The Great River Catastrophe: The Collision of the Steamboats...

SUMMARY

boats, steamboat, people, cincinnati, united states, louisville, wreck, disaster, filson, warsaw, america, catastrophe, happened, cabin, collision, pilot, war, river, civil war, fire

SPEAKERS

Mark Wetherington

On behalf of the Filson Historical Society, I want to thank you for joining us today here at the gold house and the daisy room. I'm happy to report that I just came back from the wharf and the Bella Louisville and the Bella Cincinnati in the spirit of Peoria, and the spirit of Jefferson are all tied up down there. So there are boats there to look at how many of you have been on a ride as a part of this festival? Okay, that's good. Great. Well, as Judy mentioned, it's appropriate that we explore this topic. Now, about two years ago, we had a call for papers conference at the Filson as a part of our Phillips Institute programming on the steamboat and its impact in the Ohio Valley region that was in that was really 2011 Because we were celebrating them the Bicentennial, the arrival of steamboats here at the falls of the Ohio. Today, I'm going to be talking about a major collision on the Ohio River. Sometimes, you know, it takes a catastrophe to fill an audience. And glad to see you all here. So I thought maybe between the river boat festival and and a topic like this catastrophe we're going to talk about a little bit today would be of interest to you. I don't want to this would be a downer for anybody who's planning on taking a boat ride later on the inspection service as doing a lot better job now than they did I think in the 19th century. So let me thank you. First of all, how many of you are members of the Filson Historical Society? Okay, great. I want to thank you for your membership. It's very, very important to us in fulfilling our mission. And as Judy mentioned, steamboats are one of the significant stories and we continue to build this collection on Steam, boating have added some major, major additions just in the last two or three years. One of those is a profile plan of the Idlewild which became the Avalon, which became the Belle that's in the exhibit that Judy mentioned, it's on the second floor. And I hope you'll come in and and visit the exhibit, enjoy it and learn from it. The time period we're going to be talking about today is really the immediate post Civil War period. And this accident, this collision occurred only three years, roughly three and a half years after the Civil War. Historians have recently upgraded the estimates of fatalities in the Civil War, to around 700,000. And so people were accustomed to death, and dying and all of the communities along the Ohio River who had soldiers and civilians and people who were impacted by the Civil War, when we usually think of maritime disasters, we think of a disaster like, like the Titanic, which very often makes the front page oops, there it is. But it was during the civil war that we had as a as a nation, our greatest maritime disaster. And that was
what, who's, who can come the Sultana disaster in 1865. A steamboat was loaded heavily loaded with Union soldiers and veterans from hospitals and prisoner of war camps and caught on fire. And more people actually died on the Sultana than in any other maritime disaster in our nation's history. So that was still fresh in the minds of the traveling public when when they began to get on steamboats in 1868, here, and Louisville, and Cincinnati. People who look at catastrophes now tend to divide them into stages. And I'm going to talk about some of the stages of a disaster. But I'm not going to organize this talk strictly around them. Some people call the first stage of pre-disaster where it talks about the community individuals conditions prior to the disaster. We'll talk about that a little bit when we talked about where this disaster happened. The second stage is the warning. And this is today people would would consider when the media when television radio gives you warning that a tornado or hurricane comes along and you've got some time to react. And then there's the threat which immediately precedes the actual impact, as we'll see and this catastrophe, there was really very little warning and And until it was too late to do anything. And so you then go into the post disaster when you try to sort out what happened, we'll talk about that. And then the rescue phase, and some remediation and recovery. Let me talk first, though, about where this event took place. It took place what we call the Ohio Valley region. This is the mission field of the Filson Historical Society. Many of you know that and hear me when I say our mission is to collect, preserve and tell the historical, the stories, significant stories of Kentucky in the Ohio Valley region is a huge region. And this disaster is going to occur pretty much right in the center of the region. Just about right, right there. What is happening and the region at this time, it is rebuilding from the war. It is trying to get this economy going. Unlike the Deep South, this part of the world had not really been rattled heavily, especially along the river, those towns enjoyed some prosperity and trade because of the war. southern Kentucky had been pretty much picked over and worked over by competing armies during the war. So they were still recovering in some respects. There. The other thing I would mention is a civil war is a war that was fought along railroad lines. If you think about the major battles and the American Civil