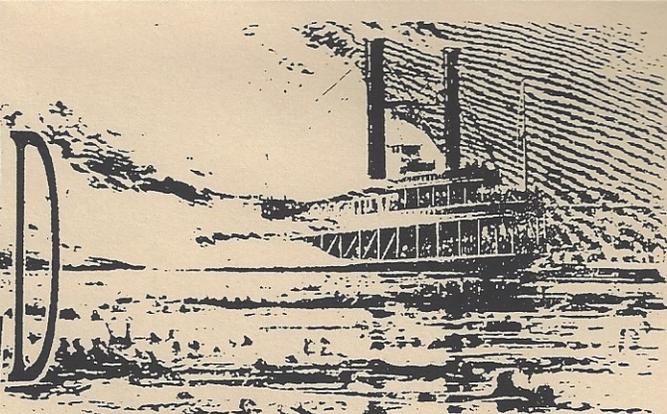


the SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

SUMMER 1997

The Story of Lt. Elbert Squire, 101st Ohio Infantry

In 1886, Sultana survivor Elbert Squire sat down and wrote, at the request of Mr. L. Day, his account of being captured by Confederate guerrillas on January 17, 1865, held a prisoner at Cahaba, and the ordeal of being on the Sultana the night of the disaster. Mr. Day included the memoir in his book History of the 101st OVI, published around 1890. It was submitted to me by Squire's great-great granddaughter Judy Jones of Apple Valley, CA. What follows is the last part of Mr. Squire's story. -Ed.

We reached Selma towards evening and were placed in a second story room of a brick (?) block. As soon as we entered we were greeted by cries from the older inmates of "Fresh Fish, Fresh Fish" Here we staid two days. The room contained nothing but prisoners. The windows were boarded so that it was impossible to see out. It was warmed by an open fire built of wood placed on a frame filled with earth. The smoke, like ourselves, was a prisoner, its only means of escape being the opening between the boards at the windows. The only way we could endure it at times was by lying flat on the floor. Here we staid as I said before, two days and then we took a steamer for Cahabaw which was distant across country about 12 miles but about 20 miles by river. There at the junction of the Cahabaw and Alabama Rivers, was located a prison pen containing about 3000 Union prisoners.

After reaching Cahaba, we were taken to the office of Captain Jones, Comman-

dant of the prison, the proper records were made, my comrades were conducted to the prison pen, and I was paroled in an upper room of a business block---minus the business.* My parole gave me the liberty of two squares of the village, the privilege to converse with many of the citizens for the purpose of barter, and to go to the office to make necessary inquiries. Some 70 officer prisoners who had formerly occupied these quarters had been sent a few days previously to Andersonville leaving but two Union officers here---one of these a Lt. Phillips, 2nd New Jersey Cavalry who was in the hospital suffering from a wound, and

*The fact that Squires was an officer entitled him to be incarcerated separately from the enlisted men held in the prison stockade on the banks of the river. -Ed.

"The foregoing is a detailed account of my capture, prison life, and the Sultana affair. I regret my inability to describe those in a more interesting manner."

Elbert Squire, Monroeville,
Ohio, 1886.

the other a Captain Henderson of an Illinois regiment who had been exchanged but remained here for the purpose of distributing supplies sent to the prisoners by the US Government. This Captain went with me to my quarters and told me that I had better get permission of Capt. Jones to mess with some 115th Ohio men who roomed in an opposite block and were paroled to do carpenter work for the prison. He said if I staid there alone some of the Confederates would probably murder me for my clothes if for nothing else. Captain Jones gave me permission and I made this change. I staid with the 115th men all the time I was at this place.

Just here let me tell you of an amusing (to me) incident that occurred when on our way from Warrenton to Gadsden [while on the way to Cahaba after being captured- Ed.]. When passing a long stretch of abandoned fields we saw at a distance two mounted men approaching at a rapid gait. As they came near enough to see what and who we were they shouted out, "Turn around, men, and go back. The war is over; peace is declared." As we met, both parties halted and we asked the reason for their assertion. They replied, "You need not go any farther as peace is declared and we are going up into Indiana to buy mules." We asked the terms of the settlement and they answered that the US had recognized the Confederacy and both armies were going to unite and whip France and England. Turning to the sergeant, I told him we would go on to prison as any story of the war being over based on the fact of the US recognizing the Confederacy was false. Our informants were positive and went galloping off as fast as their nags could carry them as if they intended to reach Indiana and purchase

mules before sunset. They appeared perfectly elated with the prospect of a fortune in Indiana mules.

