Sultana Coins Now Shipping!

Late last week I was happy to receive a package that the mailman complained to me was a little heavy. Inside was my order of 100 recently minted coins showing Rev. Chester Berry on one side, and the Sultana on the other. They are cast in bronze, have a solid heft, and measure 1.75” in diameter.

They are certain to make a fantastic heirloom for Sultana descendants, and, in fact, the coins are a great collectible for anyone interested in the Sultana or the Civil War.

Thanks to everyone who has already ordered these coins - some have already been sent. For everyone else, while there are still plenty left I'm certain these won't last long, so I encourage you to place your order soon. In order to allow as many people as possible to obtain coins for their family I now have a three coin per order maximum.

Orders can be placed one of two ways - sent by mail with check or money order, or online.

The pricing structure is as follows, and includes shipping:

- $10.50 = 1 coin*
- $19.50 = 2 coins*
- $27.50 = 3 coins*

(*online payments require an additional .50 cents per order but save you the cost of a stamp!)

If paying by check or money order make them out to me, and send to me at

David Markland
1800 El Cerrito Pl. #39
Los Angeles, CA 90068

For more information online, check out

www.sultanadisaster.com

or send me an email at

sultana@gmail.com.

Best,

David Markland,

descendant of Cpl. John Hawken, 58th Ohio Infantry, acting as Guard Unit on the Sultana; died.

(From the editor: We certainly thank David for thinking of this unique way to honor the Sultana passengers. The permanence of a medal is a fine way to pass the story on to future generations. The coins are beautiful - and have lovely antique bronze look.

To honor survivor and author Chester Berry on the medal is altogether fitting; if it wasn't for his efforts in 1892 to put together eyewitness accounts of his fellow soldiers who lived through the disaster of April 27, 1865, we would know far less about it.

I also want to compliment David on his excellent website - www.sultanadisaster.com. He is constantly scanning the media to alert us to any mention anywhere of the Sultana. Visit it often!)
Two Men of the 6th Kentucky Cavalry

Laurie Bries of Baraboo, Wisconsin, great great granddaughter of Cpl. Winfield Scott Colvin of the 6th Kentucky Cavalry, Co, F, sent the following account (excepted here), written by her ancestor. It was published in the Kentucky Republican as well as the Springfield Sun (September 14, 1918). Colvin taught school for 45 years and died at the age of 71.

"On the evening of the 26th of April, 1865, a splendid steamer was lying at the wharf in the city of Memphis. Her decks were thronged with a vast concourse of soldiers, each animated with the pleasing thought, 'Homeward Bound.' They remembered that the long struggle was closed; that battles, sieges and marches were things of the past and that they would soon lay aside the trappings of war and mingle in society with friends and relatives from whom they had long been separated.

Let us give these men more than a passing notice. They are representatives of the six great commonwealths of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, who had, some three years before, when the tocsin of war rang out over our beloved land, exchanged the peaceful pursuits to which they had been trained, and gone forth with high resolve and strong arms to do battle for the flag and the Union they loved so well. Behold them as they stand on the deck of this floating palace. They are no longer strong as they used to be. Many of them have suffered from wounds, and all of them have been inmates of southern prisons.

Their steps are no longer elastic, and their whole aspect proclaims the sufferings they have endured....

An hour has passed since (the Sultana) started on her northern journey, with her thousands of brave men sleeping on her broad decks, and she has reached a point nine miles above Memphis, when an explosion, louder and more terrible than the largest piece of artillery is capable of making, occurs. In an instant all is confusion. The screams of women and children mingle with the groans of the wounded and dying. Brave men rushed to and fro in agony of fear. Now the fire mounts up through the passage made by the exit of the exploded boiler, and as all the boats have been blown away, the men, to save themselves from the devouring flames, must leap from the deck into the turbid waters of the Mighty Mississippi. This writer was one of the last to leave the burning boat, and never, in his opinion, did human eyes look upon a sadder scene...

Winfield Scott Colvin in his later years.

I have often been asked how I made my escape, and, as it might be of interest to someone, I will answer it here. I was sleeping on (the) upper deck against the wheelhouse. When aroused, the first I heard were cries that the shore would be tried for. But in those very moments the boat was burning rapidly. Then panic seized most of those on board, and each seizing anything that he thought would float, threw it into the river and jumped after it. I remained until most of the men had left the boat, and, as I had never learned to swim, unfortunately, you will realize that my position was not an enviable one. I believed that my time had come when I must bid farewell to all earthly things. Death was sure, and in a short time at that, if I remained on the boat. There was a possibility, no probability, of escape, if I left it. But the thought of being burned to death was too horrible to contemplate, and I pulled a window blind from one of the windows of the pilothouse and swung myself down on the outside of the boat. But when I got to the opposite cabin windows the fire came out of them with such force that I loosened my hold and fell into the water. On coming to the surface I was seized by some man, and after considerable struggle with him I released myself and caught a large trunk. This soon floated into the wheelhouse and I let go and took hold of the wheel. In a short time the wheelhouse burned loose and fell over into the river, just as a house would turn over on its side. Of about a dozen men who were in it, I think I am the only one who escaped from it. I finally got on top of it and floated down the river until about 9:00 o'clock, when I was picked up.

