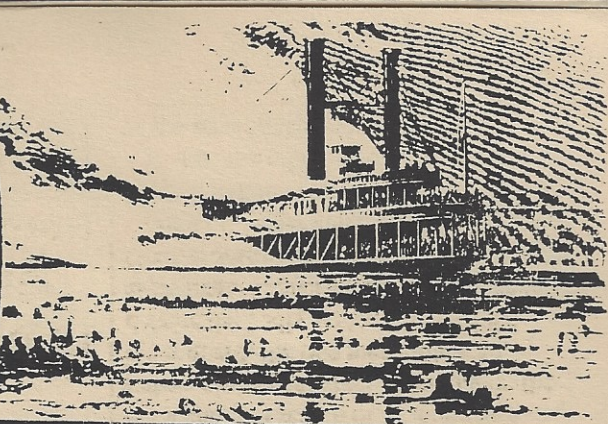


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SULTANA REMEMBERED



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

SPRING 1998

Paying for Their Misery: The Sultana's Civilian Passengers

(Part 2)

By Gene Eric Salecker

Near midnight on April 26, 1865, the *Sultana* left Memphis and moved a little north to take on some coal. An hour later, she started upriver again towards Cairo, IL. At two o'clock in the morning of April 27, 1865, the *Sultana's* overworked and ill-repaired boilers suddenly exploded. In an instant, the boat was crippled and the life of every man, woman and child was placed in the balance.

Citizen Daniel McLeod, with his useless right leg, could not sleep that night and was sitting up in the main cabin, on the second deck, reading a book. Suddenly the floor behind him erupted and pitched him over the table and against a wall. Both of his ankles were severely broken, the bones protruding through the skin. Without panicking, he removed his suspenders and tied tourniquets around each shattered ankle.

As the fire in the middle of the *Sultana* began to spread, McLeod called to a couple of paroled Union officers to help save him. Although the officers stated that they were powerless to help because they could not swim, McLeod asked only to be thrown into the river because he did not want to burn to death. Carried to the edge of the deck, McLeod let himself into the river before the maddening crowd jumped in and started swimming back to Memphis.

Passenger William Long was asleep in Stateroom No. 10, near the front of the boat. The explosion blew upwards and shattered the forward wall of the stateroom. Somewhat shocked, he ran from his room wearing only his shirt, and reached the stern. Looking down into the river he

saw "fifty persons jump overboard every minute." Unwilling to jump into this panicked mob, he went back to his room and pulled on his trousers. Waiting quite awhile, Long finally took to the water with the boat "burned clean to the stern and the whole upper deck (having) fallen in."

Senator-elect William Dunham Snow was sleeping in a rear stateroom when the explosion rocked his room. As he stood dressing, a cloud of steam rolled into his room through the transom above his door. Opening his door and seeing that the *Sultana* was burning badly, he took his lifebelt and ran to the stern. Spotting only a "sea of heads" behind the boat, he noticed an opening near the left wheelhousing and quickly went overboard.

Also in a stern stateroom, Lt. Harvey Annis and his wife Ann and seven year old daughter Belle, heard the explosion and immediately arose. Harvey placed a lifebelt on himself and his wife and took his

Ann Annis watched in horror as her husband and young daughter drowned in the clutches of the fighting mob (of men in the water).

daughter in his arms. Taking his family towards the stern, he found a rope hanging down to the lower deck and, with his daughter on his back, climbed down to the main deck. Ann followed but as she was descending the rope, someone jumped on her from above and knocked her into the hold. Unhurt, she scrambled up and followed her husband and child into the river.

Once in the water Ann found that her "life-preserver was not placed on (her) right" and held onto the rudder while she straightened it out. While hanging on to the rudder she watched in horror as her husband and young daughter drowned in the clutches of the fighting mob. Forced to let go of the rudder because of the growing flames from above, she was able to grab hold of a piece of wood, perhaps a hatch cover, and float down river towards Memphis.