My parole at Cahaba gave me the liberty of visiting the steamboat landing and I availed myself of it. Watching each boat as it came in from Selma so that I might see the three men of my party who escaped at Johnson's Plantation as I did not expect they could get back to Union lines. Sure enough, in about ten days, I saw Wallace get off the steamer from Selma. He looked as though he had been staring death in the face for a long time. I bowed and followed him to the office where the Prison Commandant gave me permission to talk with him. He told me of the fate of the other two men and the manner as before related in which his life was saved.

The prison was, to quite an extent, run by paroled Union prisoners. The 18th Michigan captives almost entirely furnished the music for guard mounting and Dress Parade. Men of the 115th Ohio did the carpenter work of the prison and the clerks in the office were Union prisoners. I inspected the books of the prison during the absence of Captain Jones and had some minutes that would have been referred to had they not been lost afterwards. I believe the prisoners at Cahawba were treated better than at most rebel prisons but it was bad enough here as many were without any shelter whatever. During a freshet the prison was overflowed and many stood in water up to the waists for nearly three days.

My Confederate money purchased me many things and the men with whom I messed earned considerable by doing odd jobs of work for citizens.

The last two weeks of my stay at this place a Mr. Mathew, a prominent citizen, sent me in by his Colored man a basket of provisions every evening that made our mess a good meal. I took dinner with him one Sunday evening and have reason to believe that he was a Union man although he had two sons on General Loring's (?) staff. He strongly advocated the emancipation of the Colored people although he was a large slave owner, gave me information of the expected attack on General Wilson on Selma, and named the probable Provisional Governor of Alabama.

Finally news came that we were to be sent North. We were divided into three squads and were sent forward at intervals of a few days. I believe I was in the last

Squad. We went by boat to Selma, then by (?) to Meridian and Demopolis. At Demopolis we had to cross the Tombigbee River and as there was no boat at hand we were placed in a wood yard to stay all night or until a boat arrived.

Capt. Moses, who commanded the Rebel guard having us in charge, gave permission to Lt. Phillips and myself to go to the hotel to stay and his orderly would call us if the boat came before morning. We engaged a room at the hotel, and as the hotel furnished but one meal per day we went to a restaurant and had a supper of stewed rabbit, corn bread and buttermilk. After supper we attended a concert in the dining room of the hotel and then went to our rooms. Captain Moses occupied a bed and in the same room; another bed was occupied by Lt. Phillips and myself. Another bed was made up on the floor and was occupied by a couple of Rebel officers not connected with our party. As we retired they commenced to ply us with questions, among others wishing to know what Corps we belonged to. We told them the 4th. This puzzled them for a while until finally one said, "4th Corps, why that's a Yankee Corps." Then came the question, "Are you Yankee officers?" We then answered that we were paroled prisoners on our way to be exchanged. Oh! How angry they were! They scolded and swore---not at us but at the landlord that would put their enemies in a bed and make them sleep on the floor. They hoped that the next raid that came through would burn his house down on his head. They got up, dressed, kicked the bed to pieces and went storming down the stairs. We heard loud words in the office and then the street door opened and shut with a bang. A heavy rain was falling but it did not appear to dampen their anger. I told Phillips that we would probably have to get out of there as I heard the landlord coming up the stairs. He came in, passed some not very complimentary remarks about his late patrons, and said that we paid him the same kind of money that they did and we came first and he could not discriminate.

Before morning we were called up to take the boat and we were taken across the river. Here we staid until quite late in the day when we were placed on board cars just vacated by a lot of Rebel prisoners just back from the north. They were fat and sleek, in happy contrast with our poor boys who were like walking skeletons, many of them complete physical and mental

wrecks---the results of the cruel treatment they had received. We were carried by cars to near Jackson, Mississippi, then marched to Clinton and then to the Big Black River twelve miles from Vicksburg.

