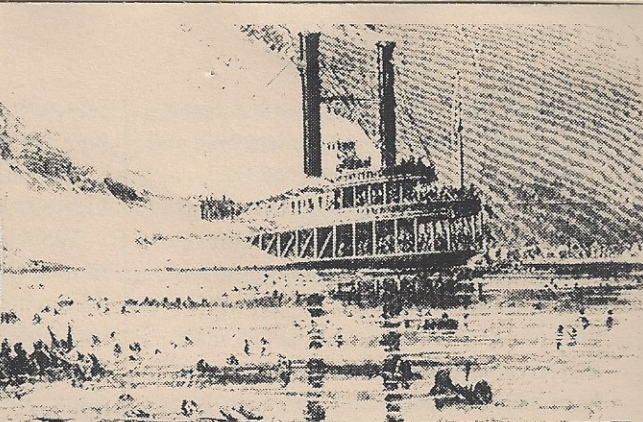


the

SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

WINTER 2002

"Shall We Gather By the River...."

By Pam Newhouse

.....the Mississippi River, that is...Vicksburg, Mississippi, to be more precise, for our Annual Reunion (April 26-28), as was put forth in the last newsletter. Details are falling into place, people have been making reservations, and if you haven't yet decided to join us, now is the time!

We have had to request more reduced-rate rooms at the Battlefield Inn, and when they are gone, they are gone. Have you reserved yet? Call 1-800-359-9363 and tell them that you are part of the *Sultana* group (rooms for us are \$50/single, \$56/double, per night. Includes full breakfast and evening refreshments/drinks from 5-7 PM).

We'd like you to arrive Friday the 26th in the afternoon, get settled in, and enjoy informally meeting each other that evening at the Inn. As always, everyone is encouraged to bring any and all *Sultana*-related items stories, photos, etc. to share with others. There have really been some interesting things displayed in past years, including wartime journals, letters, and photos of survivors/victims - and even a grapevine cane used by one of the survivors to aid his walk back home to eastern Tennessee from Memphis.

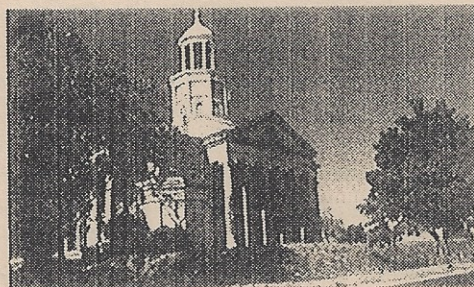
Tommy Coleman and Don Harvell, who work at the Cahaba, Alabama, site where many *Sultana* soldiers were held prisoner, have regularly come to the reunion with a nice display and we expect to see them again this year. (Ruth Coleman, I hope to see you there too!) Heck, even non-descendants will have a little something to add (i.e., Jerry Potter, Gene Salecker, and Norman Shaw, our group's founder.) :-)

The next day, Saturday, April 27th

will be a big day. It is appropriate that this will be the 137th anniversary of the explosion of the *Sultana*, near Memphis.

We will begin with a hot Southern breakfast (including grits, hooray!) at the Inn after which we will get on the bus/buses (we may need more than one) by 9:30 AM, which will take us down to the riverfront where the new State of Mississippi *Sultana* historic marker has been erected. The 30-40 minute dedication ceremony will begin at 10 AM. Participants will include the Mayor of Vicksburg and other representatives of the city, Union reenactors who will carry the colors as well as render a musket salute in tribute to the *Sultana* passengers, and of course, us.....descendants and friends who came to honor those who were on board the *Sultana*. The presence of members of our organization is vital. We are carrying on the effort began by the original *Sultana* Survivors Association to remember and honor the victims of this worst U.S. marine disaster.

After the ceremony we will walk the short distance up the hill to Washington Street, one of Vicksburg's main streets, to Lamar Roberts' Gray and Blue Naval



THE OLD COURTHOUSE MUSEUM IN VICKSBURG. Constructed by slaves in 1858. Site of the Frederic Speed trial.