War, you're talking about railroad cities, battles for Atlanta battles for Richmond, places like that Manassas. Those are all railroad conflicts. So what's happening after the war immediately after the war, is that the steamboats are trying to regain some of the market they're wanting to protect themselves from what has become apparent is that railroads have a whole lot of flexibility and can go a lot of places steam ships can you can build tracks, where you can't you can't follow a railroad. Now, having said that, we are moving out of the what was called the golden age of steam boats 1850s, just before the war. In that golden age, though there were still some real problems and between 1850 and 1852. As you look and you can see, over 1000 people were killed in Steamboat accidents. The average life expectancy of a steamboat and the pre Civil War period was about five years of steamboats could hit a snag, they could run aground, they could run into each other, they could catch on fire, boilers could explode. So there were all all problems here in steam boating. You see here the illustration of the explosion of the Lucy Walker and this is an image that that is and Lloyd steamboat directory. Now that's a title of a book that sounds kind of boring when you only think about it giving you the names and for cities of steamboats. But when they add and disasters then it becomes you know a little more interesting topic. So they came up with this. This illustration of of a steamboat blowing up and this is the explosion as I mentioned the Lucy Walker, which happened just downriver from from New Albany so people were accustomed to accidents. And the Civil War had had a direct impact on steamboats, and that they were pressed into service and turned into troop transports ammunition ships patrol boats. This is the steam or Lexington there's an image in the Filson collection, which has basically been fortified with with wooden a wooden shell in some cases, iron and arm with some cannon and so it's a patrol boat. The thing to remember here, as we come out of the Civil War is that so many of these boats were in a really pitiful condition. They had been run down and some of them didn't survive the city of Madison meaning our friends in
Indiana, Madison, Indiana, was a ammunition boat, which which blew up. So there is a lot going on here that we have to keep in mind. And so after the war, a lot of these former steamboats turned into gunboats, military boats were declared surplus boats, and they weren't needed anymore by the by the army. And so they were they were basically parted out they were put on up at auction. You could you could go and buy an engine and a boiler and some of them were cannibalized and recycle, but But the picture here is that the industry really needs a shot in the arm. And that's what people started doing individuals in the steamboat business. They had made some money during the war. First of all, they made money shipping troops. We recently received a collection at the Filson call the shank Danner collection from Vivi, Indiana. And one of the items in that collection are the transportation orders for a group of steamboats. I'm not saying that they came down the river looking like this, but basically going down to the detail of which regiment was on rich, which boat when did it leave? Where was it going? So there were basically the orders are of departure in that collection and steamboats made money depending on how many people like transported that was part of the problem with the Sultana I mentioned a few minutes ago in the disaster is that it was grossly overloaded. And it had had some, some repairs that really weren't up to speed. And and there was an explosion and a fire and a lot of these soldiers did not did not survive so so the steamboat companies had made money, they had transported troops transported out of Switzerland County, Indiana transported a lot of hay down into the deep south to feed the armies and basically the the wagons and the horses and the mules that moved, move the armies along. And so after the war, we have the steam boat companies building some really iconic steam boats like the the JM white here are painted by Harlan Hubbard. This is in the exhibit, which I hope you will come and see and enjoy with us. And it's obviously making a statement here. We're it's a new age for steamboats and we're going to we're going to outdo ourselves more so than we've ever done before. Well, let's get to the disaster. This is what's going to happen on December the fourth 1868 It's going to be winter is going to be cold, it's that it's gonna happen at night. And the two boats involved belong to the same company, the US Mail line, the US Mail line had nothing to do with the United States government. It's like some of that mail you get in the plain manila envelope through the mail that kind of tries to look like it's from the government. But it doesn't really represent the government the mail line haul some mail, but it was not owned by the mail service, the US Mail and had an enviable record it had been in operation since the 1830s and had not had really much problem with fatalities, racks, explosions, anything like that. The other thing about this to remember is that that this wasn't unusual that these two boats would be on the river at the same time or even in the place where they would collide. This happened routinely they had there were there were the big fast boats of this US middle line fleet. And every day one left Louisville and went north and one