We reached the Big Black shortly before sundown but were not allowed to cross. On the side where we were the ground was low, while on the opposite or Union side the ground was high and the sun shone clear and bright on the Stars and Stripes that floated from a staff at the head of the bridge. How our hearts leaped at the sight of that dear old flag! Men wept for the very joy. Indeed, across that river was God's country. Uncle Sam sent us over some hard bread and coffee and we passed the night as best we could around the logs in the mud and rain, cheered by thoughts of the morrow. The next morning we crossed the river, took the cars and went eight miles to a camp of paroled prisoners a "4 mile bridge"---just 4 miles from Vicksburg. This camp was occupied by Union prisoners from Cahawba and Andersonville. We remained here under the charge of the Confederate Comm. of Exchange and fed by the US until about the 23rd of April when those who belonged to the Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee regiments were placed on board the steamer Sultana.

We left Vicksburg and proceeded to the Mississippi River being ordered to report to Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio. The boat was overloaded---there being over 2000 enlisted men and officers (prisoners of war) and about 300 of the boat crew and regular passengers---2300 in all. The river was extremely high and in many places the country was submerged to such a distance that we appeared to be sailing on a lake. We reached Memphis, Tenn. on the 26th and remained there until the night. The boat at night time was so completely covered by men that it was difficult to move on any of the decks without stepping on some of them. Then commissioned officers occupied cots that were placed in two rows and two tiers one about the other throughout the cabin. I occupied a lower cot about one third the distance from the front of the cabin on the right hand side. I was awakened in the night by Lt. Eddy who was crawling into the cot on my right hand. I noticed that the boat was in motion and inquired when

we left Memphis. He replied that we had just left the coaling station. He said that he had been unable to sleep and had been up on the hurricane deck. It was now half past one o'clock.

I laid perhaps half an hour and had just gotten into a doze when I was roused by a shudder that went through the vessel. The air was full of the odor of steam and ashes. Rubbish was falling everywhere. The lamps were all out; it was intensely dark, and the cries and shrieks of the frightened passengers were terrible.

I endeavored to crawl out one way but could not turn. I rolled in the opposite direction and kept going on my hands and knees until I was free from the rubbish, and found myself nearly in the rear of the ladies cabin where a solitary lamp was still burning. The floor was covered with broken glass. My hands were saved from injury from this by having my hat in one hand and Lt. Eddy's in the other.

I was the first man out. In a moment, Lt. McDowel (4th Tenn Inf.) came out groaning and dropped into a chair. I inquired if he was much hurt and said that the boilers had probably exploded but if no fire occurred we would come out alright. Immediately, a bright flame shot up in the front part of the cabin and McDowel made a rush for the door and disappeared. In his excited condition, he probably plunged at once into the water and was drowned.

I went back to where my cot was and by the light of the flame I found my clothes and dressed. On the opposite side of the cabin lay an officer of the 6th Kentucky Cavalry unconscious with a hole in his head. Nearby was Lt. McCord of the 111th O.V.I. who was dressed and appealed to someone passing to help him carry the officer out and not let him there to burn. That person paid no attention to the request and I went across and offered to assist. We carried him out and placed him on the edge of the deck so that if he became conscious he could roll off into the water rather than burn. We could not put him into the river without endangering the lives of others.

As we were about to pass out of the cabin door, in rushed a lady passenger crying, "Save me, oh, save me!" We tried to pacify her by offering to render her all the assistance in our power, but she was too excited to listen and she rushed shrieking into the flames. One poor fellow had apparently lost his wits.

He would rush to the edge of the boat crying, "I shall drown", then back to the flames and cry, "I shall burn." Again to the edge of the boat repeating the cry. Then crying out, "I'd rather burn than drown," he leaped into the fire and perished.

Lt. McCord and myself were the last to leave the cabin. As I stood on the outside I could see the passengers going over the side of the boat like a flock of sheep through a gap in the fence. The water was filled with a struggling, shouting, praying, cursing mass of humanity, the most terrible, heartrending scene I have ever witnessed. No word painting or artist's brush could depict the horrors of that night.

