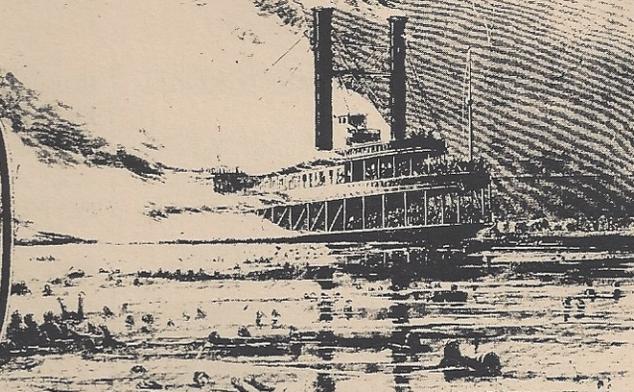


the SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

SPRING 2002

Indianapolis Newspaper Coverage of the Sultana Disaster

By Robert R. Smith

Much has been written about the lack of newspaper coverage of the Sultana disaster. Some accounts say the event was virtually ignored by the press. Curious as to how the press in my city performed, I decided to research the kind of coverage the Sultana received in Indianapolis, Indiana, home of my Great great grandfather, Pvt. John H. King, 9th Indiana Cavalry, Co. F, who survived the disaster.

In April of 1865 there were at least three newspapers in circulation here: the *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, the *Daily State Sentinel*, and the *Indianapolis Daily Evening Gazette*.

The *Daily Gazette* was a short-lived newspaper which began publication on December 29, 1862 and lasted until March 9, 1867. The daily paper (no Sunday edition) was four pages long and sold for five cents. I found it puzzling why the paper went out of business since at least fifty percent of the newspaper seemed to be advertisements. There were ads for the "New Spring Style Hoop Skirts of 1865", ads for several hotels in Cincinnati, Louisville, and Indianapolis, as well as for Glens Block, on South Washington Street (Washington Street now runs east and west) which was billed as the "New York Store" and "Headquarters for Dry Goods in the State of Indiana" Also, there were the usual "cure-all" ads such as "Dr. Seeley's Liquid Catarrh Remedy," telling readers "Cure is warranted if directions are followed." (Catarrh is an old term for inflammation of the mucous membranes of the nose and throat from colds or allergies.)

The story of the Sultana was first published in the *Gazette* on April 29, 1865, two days after the event. The headline

stories for Volume 3, Edition No. 101 of the *Gazette* listed the following stories on page one:

- Rebel Ship "Webb" Blown Up By Crew
- Johnston Surrenders
- Investigation of Assassination Plot
- The Flight of Jeff Davis
- Secretary of State Frederick Seward Recovering from Broken Jaw
- Lincoln's Funeral Train

I found the story of the Sultana disaster about halfway down on page 3 of the paper, flanked by ads on both sides. The story was part of a column on other national news including the Proclamation by newly sworn in President Andrew Johnson that "Thursday, the 25th of next month (May) was recommended as a day for humiliation and prayer in consequence of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, late President of the United States."

The Sultana story immediately preceded this item and was titled, "Terrible Steam Boat Explosion." It was presented as two separate items. The first was the original dispatch and listed the source and date as St. Louis, April 28. It was a two sentence story

All three papers carried the story, two of them putting limited information on page 3, and did not do a follow up story.

which stated:

"A telegram received by the military authorities from New Madrid* states that the steamer Sultana, with two thousand paroled prisoners on board had exploded. Fourteen hundred lives are reportedly lost.."

Following this first paragraph, a second story sub-titled "Second Dispatch" listed Memphis, April 28, as the source and date. It stated:

"The steamer Sultana which left New Orleans on the evening of the 21st, arrived at Vicksburg with boilers leaking badly. She remained there three hours, repairing and taking on board 1,966 Federal soldiers and 35 officers, recently released from Cahawba** and Andersonville prisons. She arrived in Memphis last evening and after cooling off, proceeded about 2am.

