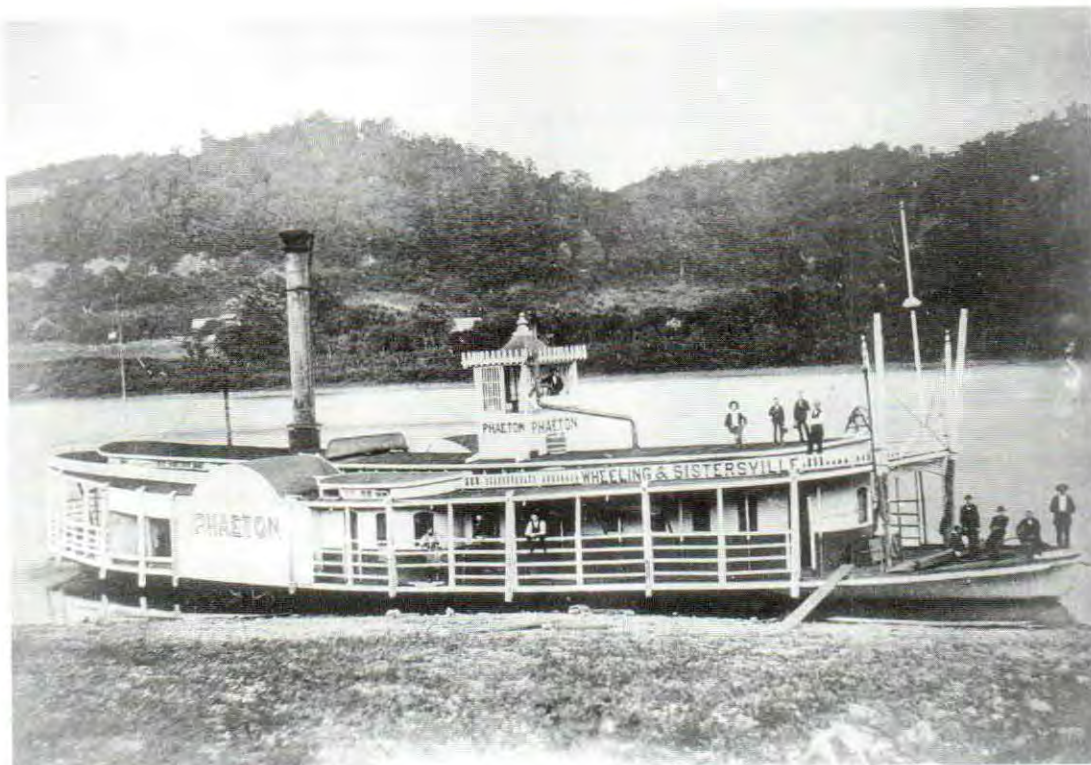




The PHAETON (4475) was built at Freedom, Pennsylvania in 1877, 135x33 feet in size, designed by Capt. John McClure of Wheeling for short trades. She was unusual in having the single boiler and engines all together. McClure soon sold her to Capt. Steve Dillon for the Sistersville-Wheeling daily trade and she was fast. She left Sistersville Dec. 5, 1878 at 6:30, arrived Wheeling at 11:58 a.m.; departed at 3:00 p.m. and back at Sistersville at 7:15, a roundtrip of 100 miles with 35 landings made. Photo at Sistersville, West Virginia and looking trim as a pin.

EXPLOSION OF THE STR. PHAETON

**In the twinkling of an eye a
fine steamer was blown into
minute fragments!**

The following account of the explosion of the PHAETON (4475) is from *The Manchester (OH) Signal* about 1926 and originally appeared in *The Maysville Republican*, the week of June 26, 1881.

The PHAETON was a sidewheel, single deck packet that had been built at Freedom, PA in 1877 for Capt. John McClure of Wheeling. She had been purchased on February 10, 1881 by Capt. Preston "Pres" Ellison who operated her in the Vanceburg, KY and Ripley, OH daily trade. The accident occurred on the Ohio River a short distance above Maysville, KY opposite Brooks Bar on Tuesday, June 28, 1881.

A terrible disaster occurred here last Tuesday afternoon. The boiler of the steamer PHAETON exploded with tremendous force, destroying the entire after portion of the boat and hurrying four passengers instantly into eternity. We have been to considerable pains to gather the exact facts in the case, and believe the statement given below is substantially correct. Thousands of wild rumors immediately gained circulation, and indeed, many unfounded reports are still being repeated upon the streets. Whenever we have heard a rumor that seemed to have any foundation whatever, we have tried to trace it to its source. In most cases we have discovered that they were absolutely groundless. The truth is bad enough, and it is cruel to exaggerate it.