left Cincinnati and went south. And a lot of folks traveled on him. The America on this particular day was heading up river. I left about 430 in the afternoon. Going against the current it was traveling at about 10 miles per hour estimated and had 90 passengers and crew. And the United States on the other hand was southbound, it had left Cincinnati at 530. An hour later, it was traveling at 18 to 20 miles per hour and then had 150 passengers and crew. Let's look a little bit at what went into building these boats. In the center of this image, you will see the America right here that America is tied up to the US Mail line workboat workboats were basically like a like a station, a boarding station. Many of them had been the halls had been used for steam boats before and they knocked the superstructure off and just left the hall. And you would come on here and make sure you had your ticket, get your baggage checked and it would be transferred onto the boat. But look at the America this is a design of both the America and the United States and that is that it has two levels of state rooms which is which is pretty and poor. that when we tried to understand the story, most of these had one level of state rooms, these both the United States and America have two. And what that means is when you're underway and you're a cab, and let's say is right here, you can walk out of your cabin on to the deck, that's kind of the way you
can on the bell and look over and see the countryside going by, or you can turn around and walk open your door, walk into your, your cabin, walk out of another door, and be looking and the saloon area, we'll look at a picture of that in a minute. So there are double decks outside and inside open, with a lot of opportunity to look inside and down on what's going on inside as well as outside. And you it was a it was a very, very interesting design. Here's the inside of the JM white. Look at the look at the detail here. This, again, is not a double decker, but if it were you would have another row of doors here are railing around this area here. And if you aren't careful, you could flip over the rail and fall on somebody's dinner table down here. The Halls of both of these boats were about 300 feet, the length of a football field. So that's important when you think about slowing them down. They're there, they're gotten a lot of footage and they're moving pretty fast 40 feet in a beam 265 cabins for the United States and 200 staterooms for the America. The wheels on these boats were gigantic that's just measured across from one side to the other, you're looking at 36 feet. And the cost. Both were built in Cincinnati cost about $240,000 then that's probably around maybe 5 million now. Maybe more. So it was very expensive. These were called brag boats. And other words these are these boats are the boats the line put out to really carry their brand and show the flag. Now, as I mentioned, the boats are heading one, America is heading up river, the United States heading down river, they're going to meet at a place that's called rails landing. That's the specific spot. It's right about here. Here's Warsaw, Kentucky, how many people have been to Warsaw and this is a this is a low area. Today, it looks very similar to what it looked like in 1868 called Egypt bottom, and Indiana. So you could stand here and probably see pretty much all the way across here. Exception for trees, you don't really start getting into the hills of southern Indiana until you you kind of move along a little bit. This was a rural neighborhood and it was a farming neighborhood. And it was named after the rails family. And they're the people that owned on the property here they had some tenant farmers that were helping them farm in that area. And I go into detail on this because this is where the rack is going to take place. And those farmers are going to be what we would call today the first responders to that to the accident the other thing to keep in mind as this was a regular passing area, again, these boats often passed and met on the river in this particular location over and over again. Right right in this area. So it was not unexpected that that would happen. But on the next couple of mornings people are gonna get up and they're gonna read headlines like this. And this wreck is very, very carefully documented and detailed, at least in the paper. If you want to go online or look up the accounts of this disaster yourself, you can get eyewitness accounts. So there's a collision between the male line steamers 70 lives are lost. That's what we know right now. Look at the date line. And the place I don't know if you can see it. Probably not but it says Madison, Indiana. Now think about that for a minute. Why if it happened in Warsaw, would the news be coming out of Madison And it’s it is the closest city but the closest city with one particular type of transportation. And that is a railroad. Madison had railroad from Madison up toward Indianapolis, and it had a telegraph office. So a lot of the early dispatches and reports on this rack are coming out of out of Madison. Here's an example of what we learned to begin with, and very often, some of their original initial reports are not particularly on target. We'll learn later there are adjustments. But the steamer is American and United States collided at rails landing about 22 miles above about 22 miles above this place. Remember, this is Madison, not Warsaw. At half past 11 o'clock last evening, both boats took fire and are totally destroyed. A large number of lives were lost. Now that's on December the fifth and then by December the fifth at 1130. From Florence, a note comes out passengers and crew mostly saved, which turns out not to be the case. And then and Madison again on December 5 impossible to give the names of the laws register of the States, the United States was burned. When the boat the loss of life is much greater. So so this sort of emotional roller coaster. Well, we lost 70 No, now it looks like most people were saved. No, we're now back up to a lot of fatalities. And finally, we get to the dispatch out of Cincinnati all on the same day, the total number lost on both boats is is about 70 and it ends up being very, very close. Well, there