I had not fully recovered from an attack of "break-bone" (?) fever, and in my weakened condition I had no hope of escaping. This fact, instead of exciting me, made me more calm and I was enabled to take advantage of every little favorable circumstance that occurred. Nearly everything that could be gathered from the cabin or deck that would float had been cast overboard into the river---in many cases upon the heads of those struggling in the water. I finally found a chair, snapped off my clothes except my undershirt, drawers and socks, and waiting until the water near the front of the boat (where I was) clear of men, I dropped it in, slid down a rod to the lower deck and climbed over the railing into the water.

I went under, came up and seized the chair. I relinquished that for a shutter that came in my way and endeavored to swim out. I got a few rods from the boat and found that I was too exhausted to ever reach the shore. Looking back, I saw men hanging onto the wheel of the boat, and remembering of a man being saved in a shipwreck that way, I determined to return and catch hold of the wheel. As I neared the boat, I became completely exhausted. Thinking I would perish in the end, I gave up struggling. Down under the water I went until my feet touched something---river bottom or a sunken body---when I thought Home was worth one more effort. Exerting myself, I came up directly under the wheel and seized hold of one of its arms or paddles. I tried to pull myself up but could not. On one side of the wheel were quite a number of men, and others were holding onto them trying to get out of the water. This destroyed the balance and the wheel partially revolved. Clinging to the arm, I was carried up until the arm I had hold of became the top arm. As the wheel revolved

those on the other side were carried down into the water, and relinquishing their hold were swept away by the current. Of course, as the weight was removed, the wheel stopped turning. I swung right over and stood up in the wheel, my feet on one of the braces or paddles. Here I rested for a few moments and removed my drawers and socks as I found them an encumbrance.

I then gave my thoughts about what was the next thing to do. I was fearful that the connection of the wheel and wheel-house to the steamer would soon burn apart and the wheel-house might sink. I determined to get on the outer edge, and just as I was executing this move, they broke away from the boat and sank down into the water. The rush of the water broke my hold and was carried along. I was nearly drowned. It seemed I was caught in the wheel-house like a rat in an open inverted box, but the side of the wheel-house that had been next to the boat was badly charred by fire and soon floated uppermost.

As I floated long on my back, my face came to a place that was broken through about the size of my hand. I thrust my hand through and splashed water on the burning boards, then broke away the charred parts. I then crawled through the hole but burned my hands somewhat in doing so. The heat from the burning boat was almost intolerable and I was obliged to let myself down into the water and splash water over my head and neck to prevent them from burning. The rubbish I was on continued to slowly sink but it appeared to be still attached to the vessel. After the upper works of the vessel had burned away, the hull protected me from the effects of the heat. I expected the boat would go down any minute carrying the rubbish I was on and me with it. I therefore secured a window blind and a guard against that time.

About this time a young man who, with the help of a piece of wood, had unsuccessfully tried to reach the steamer that passed us shortly after the disaster, came near and I helped him onto my rubbish. By this time a small rowboat had been obtained and was taking some men off from the end of the vessel. Another man near me had a fender attached by a rope to a quite large piece of railing of the boat. He said he could swim and he would go over to where they were rescuing the others by means of the

Annual Sultana Reunion a Grand Event

rowboat and see if he could be taken off. I requested him to leave his fender and rail with me. If he could not be taken off and should return, he could have them back. He did not come back and by placing the blind across the fender and rail, I was not so deep in the water.

Sitting in this position, I was amused by a number of big strapping fellows a little ways off who had a very good raft and with long poles were working their way to shore. They were praying in great earnestness by the burden of the prayer was in the shape of goods promised if they could only escape this death. I was reminded of the anecdote credited to President Lincoln of the flatboater who under similar circumstances said to his companion who had stopped his exertions that he might pray, "There's no use in praying as long as you can touch bottom with a pole."

After a time, a couple of mules who had gotten off the vessel and had been swimming around in a circle, came up to the steamer and tried to crawl on. This disturbed the rubbish and caused it to separate from the boat and float downstream.

I was in the water probably five hours. After floating quite a distance downstream, we were picked up by the packet steamer Pocohontas and taken to Memphis, Tennessee.