The steamer PHAETON made her first appearance at the Maysville wharf on the 23rd day of March, a little over three

months ago. It came here to enter the Vanceburg-Ripley trade in opposition to the HANDY, a steamer that had been running in that trade for several years. The PHAETON was a handsome and very fleet little side-wheel paddle steamer. She had no upper deck but was "built low." Her boiler and engines were amidships; the gent's cabin and clerk's office were forward, and the ladies cabin aft of the boiler. She was supplied with two horizontal reciprocating engines with cut-off steam valves. She had one tubular boiler located at her very center, the engines and paddle-wheels being on either side of the boiler. She was a very fast little boat, her time being about equal to that of the largest and fleetest of the up-river packets. According to her last inspection certificate, which will not expire for some months yet, her boiler was capable of carrying safely one hundred and fifty-five pounds of steam. She was built at Wheeling about five years ago and until

recently was running between that city and Sisterville, (WV).

Her owner at the time of the disaster was Mr. J. Pres. Ellison of Manchester, a young man of enthusiasm of some steamboat experience and of steady principles. [A portion of the clipping is missing] The HANDY (2521) was slower than the PHAETON and the latter was able with ninety pounds of steam to pass her underway. The HANDY plies between this city and Portsmouth, making daily trips.

Exactly at one o'clock last Tuesday the HANDY left the wharf at this city with her usual crew and a very small number of passengers on board. About two minutes later the PHAETON also left with an unusually light trip of passengers. The two vessels steamed up the river within a short distance of each other, the PHAETON rapidly gaining on the HANDY. Each made a landing at East Maysville, and the PHAETON made a second landing at Chester. When about two miles above the city, and while yet in full view from the public landing, and while in the act of passing the HANDY, the PHAETON exploded her boiler with terrible force. The entire after cabin was literally torn into minute fragments. Instantly the river for a considerable distance in every direction was covered with debris, and in the brief space of one minute the hull of the PHAETON sank, leaving only a small portion of her bow out of water and her head having lodged upon a bar.

The report of the explosion was plainly heard by many persons and seen by a few persons in the city. Immediately the cry was sounded: "The PHAETON has blown up!" and crowds of people rushed to Front street. It was plainly evident that it was no false alarm. Pieces of the wreck could be seen floating away from the scene of the disaster. The naked eye could also perceive that the chimneys of the HANDY were down, and from appearances many were led to believe that both steamers had been wrecked.

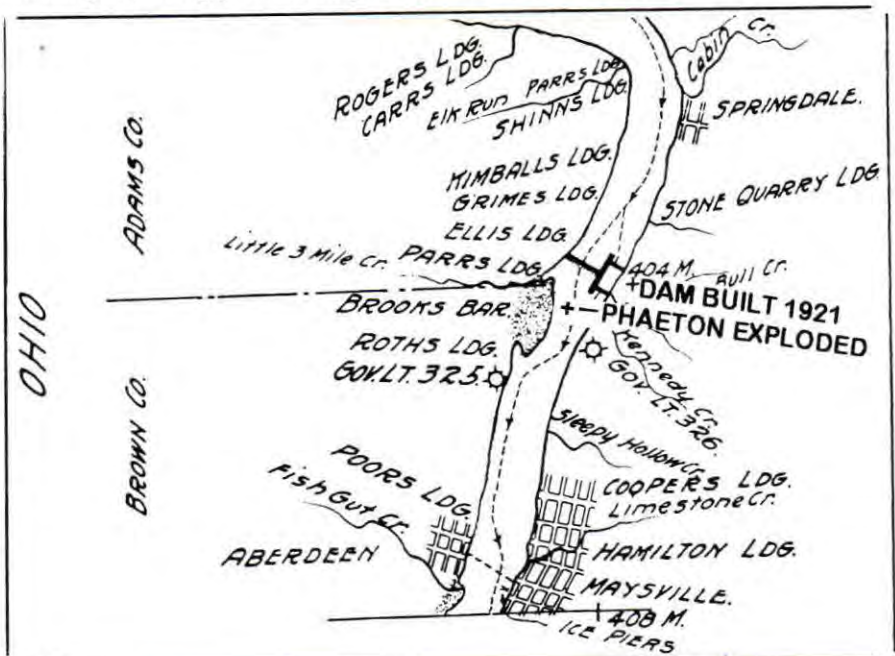
Fortunately the WILDWOOD (5791) lay at the wharf with steam up, having arrived but a short time before from Cincinnati. Several hundred persons rushed aboard of her and she immediately steamed up the river towards the scene of the disaster. A few minutes later the ferry boat FRANK S. OWENS (2133) also left with about a hundred persons on board. A great many skiffs put out from the shore at different points and many who failed to get

aboard the WILDWOOD or FRANK S. OWENS walked all the way up the beach and some drove up in their carriages. The excitement was intense. In a very short time almost the entire population of the city had gathered along Front street, and the steamboat landing was literally blocked with crowds of people.