Seth Hardin, Jr. and his new bride had waited for the crowd to disperse before taking to the river. By the time they jumped overboard the main cabin of the *Sultana* was filled with smoke and fire. And they hit the water, the hundreds of panic-stricken soldiers were still fighting for survival and the two newlyweds became separated. Although Seth Hardin tried to locate his wife, he was unsuccessful and he floated down the river with a broken heart.

One of the paroled soldiers, Pvt, George M. Safford (Company H. 10th Indiana Cavalry) moved towards the main cabin in search of his civilian father, also a passenger. Meeting on the outer guard, the two men embraced, despite the badly scalded arms of the elder man. Gathering up three lifebelts, George Safford tied two of the belts around his father and one around himself and then tore off a stateroom door and tossed it into the river. Jumping atop the door the two men

started away from the burning boat when, unexpectedly, a horse jumped on top of them. Pushed in opposite directions, the two men became separated and Private Safford was forced to float towards Memphis alone, fearing that his father was drowned.

Little is known of the plight of the Spikes family, nine people in all. What happened after the explosion or in the water is not known. Only DeWitt Clinton Spikes, the eighteen or nineteen year old ex-Confederate soldier's son, made it to shore unharmed. Rescued by the citizens of Mound City, Arkansas, Spikes took only a short time to rest before starting the help others. While he undoubtedly searched for the members of his family, he was credited with rescuing fourteen people by himself and assisted others in the rescue of twenty-four more.

Among the bodies pulled out of the water at Mound city was that of Mrs. Elethia Spikes and seventeen-year-old Susan Spikes. Recognizing his mother and sister, DeWitt Clinton Spikes was "frantic with grief at the sight of (them)." Eventually brought to Memphis, Spikes spent hours along the wharf. Looking for other surviving members of his family. In time, a report came in that one of his younger brothers was found alive down river. The newspapers never followed up on the story and it is therefore generally believed that De Witt Clinton Spikes was the only survivor among the nine members of his family that had boarded the *Sultana* at New Orleans.

Mrs. Perry of Cincinnati had left the *Sultana* with a lifebelt tied around her waist. Securing a door, along with a half dozen soldiers, she floated down river in the darkness. Mrs. Perry and a very young soldier tried to keep up the spirits of the other men, encouraging them as they floated along. One soldier, losing his head, climbed atop the door and refused to get off. Another, noticing that Mrs. Perry wore a lifebelt, tried to take the belt from her and pushed her under water four separate times. The young soldier, although unable to physically help, remonstrated with the other soldier, saying that he knew who he was and would label him a coward. Undaunted, the older soldier continued to attack Mrs. Perry for her lifebelt.

Spying another floating door through the darkness, Mrs. Perry left the first door and swam over to the second one. Just as

she was about to take hold, a soldier rose out of the water and told her to keep away. She stated that the other door was overcrowded and as she reached for the float, the soldier "thrust her off into the water, and compelled her to return to the other." Eventually the overcrowded door struck a stack of cordwood that had become lodged against a submerged tree. Climbing onto the wood, Mrs. Perry and the others waited until morning when a steamboat came along and rescued them.

By the time the sun rose, a half dozen steamboats were rescuing survivors that had become lodged in the tops of semi-submerged trees or helped by local residents. Rescued by an ex-Confederate from Mound City was Daniel McLeod. Despite his shattered ankles, McLeod had been able to avoid the crowd and float down river to a submerged tree. Taken from the tree top, he was placed in the bottom of a canoe and transferred to a steamboat. Eventually brought to Memphis, he was placed in Adams Hospital where he wound were examined, Because his right knee had been shattered by a musket ball at Shiloh, the surgeon thought that it would be impossible to save his right leg and amputated McLeod's right leg above the knee. His shattered left ankle was set and after a long recuperation. McLeod left Memphis and became a resident of St. Louis.

