemorative medals to each one on her crew. Additionally, the United States Congress had a special medal struck and presented to Captain Rostron by President Taft in recognition for his heroic efforts on the morning of April 15, 1912.

It can be said in both cases that the very instant disaster struck, the fate of the vessel was doomed. When the *Sultana's* boilers exploded, the resulting blast tore upward through the decks above, completely disintegrating the pilothouse. Without a pilothouse, the *Sultana* could not be guided towards a friendly river bank, allowing the passengers to jump ashore. With the pilothouse gone, the *Sultana* became a drifting, helpless hulk just waiting to die, and taking hundreds of lives with her.

When the *Titanic* collided with the iceberg, she was dealt a mortal wound. The side plates of the vessel had buckled in six

preventable. Had the boiler of the *Sultana* been repaired correctly, the boat probably would have been delayed in Vicksburg for a few days and the paroled prisoners probably would have been shipped on another boat. Or, had any of the officers in charge of the loading inspected the boat and known about the repairs going on, they may have selected another boat. And, perhaps, even if the *Sultana* had been selected and overcrowded, had her engineers paid a bit more attention to her boilers, using less pressure and more water, the steamer might have reached Cairo, Illinois, without incident, making the *Sultana* live on as the boat that carried the greatest amount of human freight on an American river instead of the greatest maritime disaster in American history.

After the *Sultana's* boilers blew, many of the surviving crewmen and paroled officers suggested that had the men kept their cool and tried to put out the fire before it got out of control, the boat may have been saved and the men



H.M.S. TITANIC - 882' - 0" LONG  
SULTANA - 260' - 0" LONG

were gathered to help bring the rescued aboard, while coffee, soup and blankets were readied to give to the survivors as they came on deck. In short, Rostron did everything in his power to ready the *Carpathia* for what might lie ahead.

Approximately four hours later, the *Carpathia* arrived at the scene of the disaster. Although he had reached the area after the *Titanic* had gone down, Captain Rostron was able to rescue all of the *Titanic* survivors. Almost immediately the survivors began to take up donations to bestow upon Rostron and the crew of the

compartments, allowing the sea water to rush in and drag the boat down by the bow. Had only five compartments been torn open, the *Titanic* might have been able to stay afloat. Out in the middle of the Atlantic, with a gaping hole in her side the *Titanic* came to a dead stop to allow for the lowering of her lifeboats. Like the *Sultana*, she now became a drifting, helpless hulk just waiting to die, and taking hundreds of lives with her.

Another similarity between the two disasters, and perhaps this could be said about most disasters, is that both were

might have been able to stay on the vessel and float down river until being rescued. Understandably however, a great panic seized most of the soldiers when the center of the boat suddenly disintegrated and they immediately sought the safety of the water. And even those men that did not panic could not find the fire buckets; the soldiers had appropriated them to retrieve water from the Mississippi for the coffee and meals.

The sinking of the *Titanic* may have been prevented had the ship's crew heeded the numerous warning of

icebergs and decreased their speed. Even still, it has been suggested that had the *Titanic* hit the berg head on instead of sideswiping it, that the damage to the ship might have been less than fatal. It is doubtful that the damage would have caused the flooding of more than five compartments and she may have been able to limp into New York with a crushed bow and the loss of only a few lives.

Even after scraping the iceberg, very few, if any, lives would have been lost had the *Titanic* carried enough lifeboats for everyone on board. Believe it or not, the original design of the *Titanic* called for the boat to carry sixty-four lifeboats, more than enough to carry everyone on board, but the owners had opted to trim that number down to sixteen (plus and addition four that were collapsible.) Human judgment and the penchant for a sleek, eye-appealing ship would cost the lives of more than 1,500 people.

It is interesting to note that the survivors of the *Sultana* felt a kinship with the survivors of the *Titanic* disaster. At the 1914 reunion of the National *Sultana* Survivors' Association, held in

Toledo, Ohio, the *Sultana* survivors honored the people from the *Titanic* by opening with the song, "Nearer, My God to Thee," the same song that was said to be played by the *Titanic*'s band as the ocean liner sank.

Perhaps more similarities could be found between the two vessels but as was written in the Toledo Blade: "The contrast is almost as striking as the similarit(ies)..." Most notable is the size of the two vessels. The *Titanic* measured 882.5 feet in length and 92.5 feet in width while the *Sultana* was only 260 feet long and 39 feet wide. The *Titanic* stood approximately 235 feet height, from the bottom of her keel to the top of her smoke stacks, and would have been taller than a twenty-three story building while the *Sultana* stood approximately 70 feet tall, or about the height of a seven story building. So, although the *Sultana* was tremendously dwarfed in size by the *Titanic*, both vessels carried roughly the same amount of people. This demonstrates how overcrowded the passengers on the *Sultana* were!

