THE SINKING OF THE REBECCA

December 7, 1869

Submitted to the Monroe County, Ohio website

By Betty Jane (Latta) Kitchen, Brownsburg, Indiana

July 14, 2019

Introduction:

Years ago in my research into the Latta family of Monroe County, Ohio, I

came across this brief article:

Monroe Co., Ohio Newspaper Abstracts;Vol. 2, pg. 38

Spirit of Democracy; 21 December 1869

Richard Pool, s/o Joseph, formerly of this place, was drowned on the steamer

Rebecca, at Parkersburg 7th inst.

Further research confirmed this tragic death:

Witten Cemetery, Jackson Twp., p 8, Monroe Co., Ohio

Pool, Richard G. (Drowned) Dec. 7, 1869

son of J. &amp; J.A. Pool

aged 23y 5m 1d

[Civil War Flag]

Richard Pool connects to the Latta tree posted on the Monroe County, Ohio

website developed by Richard Harrington

[https://reharr.github.io/MCGen/LattaFam.htm] like this:

1 John II Latta (b. 1784; d. 20 Nov 1865-Wayne Township, Monroe Co., Ohio)

obit, will

... +Anna Elizabeth Hockenbury (b. 1793-New Jersey or Pennsylvania; d. 17 Dec

1865-Wayne Twp., Monroe Co., Ohio) obit

.. 2 Julia Ann Latta (b.8 Sep 1817-near Huntingdon,Pennsylvania;d.17 Feb 1894-

Monroe County,Ohio) obit

..... + Joseph Pool (b.31 Dec 1815-Smithfield,Jefferson Co.,Ohio;d.20 Mar 1879-

Center Twp.,Monroe Co.,Ohio)

....... 3 Richard C. Pool (b.1845/1846;d.7 Dec 1869-Parkersburg,Wood Co., West

Virginia)

I knew that Richard Pool had drowned in the sinking of the Rebecca, but

wanted to know more about this tragedy. Thank you to James Miracle, Historian

from the Parkersburg and Wood County Public Library in West Virginia, and

Richard Harrington for helping with this project and supplying many of the articles

I typed below. Although some accounts give duplicitous information, and others

show contradictions, I felt all had merit, different points of view.

Below is what happened to The Rebecca:

Source: The Parkersburg [West Virginia] Gazette; Thursday, 9 Dec 1869

STEAMBOAT DISASTER.

The Rebecca Sunk -- Four Lives Lost.

As the packet &quot;Rebecca,&quot; running between Parkersburg and Wheeling, was

coming down the river on last Tuesday night, she ran against something at the

railroad bridge at this city and sunk some 200 yards below the piers. (There is a

difference of opinion between different persons as to what obstruction the boat

struck, and as it will probably be judicially investigated, we refrain from

publishing any of the statements that are made.)

The &quot;Rebecca&quot; sunk almost immediately after she struck -- some say in a

minute and a half. She was very badly damaged or she would not have sunk so

short a distance from where she received her injuries.

She struck at about 11 o&#39;clock -- before many of our citizens had retired. The

crash was heard several squares, and awakened many who had gone to bed and

were sleeping. The alarm bell was rung on the boat and a large number of

gentlemen hastened down to the river&#39;s bank, and every boat that could be got hold

of, was used for the purpose of rescuing the passengers, who went up on the

hurricane deck as the boat settled in the water.

There was some 30 or 40 passengers on board. The precise number is not

known, as the books, though saved by the clerk, are so badly damaged by the water

that they are at present illegible. It is believed that all the passengers were saved.

Two, the only ones who are known to have jumped overboard, were rescued by the

boat that went to the relief of the passengers.

Boats were sent out from both sides of the river, and it had not been

ascertained when we went to press, exactly where all the passengers were, but it is

believed that all were saved.

An old fireman and one or two of his sons, who were off duty and sleeping in

their bunk at the time of the accident, are believed to have been drowned. A deck

hand is also thought to be drowned. We could not learn their names. The crew

was a new one and the officers of the boat had not yet become familiar with them.

The &quot;Rebecca&quot; was an old favorite on the line between this city and

Wheeling, and her many friends will be pained to hear of her disaster. We

understand that she had a large amount of freight on board for Parkersburg, and

was insured -- for what amount we did not learn.

P.S. -- The body of the deck hand lost, has been found clinging to the boat,

drowned. His name was Richard Pool, of Long Reach.\*

\*Submitter&#39;s Note: This appears to be Long Reach, but I am not sure. The last

letters of the second word are difficult to read. Richard Pool lived in Monroe Co.,

Ohio. There is a Long Reach in Tyler Co., West Virginia, which is just across the

river from Ohio.

Source: The Weekly State Journal, [West Virginia]; Thursday, 9 Dec 1869

FRIGHTFUL ACCIDENT.

Steamer Rebecca Sunk.

Five Persons Supposed to be Lost.

