Newsletter of the Yorktown/ Mt. Pleasant Twp. Historical Alliance

September 2023 Volume 18 Edition 3

yorktownhistory.online

Editor: Julie Musick

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From the Editor Julie A. Musick

At the turn of the 19th century, one particular citizen of our town played a significant role in the lives of the people here in the early days of Yorktown and Mt. Pleasant Township.

When I first studied the Civil War military records of Jonathan Rector **Downing**, I read that he joined the 9th Cavalry, 121st Regiment, Company G. Like so many men serving in the war, he was just a teenager, having turned 19 just a couple of months before he joined up. His father died when he was 11. His mom never remarried and raised five boys, three of whom became doctors. It was common to serve with family and friends in the Civil War. J.R.'s older half-brother, David R. **McKinney** served as quartermaster in the same unit. I recognize other common Yorktown surnames throughout the lists of the different companies in *Kemper's History of Delaware County*.

In the <u>Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle, Alabama</u>, <u>Downing</u> was captured. He was taken to <u>Cahaba Prison</u> located near Selma, Alabama. Although the POW experience in itself was fascinating topic on which to write, another fact in those records jumped out at me. My jaw dropped. Maybe you will be just as surprised when you read about the bad luck of Company G, Indiana 9th Calvary aboard the ill-fated steamer called the Sultana.

And yet after tragedy, **Downing** persisted and lived a life of service to others, becoming a highly respected doctor. I admire his tenacity. Let's take a look at some of the things he witnessed and did in his fascinating life before he passed away in 1918.

~Julie



This photo is was taken in 1917 of the I.O.O.F. building. The building was new in 1913, when it suffered damage in the "Great Fire" of Yorktown in 1913. The 1913 building was just completed but the I.O.O.F had not yet occupied it when the fire started. Unfortunately, all of the early I.O.O.F. records were destroyed. You can see the white globe of a gas pump between the garage and the car. In earlier photos of the town, the garage was an outside livery stable. A barber shop is two doors down from the garage. On the right side of the picture, a few men are leaning against the railing of stairs to a basement. Outside sidewalk access to these basement areas was covered when road work was done on Smith Street. This block also contained a drug store to the left (out of the picture) and a restaurant. Today the right end of this block houses the YHA Museum. Photo from James Romack, Facebook



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The Life and Times of Dr. Jonathan Rector Downing

CIVIL WAR

PRISIONER

ASSINATED

LINCOLN

By Julie A. Musick

I first encountered J.R. **Downing** as I was researching early physicians in our community, Looking through lists of Civil War Veterans for another article, his name jumped off the page. Here was someone I "knew!" This young man, "J.R.", was in the Civil War and survived as a hostage in a Confederate POW camp—this when about a quarter of all Union prisoners died while in captivity, mostly from disease and starvation. An estimated 620,000 men died in the Civil War, more than were killed in any other American war. But here he was, my guy, J.R. leaving a POW camp alive. The war wasn't finished with him though. J.R. witnessed many things during his life, and the war. Let's take a look at a few things.

J.R. was born in Logan County, Ohio, **18 Oct 1844.**His parents, Israel and Elizabeth Rector Downing, came to Delaware County **1851**

J.R.'s father died when he was 11 years old in 1855.



1861 The Civil War begins with the firing on Ft. Sumpter

According to his biographies, J.R. was poorly educated, typical of farm children of the day. In **1862**, he began the trade of a blacksmith.

1863 Battles of Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Chancellorsville, the last two battles Confederate wins, encouraged enlistment.

On Christmas,1863, J.R. joined the 9th Indiana Calvary, Company G, of the 121st Regiment to fight for the Union in

the Civil War. He had just turned 19-years-old. Others from Delaware County were part of this unit. He signed a 3 -year enlistment.



J.R.'s Regiment performed drills in Indianapolis while awaiting their horses. The horses did not arrive. On **03 May 1864**, J.R.'s unit left the state via rail for Pulaski, Tennessee under the command of Col. George W. Jackson. They had post duty until 23 Nov. On 25 Sep., a portion of the regiment were sent to destroy the Sulphur Creek Trestle near

Athens, Alabama. In the ensuing battle, 122 men were killed, wounded, or captured. J.R. was among them. He was taken to <u>Cahaba Prison</u> (his obituary says "Libby Prison" but all POWs were brought to Libby Prison and then transferred to another prison.)