were eyewitnesses to this account because it's happening on the Ohio a couple of miles above Warsaw. And if you drive up there today and you stop where the historical marker is you can pretty much look out across the water and see where this accident took place. This is a Harper's Weekly drawing and they actually got the part about the two decks of staterooms. Correct. Here's one and here's the other here's the lower deck. And the fact that fire happens almost immediately. There is a farm on the Kentucky side just north of Warsaw called the Semmens farm. And the someone's daughter tells her father come look the Northern Lights, this is a beautiful sight. And he runs into the window and says northern lights or aurora borealis hell, that's a steamboat fire. So they basically collided out there. And they're looking at their second storey window at the scene, witnessing this this catastrophe. And here is the summons form. This is a great thing about historical records. If the more you can like the more you can tell, the more windows open onto the past. That's what's wonderful about the Filson collection. Virtually all of this material I'm sharing with you in the short time we have today is in our collection. And I'll let you layer. So the stories become so much richer and we understand much better. I want you to just look at this steamboat trap that was a term used in the newspaper. It's not something that I that I put in quotes to to ask you is this uh, this place has a bad reputation for wrecks, and steamboat RX. And if you look at what's under water here, you'll know why this dotted line is the channel which here begins to drift over on the Indiana side. And there's some rocks right there. Here's rails house and here are some of the farmers who were living in his fields. Here's Warsaw and, and in the end this turn here. We've got first of all, let's just come from north to south we got a wreck of a steamboat called the Kentucky Home, which sank in the 1850s because it ran into and collided with a steamboat called The Telegraph. Now some of you have read, do dobb I can't Emerson who spoke at the Filson several years ago, you recognize that, that fosters even foster wrote a song about the telegraph, and it was a steamboat but it had connections with this technology of steam and telegraphy. So this is a technological age but but here beneath the water is the four Oh Kentucky Home over here by the way, just in case you missed that there's a sunken barge so you'd have to watch out for that you wouldn't want to hit it. And then up here is the Tom Scott, which is another steamboat rag. So this is a this is sort of a graveyard for steamboats already and the timing for when these boats live and and pass at Louisville and at Cincinnati and then coming almost guarantees that somewhere in here is where they're going to meet. And that's exactly what happened on the night of December the fourth. You know, we've read the dispatches, we've seen Harper's weeklies, illustration, we've looked at the map. And now I'm going to read you an eyewitness account. And like I said, you can get many, many, many eyewitness accounts out of the out of the newspaper. The courier journal has some some good descriptions. And what we have happening here are people being held in suspense at both ends of the river, because once you know there's a wreck. And if you had somebody on board, you want to know what happened to them. And so the telegraph office is at both cities on the waterfront. People are waiting around outside for the for the next dispatch, people who know for sure that something's wrong and somebody hasn't, for some reason or other contacted them. People are going to Warsaw, they are there on the banks as fast as they can get there, too. Find out about their, their loved ones. Like I said, this wreck happened about 1130 at night, if you want to do a spooky story, and do a reenactment or something like that. I wouldn't recommend that you do the full disaster. But there are all sorts of premonitions and tales hear around us when it left Cincinnati. It was late at night when the wreck happened, but it was dusk in that the sun was setting and rain freezing rain was beginning to fall and some people said the United States looked like a ghost ship when it shoved off. And then there was a story about a man saying Oh darling, don't get on that boat. I've had a premonition get on this other boat over here. It's not as nice as that but I There's something's going to happen to that boat. And then the the other story, there's a lot of them was that your two wedding parties on the United States going south along the river and they stayed up and partied a lot they partied or they