Of the citizens that had been on board the *Sultana* at the time of the explosion very few survived. Among the known survivors were Daniel McLeod, Ann Annis, Mrs. Perry, DeWitt Clinton Spikes, Seth W. Hardin, Jr., William Long, Senator-elect William Dunham Snow, U.S. Scout Mr. Erwin, and Indiana Sanitary Commission Agents J. T. Farris and Mr. Safford.

Originally separated from his father, Pvt. George M. Safford "opened up more than a hundred coffins on the wharf," looking for the elder Mr. Safford. Eventually he ran into U.S. Scout Mr. Erwin, who presented him with his father's watch and told him that the elder Safford had been "rescued in an unconscious state by some Negroes on President's Island."

Another citizen that spent a lot of time searching among the dead was Seth W. Hardin, Jr. The young lawyer had become separated from his new bride and after being rescued himself, waited anxiously as hundreds of bodies were brought ashore. He waited in vain. Distaught and in

despair, having lost his bride, his trunks, several thousand dollars, and most of his clothes, he finally left the waterfront and applied for a room at a third-rate hotel. Because he had no baggage and "he looked as he did" he was refused accommodations. Just when it appeared that he had hit bottom, the Worsham House, a first-rate hotel, heard of his plight and gave him a fine room.

Ann Annis, who had lost her husband and young daughter, was rescued in an "unconscious" state and taken to Gayoso Hospital. Reaction to her destitute condition, a Memphis newspaper placed an appeal to the "Ladies of Memphis" to come to her aid. The appeal met with "considerable success" and in a few weeks Ann left the city and headed home for Oshkosh, Wisconsin.



James Willis Annis, son of Harvey and Ann Annis, with his infant daughter, Mildred. (c. 1890). Photo courtesy of Tom Mathews.

Only a few of the bodies of the paying citizens were ever found and identified. In addition to the bodies of Elethia and Susan Spikes, the body of Mrs. Hoge was found holding fast to a tree limb. Sally B. Woolfolk was identified from a number of letters found on her person and J.D. Fontaine was identified because he died wearing he "two fine shorts" marked with his name and home town.

There were approximately 100 citizen passengers and 85 crew members on board the *Sultana* when she exploded. When listing the number of survivors, the passengers and crew were never separated. The best estimate of surviving passengers and crew members is between 35 and 40, with perhaps 20 to 25 being passengers. Perhaps 75 to 80 paying passengers paid the ultimate cost for their trip on the *Sultana*- the loss of their lives. ■

SULTANA SOLDIERS' STORIES

The Long Walk Home: A Survivor's Story

How did the Sultana survivors finally get home? Most conquered their fear of boat travel long enough to allow themselves to be put on other steamboats and be sent up the river towards home. Some, understandably, absolutely refused to get on another boat and made arrangements to go overland. Others, like Caleb Rule, Co. K, 3rd Tennessee Cavalry, simply walked. Caleb's story is told to us by his gr grandson, Walt Rule:

"There is a story passed along in the family about the (Sultana) incident. My gr grandfather, Caleb, and his brother John (both of Co. K of the 3rd TN Cav) and two of their cousins, Andrew and Robert (both of Co. A) had been at Cahaba (Prison) and were transferred aboard the *Sultana* after the was. When the ship exploded, Caleb was blown into the water and suffered a leg injury. He spent the night in the water hanging in limbs, presumably on the Arkansas side since the river was in flood stage. He was picked up the next morning and taken to a hospital in Memphis...I have heard it was Gayoso. After being released, he looked in other hospitals for John, but with no success. John was never found. Andrew and Robert survived but I don't know their circumstances.

Caleb was supposedly offered passage on another steamer going up the river, but declined to accept. He started walking. Along the way somewhere he found a grapevine growing around small tree and cut it to use as a cane since he had a bad leg. So, Caleb walked from Memphis to Knoxville on a bum leg with a grapevine cane to assist. The grapevine is still in the family."