Cahaba Prison. Drawn from memory by Dr. Jesse Hawes, 1888, *Cahaba: A Story of the Captive Boys in Blue* (public domain)

A prisoner exchange was planned. <u>Cahaba Prison</u> was emptied of prisoners on **6 Mar 1865**.

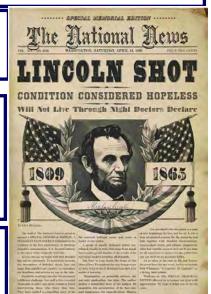
General Lee Surrenders. 9 Apr 1865. The Civil War is over!

President Lincoln is shot on 14 Apr 1865 and dies the next morning. The nation is in mourning. (The National News 14 Apr 1865)

An exchange of prisoners was held at Vicksburg, Mississippi on 27 Apr 1865. J.R. was among those weak and sick POWs that were then boarded onto the over-crowded Sultana. The Sultana exploded just seven miles past Memphis, Tennessee.

Our young J.R. was wounded in the explosion of the Sultana which cost so many others their lives. One survivor said the explosion was caused by "mistakes and

malfeasance". That comment just begins the list of reasons for the explosion. **1,195 of the 2,200 passengers and crew were killed.** It was and continues to be the largest marine disaster in the United States, even surpassing the more well-known, Titanic. This was a tragedy for J.R. and the others in the 9th Calvary, just freed from prison. Curiously, neither of J.R.'s two biographies, or his obituary, speak of his survival of the disaster. His military records are clear of his capture, exchange, and injury on the Sultana. **Read more on page 8.**





THE

1000 TO 5000 I

BECOMES DOCTOR



Memorial at Beech Grove Cemetery, Muncie, Indiana J.R. survived the Sultana explosion but the 9th Calvary lost 55 men on the Sultana many of those newly released POWs were from Delaware County. The explosion was tragic. The survivors arrived in Indianapolis on 5 May 1865 and were mustered out as paroled prisoners. J.R. was mustered out on 8 Jul 1865 according to his military records. There is a memorial to the 55 victims from Delaware County at Beech Grove Cemetery. According to the History of Delaware County, (Kemper, 1908), the 121st Regiment left the state with 11,200 men and officers; it returned with just 386 men.

1872 After the war, J.R. went to Vermillion County, Illinois and worked as a blacksmith for five years. "Finding that his army service had impaired his health..." he decided quit blacksmithing and go to medical school. (1894 Bio.)

J.R. was graduated from Indiana Medical College citation (JAMA 71:58), Indianapolis, Indiana.



Republican Convention 1884 in the Opera House

25 Feb 1884 • Muncie, Indiana

Dr. Downing on the Central Committee

Now a working physician, Dr. J.R. Downing moved to Reeds Station and, a little later, in **1886**, moved to Yorktown, just in time for the **gas boom** in central Indiana.

1886 The <u>Gas Boom</u> starts in East-Central Indiana! Gas wells are burning 24/7 and towns and cities advertised free gas, attracting Industries to move into Yorktown and surrounding towns.

1892 Western Improvement Company plans
West Muncie as a resort
town just east of Yorktown. A lake is made by
damming Buck Creek. A
hotel built, excursion
paddle-wheeler, boat
rentals. 80-room hotel
opens 1893. Yorktown is a
happening place!



Lakeview Hotel 1893

The electric train system, the **Interurban** began in Muncie in **1893.** By **1900**, the line stopped in Yorktown and Daleville on its way to Anderson.



Interurban mid-street Yorktown

1892 The **Yorktown train station** burns in the winter. It was decided to build the new train station in West Muncie amid much protest.

1893 Small pox epidemic on Muncie's south side.

1893 A national **economic panic** makes eastern investors of the West Muncie Project withdraw financial support. Anxiety spreads as glass factories close for the summer. Workers are unsure if the factories will reopen.

