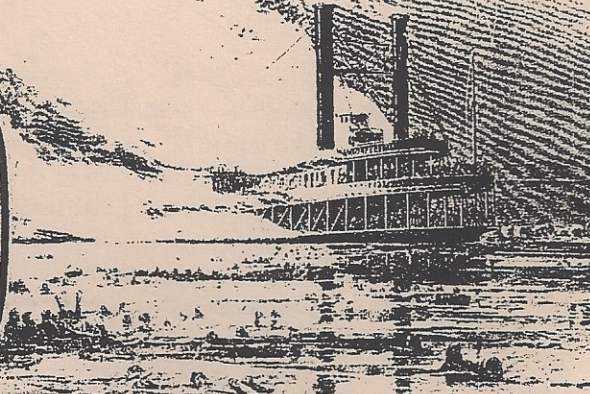


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SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

SPRING 2005

Chester Berry: "Sweet hour of Prayer"

by Pam Newhouse

(Two issues ago I included the Introduction to Rev. Chester Berry's 1892 book, "Loss of the Sultana and Reminiscences of Survivors." As I said then, we owe a debt of gratitude to this man for compiling this extraordinary collection of Sultana survivor eyewitness accounts.

Since then, I have been doing research on him. Who was this man? What pre-war and post-war life experiences did he have? His story begins below. - ed.)

Chester Dawson Berry was born at South Creek (Bradford County), Pennsylvania on August 1, 1844, the middle child of Harvey and Harriet Berry. The Berry family had a long American history, coming to America from England in the 1600s and settling in Massachusetts, where at least one ancestor fought in the American Revolutionary War.

Chester's father was a deaf mute due to "sores in his ears" as an infant, and was educated in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf from ages 16 to 22. In the early 1840s he married Harriet Jones, moving to South Creek to farm. Harriet was a strong Christian.

The family, including Chester, his older brother and younger sister, moved to a farm in Assyria, Michigan (Barry County) near Battle Creek. The property is still in the family, although the old farmhouse has long since burned. It was from here in August of 1862 that Chester went to Marshall, Michigan and enlisted in the 20th Michigan Infantry, Co. I. He served with the regiment until his capture by the Rebs during the Battle of Cold Harbor, Virginia on June 2, 1864.

He was taken to Andersonville Prison in Georgia where he and his comrades ex-

isted "with hardly a hope" until his eventual release on March 25, 1865. He and many others were then taken to a parole camp (Camp Fisk), four miles outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi by train, boat, and foot. He wrote, "I never experienced a happier day in my life than I did when we marched under the old Stars and Stripes and the Big Black river railroad bridge and drew my first cup of coffee and a single



CHESTER D. BERRY.

"My present occupation is Minister of the Gospel. Post office address, Tekonsha, Michigan."

- Chester Berry, "Loss of the Sultana and Reminiscences of Survivors" (1892)

hard tack." After 25 days in camp we and about "2,000 officers and men" were placed on the steamer Sultana to head homeward. Berry continues: "There were a large number of boats at Vicksburg at the time we (the exchanged prisoners) were to be sent north, but all demanded the \$5 per man and would take but 1,000 men. Finally the quartermaster succeeded in persuading the captain of the Sultana to take the entire 2,000 at \$3 per head, that would give him \$6,000 for the trip, whereas, if he only took 1,000 at \$5 he would only make \$5,000. The report said that the captain of the Sultana signed the papers for \$10,000 and that the quartermaster cashed them on the spot for \$6,000. How true that was I cannot tell, but I know it was believed among the men at the time.

All went gay as a marriage bell for awhile. A happier lot of men I think I never saw than those poor fellows were. The most of them had been a long time in prison, some even for about two years, and the prospect of soon reaching home made them content to endure any amount of crowding. I know that on the lower deck we were just about as thick as we could possibly lie all over the deck, and I understood that all the other decks were the same."

Two nights later the boat lay in Memphis as 100 hogsheads of sugar were being unloaded from her hold. Berry says, "The Christian commission had given me a hymn book. At the time I left home the song "Sweet Hour of Prayer" was having quite a run. I found this, and before the darkness had stopped me in the evening I had committed those words to memory and sang them for the boys, little dreaming how soon I should have to test the power of prayer as well as the hour when it was held."

