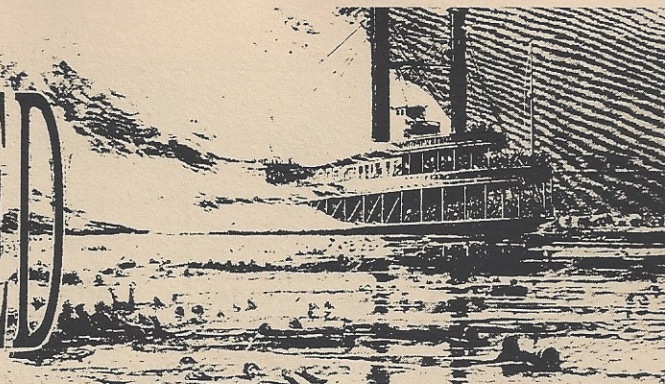


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# SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends April 27, 1865

SPRING 2000

## The *Sultana* on Film and in Books

- By Pam Newhouse

### On Film: Tom Koba

When Tom Koba began researching the *Sultana* tragedy, discovering that it was the worst maritime disaster in America's history, and yet, amazingly, one of the least known, he knew what he had to do. The documentary filmmaker decided he wanted -- needed -- to tell the story of the *Sultana* on film.

No stranger to Civil War storytelling, having produced two Civil War films about Johnson's Island Prisoner of War Camp and another two Civil War documentaries soon to be released, Koba knew this was going to be different. "This is a monumental undertaking," said Koba. "I've designed and built sets for my previous productions, but there's a huge difference between reproducing prison barracks and building a Victorian riverboat."

Koba first became intrigued with the *Sultana* after meeting Gene Salecker at the Mansfield, Ohio, Civil War show. His research into the *Sultana* began, as it has for so many, with reading the two most comprehensive books on the subject, Salecker's book "Disaster on the Mississippi" and "The *Sultana* Tragedy" by Jerry Potter.

Production began last May on Koba's docu-drama, "*Sultana*," with the "prisoner march," a re-creation of the 30-mile march prisoners made from Andersonville and Cahaba to waiting railroad cars that would transport them to the *Sultana*. On a cold, rainy Saturday, about 100 re-enactors marched through wet, woody terrain in Berlin Heights, Ohio, home to Koba & Company's production studio. A vintage boxcar and flat car were constructed on the backlot, simulating what would be, for some prisoners, their last train ride.

In August, a second shoot re-created the "burning deck." A 42-foot stretch of the *Sultana*'s deck was constructed on the Koba & Company backlot representing the side-wheeler's Main and Boiler decks. Another 100 re-enactors were utilized in this sequence, as well as eight professional stunt men and women from Cleveland. Elaborate special-effect make-up and pyrotechnics added to the authenticity of the scenes, as men and women, fearing a fiery death, jumped overboard to the swollen, icy waters of the Mississippi.

About 30 re-enactors were used in the October "*Sultana* salon" shoot. Extensive research went into the salon's construction and design. Vintage china, flatware, linens, chandeliers, and furnishings helped create a realistic Victorian steamboat interior. Lavish seven-course meals were re-created and will serve to highlight the disparity between the paying customers (officers and civilians) and the meager food given to the \$5-a-head soldiers.

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**"I think it is a noble and pious thing, to do whatever we may, by written word or molded bronze and sculpted stone, to keep our memories, our reverence and our love alive and to hand them on to new generations - all too ready to forget."**

-Oliver Wendell Holmes,  
Civil War veteran

By the time the two-year production schedule comes to an end, almost the entire ship will have been re-created, section by section. Interior sequences are planned for passenger cabins, the boiler area, the pilot house, the decks, and the courtroom. Shooting will resume this spring and continue throughout the year, most of it on sets constructed on the Koba & Company backlot. Additional exterior footage will be shot at the nearby Huron River and along the banks of the Mississippi in Tennessee and Arkansas.