Museum (entrance fee is included in your Bus Tour fee). Lamar and Charles Dawkins (of Hattiesburg, MS; gr gr grandson of Sgt. Van Buren Jolly, 10th Indiana Cav; survived) had the initial vision of having our *Sultana* reunion here, and Lamar is mainly responsible for setting the process in motion for the erection of the historic marker. Be sure you give both of them a big "thank you" when you meet them. We wouldn't be going to Vicksburg without Lamar's initiative....and Charles' hard work on reunion details.

While on Washington Street and before eating lunch we will have time to shop at the various stores here. Just to mention a few: the Hub, a mens store; the Cinnamon Tree, selling home decorator gifts, including Department 56 products; Sassafras, "elegant to whimsical gifts"; Peterson's Art and Antiques, and Buford's, selling "uncommon gifts and elegant extras." Buford's also carries Peter's Pottery, created by the four Woods brothers of Mound Bayou, MS. They are among the few black potters in the region and their works have been recently reviewed in newspapers nationwide. This reasonably priced pottery is now avidly collected by people all over the country.

Also on Washington Street is the very interesting Attic Gallery featuring local artists and many "outsider artists." To see so much of this type of art in one place is remarkable, according to my husband who is director of the art gallery here at Eastern Michigan University. The Attic Gallery takes up two floors of an historic building, and is across from the Gray and Blue Naval Museum.

Another interesting place to visit on Washington Street is the Biedenhorn Museum of Coca Cola Memorabilia.

At noon we will walk over to the Biscuit Company Cafe (1100 Washing-

ton) for lunch. This restaurant is located in a building which was built in 1850, and overlooks the river. Your lunch is included in the Bus Tour fee (see menu selections on the enclosed white form).

If you finish eating before our scheduled departure time from downtown (1:30 PM) feel free to wander about the Washington Street area and see what you might have missed. (Or go back and make that final purchase.)

At 1:30 PM we will get on the bus and head out to the site of Camp Fisk, where the ex-Union prisoners of war were held while waiting to board steamboats north. We will get off the bus here and Gene and Jerry will tell us what happened here. The area is not developed and it is easy to picture the camp site and the place where the men were placed on a train going into Vicksburg.

Next we will reboard the bus and head into town and the place where the *Sultana* was waiting, following as nearly as possible the route taken by the train. Getting off at the site of the old Train Depot, those who are able will walk the several blocks that the soldiers walked from the Depot to the *Sultana*.

Then we will get on the bus and go to the site of Frederic Speed's mansion (no longer standing). As most of you know, Frederic Speed was the only man tried after the *Sultana* disaster (for "dereliction of duty"), even though he was a junior officer in Vicksburg and certainly less culpable than others. (Specifically, Col. Reuben Hatch, who was NOT court-martialed because he quickly resigned from the army and, as a civilian, was out of the jurisdiction of a military tribunal.. Much more about Hatch in a future newsletter.) Frederick Speed was indeed found guilty of some of the charges against him, but was swiftly exonerated by higher-ups in Washington. He stayed in Vicksburg after the war, became a judge, and a powerful voice in Mississippi politics.

From Bowmar Avenue and the Speed mansion site we will go to the Old Courthouse Museum. This is Vicksburg's most historic structure, having survived the Union army's siege of the city in 1863. It was here, in the 2nd floor courtroom, that Frederic Speed was tried. We will visit that courtroom and I know you will find it as interesting as Larry and I did last year. It looks as if the 1865 jury has just recessed and will be back soon. Gene and

Jerry will tell us more about what happened here.

Our last stop will be at the Old City Cemetery and Frederic Speed's grave.

We will arrive back at the Battlefield Inn in time for Hospitality Hours (5:30-7:30 PM) where refreshments and drinks are available for all who are staying at the Inn. Some of us might want to use the time until dinner to take a nap!

At 7:30 PM we will head to the Jeff Davis Dining Room for an old-fashioned Southern meal (see menu on white form). After dinner we will hear from our founder, Norman Shaw, as well as Gene and Jerry, who have comments to make about the sabotage theory regarding the *Sultana* as advanced in an article written by descendant D. H. Rule, and printed in the November issue of *North and South* magazine. I have invited Vicksburg National Military Park Chief Historian to join us and tell us briefly about what life was like in Vicksburg during the war. There will be plenty of time left, however, to get better acquainted with each other, and to go to the tables and have a look at the *Sultana* related items which attendees have brought.