This disaster is probably the most terrible that ever occurred on a river. Out of 2300 persons on board, nearly 1500 perished. Of those rescued, a large number died afterwards of their injuries and exposure. Of 34 commissioned officers on board, 18 were lost. Of seven men with whom I had messed in prison, only two escaped. Of four men from the 101st on board, Cap Tuggart, Jake Rohr, and myself were saved. Adams of E company was lost.

We remained at Memphis a few days and then were sent to Camp Chase where in time, I was mustered out.

The foregoing is a detailed account of my captured, prison life, and the Sultana affair. I regret my inability to describe those in a more interesting manner.

- ELBERT SQUIRE ■

The Annual Reunion of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends was again held at the Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, the site of so many meetings of one of the original Sultana survivors' groups. (The last one was held in 1930, when the last survivor of the organization died.)

First, we met at the Sultana memorial monument erected in 1916 by the original survivors, which is in the adjoining cemetery of Mt. Olive Church. Then, at noon, we moved down to the church where we began our Commemoration program in the sanctuary of the church. We were welcomed by our organizer, Norman Shaw. The Pledge of Allegiance was made, and Pam Newhouse gave an Invocation. A local group, the Appalachian Harmonizers sang "Nearer my God To Thee, after which a son and daughter of two soldiers who were on the Sultana were introduced; William Warner and Glenna Greene.

Pam Newhouse called out the names of 100 soldiers who were on the Sultana: "The Roll Call of the Dead". The Appalachian Harmonizers then sang that old Civil War favorite, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" before Larry Newhouse closed with a Benediction.

The above program was very similar to those that the original Sultana survivors had every year. We carry on as a way to honor their memory.

We then adjourned to the basement fellowship room where we shared our potluck lunch. At 2 PM the Annual Meeting started with Opening

Remarks from Norman Shaw. Next, Fred Brown, Knoxville newspaper journalist, read us a chapter from his recently completed historical novel based on the Sultana disaster. You could hear a pin drop- everyone was absolutely enthralled with what they heard. We hope that a publisher can be found quickly so that we may all read the rest of the book for ourselves. Our congratulations to Mr. Brown for a job well done, and we thank him for sharing it with us.

There were comments and updates from Gene Salecker, Jerry Potter, and Pam Newhouse. Jerry and Gene have been involved with the production of a documentary film on the Sultana- they have done filming with reenactors in Memphis. We will be reporting on this project as it develops.

Carol Lundquist told us of she and her husband John's recent visit to Cahaba, Alabama and what is left of the site of the Cahaba Prison, where so many Sultana soldiers were held.

Sam Huffman and David Fraley introduced themselves as representatives of the Save the Franklin (TN) Battlefield organization. A fair number of soldiers who were on the Sultana were captured at Franklin (Nov. 30, 1864).

As is our custom, everyone present (about 100 persons) introduced themselves/their family and told what their interest in the Sultana is/who they are descended from. The day ended with informal sharing and fellowshiping as we looked at displays and artifacts.