With those who went up on the WILDWOOD the expectation was universal that not a soul could be found to tell the tale. The entire bosom of the river was covered with debris, much of it in very small pieces like fine drift. A sigh of partial relief, and an exclamation of surprise went up from each spectator when, or nearing the wreck, it was found that most of the persons on board the ill-fated vessel were saved and not seriously injured. But the joy of this discovery was checked by hearing the cries of agony that arose from one of the wounded sufferers. It was found that Timothy Seavers, the assistant engineer and fireman on the PHAETON, had been fearfully scalded. He screamed in agony of his sufferings, and every heart bled at the sound of his cries. A gentleman from Chicago, who gave his name as James McArthur, was cut on the head and considerably bruised and burned. These two men were the only persons found severely injured. Taking them and several others on board the WILDWOOD returned to the city. It was at this time a most affecting incident occurred.

Master Willie Carey, a lad of ten or eleven years of age, son of Maj. E. M.

Carey, mail agent on the steamer WILDWOOD, had gone on the PHAETON to visit friends at Manchester and was on board of her when the explosion occurred. His father was one of the persons who went to the rescue on the WILDWOOD. Mrs. Carey and her daughter Miss Julia, and little Harry were taken on board the OWENS. The writer was also taken on board the last named boat, and was a witness to the agony endured by that mother and sister on the way up the river. Innumerable small pieces of the wreck were seen floating down; each seemed to tell the story of the destruction of every soul on board. From looking upon the fragments floating upon the water no one could suppose it possible that anyone could have been on board the PHAETON and live. It was irony for anyone to speak a word of hope to the sorrowing ones at such a moment. It would have seemed a mockery. There was a sorrow without a gleam of hope. Who can imagine the joy of that mother when the cry went up from those of board the OWENS: "There's Willie! There's your boy, Mrs. Carey." And sure enough there he was on the guards of the WILDWOOD, safe in the care of his father, waving his handkerchief to his mother to let her know he was still left to her. When the two steamers touched and a plank was thrown across and that mother and her brave boy were locked in each other's embrace there was many a tear seen coursing down the bearded and sunburnt cheeks of the lookers-on.



We have endeavored to obtain exact facts respecting the number and names of persons on board the PHAETON at the time of the disaster, and to ascertain the particulars relative to the loss of life and to the extent of injuries sustained. With respect to the crew we have learned the following, which may be accepted as absolutely correct:

J. Pres. Ellison, of Manchester, Ohio, master, was not on board, having stopped at Manchester in the morning for the purpose of transacting some business in connection with the estate of his father, Mr. John Ellison.

O. H. P. Cooley, of Manchester, clerk, was in the absence of the master, in command of the boat. He escaped uninjured.

Will Cooley, of Manchester, assistant clerk, was on board and escaped without a scratch. From him the *Republican* representative obtained the statement published in the extra issued a few hours after the explosion, which statements are as nearly correct as any that have yet been printed, though prepared hastily and amid the most intense excitement then prevailing.

Hiram McMahon, of Manchester, pilot, was blown from the pilothouse out on the roof; slightly injured a nail having torn the flesh of his left leg below the knee. He sustained some bruises also.

Cassius Naylor, of Manchester, engineer, lost. His body has not been recovered and from the position he is known to have occupied at the time of the explosion it is supposed he must have been literally torn to pieces.

Timothy Seavers, of Rome, Ohio, assistant engineer and fireman; fearfully scalded and cut about the head. He died about half-past seven o'clock, six hours after his injuries. His death was caused by scalding. The rumor that a piece of iron was driven into his body was incorrect. His sufferings were intense. He died at the almshouse hospital, and his remains were taken to Rome the same night upon the railroad packet.

(Note: "railroad packet" refers to the boats operated by the White Collar Line, Cincinnati-Huntington, until the C&O extended its line to Cincinnati in 1883. Could be either BOSTONA [0693] or the FLEETWOOD [2055].)

Isaac J. Jones, of Manchester, steward, saved, with very slight injuries. A moment before the explosion, Mr. Jones had

examined the steam gauge and the water gauge and noticed that the pressure of the steam was but one hundred and thirteen pounds, and that the water-gauge showed plenty of water in the boiler.