Some hours later after leaving Memphis, in the middle of the night, in the

middle of the Mississippi, a boiler explosion of the boat awakened him, along with a stick of cord wood which hit him in his head, fracturing his skull. Before long, the boat was hopelessly ablaze, with soldiers and civilians jumping overboard, trying to save themselves. Berry's narrative continues: "The horrors of that night will never be effaced from my memory - such swearing, praying, shouting, and crying I had never heard; and much of it from the same throat - imprecations followed by petitions to the Almighty, denunciations by bitter weeping. I stood still and watched for awhile, then began wandering around to other parts of the boat when I came across one man who was weeping bitterly and wringing his hands as if in terrible agony, continually crying, 'O dear, O dear.' I supposed the poor fellow was seriously hurt. My sympathies were aroused at once. Approaching him I took him by the shoulder and asked him where he was hurt. 'I'm not hurt at all,' said he, 'but I can't swim, I've got to drown, O dear.' I bade him be quiet, then showing him my little board, I said to him, 'there, do you see that; now you go to that pile of broken deck and get you one like it, and when you jump into the water put it under your chin and you can't drown.' 'But I did get one,' said he, 'and someone snatched it away from me.' Well, then," said I, 'get another.' 'Why,' said he, 'what would be the use, they would take it from me. O dear, I tell you there is no use; I've got to drown, I can't swim.' By this time I was thoroughly disgusted, and giving him a shove, I said, 'Drown then, you fool.'

I want to say to you, gentle reader, I have been sorry all these years for that very act. There was little or no rush for the water at that time and had I given my board to that poor fellow, then conducted him to the edge of the boat and seen him safely overboard, he might, perhaps, have escaped, while as it was, I have no doubt that he was drowned. If he was not, and should ever see this, I wish he would write me that fact."

Finally, Berry jumped overboard. As he looked back at the wildly burning boat he watched in horror as a man was held, "as in an iron vice," between the wheelhouse covering and the hurricane deck while he burned to death. ".....and even now, after the lapse of years, it almost seems as though I could hear the poor fellow's screams, as the forked flames swept around him."

He struck out to swim to safety. Becoming disoriented and exhausted, he realized he had been swimming upstream away from some timber that he thought he had been swimming towards: "Becoming now quite despondent, I had about concluded that there was no use of my trying to save myself, that I would drown in spite of my efforts; and that to throw my board away and sink at once would be only to shorten my misery. I was just in the act of doing so when it seemed to me that I was transported for the moment to "the old house at home," and that I was wending my way slowly up the path from the road gate to the house, but, strange for me, when I reached the door, instead of entering at once, I sat upon the step. My mother was an earnest devoted Christian, also my father had been, but father was deaf and dumb, consequently the family devotions fell to mother, and I knew that in the years of my home life, that if one of the family were away from home during the hour for prayer, nine o'clock in the evening, that one was especially remembered in the prayer. As I sat upon the step I thought it was nine o'clock in the evening, and as plainly as I ever heard my mother's voice I heard it that evening.

I cared but little for the prayer until she reached that portion that referred to the absent one, when all the mother-soul seemed to go up in earnest petition - 'God save my boy.' For ten long weary months she had received no tidings from her soldier boy, now she had just learned that he was on his way home and her thoughts were almost constantly upon him; and for him her earnest prayer was made. I fiercely clutched the board and hissed between my now firmly set teeth 'Mother, by the help of God, your prayer shall be answered.' I started out for a grand effort."

Eventually Berry was rescued and taken to a Memphis hospital, where his wound "was poorly dressed." A week later he was transported upriver with others to Cairo, Illinois, and then on the Camp Chase near Columbus, Ohio, where he spent two more weeks under medical care. He finally arrived in Jackson, Michigan and was mustered out of the U.S. service "on special telegraphic order" from the War Department.

His post war dealings with the government were frustrating: "Two or three months after the Sultana disaster my mother received official notice from Washington that her son was killed upon

the 'Sultana,' and my name stands today (1892) upon the Michigan Adjutant Generals' Report for 1865 as killed by the explosion of the steamer 'Sultana.' Yet, when in after years, I applied for a pension for that fractured skull, which was so bad that the surgeon at Washington hospital told the man in the next bunk to mine that I could never get well, I was obliged to prove that I was upon the 'Sultana' and that I was hurt or had my skull fractured at the time."