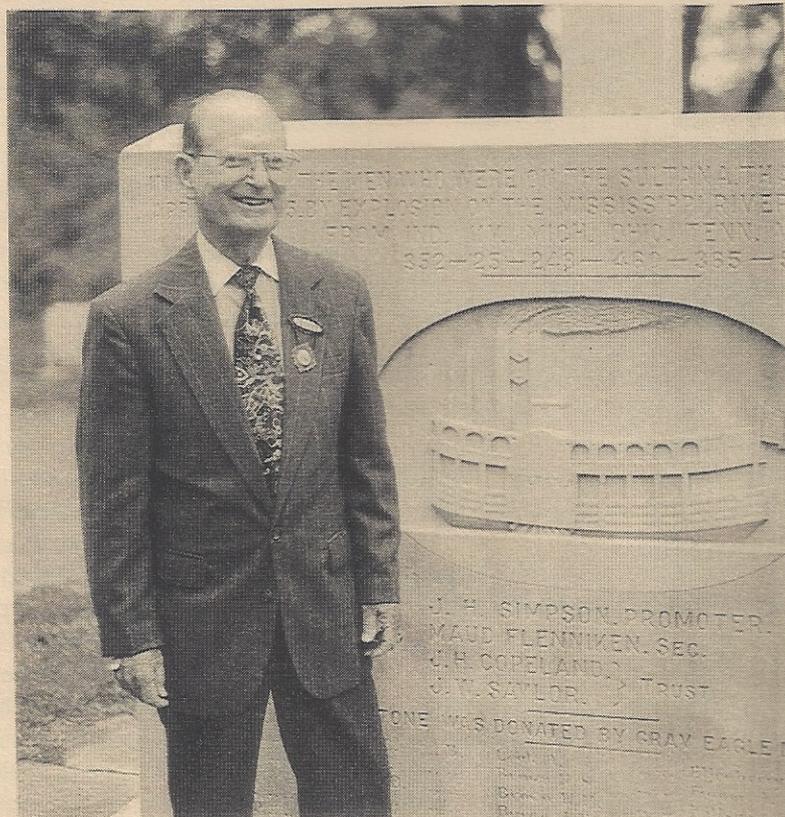


Photo. opposite: Bob Warner, the son of Sultana survivor W. C. Warner, Co. B., 9th IN Cav, stands in front of the Sultana monument in the Mt. Olive Baptist Church Cemetery, Knoxville, TN.

FROM THE EDITOR

Memorial Day Sultana Service in Memphis

Robert Neyman, member of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUV) Memphis Camp #1, informed me via e-mail (around the time of our annual reunion) that his Camp would be holding a Sultana Memorial Service on Memorial Day in Memphis, near the Sultana state historical marker on the Mississippi River. He said, "We have been doing this for the last couple of years and plan to continue to do so...We try to incorporate the story of the Sultana in any Living History that we do in this area." He invited any and all to attend.

The event went off as planned. Memphis resident Jerry Potter was the speaker, which was appropriate since it was largely through his efforts that the historical marker was erected.

There were alternating cannon and 12-rifle salutes, all of which was shown on two local TV newscasts.

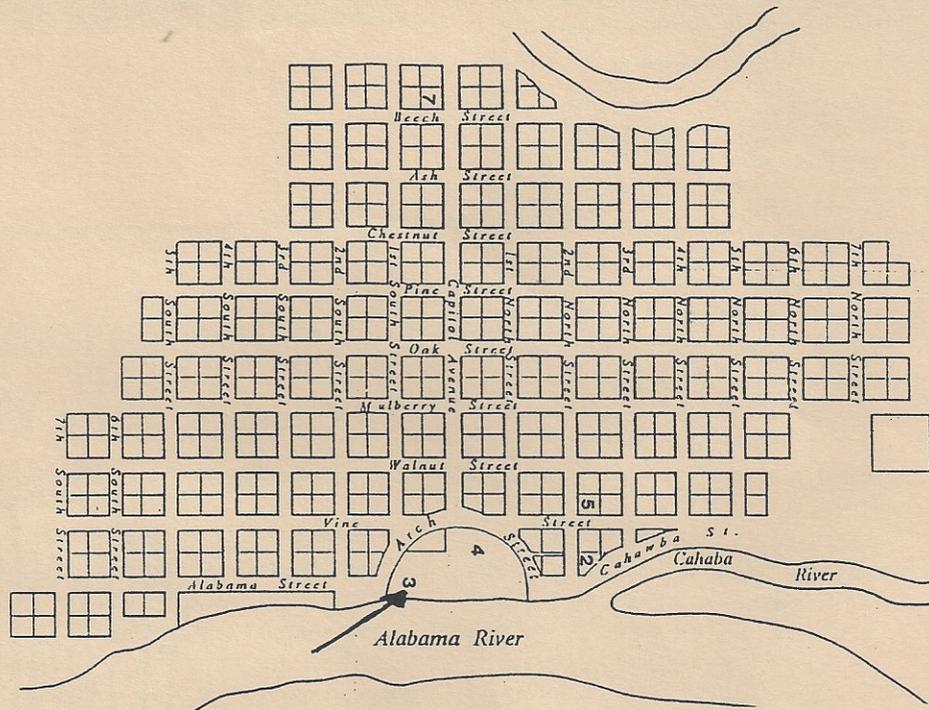
Sultana descendant Helne Chandler of Florida attended, after hearing about it at our reunion. Well done, everyone!

