



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cuyahoga Valley
National Park

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Cuyahoga Valley National Park News Release

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Author and Expert on Sultana Sinking Speaks at Happy Days

Rescheduled after weather-related cancellation in January

Brecksville, Ohio - The National Park Service welcomes author Jerry O. Potter on Friday, March 5, as he presents a program about the sinking of the *Sultana* as part of the Lyceum Distinguished Speaker Series. The word “lyceum” has roots in ancient Greek, and became the name of the school where Aristotle taught. At Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), we use it to describe our lecture series featuring national speakers who stimulate the heart and mind with compelling stories of our natural and cultural world.

Admission: \$8 adults, \$6 CVNPA members, and \$3 children ages 3 - 12. Attend any three for the subscription price of \$20 adults, \$15 CVNPA members. General seating. Advance sales are available by calling (330) 657-2909. Lectures occur at Happy Days Lodge, 7 - 9 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

April 1865 was a busy month, and the headlines of newspapers brought this home. While large print exclaimed “Lee Surrendered!,” “Lincoln was Shot!,” and “The War is Over!,” news of the worst maritime disaster in U.S. history was relegated to the back page, if it was mentioned at all. On April 27, the *Sultana*, a wooden-hulled steamboat carrying six times the legal capacity, exploded on the Mississippi River, killing more than 1,800 men, mostly soldiers just released from southern prison camps when the war ended. Join author, Jerry Potter to explore this amazing but little-known story.

Potter, a Memphis lawyer, first became interested in the *Sultana* over a decade ago when he saw a painting of the burning ship. Determined that the tragedy not be forgotten, he researched newspaper accounts, three existing books on the subject, and previously unused military and government documents. Using these sources, he compiled a complete study of what is still the greatest maritime tragedy in America. Potter reveals the greed, indifference, criminal misconduct, and gross stupidity that led to the *Sultana*'s destruction, a boat designed for 376 passengers but loaded with 2300 men in Vicksburg.

The magnitude of the catastrophe was overshadowed by the turbulent events that shook our headlines in April of 1865—namely the end of the Civil War, the assassination of President Lincoln, and the capture of John Wilkes Booth. As a result, the explosion of the *Sultana* was nearly passed over in the pages of history.

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A headstone honoring Private Thomas Coady, who served in the Ohio Volunteer Infantry, is located in Mater Dolorosa Cemetery next to Happy Days Lodge, in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Coady, an early resident of Boston Township, was captured and held at Andersonville Prison Camp. When the Civil War ended, he was returning home on the *Sultana* when it exploded.

Happy Days Lodge, located at 500 West Streetsboro Road (State Route 303) in Peninsula 44264, 1 mile west of State Route 8, is a restored Civilian Conservation Corps structure that provides a rustic ambiance for folk and traditional concerts, theater, lectures, and special event rentals. For more information on rentals, call CVNPA at (330) 657-2909 ext. 119.

CVNP encompasses 33,000 acres along the Cuyahoga River between Cleveland and Akron. Managed by the National Park Service, CVNP combines cultural, historical, recreational, and natural activities in one setting. For more information about the park, visit www.nps.gov/cuva/ or www.dayinthevalley.com/ or call (330) 657-2752 or (800) 445-9667.

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