

# Personal Effects

By Jerry Sampson  
Contributing Writer

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**Question:** Dear Mr. Sampson, I enjoyed your articles so much that I wanted to contact you about something. My brother-in-law passed away several years ago and left a lot of stones. He was always collecting gems and rocks and kept little cases of them in his study. Most were marked but not these.

There are about 6 little pieces, I've shown you two of them. My son thinks that it's a green marble and the rest of us think that it's a type of agate. The green color is intense and has all of these rings like tree rings. What is it and does it have any value? The one free form one has a hanger for a pendant. Thanks and I hope to see this in the paper. Please keep writing.

**Answer:** One of my favorite stones! I was just talking about this stone with a friend at my book club last week. You have a small collection of malachite. Malachite is a copper carbonate hydroxide mineral that comes in several forms. The most desirable is the stalagmitic masses. That means that it forms in the form of a stalactite, like you'd see in a cave, but underground. Your comparison to tree rings is very correct, as that is how it grows. It's deep in fractures and spaces in the ground so the stone interacts with the water table, other minerals and fluids to create that stunning color.

Malachite can be found all over the world. All the way from Britain to Zambia, New South Wales, France and the Southwestern USA, especially Arizona and several other locations. However, its largest and most important mines are in the Ural Mountains in Russia. The Russians have so much of it that, in the past, they have veneered walls with it and created massive columns, urns and vases out of it. The Hermitage in St. Petersburg has many fine examples.

The name malachite, in part, comes from Middle English, melochites, meaning mallow green stone, due to its resemblance to the plant's green leaves. The Egyptians, who also mined this stone, thought that the color of the stone represented death and the power of resurrection, as well as, new life and fertility. Greeks and Romans ground it to use as eye shadow. And in the Middle Ages it was thought to protect children and ward off witches.

Inferior malachite had been used as a paint pigment from the time of ancient times until 1800, when it was replaced by synthetic pigments. Of course, malachite has been used as jewelry for thousands of years and I see why. That color is rich and deep and one of the most beautiful in the world. Malachite is a soft stone so it was fairly easy to carve and turn. By the way, malachite is ALWAYS green.

The pieces that you have are lovely but have little value. Each piece at a lapidary show might be priced at \$20 each. Wear the pendant and display the square piece. They are too, too pretty to keep locked up. Thanks for sharing it.

**Question:** Jerry, could you tell me what the value of this old cast iron bank is? I know that it's an oldie but I'm not sure how old. Thanks for all your help.

**Answer:** Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news but it's a reproduction. You know how I can tell? It's the Phillips head



Photo Submitted  
Malachite stones make beautiful jewelry but usually aren't high dollar pieces.

screw in the back that gives it away. Early cast iron bank manufacturers didn't use Phillips head screws, they always used slotted screws. The Phillips head screw didn't come out until the early 1930s. However, don't be too down, as it's fooled many dealers, collectors and appraisers over the years. Readers, don't be too cocky if your bank has a slotted screw, as they have faked these too.

Your piece is very "aged" and I use that in quotation marks as it's not a natural aging or a natural patina. It takes decades or even a century of use, handling, playing with and exposure to indoor and outdoor elements to get the real and coveted patina. A lot of decorative and painted cast iron has been faked or enhanced for many decades. Things like banks, door stops, hitching posts and toys are some of the most prevalent. Fakers have done terrible things to these still and mechanical banks.

A bit of clarification, still banks, like yours, are just that, still, they don't have moving parts. Mechanical banks have moving parts, like the dentist pulling a tooth or the girl jumping rope. Back to the faking... old time dealers used to bury, burn, cover in cow poop, coat them in bacon grease and bake them in ovens for days. I heard that one dealer took banks and stood them on fence post ends, for years and years, to rust and patina them. So, in addition to the material and construction, you have to pay careful attention to the aging or patina.

Now, add something else. Your bank is getting some age on it. Certainly not the age of an original, but I think that your bank dates to the 1960s. So its getting some age to it.

Black Americana is a genre hated by some and loved by others. Many African Americans are big ticket buyers. It's a very collectible theme and originals with the right paint and patina can fetch the world.