Two fully motorized 12' models of the *Sultana* are being constructed by local shipwrights, Jerry Wertz and Bill Crennan. To ensure historical accuracy, the models' design follows the specifications in the plans produced by David J. Meagher. They will take approximately a year and a half to complete. One of the models will be blown up to portray the boiler explosion that ultimately caused the *Sultana*'s demise. A release date for the "*Sultana*" has not been set but, according to Koba, "Production should wrap in about two years."

Until then, you can whet your Civil War appetite with "Rebel Fire/Yankee Ice: The Johnson's Island Story" and "Echoes of Gray: Voices from Johnson's Island." Based on the letters and diaries of the 9,000 Confederates imprisoned at Johnson's Island, "Rebel Fire/Yankee Ice" examines the camp's history, while "Echoes of Gray" reveals personal reflections and stories of individual prisoners.

Koba & Company will soon release two more Civil War video documentaries: "Point Lookout: A Northern Hell in Southern Maryland" and "Buckeye Blue: Ohio in the Civil War." To purchase or to find out more, please contact Koba & Company at (419) 588-2938 or by e-mail at [kobaco@juno.com](mailto:kobaco@juno.com)





KOBA AND COMPANY: FILMING IN PROCESS

## On film: Ron Farmer

The *Sultana* disaster is not just the story of a steamboat explosion. It is not only about an ambitious young captain willing to overload his steamboat to make some quick money. And it is more than just citing the fact that is the worst maritime disaster in American history. All of that is important, and true, but it's not "the story." The story is about the people - our ancestors - and seen through their eyes and told with their words. Simply put, it is the triumph of their human spirit over an unimaginable situation. And that's what I hope to convey in my documentary *The Sultana Disaster*.

I first became interested in the story of the *Sultana* as a young student when I learned that my great-great-grandfather, Private Joseph Farmer of the 3rd Tennessee Calvary, was a passenger (died). From that point on, I read and gathered what I could about the *Sultana*, which wasn't much at the time.

When I first began working on this documentary I knew of only a few photographs and documents, and wondered whether there would be enough visual material to tell this story. As I dug deeper, I was happy to discover that there was a lot of material, but getting to it was not easy. I sent letters to more than 200 libraries around the country to find photographs, illustrations, and documents that would help tell the story. Several private collectors were kind enough to

open their archives to me as well. I found material in states that had no connection to the *Sultana* at all.

So far, I have filmed in seven states, shot on board several authentic steamboats, interviewed historians and ancestors of *Sultana* descendants and collected more than 500 original photographs and documents from all over the country. I have visited more than 40 libraries and archives that provided material, some of which has never been published. It has been a

monumental and time-consuming task, but one I would not trade for anything. I have thoroughly enjoyed the adventure.

Now, with more than 40 hours of material shot, I am embarking on the final part of the project, matching the words with pictures, better known as the editing process. Hopefully, I can finish the entire project within the next year or maybe sooner, depending on my work schedule at NBC News. The film will run about 90 minutes in length.

This project would have been an impossibility if it were not for the generous support of so many wonderful people, especially Jerry Potter and Gene Salecker. Jerry and Gene spent countless hours of their own time providing me with information and photographs. To them, I owe a great deal. Also, I wish to thank the many members of the *Sultana* Association for their support and allowing me to tell their family stories. And even though I may be trying to wrap up this project, if anyone comes across any interesting photograph or letter that they think may add something to this project, please let Pam Newhouse know and she can pass it on to me.

I will keep Pam informed of my progress so she can pass it on to all of you within the pages of this newsletter.

Thank you again for your support.

- Ron Farmer



RON FARMER (on right) CONSULTING WITH GORDON COTTON, VICKSBURG.



## In books, currently published:

### **American Diaries: Emma Eileen Grove, Mississippi, 1865** - by Kathleen Duey

(Kathleen's 142-page paperback book was published in 1999 by Simon & Schuster [Aladdin Paperbacks] for children from 8 -12. It can be ordered online at Amazon.com for under \$5.00. It is a well written fictional account about events that could have taken place on the Sultana. -Ed)

I learned that my great grandfather had been aboard the *Sultana* when, in the sixties, a cousin of my fathers sent him a copy of a Marysville newspaper article. It was a reprint of an account of the wreck A.T. Peery had given a hundred years before. It was amazing to read the words of my great grandfather and to learn something about what he had gone through. I greatly admired his courage and stubborn refusal to give up and die during that long dark night.