When seven miles (out), about 3 o'clock, she blew up, immediately taking fire and burning to the water's edge. Of the 2,145 souls on board not more than 700 have been rescued. Of the rescued, 510 are now in the hospitals, and two or three hundred of the injured are at the soldiers' home. Capt. Mason of the Sultana is supposed to have been lost. This morning, the river in front of Memphis is overcrowded with soldiers struggling for life, many badly scalded. Boats went immediately to their rescue, and are now engaged in picking them up. General Washburne immediately organized a board of Officers to investigate the affair, and they are now at work

* New Madrid, Missouri, is approximately three hours south of St. Louis and 2 hours north of Memphis, located in the area where Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri borders meet.

** The original spelling of Cahaba

doing so. No further particulars have been received."

There was no other coverage of follow up storied in the *Gazette* after these initial articles on April 29, 1865.

The *Daily Indiana Sentinel*

The *Sentinel*, another four page daily, published its first edition on July 21, 1841. It remained under that name until February 1906 when it merged with the *Indianapolis Star*. The *Star* is still in business and is the only major newspaper in the city of Indianapolis.

The *Sentinel* did not report the Sultana disaster until May 2, 1865, five days after the event, but had a little more information than the *Gazette* story on the 29th of April. On page three of the *Sentinel* was a column titled "Telegraphic Dispatches," then sub-headed "Latest War News." The column began with a list of headline stories, which included three of the same general news stories featured in the April 29 edition of the *Evening Gazette*. The *Sentinel's* matching headlines included: "Destruction of the Rebel Ram Webb," "The Policy of the New President" and "Progress on the Funeral Cortege." Other headlines were "Interesting Southern News," "The Reception at Chicago." "Later from New Orleans," and "The Sultana Disaster." About halfway down page three was the ten sentence Sultana article which read as follows:

"From St. Louis: St. Louis, May 1, - Hon. John Corode, of the war committee, furnishes the following information relative to the Sultana disaster. No troops from states east of Ohio were lost, all eastern troops being sent to Annapolis. The boat was overloaded, the registered capacity being 376. Other good boats were at Vicksburg at the same time, but the authorities would not let them have prisoners. He thinks there is criminality in the matter. About two thousand prisoners were at Vicksburg when the Sultana left. Three thousand were left at Andersonville, in consequence of the railroad being destroyed between Andersonville and Jackson. They go to Annapolis by way of sea. The Sultana's agent writes that near 1,700 persons were lost by the disaster. No report lists the loss less than 1,400 or 1,500."

Another sentence immediately followed the Sultana story which apparently was the only other news from St. Louis

that the *Sentinel* deemed worthy of printing. It stated, "Thomas J. Thorpe, a guerilla, was hung today." There was no other coverage of follow up stories after this initial article of May 2.

There were some local news items in the May 2 edition of the *Sentinel*; one of curiosity and the others, a telling of the times:

"City Items: It was a strange coincidence that the same horses that drew the coach that contained Mr. Lincoln when he passed through this city four years ago should draw the funeral car containing his coffin, on the 20th.....

...The decorations across Washington Street have been the cause of three or four runaways, and should either be festooned up or else taken down. They hang so low that they all but reach the heads of the horses, and flapping in the wind, scare them....

...John Turner, Levi Stultz, Jackson Lancerson, Edward Riley, and Patrick Dowd were each fined two dollars and costs for being drunk yesterday by the Mayor.....

Indianapolis Daily Journal

The paper that gave the Sultana explosion the best coverage was this four page daily paper which began June 4, 1823 as *The Western Censor & Emigrant Guide* then changed its name to *The Indiana Journal* in 1825. It remained an Indianapolis fixture until it was absorbed by the *Indianapolis Star* in 1904.