actually had to go around and tell them to look break it up because people need to go to sleep. And so as soon as this news lands back in Cincinnati there's actually I won't give it the dot denomination because frankly I don't remember right now but there was a reverend a preacher who in his sermon after this event came along said that well, you know, what, can you expect that people were dancing and drinking and partying and, and this is what happens when you do those things in sermon. So there's a lot of that kind of stuff going on here too. Okay. 1130 that's the that's the estimated time of completion or completion of the of the run without incident seem to be catastrophe. Here's a quote, a few minutes to 11 we took to our rooms. I think it was about 15 minutes past 11 When I retired, had not been asleep I think five or 10 minutes had elapsed, but from the time I retire until are heard to Wessels from an ascending boat so he's on the he's on the United States. He says he heard to whistle I listened for our signal but heard and on the alarm bell, which was under my stateroom sound image, imagine that being ready to sleep in and an alarm bell goes up, immediately sprang to my feet open the outside door and was standing in it when the boats collided. I saw the flame shoot up immediately and I knew the boat was on fire. I rushed out into the cabin and found the flames were bursting up through the office the cabin he's described me as looking down past his rail into the interior the boat, sort of like the inside of the the JM white I showed you that long area there. And basically he said at arrived at the lady's cabin the same beggars description the flames on the under deck had reached after the boat and was bursting into the lady's cabin. So this this happens incidentally. The fire breaks out right away and there's not a whole lot of precaution that people can take. Here are a couple of people that were on the boat. One was William Arvin, Louisville and after this disaster, and we'll talk a little bit about waving Garvan remind me if I forget to bring this up the other was a virtuoso violinist named Bornemann bull. That's not his way his name would be pronounced. He's Norwegian. But he's a character. He's sort of like a rock star during the days he's making the circuit out here in the West. And the Western waters is called and he's appearing in town after town with his troop which was had a beautiful lady who sang songs and accompanied him. And oh bowl was on the America and William Garvin was on the United States. So Garvin was coming home and old bull had just finished an engagement here and Louisville, and had entertained all the people who wanted to come here, his his violin music, he also in the 1840s appeared in Mammoth Cave. And there's actually a little chamber in there a call. I think it's called bulls cave or bowls room or something, where they went in and turned out all the lights, I don't know if they don't have lights, torches, but I've been in a cave where they did that, and I didn't like it. But bull was way down in this place. I asked the National Park Service one day, where are we? Where is this? And they said, No, we don't go. Nobody really goes down. They're very much way down in the cage. But they were they were in there. No, like totally silent. And oh, bull starts playing this violin. And the people who were in caves and it was just an incredibly emotional, kind of spiritual event. Well, all bowl was at the bar on the America. So the story goes heading up, Reverend, he was with those revelers and partying and telling everybody about how Norway needed to be an independent country and broken off from Sweden. And so he was a Norwegian nationalist. And somebody talked to him for a minute supposedly said this. When he got ready to go to bed, he says, you know, when I go to sleep on a train or on a steamboat, I never undress. I don't always take off all my clothes and get in bed because I don't know when there's going to be a wreck. So he leaves them and goes to sleep. And we'll talk about old bull and then of course, William Garvin was at the top of his career and Louisville as a as one of the key people of what we would call today the Kent Chamber of Commerce, he was a well respected individual and businessman in the community. Here is the scene at Warsaw which beggars description. This is where people are going to be brought into town, laid out and tried to be identified once the folks that rails landing had had been able to get them out of the water. Well, now by now you're beginning to sort of ask what happened, how did this happen, and it did happen quickly. First of all, people thought of the weather as being a possibility. It was dark, it was dreary snow was
falling. But the main thing is the boats did not discover their proximity to live within 200 yards of each other. And if you go back and look at those, the length of the boats, that's 200 yards that they're, they're basically 300 feet, that's 100 yards to both lengths apart. And one of the witnesses said that, that the first thing they knew, that gave them a sign of trouble was what they saw, were the were the furnace doors on the opposite boat coming at them. I mean, that's how close these boats had gotten. Remember, the United States was being pushed by the current and it was going faster. So they're closing pretty fast. Now, December 5, that's that's the next day calls the the collision pilots missed the signals. So what we would call that today would be what? pilot error something you know, is wasn't mechanical, it was a pilot error. And how could that happen? Well, first of all, let's