When I speak at schools, I spin a long, harrowing yarn, then draw the connection between that brave, ardently stubborn boy of 20 who did not give up, give in or slide under that muddy water so he could stop hurting--and me. If he had not hung on, I would never have been born. I tell kids their families are full of people just that heroic, or they simply would not be here, that they are made of hero-stuff, that it is their legacy. I have read so many diaries and journals now that I know it's true. And kids need to hear it, I think. They need to believe that they are equal to the great task of saving their world

I wrote *Emma Eileen Grove* because I wanted kids to know something about the *Sultana* and the ordeal of the soldiers and others who were aboard. I think the story touches all who hear it. The triumphs--and the scars--from something like this always echo down the generations

- Kathleen Duey

### **Sharpshooter** - by David Madden

(176 pages, \$19.95. Published by the University of Tennessee Press)

This fictional Civil War memoir by Madden, skillfully told, tells the story of

Willis Carr who goes to war at age 13. He leaves his home in the mountains of eastern Tennessee to tag along with his pro-Union father and brothers on a bridge-burning raid into Confederate territory. Taken captive, Willis enlists in the Rebel army rather than be executed by a firing squad. Even as young boy, Willis is a crack shot, and he soon becomes a deadly sharpshooter. Serving under General Longstreet, he targets Yankees for four years, surviving Gaines Mill, Gettysburg and the Wilderness. When young Willis finally deserts to go home to his beloved mountains, he is recaptured by Confederate forces and ends up as a guard at the infamous Andersonville prison. There, he is taught to read by a former slave. At wars end, Willis survives one more Civil War horror, the explosion and sinking of the steamboat *Sultana*. Willis begins this account as a young man of 28, trying to make sense of his experience, a task he completes only when he is old. Nearing death, he allows himself to have a memory that makes all the other --facts and recollections fall into place. Madden suffuses the narrative, dialogue and characters with understated thought and emotion so that it resonates like a true story.

## In books, to be published:

### 1) **Thunder on the River** and 2) **Darkness on the Shore** - by Gwyneth Atlee

(Historical romances based on the *Sultana* disaster. Approximate length, 350 pages; paperback. Projected price, \$5.99. Release dates, mid-2001 and 2002. Titles may be changed by publisher, Kensington/Zebra Books.)

I contacted Gwyneth and asked her to tell us about herself and her books. This is what she said:

"My first historical romance, *Touched by Fire*, is set during the Great Peshtigo Fire. After finishing it, I found a site on the Internet about other disasters, including one I had never heard of, that of the *Sultana*. I thought how sad it seemed that the *Sultana* soldiers suffered the worst indignities of war and then, on the verge of returning to their loved ones, fell victim to such a cataclysm. I felt compelled to try to remind readers that these were very real people with real homes and loved ones.

Even though I was under contract to complete another novel, I could barely wait to start *Thunder on the River*. Actually, I did start it just before I finished the other book.

Closer to the time of the books' release I'll post excerpts on my website at <http://atlee/cjb.net>. But I can tell you that both stories involve soldiers who formed close bonds in Camp Sumpter (Andersonville Prison). These young men became separated during the *Sultana* explosion on their journey home.

If books were rated like movies I think mine would be PG-13. The books explore adult relationships between monogamous couples.

Gene Salecker and Jerry Potter's books have been absolutely indispensable, along with excellent websites that your members and others have posted to honor their ancestors. I've been very impressed by the depth of feeling the descendants and friends of the *Sultana* victims show. I hope that my books honor the spirits of the soldiers, passengers, and crew who were a part of the *Sultana*'s final journey. I believe that history devoid of human stories can be a dry and dusty place, but history told with heart can bring the past alive."

(Fred Brown of Knoxville also has a fictional *Sultan* novel well underway as does Joe Smith and Stuart Lutz. - Ed)

## In screenplays:

Eric Struble, currently of Newton, New Jersey, but soon to move back to Los Angeles, has written a screenplay, *Sultana*, which is a "spec script based on the forgotten 1865 maritime disaster. The screenplay tells the story of one Union soldier's remembrance of the tragic events from his harsh internment in a southern prison camp to his subsequent release, which resulted in an almost greater hell. *Sultana* was written as a planned feature film, as the scope of the film would be too large for television."