The **Lakeview Hotel** is attached by the Sheriff for non-payment of taxes. **1894...**yes, it failed that quickly.

Yorktown **Diphtheria Epidemic**. Schools and churches closed between **1895-1896**

1898 Feb Yorktown Pike, now IN 32, ceases to be a toll road after 40 years of operation. It was sold to the county for \$1.

1899 Jun 25 The new **Yorktown Methodist Church** is dedicated. The church received its first deed in 1875 on land set aside for a church by Oliver H. **Smith** when he platted the town. The original building was moved and another church was built in the same location at the corner of Walnut and High Streets. (Yorktown lot 90.) Dr. & Mrs. Downing are members

1904 Mar 26 Spring rains bring disastrous **flooding** to White River and Buck Creek. The flooding washed away the iron bridge over Buck Creek in Yorktown. The first large concrete bridge built in the county replaced the iron bridge in October.

1904 Delaware County Children's Home is built. The facility will house between 75-100 children, all of whom attend Yorktown schools.

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BOOM AND BUST

INTERURBAN

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PANDEMICS

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HOSTING A NEW GENERATION OF HISTORIANS

By Becky Sears Monroe

As a follow-up to our last issue, we reported that on May 15th, shortly before the end of the school year, the 3rd grade classes walked from Yorktown Elementary to visit the museum. There were nine classes participating this year – giving us a total of 227 guests during the day. The study of Local History is a regular part of the 3rd grade curriculum. We were happy to welcome the young historians.

Before their arrival the students are given a list of three or four items they are to look for. After a walk around they sit on the floor and we discuss the items they located. The four items on the list for this past visit included a black and gold high school sweater, an old telephone, an old map of Yorktown and a sewing machine.

Each of these items were discussed as well as related topics. The fact that the sweater was black and gold caused some confusion – at this point we explained that our school colors were once black and gold. During that time, there were two other schools in Delaware County with black & gold. Due to that fact a decision was made to change our colors to green and white.

An explanation of the rotary dial phone lead to a discussion about the crank phones, and how one had to go through an operator to make a call and the multiparty lines were explained. They were surprised to learn that just a few years ago that phones were connected to a wire that went into the wall. Another was surprised that we haven't always had a phone that fit in our pocket – he wondered how we were able to survive!



The sewing machine once belonged to the local repair man, I explained that this was not the kind of machine that might be used by their mother, but was used in the making and repair of leather items. This also to the discussion of other businesses in the area, including a major fire that destroyed several buildings in the downtown area in 1913. During that fire a call went out to the Muncie Fire Department for assistance. Muncie agreed to send help, but the bad thing was that it took 45 minutes for them to arrive.

The old map was used to show the location of the items we had discussed and of course other areas of the town.

Following the visits some of the classes sent thank you notes. Listed below are some of the comments from those hand written notes. The teachers must have given some suggestions for the wording of the notes as they all began the same. Example:

Dear Mrs. Monroe,

Thank you for letting us visit the museum. We had a great time. You must know a lot about Yorktown history.

From this point they added their own comments. Some of the comments were:

"I liked the story about the fire and the fact that it took Muncie Ifire department 145 minutes to arrive."

Another learned that "shoes were made of leather and that you could take them to be repaired and polished."

One student was interested in the fact that Highway 32 through Yorktown is called "Smith Street", (after Oliver Smith – the founder of our town.) "It would be so cool to have a street named after you."

My favorite is at the top of the next page.

80 8 10

Shack

E SE Brindel Care

Page 5

MORE THANKS ALL AROUND

(From page 4) Last, but not least – the following is my favorite. Words are spelled like they are in the note.

Dear Mrs. Monroe,

Thank you for letting us visit the museum, you know so much about Yorktown History.

I was really sad I missed it but I herd great things about it I really HOPE I can go there sometime!

~B

And again, thanks to our volunteers: Sharon Self, Beverly White, Jan Hendricks, Vicki Lueck Craig, Judy Flick St. John, and Heidi Monroe for assisting Becky Sears Monroe. Town board member Carolyn Cline Gant also joined us for the day, and drop in visitors were Dr. Greg Hinshaw (Superintendent of Schools) and Chase Bruton, the town manager.