Samuel Reynolds, colored, of Maysville, porter, lost. His body was recovered yesterday morning. An inquest was held upon the remains. The finding of the jury is published elsewhere.

Lyman D. Smith, of Ironton, cook, saved, uninjured. He was blown into the river but rescued.

John Conn, of Drenan's Landing, deck hand, saved. Injuries very slight.

Bascom Cooper, of Manchester, deck hand, saved. Slightly bruised.

Joseph Miller, of Manchester, deck hand, lost. His body has not been recovered.

Grant Mitchell, of Manchester, deck hand, saved, uninjured.

Sprague, of Vanceburg, saved, not hurt.

John Carr, of Manchester, a hand who assisted about the boat without wages, a sort of supernumerary, lost. His body was recovered on Wednesday. His head had been blown off and he was horribly mangled. The report of the coroner's jury will be found elsewhere.

There has been greater difficulty in ascertaining who were passengers on board at the time of the explosion. Having but twenty minutes before the boat left the wharf it is probable that some of the passengers may not have registered, and there is a bare possibility that the name of some of the passengers may be omitted from the following list:

James McArthur, of Chicago, formerly of Marietta, Ohio, cut in the head and bruised about the body, also slightly burned. His injuries were not at all dangerous. He left for his home on Wednesday evening.

Thomas Densmore, of Cincinnati, saved, uninjured.

Joseph Torrens, of Pittsburg sic, saved, with a very slight scratch on the hand.

Crawford, saved, cut on the hand, not serious, was in the pilothouse at the time and blown out on the roof.

Rev. G. W. Harding, of Chester, Kentucky, saved, bruised, not serious.

John Otto, of Springdale, and his boy, both saved and uninjured.

W. W. Scott, of Springdale, saved, uninjured.

Master Willie Carey, of Aberdeen,

saved, injuries, slight.

Daniel Blye, of Bradford's Landing, saved, slightly injured.

Bloomfield, of Vanceburg, blown into the water and taken ashore, injured internally but not seriously.

FALSE & UNFOUNDED RUMORS

Certain rumors have been floating around town and throughout the country that are calculated to do harm and that ought to be denied emphatically. One of the most malicious of these is the story telegraphed to several of the daily papers that the two steamboats were racing at the time of the disaster. This is absolutely false, as it will appear from the testimony of all who knew anything about the matter. Indeed, there never was any occasion for racing between the two steamers. The PHAETON was so much faster than the HANDY that all talk about racing is absurd. Neither boat was making more than ordinary time.

Another rumor that is calculated to do harm by keeping the public mind unsettled and uneasy is the statement that there were thirty five or forty passengers on board the PHAETON. All whose testimony is worth hearing agree in saying that both boats had unusually few passengers on board.

It is very certain that there were no ladies on board. This fact is testified to by every one of the crew and by every passenger who took the trouble to observe.

The rumor that the engineer, Cassius Naylor had declared the boat unsafe must be accepted with a grain of allowance. From the best and most reliable witnesses we learn that he had frequently stated that he was afraid the boat would some day break in two across the middle where the power was applied, and he is known to have expressed his intention to quit her because his duties were hard and because the engine room was hot and close. His sister, Miss Isella Naylor, his brother, Mr. C. C. W. Naylor, and his uncle, Captain R. T. Naylor, all state that they have heard "Cash" say that he was not afraid of the boiler, because he knew something about that, but that he was afraid of the vessel breaking in two amidships. He said there was too much power on her for the strength of her hull.

The rumor that Captain Ellison had been heard to say that he was going to, "run the HANDY out of the trade or blow his own boat to hell" is as false as false can

be and as absurd as it is false. Nobody who has the lightest acquaintance with Pres. Ellison believes a word of it. The miscreant who started this rumor ought to be severely punished. A more unmeaning and uncalled for falsehood was never started, and we trust that it may never be repeated again. Pres. Ellison is a gentleman. He is as far from jeopardizing the lives of his fellow beings as anyone living. Besides, he had no control of that department of affairs. The engineer is altogether independent of the master in such matters, and the law makes it a punishable offense for a master to intrude in any way with the duties of the engineer. The story is false absolutely and ridiculously false.

Captain John Agnew's statement: "The HANDY left the wharf boat at exactly one o'clock and made one landing at East Maysville. The PHAETON left two or three minutes later and made one landing at East Maysville and one at Chester. She passed us twice before the explosion. We had only nine passengers on board at the time. The PHAETON seemed to have a very light trip, the lightest of this season. I don't think she could have had more than eight persons outside of the crew. There was no racing at all, and both boats were making their usual time, in fact, we were making rather slower time than usual.