look at the passing rules. This is by way a photograph that Lynn Gross who was a Filson member and went on with us duty and the crew to Scott down to but Duka when we looked at the brown water Navy a few years ago, and asked land to take this when steamers are approaching the signals for the passing shall be one for steam whistle to keep to the right so this boat would sound one whistle and two for the left. So the signals are to be made first by the upstream steamer so the so as the burden is on this boat to say what I'm going to do, and this boat does have the option to move over and come up this side if it wants to because this is going against the current. So that's kind of the basic idea here. That's the That's the rule of the road pilot era. And Napoleon Jenkins is the pilot of the America. He's going to be the scapegoat to begin with in this in this accident. And he was not this old when it happened. This is an 1887 photograph. So, you know, he was not a spring chicken but he was not as old as he looked. Part of Napoleon Jenkins problems was he was brought on as a substitute. Because the boat stop at downriver at a port and the regular pilot got off. That was his hometown. And so Napoleon Jenkins was next up. So people are going to naturally sort of think about Napoleon Jenkins as maybe being the person that made the era. Here we go again, with a Kentucky Home and the telegraph, which I mentioned earlier. Let's see what the Cincinnati inspectors hearing thought about this. It is frequently happened that pilots have complained on each other for not answering signals. When on investigation, it was shown that the answer was made just at the same time or the time the sound of one reached the other while into the act of giving his signal. So if you're beginning to kind of follow where they're going with this, you can see why both both pilots will talk about this a little more, felt like they had done the right thing. And we're moving on. And so when 1869 was just another January of 69, the wreck happened in 68. The government is moving with incredible speed here and and solving this catastrophe. They says After careful review of that testimony, we believe pilots on both boats were at fault. The pilot of the America when he first signal, blue, two sounds of the whistle. And while sounding the first blast that of the United States was evidently also long. So one sound simultaneously in ceasing with the first sound of the America's whistle, which entirely prevented the pilot of the United States from hearing it. Hearing only the second sound blown at the time by the America. He came on. So the United States coming down river is only hearing one, one sound and he is assuming that the America is coming up whoever is going to stay on the Kentucky shore. But Napoleon Jenkins had decided for whatever his reasons he was not going to go up the shoreline that had a sunken barge and the the Kentucky Home rack there he was going to slide over to the Indiana side. But the first blast was just wiped out dude, the first muscle just canceled each other out. So only one blast was heard in the pilot house. But remember, our eyewitness said he heard to blast. So there's still some confusion there. But this is the this is the hearing. And everybody said and Jenkins had a perfect right to do that later. But at the time of the wreck. People were really trying to hang out on the Polian Jenkins. Well, what about all that fire? I mean, you know, you could have a collision, but you didn't need to have a fire right away and all these people being killed. Well go back to the Cincinnati or go back to that wharf boat that I told you about where goods are stored. The well people recall now going back and looking at it. Oh, yeah, I remember right at the last minute. All these roundabouts are bringing on all these barrels and didn't really make
any sense to me at the time. But they were it turned out that the barrels were according to the investigation ladder later. 28 barrels of Napa. Now I had to look that up. But we all probably have some version of Napa around the house somewhere. And for me, it's when you take up that bottle that you put in a tiki torch. You look at the you look at the description. That's it, it will burn on anything, it will burn on water, which was unfortunately exactly what it did. The Napa was put on the United States right here. And the America because it was coming across the river and heading in this direction. The bail drove right into here. So all of those barrels of whatever you want to call it. petroleum oil, Napa, they all get knocked over and they get knocked over right into the furnace box that calls that furnace box remember is right along in here. And the people that are really, really have almost virtually no chance to get off of the boat are going to be the deckhands and the people working on the furnaces stoking those furnaces, they don't have a chance. And I put this illustration up because I think gives you a good view of about where this bow of the Merica hit. How it knocks everything over. All Wood was a steamboat except for the machinery as what would paint. You know, lacquer, varnish, everything in it is flammable and it's gonna go up. And they did both of them. Well, the public outcry over this is huge. I've already talked about we're getting now into the end of the post disaster and, and really what I would call maybe traces that are still out there. This is a William Garmins grave marker in Cave Hill Cemetery. And his funeral procession at