The Toledo Blade also touched on another contrast. "The *Titanic* represented the wealth and pride of the world and carried in its passenger list people of great

wealth who were enjoying the voyage as a pleasure trip. On the other hand the *Sultana* was loaded down with Union soldiers who had been confined in Andersonville and (Cahaba) prisons. Weakened and exhausted from their imprisonment and lack of proper food and shelter they were en route home at the close of the war." When the author of the Blade article wrote this in 1912 (only 47 years after the loss of the *Sultana*), he had no idea that 85 years later the *Sultana* would be a forgotten footnote in history- while every school child in American would be taught the story of the *Titanic*. Because the *Titanic* was the largest ship ever built, the epitome of elegance and glamour, and "carried in its passenger list people of great wealth," its story lives on forever. Because the *Sultana* was a privately owned steamboat, badly in need of repair and overcrowded with recently released prisoners of war (the common men of America) - her story, equally as poignant and unfortunately more devastating than the loss of the *Titanic*, has slipped through the cracks of history. This is a situation that needs to be corrected and, I believe, is slowly being accomplished. ■

## Can Anyone Help Solve this *Sultana* Mystery?

"Please help solve a family mystery. Our family legend tells us that Harvey Annis was a prisoner at Andersonville whose wife and nine-year-old son James Willis Annis came south to meet him upon his release at the end of the war. On their way home on the *Sultana*, Annis, weakened by his treatment in prison, used what strength he had left to see his wife and son safely onto a hatch cover. Unable to maintain his own grip on the hatch, he slipped away and disappeared into the night.

*Sultana* historians say that he was a lieutenant in a Colored Infantry unit (51st or 57th) and that he resigned his commission in New Orleans to return home 'where his presence was required.' According to one historian, he boarded the *Sultana* in Vicksburg, along with his wife and an unnamed small child. No

reference was made to whether or not he had been a prisoner or whether his family had been with him for a while. In this version of the story, both father and child sink into the river. One, source says that Ann's sister, possibly a Mrs. Hoge, also perished.

If James Annis was the child who perished, then I don't exist, as he is my great grandfather. As that is clearly not the case, who is the child with Harvey and Ann Annis who perished?

Would anyone who is familiar with the history and fate of the Annis family or identity of Mrs. Hoge please contact me, Tom Mathews at 3883 Mission court, Oakley, CA 94651, or by E-mail at [Unkletom@aol.com](mailto:Unkletom@aol.com)

Thank you!"

## Places to Visit: The Howard Steamboat Museum

Those of you who are interested in steamboats should stop by the Howard Steamboat Museum the next time you are in the Louisville, Kentucky area.

The museum is located in the mansion built by the Howards of Jeffersonville, Indiana (that's right across the river from Louisville) who were premier steamboat builders during the great Steamboat era and maintained the Howard Ship Yard from 1834-1941. Theirs was the largest inland shipyard in America. The purpose of the museum is to preserve the Howard family story, their mansion and the history of their shipyard, and to communicate an appreciation of the history of the development of Western Rivers steam boats and commerce along the Inland Rivers.

Address: 1101 E. Market St.  
Jeffersonville, IN 47130

REMEMBER

## More on "Sultanas" as Flowers (and Raisins)

Mary Simmons McAlister reminisced for us in the Summer 1996 issue of the newsletter about her mother and aunts planting their Sultanas (*impatiens*) every spring. Descendant Dale Talkington contributed an article written by Loretta Aaron called "Impatiens in Great Demand Among Gardeners" which sheds further light on this subject. Here is an excerpt: "Some of us can still remember when this plant was in short supply, and we called it sultana instead of *impatiens*. The plant was first discovered growing in the eastern regions of equatorial Africa, but was thought to be indigenous to Zanzibar, an island off the coast and a part of the present day Tanzania. It arrived in England in 1896, via the effort of British naturalist, Dr. John Kirk.

Initially, the plant was called *impatiens sultani*, in honor of the Sultan of Zanzibar. In 1950 (the species) was available to gardeners as open pollinated plants and only as a collection of mixed colors. Now we have dwarf varieties and a wide range of colors, and even fully double flowers. The *impatiens* was the leading bedding plant sold during 1994, having surpassed the popular petunia, which held first place for years."