Eric previously has written and directed films.

So, as you can see, the circumstances of the event that took so many lives and changed so many others on April 17, 1865 are being told and retold in numerous ways. We are still remembering. ■



## Sultana Membership Pins Available!!

Last spring at the reunion meeting in Knoxville Pam and I discussed the possibility of having a membership badge of some kind for our group. I looked into various possibilities and found that a custom made pin could be made in a limited quantity for us.

The pin is shown here actual size, 1" x 1". It has a white background with a black image and blue lettering, and the border and reverse (which is a tie tack type back) is in a Brite Brass finish.

The Pin will sell for \$10. and only be available to members of our Association. There is a limit of four pins per member and shipping cost is \$2. per order. The pins will be available in Marion, Arkansas on April 1st and in Knoxville on April 8th, where you can purchase them and save on shipping. A beautiful presentation box in gold with a black lining can also be purchased to store the pin for \$1.

After the cost of the pins has been met any additional monies will be placed in a fund to build a memorial to the 102nd Ohio Infantry Regiment formed in Manchester, Ohio, which lost more men than any other regiment in the disaster. I have discussed the memorial with the Mayor of Mansfield

and the possibility of getting matching funds from the Ohio Bicentennial Commission and erecting it in City Park or next to the G.A.R. Hall on Park Avenue which is being remodeled.

The Sultana Survivors Association had reunions and could buy medals at these events which today are as rare as hen's teeth because of the limited number of members. Pam and I felt that a membership pin would be a good advertisement for our group and would carry on the tradition of our ancestors. -RICHARD E. THROUP

• Orders can be made by sending check or money order to: RICHARD E. THROUP, 235 POPLAR DRIVE, McCONNELLSVILLE, OHIO 43756. (Richard's ancestor, Manuel Harnly, served with the 102nd Ohio, and died on the *Sultana*).

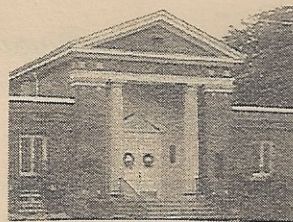
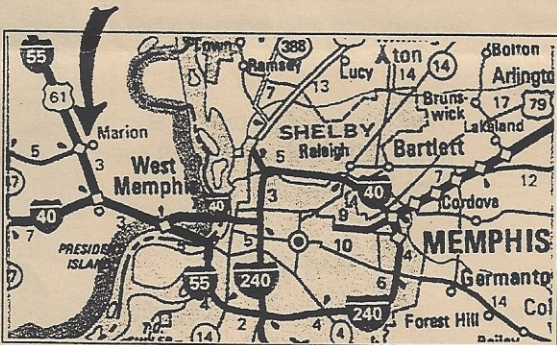
PIN SHOWN ACTUAL SIZE



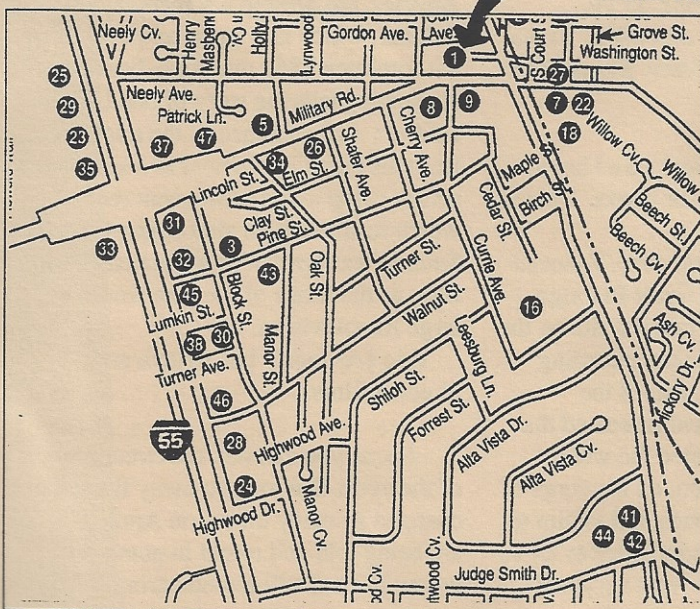
## Sultana Historical Marker Dedication in Marion, AR