There are several variations to the mammy bank and originals date back as early as the 1870s. One mechanical mammy bank, that shows her feeding her baby, in remark-

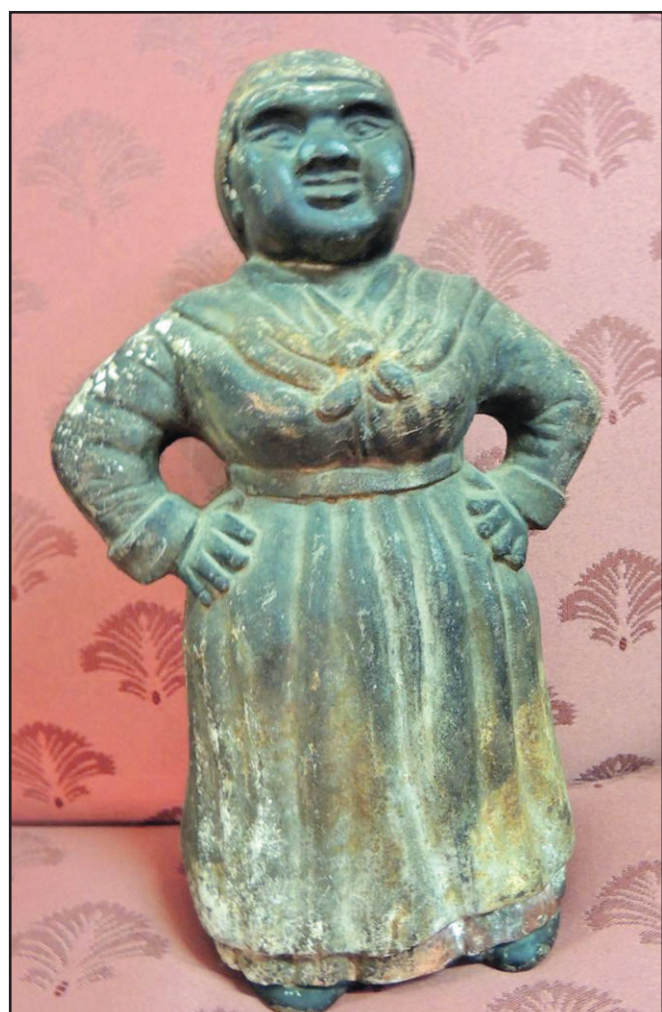


Photo Submitted  
Unfortunately this bank is a reproduction, even though it has an aged patina look.

able condition, at a Bertolia Auction, a few years ago, brought over \$50,000.00! A bank like yours that's right and proper, easily sells for \$400.

Your bank has a nice country, old timey look to it. We already know that it's a reproduction and that's going to effect the value. I think that in an antiques mall or country decorator's booth would be priced at about \$45. Thanks for sharing it.

(Jerry Sampson is owner of J. Sampson Antiques, Books and Appraisals on Harrodsburg's Main Street. A native of Mercer County, he has been collecting, selling and appraising antiques for several years.)



SAMPSON

## The Worse Maritime Disaster in US History

By William Robinson  
Contributing Writer

Someone wrote, you could read deeply into Civil War history, before you came up with an explosion of a steamboat on the Mississippi. That steamboat was called the Sultana, and its destruction killed 1800 people.

On April 27, 1865, the Sultana a 260 foot wooden--hulled steamboat--smaller than the Titanic, but carrying more passengers---exploded on the Mississippi River near Memphis, Tennessee on its way from Vicksburg with overloading of passengers and with a boiler not properly fixed.

On board were 2400 passengers six times the ship's legal capacity. Most were union soldiers on their way home from confederate prison camps, and many of the men were so weakened by malnutrition and disease from their imprisonment at Andersonville and Cahaba, that they had to be helped aboard by their army soldiers, and because of their injuries many would die on the Sultana. Unable to join those who had jumped overboard, and were left to endure the encroaching fires. Many begged to be thrown into the muddy dark river. A soldier Michael H. Sprinkle cast screaming wounded men into the water to drown and is known to have said, "he lived with their screams the rest of his life."

While the death toll was higher than caused by the sinking of the Titanic half a century later the Sultana was given only a brief mention in the country's newspapers, overshadowed by the end of the Civil War and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln less than two weeks earlier. Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth had been killed. The Sultana story of 1865 could not compete with headlines such "Lee Surrenders!" "President Murdered" "Booth Killed."