Among those on board were Major Fidler*, Captains McCowan and Parish, and Lieutenant Surber of the Sixth Kentucky Cavalry. They had, but their bravery and frankness won the esteem and confidence of the whole regiment. Especially was this true of Fiddler, who, though a lion in battle, possessed all the attributes of the Christian gentleman. After the explosion he said to Captain McCowan: 'Mac, I want you to stay with me.' But while he was speaking to the Captain, a young lady approached the edge of the boat and exclaimed, 'My Mother, oh, my mother.' The heroic Fiddler could not see a lady perish without offering his assistance, so he quickly sprang after her and that was the last ever seen of either of them. Captain Parrish and Lieutenant Surber also perished but neither of them by drowning or by the explosion."

Who was Major Fidler, who impressed Colvin so much in the last moments of his life? Steve Wright of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, who has been extensively researching the 6th Kentucky Cavalry for a forthcoming book, picks up the story:

"William H. Fidler was just 19 years of age when he received his commission as the junior major of the Sixth Kentucky Cavalry. It is a testament of the high esteem and confidence placed in him by his former teacher, mentor, and regimental commander, Colonel Dennis J. Halisy.

* the name Fiddler/Fidler was spelled alternately two different ways in Civil War records. Unlike today, the correct spelling of a last name wasn't a big concern back then. For instance, "William H. Fiddler/Fidler" is spelled both ways (the is
Major Fidler's intellectual abilities were noted early in his life. However, it was not until he donned the uniform of a Union officer that his bravery and qualities of leadership became fully recognized. Along with his brothers, his future military commander taught the "three Rs—reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic"—to William as a boy, in his hometown of Haysville, in Marion county, Kentucky. In the late 1850s he obtained a further classical education under the tutelage of Professor Joseph Codell, at the county seat of Lebanon. "That classical scholar, rhetorician of rhetoricians, a great profound lecturer on the immortality of the soul.... declared that he had never known a young mind to open up with so much promise as that of W. H. Fidler. He was a lovable character. In his personality he was extremely handsome... Loyal and gallant ad filled with the most exalted principles, he early offered himself as a sacrifice on his country's altar."

During Kentucky's neutrality period, between April and September 1861, a war of nerves was waged between Unionists and Seccessionists in Marion country. A Haysville correspondent to the Louisville Journal wrote on the 17th of August, "The seccessionists here are playing a bold hand. They are trying to humbug the Union men—but we are too fast for them. They tried here to get up a secession company of cavalry, and to get enough Union men with them to get guns for them. I understand they are trying this elsewhere. Had not Unionists better watch?" In response to this threat a company of Home Guards were organized at Haysville under Captain J. S. Wilson. Fidler was elected first lieutenant of the company, which, for this precocious young man, was the start of a brilliant yet all-too-brief military career.

When (recruiting began) for a cavalry regiment in Lebanon, Kentucky, in July 1862, William Fidler organized a company. In the subsequent organization of the new regiment, Colonel Halisy designated Fidler as one of his field grade officers, with the rank of major. In December the town of Lebanon was threatened a second time by the forces under Confederate General John Hunt Morgan. The Sixth and Ninth Kentucky Cavalry regiments were among the forces to defend the town and its vast amount of army supplies. Major Fidler of the Sixth and John T. Ferriss of the Ninth were ordered on a reconnaissance of Springfield, eleven miles away. After arriving at Barbours' Mill, Major Fidler, along with two other officers, proceeded to Springfield with a detachment of fifty troops from the Sixth Cavalry. 'Carefully feeling his way, he penetrated, with his men, to the center of town and almost to the center of the rebel encampment. He took his men to within fifty yards of a rebel battery, took one prisoner, fired into the battery—killing two men, as we afterwards learned from prisoners—skedaddles, losing no men, and gaining much valuable information. A more daring feat than this has not been performed during the war.'

Major Fidler's reputation as a soldier and leader of men was unquestionably established that day.