### SATURDAY, APRIL 1

Pre-Dedication Ceremony Reception, 2PM  
Dedication Ceremony, 3 PM



Marion United Methodist Church



Detail map of downtown Marion, Arkansas

We are honored that the Arkansas Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) have erected an historical marker commemorating the *Sultana* to be erected in Marion, Arkansas - the closest community to where the remains of the boat lies buried.

Pre-ceremony reception will be at the Marion United Methodist Church at 2 PM. The dedication will follow at 3 PM across the street from the church, in front of the City Hall at 15 Military Rd. complete with a Civil War re-enactors' band.

For more information contact Jeannette Coley, 910 South Roselawn Dr., West Memphis, Arkansas 72301-2446 (online address: JMCCOLEY@aol.com) or Kay Brockwell (online address: MarionAR@aol.com) or phone (870)739-5414.

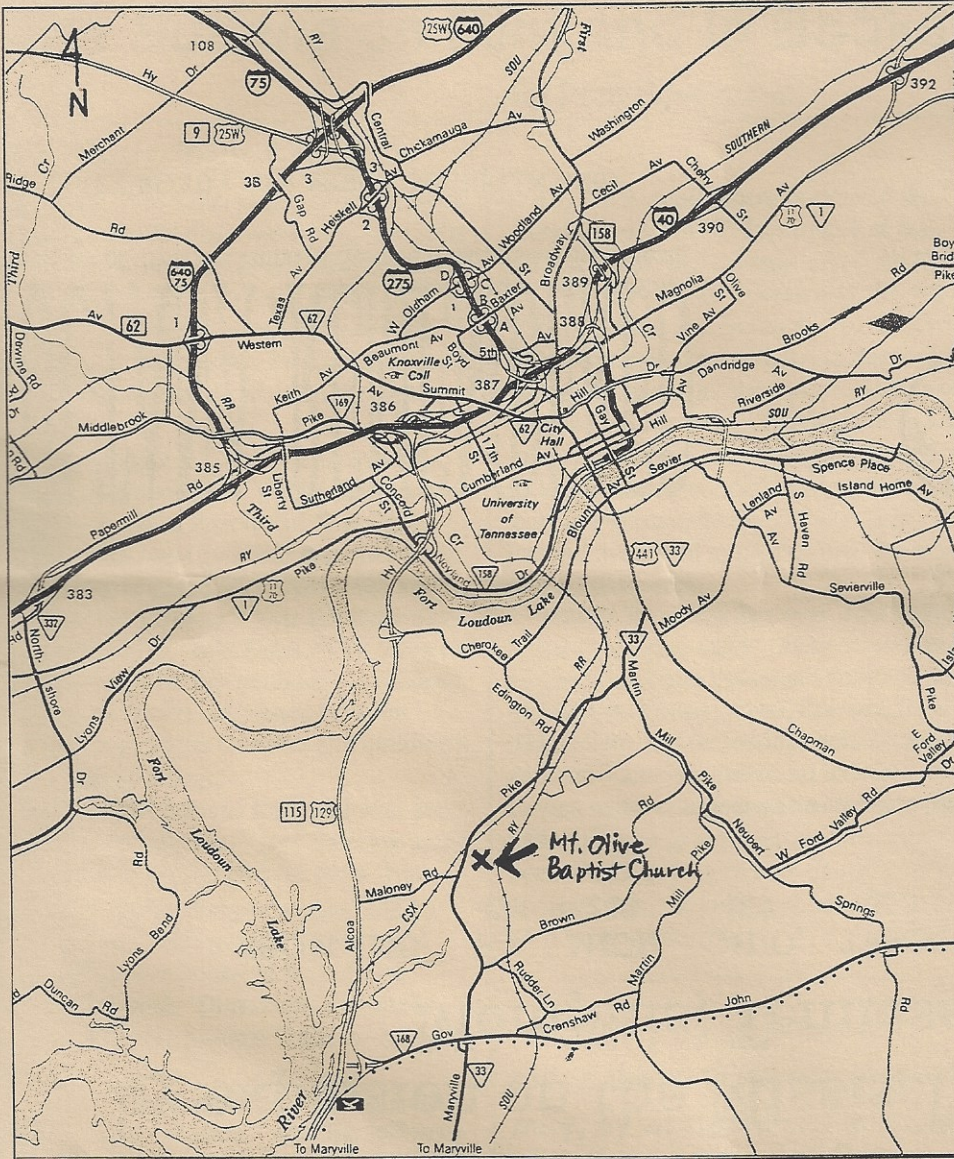
Gene is coming from Chicago, I'll be there from Michigan, and Jerry will be coming all the way from Memphis! Please let me know if you can make it so the hosts can make plans based on numbers of people expected. (Pam Newhouse, CW1865@aol.com or 4081 Clark Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105-9505).