Life and Times of J.R. Downing (Continued from page 3.)

Dr. J.R. Downing became a founding member of the **Delaware County Medical Society** in **1903**. Our local historian friend, Dr. G.W.H. Kemper is president.

Dr. and Mrs. J. R. **Downing** were in a fire Feb at the Sherman Hotel in Indianapolis. Dr. **Downing** had been in bad health and was staying at the hotel. 21 Feb 1905

World War I begins 1914. It was fought until 11 Nov 1918.

1913 Jan 26 Great Yorktown Fire The entire block on the north side of Smith Street was lost, including the new building for the I.O.O.F. The fire started in the back of LH Greer Drugs on the northeast corner of Walnut and Smith. (The site was later Bonnet Drug Store and The Stork's Nest.) The fire also burned the post office, Signal Handcock Grocery, E & F Prillman Hardware, Dr. C.H. Wright's office, and the apartment of William Hanson. The I.O.O.F. had just taken possession of their new meeting place just days before the fire. The inside was gutted. It was a terrible day in the history of our

town. Fortunately, there were only minor injuries, which included **Dr. J.R.**

Downing and his son, Dr. J. Frank Downing.

Dr. Jonathan R. Downing, aged 73

OBITUARY

years, Civil war veteran, one of the oldest practicing physicians in Delaware county and father of former Coroner Dr. J. Frank Downing, now a lieutenant in the military service of the United States, died at his home in Yorktown early this morning following an illness of several months of dropsy.

Dr. Downing was born on October 18, 1844, in Logan county, Ohio, near Bellfontaine. He was one of the most widely known residents of the county. At the outbreak of the Civil war, Dr. Downing volunteered and served as a member of Company G, 9th Indiana cavalry. He was captured in an engagement and was imprisoned in the Libby prison. Dr. Downing was a life long member of the Methodist Episcopal church. He was also an active worker in the Odd Fellows and K, of P, lodges.

21 Jun 1918 Muncie Star Press. Muncie Indiana Dr. Downing is survived by the widow, Mrs. Lizzie Downing; a daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Wellington, of near Yorktown, and two sons, Charles E. Downing of Yorktown and Lieutenant J. Frank Downing. He also leaves a brother living at Champaigne, Ill.

Dr. Downing had practiced medicine in Delaware county for thirty-six years ,thirty-two years of which, he had made his residence in Yorkown. The funeral services will be held Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock in the Yorktown M. E. church, with the Rev. Mr. Gehres in charge. Friends are

- REFERENCES
- "Yorktown Family Trees" -Ancestory.com
- Birth, Death, and Marriage Records
- NPS.gov, History of Unit
- Ohio State University, ehistory
- Twentieth Century History of Delaware County, Kemper, 1908 (Museum Website)
- Portrait and Biographical Record of Delaware and Randolph Counties (Museum Website)
- Muncie Newspapers-several issues; Newspapers.com
- Civil War Records; Fold3.com
- AMA Deceased Physicians
- Wikipedia: Sultana, Cahaba Prison,

 Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle

Huller

Today's News is Tomorrow's History

Historical Alliance Meetings

All YHA meetings will be at the Alliance Museum at 7:00 PM at 9132 W. Smith St., Yorktown. We meet

the **2nd to the last Tuesday**. Follow us on **Facebook**! There will be no meeting on October 24th.



Yorktown Farm and Artisan Market

Fridays through Sep 29th, 4:30-7:30pm in the walnut grove at Morrows Meadow, 1901 Tiger Drive.

Artisan Crafts/ Local Produce/ Meat/ Goodies/ Fun

Delaware County Historical Society



Delaware County Historical Society Research Center is open on Fridays from noon to 4 PM at 120 East Washington Street, Muncie.

The Pioneer Cemetery Preservation Committee conducts a business meeting on the Third Thursday of each month at 6:30 pm at the Delaware County Historical Society. The committee also schedules workdays on most Saturday mornings. Anyone interested in learning more about the committee and its work may email dchspcpc@gmail.com for more information.

Delaware County Historical Society Ancestor Hunters

The group meets each month on the last Monday. Email Karen Good - markerfinder@gmail.com - for the link to the Zoom meeting.