Dale also included this brief item from the Epicurious Dictionary: "Sultana: Originating in Smyrna, Turkey, this small,

pale, golden-green grape was once used to make wine. Today, however, it's primarily cultivated for raisins. Its offspring in the United States is known as the Thompson seedless grape."

**Mark this date:**  
**Saturday, April 26**  
**in Knoxville, TN-**  
**Annual Reunion**  
**of Sultana**  
**Descendants and**  
**Friends.**  
**(More info and map to**  
**follow in the next**  
**newsletter, Spring '97)**

## The Sultana as an Antique Toy

The antique toy in the photo below belongs to descendant Ian Wheeler of Fairfax, VA. (Who is, by the way, the great grandson of the Rev. Chester D. Berry [20th MI Inf.], author of the famous and invaluable "Loss of the Sultana and Reminiscences of Survivors", published in 1892. The last issue of the Sultana Remembered mistakenly represented Ian as a descendant of Capt. Deming Lowrey [115th OH Inf.] ). He purchased it in an antique store out east. It was represented as being built by "one of the owners of the *Sultana* and his young son". They also built a model of the *Luminaria*, and this was sold by the same dealer three days prior to Ian's purchase of the *Sultana* model.



### "THE HONOR ROLL OF THE DEAD"

Continuing the original Sultana Survivors Associations' custom of calling out the names of the *Sultana* soldiers who had passed away since the previous reunion, we carry on by calling out the names of Union soldiers from the great state of Ohio:

2nd Ohio Infantry: John W. Graham, James Allman, James B. Peese, C.G. Russell, William P. Snodgras, Alexander C. Brown, Henry P. Linsted, George M. Long, Irwin M. Bolenbaugh, William F. Clancy. 4th Ohio Infantry: Edward Sorgen. 19th Ohio Infantry: William H. White. 21th Ohio Infantry: Abraham Cassel, John Engle, Phillip Harguard, Nelson M. Uhler, William H. Shively, Levi. G Morgan, Rinaldo Kimmell, Isaac Dunafin, Thomas Forest. 22nd Ohio Infantry: John Davidson, George Murshern. 23rd Ohio Infantry: Gilbert G. Field, William C. Barnes, William Gray. 24th Ohio Infantry: John Babcock. 26th Ohio Infantry: John R. Miller, William G. McClintock. 28th Ohio Infantry: Lewis Koch. 30th Ohio Infantry: Lakins King. 31st Ohio Infantry: Payton Shields. 33rd Ohio Infantry: James B. Lang, William Nelson, Irwin J. Lyman. 34th Ohio Infantry: William H. Sheperd, William Skeon, H. Scott. 37th Ohio Infantry: Adam Baum, William Abeler, Gustave Augenbacke, Frederick Siemer, John Webler, John Hensingier, Conrad Sessler, John Hess. 40th Ohio Infantry: Jacob Edwards, John Kearns. 41st Ohio Infantry: John Gamber. 45th Ohio Infantry: Henry M. Cline, William H. Sands. 46th Ohio Infantry: John Thacker, Loran K Clutter. 47th Ohio Infantry: Jotham W. Maes, Anton Bechtolsheimer, Louis Hesser. 49th Ohio Infantry: John M. Fesler, John Huffey. 50th Ohio Infantry: John Fox, Jr., Alfred E. Price, John Roberts, Perry Haskins, Wilson C. Hunphrey, William M. Morrow.....

to be continued.....

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**BOOK REVIEW**


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**American Diaries:****Emma Eileen Grove, Mississippi, 1865**

by Kathleen Duey.

Aladdin Paperbacks, Pages: 142.

Price: \$3.99

This book is only one in a series of books written for young girls. As stated on the back cover, the diaries are from "different girls, living in different periods of America's past, reveal(ing) their hearts' secrets in the pages of the their diaries."

In short, this is the story of a fictional young girl from Mississippi and her older brother and younger sister who have lived through the horrors of the Civil War only to board the *Sultana* on her last journey, hoping to reach St. Louis and take refuge with relatives. The book opens with Emma confiding in her diary that she is a staunch Confederate and that she despises the thousands of Yankee prisoners that have been placed on the *Sultana* at Vicksburg. With the boat nearing Memphis, the reader follows Emma as she interacts with some of the boat crew and paroled prisoners, moving about the boat from main cabin to boiler room, from bow to stern. When the *Sultana* stops in Memphis, Emma's older brother, Randall, goes into the city while Emma and her young sister, Claire, remain on board. With the coming of darkness, the two young girls go to bed, only to be awakened a few hours later by the explosion of the *Sultana's* boilers. What follows is a fight for survival by the two youngsters amidst the chaos and horror. Will the two girls survive? Did Randall get back on board the *Sultana* and if he did, where is he? Will their friends survive? Will any of the despised Union prisoners help? These are questions that can only be answered by this delightful little book by Kathleen Duey.