Some authors, think it didn't get a lot of attention because of where and when it occurred and who the victims were. They were mainly enlisted men who hadn't made any mark on our history, also the nation had just finished four long years of the Civil War during which 600,000 men had died, and people were used to reading about death all the years of the war, and were calloused about

it, so what just a few more deaths of the war.

What caused this disaster (Lost in the lingering fog of the Civil War)? Some authors like Jon Hamilton say greed, incompetence. Recklessness all played a role.

The trouble started the moment the steamboat docked in Vicksburg, Mississippi. One of the boilers had sprung a leak on the way from New Orleans and needed to be repaired. The boat's Captain J. Cass Mason brought in a mechanic who wanted to replace a ruptured seam. The job could take days and cost Mason time and money, so he insisted that the mechanic hastily patch the leaky boiler.

The government's offer to pay \$5 or more per man to transport Union POWs back north after the war meant money for steamboat captains such as Mason. It also sowed the seeds of corruption, as boat captains commonly offered kickbacks or other bribes to Army officers willing to load their vessels with as many men as possible.

The Sultana built to hold about 375 passengers was crammed with 2,400--about six times its recommended capacity, as it began the journey to Cairo, Illinois. Every corner of the boat was occupied by weary (and sick soldiers) so tightly sandwiched together that many could find no place to sleep, even a place to stand. The decks of the 260-foot long boat sagged and creaked under the load.

Months earlier on Christmas Day, a Union soldier from Ohio named John Clark Ely had sat in a prison camp in Mississippi, wondering whether he would see home again. "Such a day for us prisoners, Hungry, dirty, sleepy, lousy," he wrote in his journal. "Will another Christmas find us again among friends and loved ones?"

Ely was among the more than 2,000 paroled Union prisoners of war crowded aboard the steamboat

Sultana as it pulled away from the docks at Vicksburg Miss. They were headed home to see their families and friends, that they had not set their eyes on in such a long time. It had been over four years for some.

Hours after the explosions, the Sultana sank to the bottom of the Mississippi. Bodies continued to surface down river for months: many were never recovered. Mason the boat's captain was among the casualties. Greed caused his death, after all; he could get \$5 for each enlisted soldier he could pack aboard the Sultana, and time was money.

Despite claims of Confederate sabotage, a government inquiry determined that too little water in the boilers, coupled with the shoddy repairs and the strain of the heavy load probably contributed to the disaster. There were investigations and military tribunals, but ultimately no one was held fully accountable for America's worst maritime disaster.

In the spring of 1865, the soldiers on the boat had wanted nothing more than to go home. Most never made it past Memphis. Today many to them lie in the Memphis National Cemetery under white headstones engraved with the words "Unknown U. S. Soldiers." One marker is etched with the name of John Clark Ely, the Ohio soldier who never saw his next Christmas.

More than two decades after the disaster, survivors of the Sultana in different parts of the country began holding annual reunions around the anniversary of the disaster. Over time their number dwindled, until the last survivor died in 1936.

Descendants of Sultana survivors have continued to meet in recent decades to remember a tragedy that the nation barely acknowledged at the time and has been relegated to a footnote ever since, and this April to mark the anniversary some will gather in Marion Arkansas, just across the Mississippi

(Editor's Note: William Robinson is a graduate of Campbell University and has a master's degree in education from the University of Arizona. He has taught at the high school and college level. He is retired from the U.S. Postal Service. He and his wife, Wilma, have three children, Christina, Rita and Rebecca.)



ROBINSON

River from Memphis. They will board a boat (as they have done in the past) and travel upstream to where the Sultana sank and place a wreath on the river to honor those lost, and visit the spot where the wreckage of the Sultana now lies under the field on the Arkansas side of the river.

Today there is a small museum in Marion Arkansas with photos of artifacts of the Sultana.

Author's Note: Thanks to authors like Jerry Potter and John Hamilton and others who over this past 153 years have taken the time to research and taken the time to write about the Sultana.

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## The Harrodsburg Historical Society

cordially invites you to their meeting

**March 13, 7:30 p.m.**

Patrick Lewis:  
Author of the book  
*For Slavery and Union:  
Benjamin  
Buckner & Kentucky  
Loyalties in the Civil War.*



All meetings are free and open to the public.