Check out the Delaware County Historical Society on Facebook for current meetings and updates.

Eclipse! Mark your calendars for October 14 to see a partial solar eclipse visible from Yorktown. This year's eclipse is just the precursor to the once in a lifetime total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024!

Learn all about eclipses and the mysteries of the universe at Ball States Planetarium. (bsu.edu/calendar).

CIVIC GREEN CONCERT SERIES



7:30-9:30 PM, Downtown Yorktown

We've had great fun and music on the Civic Green this summer! If you haven't yet attended a concert, you have one last chances to join in. Bring a lawn chair, food and snacks, or get something from one of the food trucks. Food trucks at 5:30. Music at 7:30. Splash pad is open for the kids. Beer and wine for sale only at the venue. Be cool: no fireworks, weapons, alcohol, or bad Last Concert!

Sat. Oct. 07 **Grove Smash**

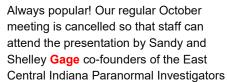


Farmers Market at Minnetrista: 9 AM-Noon, Saturdays: throughout the summer. Discover fresh and healthy food, produce, and more!

Tapas and Talk: Indianapolis Graverobbing Our friend, Chris Flook will showcase his new book on the grisly history of grave robbing in Indiana. Tapas and drink at Minnetrista. Weds., October 18, 6:30-8 pm. Cost is \$20. Age 21+ event.

Learn About Paranormal Investigations

Tuesday, October 24, 6:30 PM, Ball State Alumni Center





on their methods of conducting paranormal investigations. The couple will talk about the systematic techniques they use to find causes behind perceived activity. There is no charge but reservations are required.

Call: 765-285-8975 or email: ebball@bsu.edu.

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Membership

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS 2022

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Sponsorship: \$200 or more

Many memberships are now due.

Click here to pay membership online

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Donate Now

Ill-fated Company G

Kemper, (in The History of Delaware County, 1908, p. 400-401), lists the names of Company G, J.R.'s company. The list notes if the soldiers were lost on the Sultana, died in prison, battle, or were mustered out.

On the Sultana.

On the 27th of April, 1865, by the explosion on board the steamer Sultana, the Ninth Cavalry lost fifty-five men. Those who were saved from the steamer reached Indianapolis early in May, and were there mustered out as paroled prisoners, under instructions from the War Department,

REGIMENTAL OFFICERS.

Major-James R. Nation, mustered out as Captain of Company G, June 5, 1865.

COMPANY C.

Selemon Bantz, discharged June 10, 1865.

COMPANY O.

Captain-James R. Nation, premoted Major.
First Lieutenant-Elihu H. Swaie, mustered out and honorably discharged,

Captain—Janes R. Satton, promoted angle.

First Licuteaunt—Elibu H. Swine, mustered out and bonorably discharged,

May 15, 1865, for disability.

Second Licutenant—John W. Watts, resigned March 4, 1865.

Privates—John H. Hlack, Spencer H. Remedum, John Barrett, Jacob Barrett,

Jeaso Chalfant, Gardner F. Collins; Carkson Cates, as bugler; Samuel Disbennet,

Robert Padely, William Fortich, as sergeant; Eli Gaudy; Samuel U. Haffor, promoted

to Commissary Sergeant, to Second Licutenant; Noison Kirkpatrick, Jacob Keeding,

George Recaling, as Corporal; Utink Lowe, David Lee, John M. McCreary, David R.

McKinney, as duariermaster Sergeant; Francis M. Moore, premoted to Second Licutenant, to First Licutenant; Edward McKewer, Abner Myers, John F. McClellan, as

Curporal; David Nimer, as Corporal; Anno J. Gard, as Sergeant; Thomas Parker,

Rouben Pence, as wagener; Jacob H. Reese, Jacob G. Spradling, William G. Thora
burg, Edwin Underwood, Samuel C. Williams, Richard Watts, John H. Will, William

B. Wright, as Sergeant; Hiram Altisen, mustered out June 17, 1865, as Corporal.

Peter Acker, mustered out July 11, 1865.

Samuel Hrown, died at Vicksburg April 10, 1865.

