

discuss the horrors of that night with anyone, not even the members of his family. However it is known that soon after the vessel sunk, Mr. McElrea managed to get hold of a board or other piece of wreckage upon which he floated more dead than alive for a period of 72 hours, being rescued on the third day after the explosion at a point 18 miles down the river. When rescued he was perfectly helpless and partially unconscious, but was still clinging to his piece of wreckage.

After the close of the war, Mr. McElrea returned to Tipton, Cedar County, Iowa, where in 1865 he was united in marriage with Miss Sarah Jane Dilts. They removed to Marion county the same fall and settled on the farm which has since been the family home and where he passed to his reward on the date mentioned in the opening.

To Mr. and Mrs. McElrea, eight children were born, six of whom are still living, as follows: Frank, of Knoxville; Dale, wife of M. M. Sonnichsen, of Colorado City, Colo.; Emma, wife of J. M. Peck, Omaha; Carrie wife of John Henby, Knoxville; Thomas, on the home place, and Chester A. (Pete) McElrea of Knoxville. There were also twenty grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Mr. McElrea was one of the splendid men of the county and his death is a loss to the entire community. He had never joined any church, but the reputation he has left as a man who prided himself in morality, honesty and square dealings is one that has seldom been equaled and never excelled in the county.

The funeral services, under the auspices of John C. Ferguson Post, G. A. R., was held at Eden church, Friday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Burial in Lincoln cemetery.

Life History Of W. G. McElrea

Union Veteran And Last Survivor of the
Sultana Disaster

Born May 9, 1829
Died November 25, 1915

W. G. McElrea, pioneer Marion Co., citizen and widely known throughout the state on account of his thrilling experiences during the war of the rebellion, died at his home in the Highland neighborhood, Franklin twp., on the early morning of Thursday, November 25, 1915, aged 86 years, 6 months, 16 days. Death resulted from paralysis and other ailments incident to advanced age.

Deceased was born in Baltimore, May 9, 1829, and grew to manhood in that city. During his young manhood he was a Mississippi river steamboatman for several years and at that time was well acquainted with the Father of Waters from Dubuque to New Orleans, especially from Cairo to Memphis.

He was a citizen of Iowa during the troublesome time of 1861-65 and as such enlisted at Tipton, Ia., as a seventh corporal, Co. A, Fifth Iowa infantry, June 24, 1861. On June 30, 1862, he was made third sergeant and before the end of the war had attained the rank of captain of his company. He served during the entire war and was twice held as a prisoner four months at Libby and for a period of equal duration at Andersonville.

The most interesting event in Captain McElrea's experience, overshadowing all the horrors of Libby and Andersonville, occurred in the spring of 1865. He had been with thousands of other union soldiers in the death pen at Andersonville and with 2,107 other of his fellow sufferers had been taken to Vicksburg about the middle of April, 1865, to be taken to Camp Chase and exchanged. This motley crew remained in Vicksburg several days awaiting the arrival of the Sultana steamboat from New Orleans. That vessel was one of the largest of the Mississippi river steamboats at that time and regularly made trips between St. Louis and New Orleans. She left

the last mentioned city with 250 cabin passengers, several steerage passengers and the crew, making up about 350 persons, and a cargo of 250 hogsheads of sugar. At Vicksburg, despite the protests of the crew, the captain took on board 2,107 union prisoners of war and 35 officers, making the total of human freight nearly 2,500 souls. Everybody capable of thinking, knew that the boat was overloaded and anticipated some sort of disaster. But the captain declared that he was "working under orders," and that orders must be obeyed, and suggested that those who did not care to ride had "better foot it." At Memphis the vessel was lightened by unloading the 250 hogsheads of sugar. A new danger now stared the passengers in the face. The sugar had acted as ballast and now that it had been removed from the hold, the vessel listed frightfully as soon as it started from Memphis. This listing or rocking slushed the water in the boilers up onto their superheated sides and within an hour the explosion followed, and at a point where the river was then fifteen miles wide. The vessel parted in the middle by the explosion and in an instant the entire stern end, crowded with helpless humanity, was wrapped in flames. Hundreds were burned and scalded to death and other hundreds upon hundreds drowned. The war department report says that exactly 1,739 soldiers perished out of the total of 2,107. Of the passengers and crew, scarcely one hundred survived.

This terrible explosion, known in history as the Sultana disaster, occurred about 1 o'clock in the morning of April 27, 1865, at a point on the Mississippi river, about eight miles above Memphis, Tenn.

Mr. McElrea was a reticent and peculiar man. His hardships following the explosion appear to have so preyed upon his mind that he would never