Sultana Memorial Tribute Held in Selma, Alabama

Brain Snavelly wanted us to know that his reenactment group, Co. C, 3rd TN Cav. along with Co. C, 7th TN Cav, and Co. C, 1st AL Cav, would be holding a ceremony to honor the Sultana passengers. Brian writes: "At mid-night, April 27th, half of the 7th Tennessee men will be at Arlington, TN, just north of Memphis, (at another event) and will face southeast toward us (at Selma) while reading off the names of the men from the 7th Tenn and 1st Alabama who were on board the Sultana. Meanwhile, at Selma, we'll be facing toward Memphis and reading off the names of those same men and several from the 3rd Tenn. After the names have been read, we will give a saber salute to all the soldiers who were on board that tragic night, 132 years ago. So, you see, you all won't be alone in paying your respects. You'll have some 50 reenactors' voices being heard in the night."

Map of Old Cahaba Archaeological Park

Number 3 is the site of Cahaba Prison. The Cahaba Visitor Center is open daily from 9-5. For more information write: Old Cahaba Archaeological Park, 9518 Cahaba Road, Orrville, AL 36767
Internet site: <http://www.oleg.com/selma/cahawbah.html>



Subscribers Looking for Information

• Gene Ingram would like to hear from descendants of Pvt John Robinson Smith, 3rd TN Cav., who was a prisoner at Cahaba and died on the Sultana. Write Gene at:

6673 Winding Birch Dr.,
Memphis, TN 38115-6665.

• Nina Montgomery would like to hear from anyone who has information on her ancestor, Jacob Edwards, Co. I. 40th OH Inf. Write her at:

18980 Burnt Leaf Way
Monument, CO 80132-9016

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

- David Fraley, 1312 Liberty Pike, Apt. 3, Franklin, TN 37064
- Shea Fraley, 225 Circle Dr., Anderson, IN 46013
- Clinton Riddle, 711 Johnson St., Sweetwater, TN 27874-7154
- Susan Baumgardner, 16632 Bexhill Dr., Knoxville, TN 37922
- Joan S. Goodrich, 155 Lebanon St., RR2, Box 330, Hamilton, NY 13346-95574
- Robert Moore, 45413 Cove Island Rd., Knoxville, TN 37919-9308
- Wm. & Judy Henderlight, 8728 Highland Circle, Knoxville, TN 37920
- Randall Helton, 5914 Neubert Springs Rd., Knoxville, TN 37920-5720
- Dan Helton, 12380 Orchard Hollow Way, Houston, TX 77065-3331
- Fred Brown, #1009 Cross Creek Apts., 5000 Western Ave., Knoxville, TN 37921
- Mrs. Eugene Doll, 1557 Laurel Hills, Jefferson City, TN 37760
- Robert Neyman, 3628 Carnes Ave., Memphis, TN 38111
- Gene Shields, 732 Hurstview Dr., Hurst, TX 76053
- Doug Quarles, 1077 E. Dumplin Valley Rd., Jefferson City, TN 37762
- Vessie Johnson, 944 Love Lee Rd., Morgantown, KY 42261
- Dr. Ralph White, 334 Eventide Dr., Mufreesboro, TN 37130
- Patsy Miles, 606 E. Moody Ave., Knoxville, TN 37920
- Pamela Cooper, 1745 Shiloh Church Rd., Seymour, TN 37865
- Louis Bur, 12339 Lennon Rd., P.O. Box 409, Lennon, MI 48449-0409 (desc. of Chas. Peck, 6th MI Cav., Co. E.
- Patricia S. Johnson, 760 E. Three Fountains Dr., Unit 109, Murray, UT 84107
- Natalie Kinsey-Warnock, RD 3, Box 36A, Barton, VT 05822
- Col. Gene Ingram 6673 Winding Birch Dr., Memphis, TN 38115-6665
- Nina R. Montgomery, 18980 Burnt Leaf Way, Monument, CO 80132-9016