About twenty minutes past one I was sitting on the larboard guard talking to Bruce Redden. We were about two miles above the wharfboat at Maysville and directly opposite the country infirmary a short distance below the fair grounds. The PHAETON passed us on the larboard side and her stern was just about abreast of our bow and fifty feet from us. I was looking at her when the explosion took place. The first thing I saw was the PHAETON's chimney going up in the air; it seemed to go about fifty feet high. I knew the PHAETON had blown up and I was for an instant stunned. I had an impression that my boat had also met with the same misfortune. The HANDY was covered allover with debris and our chimneys were blown over. In less than one minute the PHAETON went down.

I got up and went on the roof and ordered the HANDY brought alongside the wreck and our yawl lowered. I saw six or eight persons struggling in the water, and we succeeded in saving every one we could see. I am sure there was no living person in the water but what was rescued. Among those taken on board was Timothy



After Capt. Pres Ellison lost the PHAETON he became a popular clerk/purser on several of the big packets of the 1880s and 90s, - PARIS C. BROWN, THOMAS SHERLOCK and several White Collar Line boats. Pres was purser on the GREENWOOD when Jesse Hughes took his photo with dogs on the Vanceburg, Kentucky wharfboat about 1908.

Seavers. It was George Edgington who first saw Seavers and called Mr. Cooley's attention to him. When brought on board the HANDY he was suffering terribly and crying with pain. We covered him all over with flour. It was the only relief we could give him. I noticed one other man who seemed seriously hurt about the head.

Every one on and about the wreck, except Will Cooley seemed to be entirely uninjured. About thirty minutes after the explosion the WILDWOOD reached us and took the seriously wounded on board, and rendered such assistance as was possible. We took several of the PHAETON's crew and passengers on board the HANDY and left them at different points up the river. We remained for about two hours.

I knew Cash Naylor very well. He frequently shipped on board the HANDY. He was with us all last week. He was a good man, a man of fine habits, sober and careful and a good engineer. I don't think it possible to speak in too high terms of Cash Naylor. I never heard him say he thought the PHAETON was dangerous. I have heard him say that he didn't like the PHAETON because her engine room was so hot and close and that the work on her was hard.

The direction of the explosion appeared to be backward and lightly upward passing immediately over the HANDY. One peculiar circumstance I noticed: Scarcely a particle of steam arose from the explosion."

NAYLOR'S BODY FOUND

The remains of a man supposed to be those of Cassius Naylor, the engineer of the PHAETON was found in the river about a mile below Foster's Landing yesterday morning as the WILDWOOD came up yesterday. Esquire Markley, acting coroner, was holding an inquest upon the remains. The WILDWOOD landed and Mr. Richard Smith, second engineer, examined the body and thought he could identify it. He states that both legs were gone from a short distance below the knee, the right arm was entirely carried away, and about half of the head was torn off, leaving about half of his upper lip, sufficient to show that both the hair and the mustache were red. The one ear that remained was a large one. A telegraph dispatch was sent to the friends at Manchester yesterday afternoon.

The leg of a man, supposed to be the left leg of Mr. Naylor, was found floating in the river in front of the city yesterday afternoon.

"Then she was, with lawful steam, a twelve mile an hour boat?" continued Capt. Moore.

"Yes," said Capt. Ellison, "That's about right"

At this point Capt. John Agnew stepped into the office. He was called onto the witness stand at once and asked how fast he thought the PHAETON was. Capt. Agnew answered, "I'm sure she can make twelve miles an hour." He was then asked how fast the HANDY was and he answered that the HANDY was a good seven mile an hour boat.

Capt. Moore turned to Capt. Ellison and said, "Captain you are found not guilty."

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We are grateful to Lois Kidd of Manchester, Ohio for making the copy of the PHAETON disaster from a disintegrating 1926 newspaper and providing it for your edification.

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Now, for the rest of the story, - as reported by Capt. Ellis Mace who sometimes had trouble with dates or spelling but knew the principals in these events.

"On account of the causes being misrepresented by the papers, - that blamed it all on the crew - the steamboat inspectors called Capt. Ellison to Cincinnati for an investigation.

On July 5, 1881 Capt. Ellison arrived at Cincinnati on the Str. TELEGRAPH and reported to the inspectors as requested. Capt. Moore, Inspector of Boilers, told Capt. Ellison that he was accused of steamboat racing, thus causing this boiler explosion.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?"

Capt. Ellison answered, "Not guilty."

Then he was asked, "How fast is the PHAETON?"

"Well, we have run from Maysville to Manchester, a distance of twelve miles, making three stops, in fifty-seven minutes."