The Sultana story made page one of the *Journal* in Volume XIV, Number 258, on April 29, 1865. Under a column of headlines title "By Telegraph," the top stories were listed as "Johnston Surrenders to Sherman," "Washington Matters," "the Conspiracy and National Affairs." and "The Funeral Cortege at Cleveland." It also included a double headline which said "Terrible Steamboat Explosion, Fourteen Hundred Lives Lost." The information in this article was, for all practical purposes, buried in the middle of page 3. The few discrepancies between the articles are a sub headline under "Terrible Steamboat Explosion" which read "Steamer Sultana Blown Up- Fourteen Hundred Lives Lost." A minor bit of editing was done to the lead sentence of the story by one of the papers. Without the actual telegraph message it is unknown which one changed the sentence. The *Gazette* said, "The steamer Sultana, which left New Orleans on the evening of the 21st..." The *Journal* printed " the

steamer Sultana, from New Orleans, on the evening of the 21st..." later in the article, the *Gazette* lists the number of troops on board as "2,145" while the *Journal* said "2,148." The discrepancy is most likely due to a typo or a misreading of the information.

The *Indianapolis Daily Journal* was the only paper of the three dailies to do a follow-up story. On April 30, the day following the first article, the Sultana again made page one. The three sentence article gave no information on the particulars of the boat or the explosion, but did update their readers on the status of the troops under a column titled "Postscripts.":

"Sultana Disaster. Cairo, April 29.- Some eighty-six of those aboard the ill fated Sultana have been found. The number lost is estimated at 1500. The Memphis hospitals are full of wounded from Sultana, many being badly scalded."

In conclusion, I'd say that although the three papers didn't carry many details of the Sultana disaster initially, they did a fair job of informing their readers quickly of the event. There are some considerations: The explosion and burning of steamboats at the time in history was quite common, and this explosion might have been regarded as just another incident among many.. However, had the editors realized that 352 of the men on board were from Indiana, chances are there would have been more coverage and certainly great concern on the part of the readers whose loved ones were known to be heading home from Andersonville and Cahaba prisons.

We must remember that the papers were filled with lengthy articles on President Lincoln's assassination, the capture and shooting of John Wilkes Booth, the search for conspirators, the progress of Lincoln's funeral train, and the last battles of civil war. If other papers covered the Sultana disaster as the Indianapolis papers did, I think we can say that the event was not purposely ignored, but was instead merely lost in the turmoil of the times.

- Robert R, Smith
Fishers, Indiana

Vicksburg Reunion Details

As many of you know, the 2002 Association of Descendants and Friends reunion will be held in Vicksburg, Mississippi April 26-28. We have asked those interested to sign up, and you did-- 102 of you! That's two busloads for the Sultana Saturday Bus Tour led by Sultana authors Gene Salecker and Jerry Potter. We can accommodate no more on the tour or at the Biscuit Cafe for lunch. However, if you still want to come you can attend the Saturday night banquet program by contacting Charles Dawkins (email: cfdawkins@webtv.net, or phone (601)264-9668; address, 13 Melrose Circle, Hattiesburg, MS 39402). After that time those not signed up can still attend the post-banquet program at the Battlefield Inn beginning at about 8PM-- just show up!

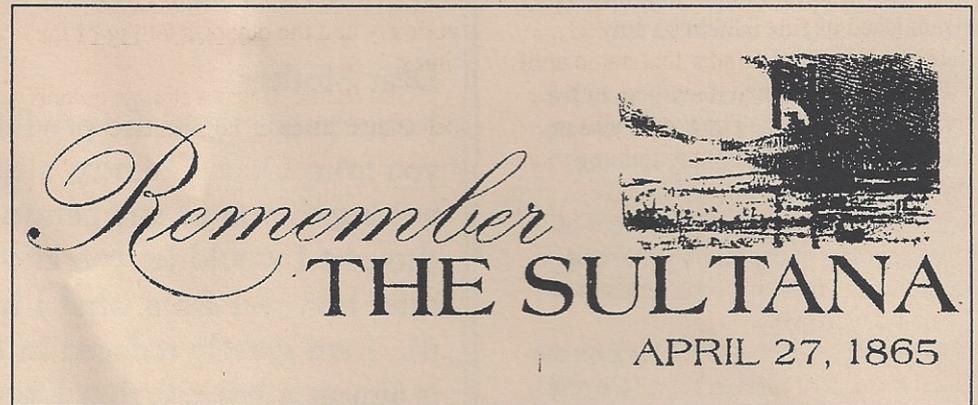
By the way, the Battlefield Inn, our headquarters, is full, but there may still be rooms at the Hampton Inn, Motel 6, or other places in town.