Major William H. Fidler, 6th Kentucky Cavalry

Major Fidler continued to do his duty as a soldier in the campaigns in Middle Tennessee in 1863 under his new commander, Colonel Louis D. Watkins. By 1864 Fidler was the de facto commander of the Sixth, due to illness and reassignment of his superior officers, even though his young age (22) prevented him from actually being awarded the rank of Colonel. During the 1864 Atlanta Campaign the Sixth Kentucky Cavalry was assigned, along with the rest of Watkins' cavalry brigade, to protect the railroad communications of General Sherman's army against the incursions of Confederate cavalry and guerrillas. On June 24, a large force of Confederate cavalry, under Brig. General Gideon Pillow, attacked Colonel Watkins and detachments of his brigade at LaFayette, Georgia. The Union cavalrymen fortified themselves as best they could in the courthouse square: Watkins with one squad holed up behind barriers in the courthouse, and Major Fidler with another group, in the brick jailhouse. Though attacked furiously by a superior force, the Yankee troopers held out until reinforcements were sent to their aid lifting the siege. Pillow's men lost heavily in the fight, as is attested to by their many graves in the city cemetery. Major Fidler once again proved his worth as a combat officer, leading by example.

In the spring of 1865 the regiment was assigned to a brigade commanded by Brig. John T. Croxton as part off General Wilson's 'Great Cavalry Raid' into Alabama and Georgia. Near Pleasant Ridge, Alabama, on April 6, Major Fidler and his regiment were operating as the rearguard of the brigade when General Wirt Adams' cavalry attacked them. A number of men from the regiment were captured or separated from the brigade, including Major Fidler. 'He attempted to reach the Federal lines, but the enemy pursued and caught him with bloodhounds... After a brief period of incarceration in the local county jail, Major Fidler and others were sent to Mississippi, where they were reunited with other captured members of the regiment at a parole camp located at Four Mile Bridge, situated on a railroad line running to Vicksburg. Hundreds of paroled Union soldiers returning from Cahawba and Andersonville prisoner of war camps were already encamped there. These long-suffering soldiers had the misfortune of being placed on the steamer Sultana at Vicksburg. Major Fidler, being the senior officer, was placed in charge of the all the soldiers being transported on the boat. In the middle of the night of April 27 the steamer blew her boilers, killing and scalding a great number of men. Major Fidler urged the men to remain on the boat as long as possible. However, the fire spread rapidly, threatening to consume drowning men."

(Three decades later, Cpl. Colvin would write his account of the last minutes of Major Fidler's life. -ed)
lived with no thought to his personal promise. William Fidler died as he had ended the life of a young man so full of promise. Fidler’s brother Jesse was given leave to retrieve William’s remains. Unfortunately, his body was never found. Thus William Fidler’s remains were never discovered.

**GPS Coordinates of the Sultana Wreckage**

Bill Hendron, great grandson of Cpl. Winfield Scott Colvin, asked if we could tell him the GPS coordinates of the place where the Sultana lies. Many of you who have gone there will remember that the site is in an open field near Marion, Arkansas, the Mississippi River having changed its course at least several times since 1865.

**Civil War Effects of a Sultana Soldier Auctioned on eBay**

The following was posted on eBay and was won by a bidder on April 12, 2006. Winning bid was $610.

**And Here's Another Monument in Alliance, Ohio....**

Anyone in Ohio want to help this Alliance, Ohio man find out more about the Sultana monument he came across in the Alliance City Cemetery? And possibly help him get it restored? And certainly, tell him the story of the Sultana that he’s interested in knowing? For those of you who have computers, go to [http://www.cantonrep.com/index.php?ID=282821](http://www.cantonrep.com/index.php?ID=282821) and read about it yourselves. For other subscribers, I will give you a basic outline of the article written in the CantonRep newspaper on April 17, 2006:

Three years ago an Alliance, OH history buff, Jim Peters, found a weather-beaten Sultana monument at Alliance City Cemetery, engraved with names of local men who died in the disaster. It is twelve feet high with the engraving on it nearly illegible. (It was most likely erected by a post of the area’s post Civil War veterans group, the Grand Army of the Republic, as it is identified on the cemetery plot map as...
it is identified on the cemetery plot map as "GAR." - ed)

Peters hasn't been able to identify the names engraved on the stone, but he knows that the men belonged to Company F, 115th Ohio Infantry, which included residents of Stark, Columbiana and Portage counties. He found out that the regiment was mustered in in Massillon in the fall of 1862, and the soldiers probably were captured while guarding railroads in Tennessee.

Robert Toth, executive director of the Stark County Veterans Commission, has high hopes that the county commissioners will pay for the monument's restoration, as Ohio state law requires county commissioners to pay for and maintain monuments created in memory of veterans.