Last night, about 11 o&#39;clock, as the Rebecca was coming on her down trip from

Wheeling, in passing through the wide channel of the new bridge, at this point,

between piers No&#39;s three and four, she struck her stern on the piling to which the

guy ropes of pier number four are attached and immediately began to fill. It is

supposed that her entire starboard side was knocked away. So sudden and

complete was the wreck that she was unmanageable before clearing the piers, and

the engineer barely escaped with his life. He informs us that, in less than three

minutes after she had struck, her boilers were covered. The sound, at the time she

struck, was distinctly heard over the city, and aroused many from their sleep.

Within ten minutes the banks of the river were lined with persons, all anxious to

render aid to the imperilled [sic—imperiled] crew. Unfortunately the means at

hand for rendering assistance were very limited. Both transfer boats were on the

other side, and had extinguished their fires three hours before, and only four or five

skiffs could be found.

In a very few moments from the time she struck, she had swung round and

floated down about 200 yards below the piers, and sunk in 18 or 20 feet of water,

filling her cabin except a small portion of the ladies&#39; cabin. Soon as she

commenced sounding a distress bell, the Court House bell was struck up in

response, and our citizens were thoroughly aroused. As soon as the skiffs could be

unloosed and oars gathered up, some five well-manned boats went to the rescue.

Arriving there, they found nearly all the passengers on the hurricane roof and

comparatively safe, as the boat was then on the bottom of the river. The skiffs

were immediately filled, and, after making about three trips each, all the

passengers that could be found were landed and conducted to hotels. It is

impossible to state, at this writing, the extent of the loss of life; but it is supposed

that five persons were drowned, as that number, at 11 o&#39;clock this (Wednesday)

morning were missing -- but it is hoped that some of them may have reached the

Ohio shore. The steward informs us that he set two full tables for supper, which

would indicate a pretty full load of passengers. Some of the Scenes enacted there

were somewhat ludicrous, although death stood staring them in the face. One

gentleman managed to escape the hurricane roof after being aroused, sans trousers,

hat and boots, and in that condition was brought to one of our hotels, where a

warm fire soon made all right again.

The bar clerk, at the first premonition of danger, decided to &quot;take time by the

forelock,&quot; and immediately jumped overboard. In his bewilderment he hardly

knew which course to take and struck out for Blennerhasset island instead of the

Parkersburg shore. He was picked up by a skiff, opposite the Swann House.

&quot;Charley&quot; has certainly established his reputation as a superior swimmist. Some

four persons, in all, who jumped overboard, were picked up by the skiffs. From

fifteen to twenty ladies were on board, so the steward informs us, but it is believed

that all were saved; although a rumor is circulating, as we write this, that one

elderly lady was lost, but it is discredited by the officers of the boat.

All our citizens showed a most praiseworthy zeal in extending aid to the

sufferers. We can hardly mention individual cases without showing invidious

comparisons, where all done so well. But the action of Mr. CLEMENT, Agent of

the B. &amp; O. and M. &amp; C. Railroad here, was particularly commendable. Upon the

first intimation of the disaster, he rushed to the telegraph office to signal the office

on the Ohio side, and order the Mount Clare to be immediately fired up and come

to the rescue. But owing to the late hour the operator at Belpre had retired, and his

efforts in that direction were unavailing. He then went over to the sunken boat,

and was untiring in his efforts to render assistance.

        Our young friend Jimmy Mehen, upon hearing the first alarm, did not wait to

don boots or coat, but in slippers and coatless, brought away the first skiff load of

passengers.  Also Geo. Cross and the watchman, of the steamer Thompson, are

deserving of special mention for their indefatigable efforts on this occasion.  We

might mention many other individual cases of personal daring and prompt

action, but our space will not permit.  We hear the bravery and courage of the

officers of the Rebecca commended by all.  By their prompt and energetic action it

is believed that many lives were saved.

It is useless to speculate, at this early writing, upon the causes of the disaster.

The pilot was supposed to be thoroughly acquainted with the channel, as he passes

the bridge every day, but no blame can be cast in any particular direction until all

the circumstances are better known. We understand that the boat was insured for

$15,000. The agent of the underwriters has been sent for to come and take

possession of the wreck. We have special reason for congratulation that the

accident did not occur four days ago, when the Ohio was from seven to ten feet

higher than at the time of the disaster. Then, not a soul could have been saved, as

the water would have covered even the texas, and probably the pilot-house.

LATER -- Since the above was in type we learn that one body has been

found, that of RICHARD POOLE, deck hand. Two others, an old gentleman and

his son, we could not learn their names, are positively known to be missing.

Source: The Wheeling [West Virginia] Daily Intelligencer; 9 Dec 1869

SHOCKING STEAMBOAT

DISASTER

The Wheeling and Parkersburg

Packet Rebecca Lost.

She is Wrecked on a Sunken

Barge at Parkersburg and

Sinks in a Minute and

a Half.

Seven of the Crew Missing.

Special to the Intelligencer.

PARKERSBURG, WEST Va.,

Dec. 8 - 11:15 p.m.