The dedication of the State of Mississippi historic plaque commemorating the Sultana (10 AM, Saturday, April 27th) is also open to all, of course. It will be held at the Mississippi River at the foot of Grove Street (check your Vicksburg map).

If you are not signed up for the bus tour Saturday afternoon you can follow behind in your vehicle and join us when we get out at the Old Courthouse Museum, the site of Camp Fisk, the site of the old train depot, and at Frederic Speed's grave.

Here are some schedule details: When you arrive in Vicksburg and get settled in, come to the Jefferson Davis Room at the Battlefield Inn.. (If the weather is nice, we may gather around on the terrace around the pool.) On Friday from 3PM on Charles and Della, Larry and I will be giving out nametags, and for those who have pre-paid, vouchers for the bus tour and lunch. A representative from the Vicksburg Visitor Center will be there to give you related materials and answer questions about the area. And at this point, if you haven't already, you may want to make an appointment with Mike Marshall to be interviewed for a new upcoming Sultana documentary (see article by Mike on page 5).

Also available at check -in will be "Remember the Sultana" T-shirts and tote bags for \$10 each (in "wheat or "natural", with brown printing). I hope to see these tees and totes all over Vicksburg that weekend- we need to let everyone know about the Sultana! If any of these are left after the reunion I will sell them via mail order - details in the next newsletter- or you can contact me after the reunion (CW1865@aol.com or, 4081 Clark Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48105). The logo is below.



Friday dinner will be on your own. The Battlefield Inn has a good restaurant, and there are many others in the area. (Check the last newsletter for ideas)

At 7 PM everyone who is in town should come to the Jefferson Davis Room with their Sultana-related items for display. This means photos, scrapbooks, artifacts etc. We will have tables set up for this purpose. But please take your items back to your room with you for safekeeping when you turn in for the night-- and bring them back to the tables before the banquet in the adjoining Mississippi Room Saturday night.

At past reunions we have seen some wonderful things on display, including diaries of soldier passengers, and a grapevine cane used by a survivor to help him walk home to eastern Tennessee from Memphis. So bring whatever you have!

The Hartford Steamboat Boiler Inspection & Insurance Company has graciously sent us 40 of their dwindling supply of the print of the burning Sultana - original watercolor is by Andy Yelnick. This is the one people are always asking about - where to buy it? The image is 16" by 22", suitable for framing. Hartford Boiler had it reprinted and unfortunately, they are nearly gone again, with no plans to reprint. This is the one I use in all my Sultana lectures. They are \$10. I will be selling these both Friday and Saturday. Also for sale will be back issues of this newsletter, and Jack Lundquist will have sample repros of Chester Berry's 1892 book, "Loss of the Sultana and Reminiscences of Survivors.", Sultana registers and manifests, plus others. He will have order forms available. His wife Carol is his research partner, and is a descendant of Daniel Garber, 102nd OH Inf.

Also for sale will be Gene Salecker's book, "Disaster on the Mississippi," which Gene will be happy to autograph for you.

Linda Derry, Tommy Coleman, and Don Harvell will be on hand with a display about Cahaba Prison- then and now.

All of the above will again be set up for you on Saturday, after the banquet.. As well as all the items that you as descendants will bring to share.

On Saturday morning, April 27th, the 138th anniversary of the demise of the Sultana, those who have signed up for the Bus Tour should meet the buses (2) at the main entrance of the Battlefield Inn by 9:30 AM, after breakfast. We need to be at the riverfront by 10AM. We will go, rain or shine, so plan/dress accordingly! There will be a small number of chairs set up at the site- which is not very large- please leave these for those who really need them. The rest of us will be standing for the 40-45 minute ceremony.