No one is buried at the memorial. Peters believes that the soldiers are buried where the boat exploded in Tennessee. "If I ever get to Memphis I will visit every one of their graves," he says.

(The best way to reach Peters is probably through the writer of the newspaper article, Kelli Young, phone (330) 580-8339; e-mail kelli.young@cantonrep.com)

"Don't Call us 'Federal Soldiers!'"

The following was written by a Michigan Civil War vet and printed in the January 28, 1885 magazine, "The Veteran," published in Lansing, Michigan. I think this is surprising because I always thought that "Federal soldier" was interchangeable with "Union soldier." Apparently not! - ed

"To the Editor of the Veteran:

Just now, the public prints of high and low degree teem with articles relating to the 'war of the Rebellion,' written by men of all ranks and on both sides of that great struggle. The rising generation reads these articles with unfailing zeal, and is in a fair way to become well informed regarding the outlines of that grand time, but the heart of it only can be known to those who stood under the old flag in defense of the whole country. It is all important that history should falsify no fact. It is equally important that it should create no false impression. I do not refer to the question who was right, for that has been settled in the lessons of the years, but to the underlying principle which all through that mighty struggle animated the heart of the Union soldier, for which he suffered and dared to the utmost. What was it? That this was the United States of America, one people, with one flag, and one destiny.

He was proud of the name, Union soldier. His shout was "three rousing cheers for the Union." Whatever his foe might be, "Johnny Reb" or a "Confederate," he was either "Yank" or "Union."

Of late an effort is making in high places as well as low to ignore this fact. It is a term of approbrium now to call a man who wore the gray a rebel; he is a Confederate. That is well enough if he wants it that way, but by the same sentiment of namby pamblyism that would emasculate patriotism, and re-write monumental inscriptions so that the feelings of the vanquished may not suffer *, the Union soldier is deprived of his proud title, and arrayed under the newly found name of Federal.

Even the editor of the Century Magazine is not above this mean practice in the notes that he appends to Grant's article on 'Shiloh' in the February number. The grand old hero who writes as modestly as he fought, triumphantly uses no such term, but it is reserved for the editor and his Confederate friends. The term is the coinage of our foes. It is degrading in that it lessens and detracts and is practically a synonym of Confederate. There is nothing in the word Union to be ashamed of, nor are we ashamed of having been Union soldiers. There are enough of us to spurn it out of existence. When a man speaks of a Union soldier in our presence as a Federal let us see to it that he is corrected in such manner that he will not be likely to do it again.

When a newspaper uses the term let the editor hear from us. There is one way in which we can make him listen if in no other. Let us give all men everywhere to understand that while from 1861 to 1866 there may have been Confederates, there were no Federals, but that the men who saved this nation, marched, fought, bled, starved, died as Union soldiers, and for them there is no other name.

- J. H. Palmer

* Ah! Political correctness reared its ugly head in the 1880s also! -ed

FROM THE EDITOR

REMEMBERING A TRAGEDY

Recently a member of a womens luncheon club contacted me about speaking to their group. She had heard that I give a "good talk" on a topic called "The Sultana" and asked if I would come and talk to them while they ate their lunch. First, I had to gently tell her that my topic, our country’s worst marine disaster, wasn’t a topic they’d want to hear about "over lunch," and secondly I told her that I would be uncomfortable giving it under such light-hearted circumstances.

While I’m glad word has gotten around that I give a “good talk,” it concerns me that it may be seen by some as mere entertainment. Of course, once an audience has heard it, they no longer feel that way, and, I hope people come away with a sober sense of what happened to 2,400 Sultana passengers on a dark, cold river in 1865.

It seems to me that all of us in the Sultana Association walk a fine line. On one hand, we want to remember and honor our ancestors, while on the other hand, we don’t want to be known as individuals who go around endlessly telling a gloomy story.

When listening to accounts of relatives (and survivors) - of those who endured our nations most recent common tragedy, 9/11, I am eerily reminded of the same elements of those affected by the Sultana: There was great fear and terrible suffering during both disasters; the families of those who died were forever changed; there was lots of blame-placing that amounted to little afterwards; and, this is the most significant thing - there were moments of great inspiration and courage in the middle of it all (1865: Sisters of Charity staying on the boat to help the injured and frightened; 2001: Firefighters going up the stairs to help those still trapped, offering words of encouragement to those coming down.)

So, we continue to tell our story, even though it may not be appropriate to tell it everywhere at any time. And this should be the main message - not that the government and loading officers were responsible, but that so many innocent people died, but this: There are a lot of good people out there who, in times of crisis, will rise to the occasion and offer help and comfort. Then and now. God Bless America.