Later, we will get a chance to go out close to where the *Sultana* rests. Hope all who can possibly come will do so! -PAM



# 13th Annual Sultana Reunion

Mt. Olive Baptist Church  
Knoxville, Tennessee  
SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2000  
11 AM to 6 PM



## Notes from Norman

A primary goal for our organization is to inform and to educate as many people as possible about the *Sultana* tragedy. I'm excited over two recent events which have and will tell hundreds or even thousands about the greatest loss of life in U.S. history from a maritime disaster.

Last November a Memphis-based Associated Press (AP) reporter, Woody Baird, wrote an article covering the *Sultana* explosion and defining what our group is all about. This story was available to any newspaper in the country that wished to publish it. I have heard of at least three papers that did decide to print Mr. Baird's article which would mean others have done likewise. I was in Huntsville, Alabama, visiting by brother over the Christmas holiday and happened to spot it in the *Huntsville Times*. Included was a good picture of *Sultana* author Jerry Potter standing by the *Sultana* monument in Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis.

A second accomplishment has been the recent update of our *Sultana* website ([www.sultana.org](http://www.sultana.org)). Many thanks to Michael Johnson of Sumter, SC for volunteering his time to meet this need. Mr. Johnson had an ancestor, Lewis Johnson, who survived the *Sultana* disaster after being captured at Sulphur Trestle along with other members of the 9th Indiana Cavalry commanded by Maj. Eli Lilly. (Footnote: Maj. Lilly previously served as an artillery officer at the Battle of Chickamauga and near Knoxville) Check our our *Sultana* page and you'll see several important additions and expanded links.

I hope everyone has highlighted April 8, 2000 for our next annual reunion at Mt. Olive Baptist Church, south of the city. Meet at the *Sultana* monument in the adjoining cemetery at 11 AM. Reunion to follow at the church. Bring your family stories, artifacts, questions, answers, finger foods- and be prepared to have a great time!

One last thing. Please contact me immediately (865) 558-0331 (work #) if your Tennessee *Sultana* ancestor's name is not on the monument in the Mt. Olive Cemetery and you would like to have it added.

See you on the 8th!

- NORMAN SHAW

**From the city:** Take I-40 (near downtown Knoxville) to the Alcoa Highway (US 129), the "Airport" exit, 386B); go south on this (crossing over the Tennessee River and passing the University of Tennessee Hospital complex on the left) - about 2 to 3 miles. Turn left on Maloney Rd. (1 1/2 miles after passing the Southgate Shopping Center) and go to Maryville Pike. Straight in front of you, across the Pike, is Mt. Olive Baptist Church. (To go to the cemetery, turn left here onto Maryville Pike and Mt. Olive Cemetery will be about 50 yds. down the Pike on your right. The *Sultana* monument is not hard to find- the cemetery is small. Look for the people gathered there.)

**From the airport:** Take the Alcoa Highway from the airport- go north approximately 6 1/2 miles. Turn right on Maloney Road, a little less than a mile and a half after passing the Gov. John Sevier Highway (State Road 168). Follow directions above, (starting with Maloney Rd.) to church.