Silas W. Black, mustered out September 27, 1865.

George W. Bowers, died in rebel prison.

Absalom Brown, mustered out September 27, 1865.

Charles W. Clevenger, lost on steamer Sultana, April 27, 1865.

Peter Cogshall, mustered out January 10, 1866.

HISTORY OF DELAWARE COUNTY

401

John Cockrau, died at Indinaapolis April 24, 1864.

John C. Dragoo, died at Indinaapolis January 11, 1865.

Jouathan R. Dowang, mustered out July 8, 1865.

George Downing, mustered out July 8, 1865.

William H. Graves, lost on steamer Sultana April 27, 1865.

Daniel Gunnion, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Henry C. Hiatt, died in rebel prison.

Hotton C. Hanna, mustered out June 17, 1865.

William G. Hoeker, lost on Sultana, April 27, 1865.

Lewis Jones, died in rebel prison.

Philip Kessler, mustered out July 20, 1865.

Charles W. King, lost on Sultana, April 27, 1805.

Lewis Jones, died in rebel prison.

Philip Kessler, mustered out July 31, 1865.

Charles W. King, lost on Sultana, April 27, 1805.

Francis M. King, mustered out July 31, 1865.

Peter H. Kline, died at Pulaski, Tenn., September 8, 1864.

Henry J. Kline, nustered out June 17, 1855.

John M. Maynard, died at New Orleans April 8, 1865.

James S. Moore, mustered out June 13, 1865.

Sammel McConnick, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Isane McConnick, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Isane McConnick, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Reuben Pritchard, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Keuben Pritchard, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Keuben Pritchard, mustered out July 24, 1865.

Keuben Porter, mustered out July 24, 1865.

William H. Peaceck, mustered out June 17, 1865,

Martin V. Rodepouch, lost on Sultana April 27, 1865.

John R. Reasener, lost on Sultana April 27, 1865.

John Heynolds, mustered out July 21, 1864,

Jacob Smith, returned to One Hundred and First Regiment.

Prederick Stiller, mustered out August 15, 1865,

Abury Shockley, died at Lestport, Miss., February 7, 1865.

Martin Shoup, died at Eastport, Miss., February 7, 1865.

John W. Skiff, mustered out June 16, 1865.

Reaben Thompson, died at Lestport, Miss., February 7, 1865.

John W. Skiff, mustered out June 16, 1865.

Reaben Thompson, died at Caire, H., April 5, 1865.

Thomas Williams, mustered out August 19, 1865, as Corporal,

Andrew J. Wasson, died at Caire, 18, April 5, 1865.



The Indiana Digital Library is available through the Yorktown Library.

The library is a happening place. There are thousands of audio books and e-books that can be borrowed. Visit the library or their website for information.

If you have ideas for a newsletter or want to write a column, please contact Julie Musick at my personal email: JHillgrove@gmail.com. Comments, complements, clarification, and complaints about the newsletter are always welcome.



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The Story of the Sultana is Shocking Even Today!



The Sultana remains the worst maritime disaster in the U.S.—far more than even the more well-known, Titanic.

Thousands of Union Soldiers who survived the dreadful conditions during their Civil War imprisonment were journeying home. They boarded the Sultana in Vicksburg for freedom, heading up the Mississippi River, north.

The Sultana carried almost 2,137 people when it pushed away from the dock. There were 1,960 paroled prisoners, 22 guards, 85 crew,

and 70 paying passengers. People were crowded into every nook and cranny. It was five times over its capacity of 367.

Mistakes and greed lead to the Sultana's fiery explosion. A boiler repair was hurried. A bribe was made, causing the ship to be overloaded. The engine struggled and three of the four boilers exploded throwing burned bodies into the icy water. On April 27, 1865, about 1200 people died—55 were from Delaware County.

The disaster competed with too many high profile events of the day—the assassination of Lincoln and the end of the war. The Sultana sunk out of the light of history and investigation.

No one was ever held accountable for the explosion.

More information at the Sultana Association of Descendants and Friends.

A short documentary about the Sultana here. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08Q-7YKw RY)



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9140 W. Smith St. - Yorktown, Indiana



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