this time was considered the longest in the history of Louisville. No, no one had ever had this many people join in a procession of public grieving and mourning for for a citizen like William Garvin and the city made a decision to memorialize William Garvin by creating a small neighborhood on the South side of town which would be called Garvin place that's correct. reactions in the papers. It's no longer safe to go traveling. I'm not going to take any more trips on a steamboat, it's too dangerous. The only way to make traveling less dangerous is the whole the carriers of human beings to strict legal accountability for the damage they do. So somebody has to pay this, this did not have to happen. How did this happen? Captain piers who worked for the United States male line and worked on the United States lost his wife and son and this disaster and sued the company. Now I brought up les earlier the fact that those wheels that are driving these boats are gigantic 30 feet across. And part of the problem was when that fire broke out on the the United States. The America tried to back away from it. Remember, the United States coming down the Americans here is trying to reverse. But in doing that is pulling people who have already jumped off the burning United States into the water under the wheels. So the last time anybody saw for Captain Pearson, his poor wife and son, they were going under the starboard side of the America. So you can go to Cave Hill now and see. See William gardens grave? Well, we might as well know that before too long, people are going to start trying to figure out, you know, how can we recover our losses in this you can't recover the loss of human beings, but lawsuits start flying. And of course, we all know that. I wouldn't call all of these people ambulance chasers, but a lot of people were looking for work and the lawsuits that fell out after this collision. And one of those was one of our founders Ruben T Durrett. We have the direct papers in these documents are in Ruben T dirts papers. This is the deposition of Rhoda Taylor, she lost her husband and and this crash and she hired Ruben Durant to see if they couldn't sue the US Mail line. Andrew spiegelberg of Louisville was a passenger on the United States. The story on spiegelberg in the paper is that he went to Cincinnati to sell his race horse or a horse and he got to Cincinnati and he sold it he was coming back home and he was lost in this collision. And one of the things you've got to do is make sure and prove that the person you're saying died on the boat was actually on the boat. So in the dirt papers again, this is a kind of ideal layering kind of looking at the evidence is this no this is like a it's almost looks like a scrap of paper or something on the back of an envelope. And these are the people who saw Andrew spiegelberg of Louisville on the United States and a man named price that looks like Northcott Harris, saw Spiegel were on both kind of shorthand. Here's an interesting one. Mr. Gavin's here may close and recognize the body by by basically the closing So these are the kinds of
techniques people use and try to identify people because a lot of them were horribly burned and, and some of them were never found. Look at the fatalities, just basically it was about half and half 54% passengers 46%. Crew. When you come and look at our exhibit, one of the things I have to admit to you up front as the architect artwork, and images that we have in that exhibit, don't display and reveal the extent to which women and African Americans were involved in the traveling public. They basically aren't there we have a really good example of roundabout music, publishing music there, but women are going to account for about a quarter of the casualties on this. And as wreck the of the crew a half of a half of those were deckhands. Seven out of 10 of the firemen, those were the people near the boilers, and fireboxes. Died in this wreck. And, you know, by the time we get into the 1870s, were at the beginning of the end for the steamboat era. railroads were beginning to come into play. They are beginning to reshape transportation in America. As I mentioned, the fact that they had played such a critical role in the Civil War was was one of the things that the steamboat industry wanted to try to counter with these large boats, fast boats, moving with a lot of people on them and and navigating through some, some pretty close quarters. This is from the Inn railroad collection we have at the Filson apparently we don't know what happened here, but I'm going to tell you what my guess is and talking to Jim Homburg, a member gave us this collection of great images. This is south of Louisville, before Louisville, and Elizabeth town. We think these photographs were documenting track condition because there were a couple of accidents down in this area too. So they were coming along, trying to shoot the lines and and find out what what was happening down there. William Garvin, as I mentioned, we have a Garmin didn't make it off the boat. He died and I'll wrap this up real fast. He died in his cabin. Amazingly, the United States was raised refloated and the whole was packed up and, and put another superstructure on it, and use it again. But when they brought the hall up, Wijngaarden was still in his statement. And that's described in newspaper accounts and the Filson has a memorial book about we have norburn. And, and this incident and the library that's kind of pulls a lot of those different disparate newspaper