Sunday morning breakfast is included in your room bill. After that, you are free to check out and see some of the other sights in Vicksburg and the surrounding area. I asked Charles Dawkins and wife Della to tell us about some things in the area to see before you leave: "Good Vicksburg restaurants are the c. 1840 Cedar Grove Mansion Inn (we'll second that! Charles, Della, Larry and I ate dinner here last year. Beautiful! Excellent food. Need to reserve here). Duff's Tavern (downtown), the Beechwood (good steaks), Maxwell's, and Eddie Monsour's Restaurant (seafood, steaks, and Lebanese food)." If you like ribs and Mississippi cooking, don't miss Goldie's Bar-B-Que..... a local favorite!

A must to visit is the Vicksburg National Military Park run by the National Park Service which surrounds the city. And if you like to gamble, there are four major casinos on the river at Vicksburg.

And while you are in Mississippi it would be a shame not to visit Natchez. About an hour south of Vicksburg, this city has more beautifully preserved antebellum plantations/mansions than almost any other Southern place. Here are Charles and Della's recommendations for Natchez:

"Restaurants: The Castle at Dunleith Plantation---if you eat only one meal in Natchez this is the place. It is not inexpen-

sive, but the food is very good and the setting is spectacular. Farraday's----another upscale restaurant located 'under the hill.' King's Tavern---another great setting. Their specialty is smoked prime rib and steaks. Also located 'under the hill' are the Magnolia Grill and Wharf Master Restaurants. For the best catfish in Natchez we like Cock of the Walk located in the old train depot.

There are two good restaurants across the river in Vidalia, LA---West Bank Eatery with a view of the Natchez bluffs and The Sandbar. Both are mainly fried seafood places.

For a good Southern-style lunch try the Carriage House Restaurant. Their fried chicken is great. There's also Pearl Street Pasta and Biscuits and Blues.

Aside from the numerous antebellum homes to tour we would also recommend the Gandy collection of photographs located in the Presbyterian Church. It contains many excellent quality pictures of steamboats (but none of the *Sultana*). Also the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians.

In the outlying area there is the Episcopal Church at Church Hill, along with numerous old homes. Just a few miles from there is Springfield Plantation, where Andrew Jackson married Rachel Robards. From there you can take the Natchez Trace back to Natchez. On the way is an old tavern with a tour-guide as well as the second largest Indian mound in the U.S.---Emerald Mound. And finally, coming into Washington is Jefferson Military Academy. Aaron Burr was tried under the old oak tree there.

As far as Natchez hotels go, there is the downtown Eola Hotel, now run by Westin, and the Ramada Inn, overlooking the river. There are also many, many Bed & Breakfasts."

So there you have it! Thanks, Charles and Della, for those inside tips. By the way, all newsletter subscribers will soon be receiving, by mail, information packets from both the Vicksburg and Natchez Visitor Centers.

We are going to have a wonderful time! Call the Battlefield Inn for reservations and fill out the enclosed form and send it and the Bus Tour fee to Charles as soon as possible.

"Take me to the River!"

Reflections by Virginia Lee English

The end of April, 2001, I spent a week on the *Delta Queen* paddlewheeler re-tracing the *Sultana* portion of my great-grandfather's trip home after the Civil War. This was possible because of the historical knowledge of Ed Bearss, retired National Park Service Chief Historian Emeritus, and authors of books about the *Sultana*, Gene Salecker and Jerry Potter, who guided us throughout the week with considerable and amazing expertise. (Grandfather had been in the 102nd Ohio Infantry, captured by General Bedford Forrest near Athens, Alabama, and sent to Andersonville. After six horrendous months there, he was sent to Camp Fisk outside Vicksburg to await the trip home.) I could never have dreamed that I would learn so many fascinating details of this story and it was a truly unforgettable, unique and poignant experience. We are tremendously indebted to Gene and Jerry for sharing their years of interest and historical research, the more unusual since neither of them had relatives on board the *Sultana*.