Five years after the war ended Berry was living back on the farm in his hometown of Assyria, Michigan, Barry County (pop. 500). He married Sara Shepard in 1875 and the 1880 census shows them living in Burlington, some miles away, near Tekonsha (both very small villages). They now had a three year old daughter, Gertrude (Gertie). They lost a son and a daughter at or near birth in 1880 and 1882, and had another son, Paul, in 1889.

Family history says that Chester (Uncle Chet) may have pastored churches in Penfield, Galesburg, Allegan, Burlington, and Bellevue - all small southwest Michigan communities, then and now - but it is not known which churches or what denomination they were (Historically, the Berrys were Methodists).



CHESTER BERRY AND HIS SECOND WIFE

In 1890 Rev. Berry was living in the Tekonsha, Michigan post office district and was most likely gathering material for his book which was published in 1892

by a Lansing, Michigan printer and Civil War veteran, Darius D. Thorp. I am sure that Berry had been attending the annual Sultana reunions (northern states group) which were held in the Michigan cities of Adrian and Hillsdale, and in Toledo, Ohio. He surely have continued to do so until he and his wife moved to Theodore, Alabama (near Mobile). They are listed in this area of Alabama according to the 1910 census. He obviously harbored no ill will towards Southerners!

Pastor Don A. Elbourne, Jr., minister at Lakeshore Baptist Church in Lake-shore, Mississippi (about 100 miles from Theodore, Alabama) sheds some light of Berry's activities around this time: "I have not confirmed it, but I believe the 'C. D. Berry' present at the founding of Lake-shore Baptist Church was the same Ches-ter D. Berry who survived the Sultana. He never served as pastor of our church, but the records indicate that he 'organized' it by serving as moderator at its first meeting in 1911..... Theodore, Alabama is about 100 miles away and therefore he would have been a reasonable candidate to serve as moderator at its founding."

If this is true, he must have become a Baptist at some point, if he was not in fact raised in this faith.

In 1913 his wife Sara died and was buried in Theodore. At some point there-after he married again, this time to Jessie Howland.

He appears in Battle Creek, Michigan on the 1920 census and was present there at the 50th wedding anniversary celebra-tion of his brother Edward and sister-in-law Cynthia. There is a photo of him with them on that day.

By 1924 he was back in Theodore, Alabama, and wrote a letter from there to a cousin in Missouri in response to an inquiry about the family's Revolutionary War service. He ends his letter: "I hope you can make this out. About a year ago I had a bad spell of blood pressure, and bad leakage of the heart; but now he says what ails me is harding (sic) of the arteries - my nerves are pretty bad so I can hardly write. I am living with my son Paul. Say, Ed, do you remember that 70 years ago, Sept. 5th, we rode from Battle Creek, Mich. to Hast-ings in a Stage??"

By the end of 1925 Berry was inexplic-ably living in New Jersey. According to his death certificate he died at the Arthur Pitney Comfort Home in East Orange, New Jersev. on November 22, 1926 of a

cerebral hemorrhage. His occupation was listed as "Retired minister." As far as is known, he had no family or friends there.

He was buried two days later in Glendale Cemetery in nearby Bloomfield. Although the plot is listed on cemetery records, there is no gravestone or marker of any kind. It seems that he died as he lived, humbly and without fanfare. □

Sweet Hour of Prayer!
Sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of
care,
And bids me at my Father's
throne
Make all my wants and wishes
known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter's
snare
By thy return, sweet hour of
prayer!

Verse 1.
Words written by William Walford, a blind English preacher in 1845. Music by William B. Bradbury, 1861



CHESTER BERRY'S GREAT NEPHEW, ROBERT BERRY, AND HIS WIFE, BARBARA

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Berry descendants Bob Berry and Dorothy Gouzoules for generously sharing their family history research with me. Also, I am indebted to historian and friend Joe Bilby of New Jersey for his efforts and time spent gathering information as well as grave and residence and photos. And finally, I certainly am grateful to historian Jim Epperson who retrieved informa-tion for me from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Thanks to you all!

French Cake

(A Civil War-era Recipe)

Five cups of flour.
Two cups of powdered sugar.
Half a cup of butter.
One cup of milk.
One wine-glass of wine.
Three eggs. Spice to the taste.
*A Teaspoonful of pearlash. **

Rub the butter and sugar together, then add the milk, part of the flour, and the pearlash dissolved in wine; afterward the remainder of the flour and the eggs. The yolks are to be beaten separately, and the whites beaten and put in the last thing. Bake in two square tin pans.