Last letter home: P. W. Weaver, 115th Ohio Infantry

This letter, written by Pvt. Weaver, is shared with us by his descendant, Robert Thompson of Bordon, Ontario, Canada. The original is in the possession of his uncle.

Pvt. Weaver is writing home from the parole camp at Vicksburg, before being boarded on the Sultana. He did not survive the disaster:

"Dear Sister,

With pleasure I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well and I hope these pen lines will find you the same. We are at Vicksburg yet, and I don't know how long we will stay here but I guess they will soon send us to Camp Chase near Columbus and perhaps we will get a furlough if nothing turns to stop it for we have been seeing such hard times since we was captured and in the Confederacy. We was starved and marched through the rain. When we started from Columbia Tennessee they gave us corn meal and we got the citizens to bake it up for us. The way was to mix it up with cold water and a little salt and then bake it till its as dry as a chip and there is no more substance than a rock an then we had to carry enough for (?) days rations and it comenced raining the day that we started and rained until the 9 day. So you can just suppose what it was to march all day through the (?) and ford crick (creeks) up to the neck and at night lay down in the mud and rain without enny covering or dry cloths. My cloths was wet for 10 days without being dry and the weather being pretty cold it was in December and after that we was put on hog cars and run 100 (?) miles. I spent my Christmas on the (train) cars between (?) and Maridian Mississippi. We went through Tennessee and Alabama, Miss & Georgia on my pleasure trip through the (?) cities but is has fill me of going south. If you can read this you can do more than I can. You need not wright yet until you hear from me again.

Yours truly, Good by, Give my best respects and love to all.

P. W. Weaver, 115 regt, OVI"

"Thanks to God for Preserving my Life." Memoirs of a Survivor

The following are excerpts from the memoirs of Pvt. Isaac Noah Davenport, Co. K., 7th TN Cavlary. The original is owned by his granddaughter, Ruby Winslow, of Lexington, Tennessee. I have lightly edited the excepts (mainly the spelling) in order to make it easier to read:

"....I was awakened by a loud noise amid shrieking and screaming and now, my readers, I tell you here was the awfullest sight I ever saw- to see men jumping overboard like sheep when scared as if the wolves was after them. Some men was drowning and some was burning and some was held fast by the smashup and crying for help....I was slightly wounded by a piece of timber...there was two of my mess mates killed- one on each side of me....I did not like the idea of jumping into the river as I could not swim very well but the time had come..I thought that I had rather risk myself in the river than to be burned to death on the boat, so I got a piece of plank and jumped in....I paddled around trying to save myself but just then I was seized by a drowning man and carried beneath the waves of the river. We struggled together until I thought I would have to open my mouth for breath, but with God's strength I broke his hold and by the right presence of mind I arose above the waves once more.....I thought I would risk my chance around the hull of the burning Sultana and on my way back to the hull I was struck on the head and shoulder with a piece of plank which fell from the top of the boat. It knocked the blood out of me.....About this time two men from a wood yard came to our relief (with) a raft of logs....and in a short time they had all that was hanging around the boat rescued.... The sun was just rising and sending its silver rays across the river. I viewed the hull of the burning Sultana for the last (time), she went down beneath the waves....there was but eight of our regiment on the boat, and six of them were lost."

"The Sultana Disaster" Documentary to Air on TV, May 29

MPH Entertainment of Los Angeles, CA has produced an hour long documentary for the History Channel (cable TV) which will be first shown (three times) on Friday, May 29. (Individual areas may then elect to rerun it when they wish.)

The three people interviewed for this project were Ed Bearss, retired Chief Historian for the National Park Service, Charles Robinson III, History Instructor at South Texas Community College, and myself. I have seen the working script which shows all the elements of the documentary in place (narrative, interviews, indications of music, photos, etc.) and believe that MPH has done a wonderful job. Thanks to the many descendants who participated by allowing photos and stories to be used. Tune in!