reports together, or below. Well, you know, there's always a story going on with old bull wherever he travels. He claims to have jumped off the boat on the Indiana side. So that was the right choice because it's still pretty shallow over there. He's not jumping on the side that America is coming in, and has hit and trying to back away. So he's avoiding a lot. But he says he gets about halfway to shore and remembers that he's lost or left his violin in his cabinet. So we turned around and I don't know how you weight back and you know, and his age and get up and get back in the cabin. But he says he did. He went back to him. And we know that he did end up with the violin and it did go with him because once they sorted out the casualties on rails farm, they designated two different cabins. Women went to one cabin, and men went to another cabin. This is Victorian America, and they started trying to nurse them. And then they went up to the ferry in Florence crossed over to Warsaw and also became the scene of as you saw a lot of a lot of angst and really people really torn up by this. But oh bullpen on event benefit concert to the type of people Warsaw and they found a space and he got up and played his violin. And so we know he survived. He went on and actually married a woman about 30 years younger than him somewhere down the road but, but he's one of those characters you can see on his steamboat. Steamboat is a cross section of society and included virtually everyone and some capacity or other and sweet See, in this case, it kind of depends on where you were in which way you went as the case a lot of disasters, whether you made it out or not. So I'm sorry, I've taken this much time to work through that. But I hope you've enjoyed it. And I'll be happy to answer questions. Yes, sir? Well, that's a good point. And after this collision, the Coast Guard does put a light there, there is a there is a light, there is a light that lets people know. But, you know, these pilots knew those rivers, I mean, a pilot drew that one map that I showed you with the summons farm is the X. That was a pilot, his name was Craig. And then I was giving this talk one time, up the river and vv, and there was a descendant of that pilot who drew that map and the audience. There's also some, a little bit of
controversy about whether or not the location of the wreck is exactly where, you know, as indicated on the map. Those boats drifted some after they, after they collided and sort of hooked up with each other. So that's, that's another question, though, as far as the water and the depth of water is deeper now than it would have been then. So it's conceivable that old bull could have gotten out and after going a little bit, kind of got his feet on the ground and, and, and moved over toward the Indiana shore. But still, the fire was so bad. And large by the time both boats were in golf, that they account, say the trees on the Indiana side, you know, for many yards back from the from the shoreline were really burned. And, yes, I can go back and try to see that we'll review it, we'll roll it back after we get through. Well, that could very well be if he was in. If he was in Louisville, if it's a deafens Taylor shop, could it it could be very well. Let's see if we can't read that in a minute. Yes, right here. No, the America was not raised. I'm glad you asked that question because it reminds me that the America is still out there. And then about the 1960s somewhere. So this newspaper account that one of the toes, lost a barge, that that is sometimes happens on our bridge out here gets just pushed up against one of the piers and just stays there. They couldn't shut. Like they couldn't lock it up the locks, they couldn't get the gates closed. And so the pool drain for a while. And it drains so low that people could see some of the remnants of the wreck of the America out there in the water. And it's still there. As far as I know, the United States was taken to Cincinnati, there are photographs and pictures of it, almost all of it burned down to the waterline except for part of the will house where you can see United States on it. And they were able to rebuild that. They had a huge auction and in Cincinnati, and they auctioned off everything they could from the United States as far as property that was left, as the newspaper said, all the way down to the toothpicks, so it's just incredible. Yes, sir. My only consideration there would be costume match. That would be very expensive to get in and raise them they weren't going to try to use them again. It's a very interesting question, but it was just not going to be profitable in that case. On the other hand, if a boat burns all the way to waterline you don't think it would be profitable to raise it but they did. So that's a good question. I actually think they called it the United States. Believe it or not, I can't I'm not positive on that. But I think that's it's been a while since I, since I read that. The place to find out is Waze packet directory. How many people have heard of Waze packet directory? Anything you want to know about steamboats and boats and when they were launched and how many of them there were there were three I think JM White's for example, go two ways packet directories Wilson's got a copy of that. Well, the most of these boats were steam powered and they were operated using wood first and then cold. You know, I don't I have not researched that area. That's, that's above my pay grade. Yeah, I'll be hanging around.

54:48

Thank you.