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**NEW SUBSCRIBERS**


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- James Swift, 7330 Colgate Ave., St. Louis MO 63130
- Wayne Markland (desc. of John Hawken, 58th OH Inf)  
2328 Sherwood, Toledo, OH 43614
- Robert Harrell, 130 South Hawk Dr. Rainbow Dr., Rainbow City, AL 35906
- Jeannet Routhier, 12186 W. Hill Rd. Swartz Creek, MI 48473-8580
- Mary Lou McKay, 494 Hintz Dr., Owosso, MI 48867-9689
- Jim Johnson, 698 Layne Dr., Dunkirk, IN 47336
- Kenneth Johnson (desc. of Nicholas Won Johnson, 2nd KY Cav, Co H.)  
RRT 1 Box 78, New Harmony, IN 47631-9732

Although there are some mistakes concerning the structure of the boat as Emma moves about from deck to deck, this is really a very good book. The author, Kathleen Duey, is the treat granddaughter of a *Sultana* survivor, Sgt. Andrew Thomas Peery, Co. B. 3rd Tennessee Cavalry, and does a good job of bring the terror of the *Sultana* disaster to life. All of the panic and confusion is there., There is, naturally, an antagonist, but Ms. Duey makes him a Mississippi riverboat gambler instead of one of the soldiers of crewmen. All in all this is a very delightful book that, although meant for young readers, adults will find worthwhile reading as well.

It was nice to find this book on the shelf of my local bookstore. If the story of the *Sultana* can be made more public, perhaps a greater amount of people will finally give the disaster the interest it deserves. Young people are very impressionable and if the story of the *Sultana* can be impressed upon people at a young age, we can be assured that the story of this historical event will live on forever. Let us hope that more and more people will work the *Sultana* into their manuscripts, whether fact or fiction, and bring the *Sultana* to her rightful place in the annals of history. I recommend you read this delightful little book!

-GENE ERIC SALECKER

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**FROM THE EDITOR**


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I continue to hear from descendants and persons interested in the *Sultana* via "snail mail" and E-mail. The latest letter came from an eighth grade American History class in Traer, Iowa which is entering a project on the *Sultana* in the National History Day competition. They have requested my help in locating primary sources, etc. which I will be glad to give. The word is out!

As I write this in a middle of a snow-storm, my thoughts turn to beautiful Tennessee in April. See you at the annual reunion!

-PAM NEWHOUSE

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**FROM NORMAN SHAW**


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It is hard to comprehend that this April will be our 10th annual *Sultana* members meeting. Many of you will remember gathering around the *Sultana* monument in the cemetery of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in south Knoxville at 2 PM after reading Fred Brown's article that Sunday morning in the Knoxville News Sentinel about Si Keeble, the living son of a *Sultana* survivor, Pleasant Keeble. At my request, Fred had included an invitation to everyone interested in starting a *Sultana* organization to meet at the monument. Much to my surprise and delight, about 40 people showed up.

Speaking of Fred Brown- I am going to ask him to speak to us this April about the intriguing fictional book based on the *Sultana* disaster which he has recently written. I hope he will give us some details and read us excerpts from it. Also, it would be fitting to have him there since we could have not gotten the great start that we did in 1897 without his help, nor had the wonderful turnout that we had last year without his newspaper coverage.

I also want to do something else special to commemorate our 10th year together. I have had several people over the years tell me that the name of their *Sultana* ancestor was somehow left off this Mt. Olive Cemetery *Sultana* monument (which is only large enough to contain the names of the Tennessee troops). You might remember a few years ago when we had the monument cleaned that we also added the name of Jesse Huffaker, the father of Elsie Huffaker who currently lives in Knoxville. I am requesting that you contact me as soon as possible after you read this if your ancestor's name does not appear on the *Sultana* monument and you would like to have it added. (I remember the cost being reasonable, but I will get a price update). With the permission of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, I plan to hire a qualified company to chisel these names on the monument which we will recognize in a special ceremony (hopefully with some Union reenactors) at 11 AM on Saturday, April 26th. Write me at 1120 Winding Way Drive, Knoxville, TN 37923 or call me at (423) 450-9295 (w) or (423) 693-9544 (h).

Let's have another spectacular crowd and a wonderful time at our 10th annual meeting of descendants and friends!