- PAM NEWHOUSE

The Sultana on the Internet

A new site has been posted on the Internet by Greg Reeves. He states that on it Sultana descendants can share notes about their ancestors, research new Sultana-related topics, exchange notes and reviews of Sultana articles, documentaries, etc. "In short, anything concerning the Sultana is fair game," says Greg.

If you'd like to subscribe to this free mailing list, send an e-mail to

SULTANA-L-request@rootsweb.com

Type the word SUBSCIRBE (nothing else) in the body of the message. This will enable you to receive every message sent to the list on a daily basis. If you would rather receive a "digest" version- where you receive all messages bundled together and distributed only once a day, send an e-mail instead to

SULTANA-D-request@rootsweb.com with the word SUBSCRIBE typed in the body of the message.

Thanks, Greg, for starting this service.

The Letters of Frederic Speed

Captain Frederic Speed, one of the men who was involved in the overloading of the Sultana, was the only officer ever put on trial for the disaster. His guilt or innocence has long been a source of debate. He was originally found guilty, but that verdict was soon overturned. He continued to live in Vicksburg during and after Reconstruction - "Judge Speed, the Carpetbagger," as they refer to him today - and he and his family are buried in Vicksburg City Cemetery.

The Clements Library at the University of Michigan has a collection of Speed's letters which were written from Vicksburg to his parents and sister just before and after April 27, when the Sultana exploded. The following are excerpts from those letters.

-EDITOR

Vicksburg, Miss. June 3, 1865

My dear father,

I am in a fair way to make a highly advantageous arrangement by which the ice trade can be largely, and I believe, profitably entered upon. A gentleman of large means, who owns a property suited to the business, at new Orleans, engages, if a satisfactory contract can be made with you, to enter into the business and give me a paying chance in. He has resources sufficient to carry it on upon the largest scale at New Orleans, and Mobile (if houses can be had upon satisfactory terms there).....(no mention of the Sultana in this letter. -ED.) Affectionately, Frederic Speed

Vicksburg, Miss. Sept. 17, 1865

My dear father,

I arrived here last evening and have ascertained that I am to be tried by a General Court Martial on account of the part I payed in the Sultana disaster - I do not fear the result...The charges are serious and much time must be consumed in the trial, and I fear not a little money. I am glad to observe that all who have any acquaintance with the case are on my side. General Slocomb who left last night spoke very confidently as to the result as indeed everyone does - I have not yet been served with a copy of the charges but have seen a memorandum of them and therefore know that they will be very strongly drawn and, altho easily disapproved, yet of a nature too serious to tolerate any mistake on the part of the defence.....Please be good enough to prepare for and anticipate some drafts which I must draw on you shortly.

I will be detained here at least two months - perhaps longer - So please have my trunk sent to me via express.... Affectionately, Frederic Speed

Vicksburg, Miss. Sept. 19, 1865

My dear father,

...Gen. Slocomb, who has read all the evidence (of the impending Court Martial) ,told me I would be acquitted - everyone says this, but the order from Mr. Stanton is to try everyone implicated in the matter and the Judge Advocate thinks that he can make a great thing for himself ...and to take advantage of the ample order of Mr. S- to make it a Wirtz* trial, if possible.....Affectionately, Frederic Speed

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

- Maxine Smith, 876 Arlington Ave., Mansfield, OH 44903-7020
- Mrs. Agnew (McPhail) Ellis, 7414 Hamilton Run Dr., Chattanooga TN 37421-1866 (Desc. of Bird McPhail, Co. C., 3rd TN Cav.)
- Ken Hamilton, 10823 Rutledge Pike, Bliane, TN 37709-9001
- Lois Maddox Bell, 630 Garfield St., Alcoa, TN 37701-2704
- Debbie Purnell, 4020 Penrod Dr., Riverside, CA 92505
- Gladys Neal, 5810 42nd St., Riverside, CA 92509
- Walt Rule, 312 Holland Dr., Kingsport, TN 37663 (Desc. of Caleb Rule, Co. K, 3red TN Cav.)
- Katie Morton, 940 Belle Wood Dr., Henderson, KY 42420
- Joe W. Smith, P.O. Box 2, Gamaliel, AR 72537
- Linda Goldsmith, 10111 South Sandusky, Tulsa, OK 74137-5914
- C. N. Seger, 4522 Ivanhoe, Houston, TX 77077
- Grant Harrell, 1305 Hawk Dr., Gadsden, AL 35908