Even though I was not yet born when Grandfather Wesley died at age 85, I feel a connection and appreciation for what he endured that I never expected to experience. We saw the site of Camp Fisk, outside Vicksburg, where he and others from Cahaba and Andersonville prison camps were held for awhile before being put on board the *Sultana* for their ill-fated trip home; stopped at the site of the train station in Vicksburg where all would have left the train and walked to the boat; passed by Helena, Arkansas, and saw where the last photograph of the overcrowded *Sultana* was taken; then went by chartered bus near to where *Sultana's* burned and buried remains lie under thirty feet of soil since the river changed its course over the years outside Memphis. The river is now about a half a mile away.

Additionally, we saw the area in Memphis where the wharf boat would have been secured to the bank and Grandfather was rescued several hours later, first to tell authorities that the explosion had taken place. We visited the granite memorials to the *Sultana* at Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, and Marion, Arkansas - the latter, sponsored by the Arkansas D.A. R. The citizens of

Marion rescued and were very helpful and kind to whatever survivors they could find that night and the next morning. Add to all this the fact that we stood on the bank of the river near Memphis 136 years to the day after the explosion took place, and you will begin to understand why the experience was so touching and special. Six other Lee family members were with me (three of whom are octogenarians - 83, 85, and 88 years of age - grandchildren of Wesley.)

There were three other individuals on the cruise who had relatives aboard the *Sultana*, two of whom did not survive the explosion. Now a common bond exists between us all as we talk about what happened and marvel that ANY survived, knowing full well that if those who did survive had not, most of us would NOT be in this world, much less taking this trip!! We parted amid hugs, handshakes, and the sense that we would like to continue to be in touch as time goes by. This trip was "better felt than telt," as the old saying goes!!

A Civil War Letter from Camp

Hi Sis: OK here we go. A Regiment is made up of 1,000 officers and men. There are 10 companies to a regiment, they use letters for each company, A-K except there is no I company. So it would be A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, & K in most regiments. In most regiments Company E was the color company, they carried the National and state flags.

There are 100 men in in company. We will work at company level so you will understand how they are moved around the field.

The 1st Sgt. would call the company to attention and the men would line up in size (height) order... smallest man on the right end of the line to the tallest on the left end of the line. This was done so the smaller men would always be in the front row so they could fire the rifles.

Now with the men in one single line going from right to left, the men count off. One, two, one, two, one, two, all the way down the line so now each man is either a number one or a number two. Now I want to take that single line and make two lines. Here is where the fun starts.

The Sgt. gives the command "Right Face." Now here is what would happen, the number one man turns right, at the

same time the number two man turns right and steps in. We now have two lines or column of two.

Now the Sgt wants the company to face him so he gives the command "without undoubling front" which is really another right turn, so that all the men are facing him.

There are now two rows of men facing the Sgt. These lines are called files. His next command is from the right in each file, count off again. It's one, two all the way down the line.

Now we are ready to march out the command is "shoulder arms right face" Again, the number one men face right and the number two men step in also facing right. We are now in a column of four and away we go. We are marching along and we run into the enemy so we must now form line of battle.

The command we would hear is "on the right by company into line." Here is what happens. The First Sgt. would post where the commander wants the battle line formed and the men would line up on him in their file formations, so you now have two lines of men. This is a battle line.. This line would not move, but stand and get ready to fire.

The command comes to "advance," the colors step out five paces and the whole line moves forward. The command is "halt Dress" on the colors. Everyone side steps to the colors so you have a tight compact double line with the colors in the middle.

Ok, now what would happen is, the colors would step to the rear of the line and the companies would close that gap. The fight is now on. All the rifles are loaded (we will go through the 9 steps to load and fire another time.)

We want to get their attention so the command would be "fire by company! Ready, aim, fire," that's a volley. Another command might be "fire by rank. Front rank kneel. Rear rank, ready, aim, fire. Load. Front rank, ready, aim, fire. Load". Or, the command might be "fire by files" from the right the two men at the right end of the line would fire and so on all the way down the line to the last two men on the left. Once that command is given then it's fire at will. Load and shoot as fast as you can.

Ok Sis, I will stop here for today. Before you know it, you will be able to command an army on the field.

Tom