** Pearlash is today's equivalent of baking soda.*

Andersonville Prison

Chester Berry was confined to Andersonville Prison from June of 1864 to March of 1865, the same time as another Michigan soldier, Benjamin F. Johnson, who would also end up on the Sultana.

Johnson was a "veterinary surgeon" with the 5th Michigan Cavalry, Co. A. Not knowing whether he would live or die in prison, he wrote an impassioned poem while confined there. (Note from editor Pam: He survived both Andersonville and the Sultana, coming home to Almont, Michigan - a village eight miles from where I grew up. A printer by trade, he was a Mason, active in the Congregational Church, and served as President of the Village. From his obituary: "The ever sounding taps were called for Benjamin F. Johnson on Sunday afternoon, March 1st, 1914, when (this) comrade passed his Commander in final review and joined the host in that last encampment on that other shore!"

Prisoner's Appeal

Friends of Freedom, one and all,
Pray do listen when we call,
For release from this earthly hell,
The horrors which no tongue can tell,
Exposed we are to disease and death,
Lying upon the filthy earth,
Unprotected from storms and heat,
Little, unwholesome, food to eat.

The sufferings here can ne'er be told,
By finite tongues, young or old;
Possessing one like Demosthenes,
Cannot describe the horrid scenes.
Neither the eloquence of Cicero,
Can proclaim them so you know,
Our true condition, our wretched state,
Language is wholly inadequate.

Thirty-five thousand are here confined,
Inside these walls of Georgia Pine.
The acreage which we occupy,
Is twenty-two, both marsh and dry;
Completely covered over with filth,
Throwing off a sickening stench.
The only water to quench our thirst*
Runs between the rebel's post.

We love our homes and kindred too;
Must we here bid them adieu?—
Remained confined inside this pen,
Until our days on earth do end,
Where no relief does ever come.
To the sick and fevered one,
No heart to sigh, no tear to shed,
O'er the dying and the dead.

Thousands confined in this stockade,
Volunteered their country's aid;
Left their homes and kindred too,
Protecting the flag, red, white and blue.
Many times we all have faced,
The cannon's mouth without disgrace,
Proving our willingness to fight,
Against oppression for freedom rights.

Thirteen thousand heroic men,
Already have died inside this pen;
Died alone in deep distress,
Without a place for their head to rest,
Excepting upon the filthy ground,
Where lice and vermin can be found,
Completely covering their ghostly forms,
Before their spirit had fled and gone.

Through misfortune, not for crime,
We are in these walls confined,
Far away from home and friends,
Expecting soon our days to end;
Starving, thirsting* every day,
Until our flesh has shank away,
Leaving nothing but skeletons,
For myriads of vermin to feast upon.

Again to our friends we do appeal,
To get us away before you yield,
For life's sake do all in your power.
We're growing weaker every hour,
Then, oh then, release us soon,
Or we shall face that awful doom,
Dying alone without a friend,
Inside this filthy horrid pen.

*until after providence Spring broke out, in August, 1864

Exciting Times Ahead at the April 8-10 Reunion in Vicksburg! See you There?

Plans are nearly complete for the annual reunion to be held this year in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The "Loading the Sultana" floodwall mural is completed; I've seen photographs of the mural and it is spectacular. The Dedication Ceremony is set for 10 a.m. Saturday, April 9th by the river in downtown Vicksburg, and will last about an hour and a half. Those of you who sign up for the bus that day will be taken there by 9:30. There will be chairs in which to sit, and alternate plans have been made to hold it indoors at the Vicksburg Convention Center if the weather doesn't cooperate.

There will be music, Union reenactors, brief remarks made by the city's mayor, perhaps by the Governor of Mississippi, representatives of our Association, descendants, historians, authors, the artist, and, of course, the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Riverboatmen. The Yazoo Chapter (at Vicksburg) of this organization sought and received a grant of approximately \$15,000., specifically to pay for the Sultana mural, from the J. Mack Gamble Fund administered by the parent organization in Marietta, Ohio. Nellie Caldwell and Yazoo Chapter president Lamar Roberts played key roles in securing this grant, and we are greatly indebted to them.

And, of course, there will be the unveiling of the mural, which will be covered until that morning.