Afterward, you can either walk up the steep one-block hill to Washington Street, or ride up on the buses.

There should be time to go in a few of the shops/places mentioned in last month's newsletter before the 1st seating for lunch (11:30-12:15) at the Biscuit Company Cafe. While the first group is eating, the rest can continue to visit the area shops, especially the

Gray and Blue Naval Museum run by Lamar Roberts, who was instrumental in getting our group to come to Vicksburg. The cost of entry to his museum has been prepaid as part of your bus tour. And I hope you all will tell Lamar "Thank you!" when you meet him for all the work he has done to help us remember the Sultana.

At 12:15 the 2nd group will go in for lunch while the others visit the museum and shops. (I am particularly looking forward to visiting Buford's [1305 Washington St.] to purchase a piece of "blue bayou" pottery unique to Mississippi, created by the Woods brothers of Mound Bayou, MS).

At 1 PM we should all be back on the buses as we continue our tour. We will arrive back at the Battlefield Inn between 4:30 and 5 PM, giving you some time before the Banquet begins at 7PM. Again, be sure to bring your Sultana items for display that night as you come to dinner! After our program, which will start around 8PM and end an hour or so later, we will informally gather in the adjoining Jefferson Davis Room to visit and look at the displays.

Sunday morning after breakfast is check out time. If you have made a Sunday interview appointment with River Rock Entertainment, you will be staying a bit longer. This day would also be an excellent day to visit the Vicksburg National Military Park which surrounds the city.

Larry and I will be leaving after breakfast for Natchez with Charles and Della Dawkins.

I can't wait to see you all!

-Pam Newhouse, Reunion Co-Chair and Gr gr granddaughter of Pvt. Adam Schneider, 183rd OH Inf; died on the Sultana.

Directions to the Vicksburg Battlefield Inn:

Take the Clay Street/Downtown Vicksburg exit off Interstate 20. The Battlefield Inn will be on the service road to the right and the Hampton Inn will be on the service road to the left.

A Letter Home from Vicksburg

Parole Camp near Vicksburg, Mississippi *
March the 17th AD 1865

Dear Mother

I once more have the privilege of addressing a few lines to you from Gods Country, although I feel but little like writing to you or any person on account of poor health I thought I would let you know I was yet alive. Do not infer however from what I have said that I am dangerously ill. I am greatly reduced in flesh and am very weak But it is almost a miracle that I am not dead, but I am not going to enter into a detail of particulars. Suffice it to say that 24 hundred of us have been penned up in an old cotton factory** about 100 feet wide by 200 feet long with a mud floor about half under roof and half no roof but the sky and it nearly all the time cloudy. We would doubtless have been there yet had not the Alabama river rose so high that the rebs were obliged to move us or have us all drowned about one week before we left the water commenced to come into the prison and for three days and nights previous to our leaveing we had to stand in from two to four feet of water there was 800 of us left on the 6th inst and after traveling by boat or railroad and on foot a distance of 800 miles we arrived here last night we were paroled at Jackson three days the 16 hundred that we left in prison are supposed to be Somewhere on the road. What disposition will be made of us now is not known but I think we will be furloughed home. there was 19 of Co. A, 102 in the prison and there is only four of us here yet. give yourselves no uneasiness on my account for I hope to See you all in a short time You need not write to me until you hear from me again which will be in a few days if things go right tell Bob I have not forgotten him and will write him soon.

your Son, B.F. Wade

Sgt. Benjamin Wade was in Co A., 102nd Ohio Infantry. He died on the Sultana. (Letter from the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville)

* Camp Fisk, just outside of Vicksburg
** Cahaba Prison, near Selma, Alabama

New Sultana Documentary: Sign Up to Participate

Greetings to the members of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends. My name is Mike Marshall. Although I am not a descendant of anyone aboard the Sultana that terrible night in April of 1865, the story of her demise and the fate of her passengers and crew has totally captivated me. I wasn't even aware of this piece of our history until browsing in the bookstore at Andersonville last July. I'm sure a number of patrons were inconvenienced as I stood rooted to the middle of the floor, oblivious to the traffic around me, reading about the Sultana in William O. Bryant's book, *Cahaba Prison and the Sultana Disaster*. Since that time, my education on this subject has been furthered by Gene Salecker, Jerry Potter, Pam Newhouse, and many others who have unselfishly shared their knowledge of the Sultana through books and/or personal conversations.

