

Attack On The Westmoreland

by Lynne Belluscio

With the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War, I will be writing a few articles that feature LeRoy stories. Unfortunately we do not have copies of the *LeRoy Gazette* for the first months of 1861 so I wasn't able to find out what was going on in LeRoy when Fort Sumpter was attacked on April 12. The first paper we have is May 8, 1861.

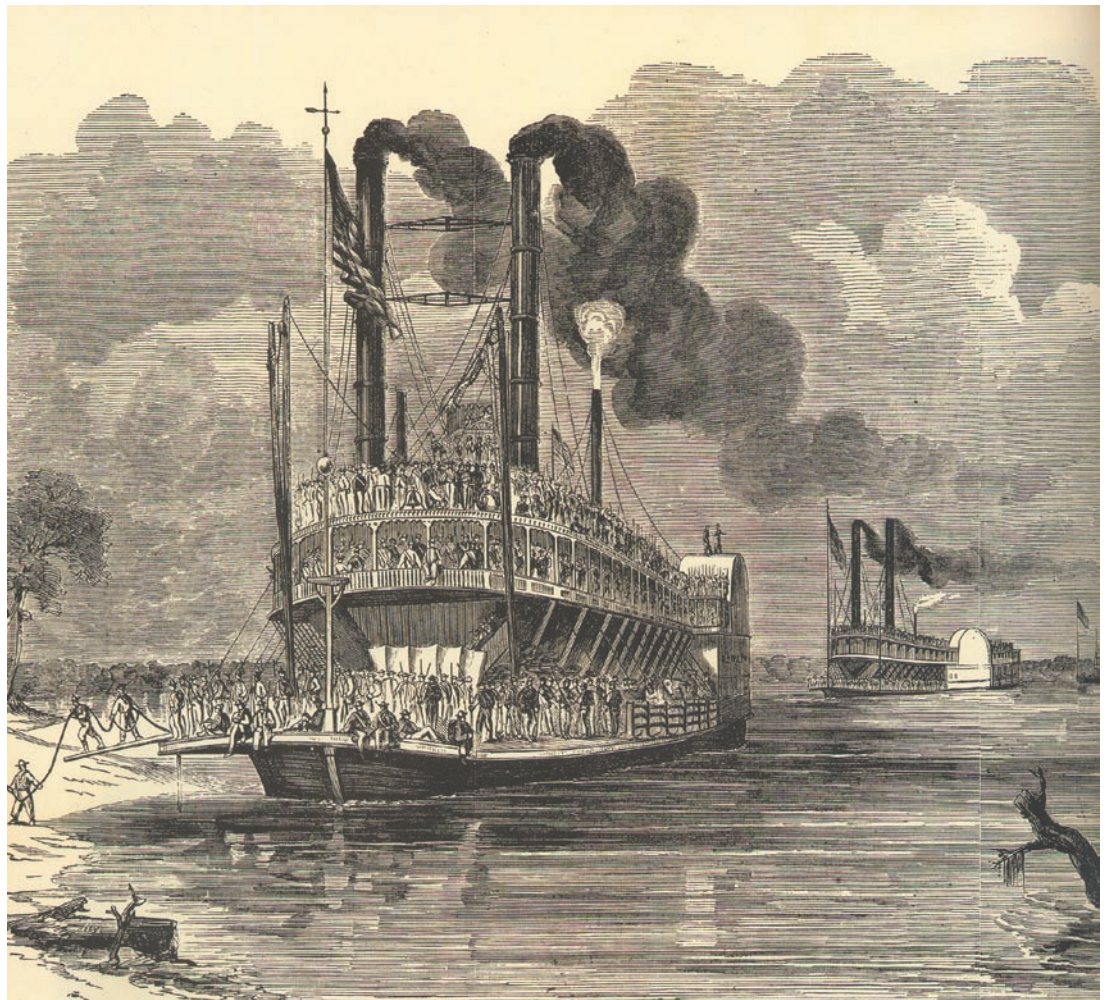
The *Gazette* noted that they were short handed, because two of their compositors had volunteered for service. The front page was a reprint of a sermon delivered at the Washington Street Baptist Church in Buffalo "A Discourse on the National Peril." On page two were directions for making lint bandages and an announcement of the formation of "Lint and Bandage Societies."

Another note mentioned that the doctors in LeRoy, following the examples of the physicians in Chicago, were offering to attend the families of volunteers for free. And then in column three is the story of Zephaniah Waterman of LeRoy.

In March, 1861, he headed to Texas to bring home his son and family "whom he supposed were not in the land just at this time 'flowing with milk and honey, nor surrounded with the most amiable and civilized citizens of the world.' He went to New Orleans, then Galveston and then north about 200 miles.

He found his family and hired five yoke of oxen to transport his son and wife and their two children. It took them ten days over the prairies, camping out and eating nothing but bacon and a little flour. They finally reached the Mississippi and secured passage on the steamer Westmoreland, bound for Cincinnati. But they were 'Destined not to get out of the land of Slavery so easily as they had hoped.'

The banks of the river were lined with "guerrillas" who were stopping boats and plundering the cargoes. They reached Napoleon, Arkansas on April 26 and as they approached the wharf the captain asked if there was any freight to be picked up. When they tied up, a mob appeared and a volley of



gunshot rang out. There were shouts of "shoot the captain and pilot!" Bullets hit the pilot house. The passengers included a large number of women, who immediately began screaming as bullets struck the walls of the ladies cabin. A passenger, Henry Hammer of Memphis was struck in the heart and died immediately. It was reported that he was originally from Ithaca, New York.

Mr. Waterman, who sent the report to the *LeRoy Gazette* said that a mini ball stuck a column only six inches above his head. He went away a 'Northern man with Southern principles,' but this awful onslaught, with other unmistakable features of the human chattel system, had effectively converted him to the Christian view of the question which now embroils the Nation in civil war and endangers the stability of the American Union."

The article about the Westmoreland in the *New York Times* mentions that the captain, and the pilot, who had been

wounded, immediately powered the boat and backed it away from the dock, breaking the ropes and headed upstream to Cincinnati. When it arrived, the ship was full of holes that looked like it had been hit with grapeshot. It appeared that it wasn't the only ship threatened on the Mississippi. Two other boats had been seized in Helena, Arkansas. Turpentine, 400 barrels of molasses, sugar and resin were taken. The article in the *Gazette*

goes on: "Such lawless and inhuman outrages could scarcely be perpetrated in any community where slavery is not the leading idea. Arkansas should be made to answer for this damnable attack upon an unarmed vessel crowded with women and children and unsuspecting and unoffending men." I haven't been able to find out if Mr. Waterman brought his family back to LeRoy. It appears that he moved back East where he died.

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