After the ceremony there will be refreshments and an opportunity to purchase prints, posters, and notecards of the mural, as well as Gene Salecker's and Jerry Potter's Sultana books - AND a brand new reprint of the 1892 Chester Berry book.

Next we will get back on the bus and go to a Mississippi riverside park for our box lunch (see the last newsletter for ordering information, and/or call Sultana descendant Charles Dawkins at (601)264-9668).

Has everyone sent their bus and Banquet reservations to Charles (13 Melrose Circle, Hattiesburg, MS 39402)? Money needs to reach him by March 15.

And have you made room reservations at the Battlefield Inn (mention the Sultana reunion and call 1-800-359-9363)? We have rooms held at a special rate until March 15. If not, please DO

IT NOW!

After Saturday lunch we will be going by bus to the newly restored Courthouse/Museum, the "Cairo" ironclad boat exhibit at Vicksburg National Military Park, The Battlefield Museum, and hopefully, even have a little time for some shopping downtown.

Be sure to bring your Sultana-related items/photos/articles etc. for Friday afternoon and evening display. As soon as you arrive and get settled in your room, come down to the Jeff Davis or Mississippi Rooms so we can greet you, give you your name tag and you can set up your items/or browse what is there. I will be bringing Sultana T-shirts, tote bags, and back issues of *The Sultana Remembered*, and descendant David Markland, who is coming all the way from Los Angeles, plans to have a limited number of commemorative Sultana coins for sale.


The Saturday Banquet will be special, and, among other things, may include a premier screening of RiverRock Entertainment's Sultana film, the trailer of which we viewed at the Memphis reunion. Mike and Mark Marshall have been hard at work on this ever since that time. Also, singer/songwriter Jon Waterman of Salem, MA will perform his Sultana song for us which is included in the film. We are honored that he wrote this, and that he will come to Vicksburg to perform it.

(Update: Tom Koba of Koba & Co. will be finishing up his Sultana docudrama this summer. He had heart surgery last summer which put him a little behind! Tom and Jennifer may also be joining us in Vicksburg.)

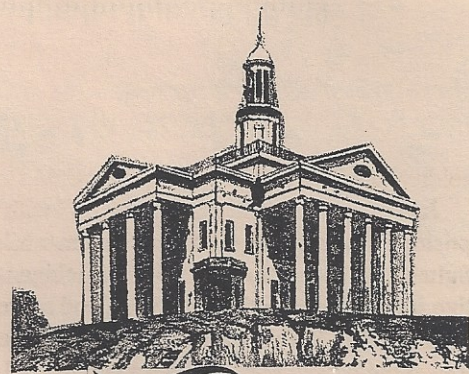
This year we will again hold a Memorial Sultana Candlelight ceremony, as we did in Vicksburg last time and at Memphis.

We are going to have a wonderful time. There seems to be more and more interest in the Sultana and so we expect to see some media folks there as well.

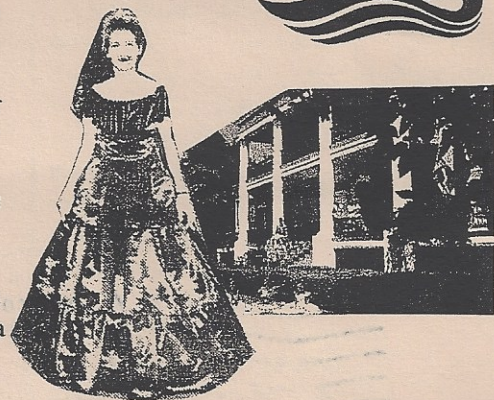
I am looking forward to seeing you all.


Pam Newhouse,

Gr gr granddaughter of Pvt. Adam Schneider, 183rd Ohio Inf., died on the Sultana



Vicksburg



In Memoriam

Rachel Troup, beloved wife of Sultana descendant Richard Troup of McConnellsville, Ohio, died unexpectedly this past December. She was a dear person and we offer Richard our sincere condolences. He will be with us in Vicksburg this year.

Also, I recently received a note from Elaine Bur of Lennon, MI regarding her husband Louis:

"I am sending renewal for the newsletter. I lost my husband Lous Bur April 27, 2003. But I know how much he loved the Sultana Association. His grandfather Charles Peck survived the Sultana. Good luck and God Bless."

Louis died on the 138th anniversary of the Sultana disaster. He often dropped me a note and sent me a Sultana-related bit of news or article. He will be missed.