When I told Pam of my interest in producing a video documentary about the Sultana, she kindly invited the submission of this article to the newsletter with the hope of securing the help of those within the Association. I am aware that there is already an excellent video by the History Channel on the market. I have also been told that at least two other production companies are working on projects about the Sultana. I envision our documentary a little differently than those already available or in the works, however. To me, the true story of this tragic event rests not so much with the ship as with its passengers and crew. The eye-witness accounts of these folks are prime examples of all that makes us human. I find myself alternately grieving with the tragedy of those who perished and rejoicing over the survivor's triumphant spirit of perseverance and courage. At no time in our history as a nation have we needed the lessons of the Sultana more than we do today.

My brother, Mark, and I own a very small media production company. It is our desire to produce quality historical documentaries that are both educational and entertaining. We will be attending the reunion in Vicksburg, and would like to interview, on camera, any members of the Association who would be willing to share their story. We are particularly interested in those who are descendants of civilians, soldiers, or crew members, but we would be happy to talk to anyone who feels a bond with the Sultana. Most of our interviews are simple, one-on-one situations where we ask a few questions but mainly allow you to share whatever information you deem appropriate. We plan on arriving at the Battlefield Inn shortly after lunch on Friday, April 26 and we will be staying through Sunday night, April 28. We would like to schedule one half hour interviews from 2PM to 9 PM on Friday, with a break for the 5:00-7:00 PM informal gathering at the Inn, and also on Sunday, from 10AM-9PM, with an hour and a half break for lunch at noon. We have reserved two hotel rooms at the Battlefield Inn, one which will be used for the taping and interviews.

Thank you for this opportunity to share the project with you. Please feel free to contact us to set up an appointment by any of the following methods:

Regular mail: River Rock Entertainment, LLC
114 E. Broadway Suite 915
Enid, OK 73701-4126

Telephone: (580) 242-7487 office
(580) 402-2295 cellular

FAX: (580) 242-7487 (if the answering machine picks up, push "send" on your fax machine at any time during the recorded message).

E-mail: riverrockent@sbcglobal.net
mkmarshall@prodigy.net
RiverRockEnt@aol.com

A "real son and daughter" coming to the Reunion

I am delighted to tell you that attending our reunion will be Bob Warner, whose father was William C. Warner, 9th Indiana Cavalry, Co. C, survivor of the Sultana disaster, and Glenna Greene, daughter of Samuel Washington Jenkins, Co. I, 3rd. Tennessee Cavalry, also a survivor. They are delightful people whom I know you all will enjoy talking to and hearing about their fathers. Both have been regular attendees of our reunions, and we are so glad they are coming to Vicksburg!

JOSEPH HENRY COLLINS

He was my great, great grandfather
On my mother's side.
He didn't say, "It's too much bother."
And didn't run and hide.

He felt his country needed him
And joined the cavalry.
The outlook at that time was grim,
Cause states could not agree.

He could have stayed at home I know,
For he was no spring chicken.
But he felt that he had to go
Help give the Rebs a lickin'.

His bunch fought Bedford Forest's men
In Alabama state.
But that fight wasn't theirs to win
And prison was their fate.

They lingered at Cahaba's camp,
And some died from disease.
The lodgings there were cold and damp.
Sometimes enough to freeze.

At war's end they went aboard
A boat much overloaded.
Sultana, as her engines roared,
Suddenly exploded.

Many died on the Mississipp',
And that is very sad.
Don't e'er let us forget that ship,
Or my great, great granddad.

-Gene Shields,
Gr gr grandson of Joseph H. Collins,
3rd Tennessee Cavalry, Co. G