* CSA Commandant of Andersonville Prison

NOTES FROM NORMAN

Eleven years have passed since the renewal of our association. The original Tennessee Sultana Association of surviving soldiers would be pleased with the success we have made in informing and educating the public about the greatest maritime disaster in U.S. history. One of the highlights at the 10th annual reunion this past April was the adding of three names of soldiers of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.) to the Mt. Olive Baptist Church cemetery who had been inadvertently left off. This is an event that we will continue at each upcoming reunion as long as omitted names are discovered. Feel free to contact me throughout the year if you know of any Tennessee soldier who was on the *Sultana*, but whose name is not on the monument. Keep in mind three important points: 1) the monument was dedicated to only Tennessee men so only the names of Tennessee troopers can be added to the monument (2 These men must be verified as having truly been on the *Sultana* when it exploded (3 The descendants will be responsible for the cost of stone cutting to inscribe their ancestor's name into the stone.

This year three more names will be added to the *Sultana* monument: (1 Noah Thomas, 3rd TN Cav, Co. A, who is the ancestor of Mrs. Glenn Dixon Rowell (2 John H. Campbell, 3rd TN Cav, Co. A, ancestor of Joan Ellis Gibson, and (3 Henry Clay Maples, 3rd TN Cav, Co. I, who is the ancestor of someone who gave me his name at the last reunion. If you are that person and you read this, please give me a call at (423) 450-9295 (w).

Two other names that were given to me as possible omissions were found to be listed on the monument under a variance of the true spelling. Trooper Madison Isaac Thompson, 3rd TN Cav, Co. I, is identified as "U. Thompson, Co. A", while Madison B. Hysinger, 3rd TN Cav, Co. H, is remembered as "H.P. Hissinger, Co. H."

There is still some time to inscribe additional names for our 1998 meeting if any reader knows of an omitted name and contacts me immediately after reading this piece.

I know the Tennessee men on the *Sultana* would be proud of our efforts.

-NORMAN SHAW, Organizer of the Association of Descendants and Friends

11th Annual Sultana Reunion

Mt. Olive Baptist Church
Knoxville, Tennessee

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 1998

Noon to 5 PM

DIRECTIONS TO MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH:

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.

Second Sultana Documentary in the Works; You Can Help

Descendant Ron Farmer, a producer with NBC Evening News with Tom Brokow, has been working on a comprehensive *Sultana* documentary for the past few years with Jerry Potter and Gene Salecker, and is "90% done" with the project, says Ron. He will be at the reunion this year, as he was two years ago, with a film crew and will film parts of our reunion program. He encourages all attending to bring family artifacts, relics, and documents relating to the *Sultana*- and any *Sultana* stories that have been passed down in your family.

We are excited about this project, as we know it has been meticulously and lovingly done by three men who care very much about those who were on the *Sultana* on April 17, 1865. Let's all offer them our full support.

Called Home

Anniversary of Sultana Sinking Today—None For Reunion.

Today marks the 66th anniversary of the destruction of the steamer *Sultana*, which carried hundreds of Union soldiers to their graves at the end of the Civil War.

The last of the survivors, J. H. Simpson and P. M. Keeble died within the past year. Annual reunions were held as long as any of the survivors lived. The last reunion was held April 27, 1930.

No reunion will be held today, but Ralph L. Berry, head of the Berry funeral home, will place a large flag on the *Sultana* monument, which was erected a few years ago, in Mount Olive cemetery.

- from the Knoxville Journal, April 27, 1931