The U.S. Mail Steamer Rebecca, on her trip from Wheeling, struck a barge at

the piers of this place about 11 o&#39;clock p.m. last night, and sunk nearly to the

hurricane deck. She sunk in about one minute and a half.

She had between 30 and 40 passengers on board at the time. The books are

wet, and we can&#39;t tell whether any passengers are lost or not. Several of the crew

have not been heard from.

The Rebecca was insured for sixteen thousand dollars in the Wheeling

Companies.

(Our correspondent is in error here. The boat was insured in Wheeling

Companies but for $5,000--$3,000 in the Citizens and $2,000 in the Franklin, --

ED, INT.]

LATER

It has now been ascertained that none of the passengers have been lost. There

were seven of the deck hands lost, named as follows:

THE LOST

Sanford Carr, fireman; Geo. Henthorn, assistant fireman; a man named

Young, of Wheeling, striker, (first name unknown;) John Sanford\*; Richard Poole,

McBride, (first name unknown); and another, who was entirely unknown.

The body of Poole has been recovered. None of the other bodies have yet

been found.

\*Submitter’s Note: I believe the John Sanford listed above is a son of Sanford

Carr. Several articles mentioned that Mr. Carr and son were drowned. A later

edition, the 16 Dec 1869 Parkersburg Gazette, about the inquest, stated:

“The following is a list of the names of those that were on board the boat and

were drowned:

“Richard Poole, deck hand, from Monroe county, Ohio;

“Mr. Carr and son -- firemen -- a Mr. McIntire and a Mr. Patterson -- deck

hands -- first names unknown -- from about Sardis, Ohio;

“George Henthorn, who came aboard a port above, to see a friend, and

remaining on board was drowned;”

In the 1860 census of Jackson Twp., Monroe Co., Ohio, (Post Office: Sardis)

is Sanford Carr, in a household with son John, but also a son Sanford.

Source: The Wheeling [West Virginia] Daily Intelligencer; 13 Dec 1869

THE SINKING OF THE REBECCA.

A Graphic and Detailed Account.

By one who was There:

PARKERSBURG

Friday Evening Dec. 10th, 1869

To the Editor of the Intelligencer.

As the excitement has passed away, it may not be uninteresting to your

readers to review some of the particulars of the late steamboat disaster. As had

been already stated, the &#39;Rebecca&quot; struck a stone barge anchored off to the left of

Pier No. 4, of the Parkersburg bridge, at 11 o&#39;clock Tuesday night, December 7th.

The barge was without a light and loaded with two car loads of stone. The night

was cloudy and dark with snow falling.--The Rebecca struck with tremendous

force her starboard forecastle--and is supposed to have completely demolished that

part of her hull--the wreck at once turning, careening, floating, sinking; while the

shock was so great as to notify all of immediate danger. Yet such was the rapidity

with which the hull, deck and cabin filled that the most self-possessed and wide-

awake had scarcely time to escape to the hurricane roof. The wreck went to the

bottom in from two to three minutes, and at a distance of about two hundred yards

below the piers, near the middle of the river, in about twenty-two or twenty-three

feet of water.

Among the many incidents a few might be noticed:

Mr. James Stevens, first Engineer, stood at his post until the engine refused to

work and the water came up to his foot-board, when, like magic, he darted through

he little window of his room and climbed a fender to the boiler deck; from thence

to the hurricane roof, the water following close upon his heels. He was next found

assisting the ladies from the window in the after part of the cabin to the hurricane

roof.

Mr. Hugh Irwin, second mate, (on duty) rushed from the stern on deck to the

forecastle, raised the trap door to the hull and found it impossible to descend, the

hull being already filled with water. He gave the alarm, hurried to the cabin to

notify officers and passengers of the impending danger. (This same hero recently

saved the Rebecca from the flames by his undaunted courage and self-possession.)

Mr. Ed. Muhleman, first clerk, was off of watch and asleep in his room, yet the

importance of saving his books and valuables from the office rested so heavily

upon his mind, that he went at the hazard of his life against the rushing waters and

gathered up the most important of them, viz: the passage book, the log book, and

money from the drawer. But few would have risked their lives in the discharge of

their duties as those mentioned.

While we have named several that were conspicuous in their efforts to do

good, we wish it to be understood that it is quite probable that every one did the

utmost to save himself and others, especially the former. There were only four

lady passengers on board--about thirty-five or forty in all, besides the crew. But

few had retired to their state rooms. The writer was unfortunately (should I not say

fortunately, because saved?) one of this number, and was locked in the arms of

Morpheus. The shock partially awoke, but bewildered me. Opening the inner door

I heard several voices crying, &#39;help! help! Save me! Lord, save me!&#39; &amp;c. Chairs

and tables were being hurried through the cabin at a rapid rate. I involuntarily

closed this door, and turned to the outer door, and in making the effort to unlock it,

withdrew the key without turning the bolt. The water filled my room rapidly to the

depth of six feet, and I began to realize that it was highly necessary for me to get

out of my room. I also realized more than ever before the advantage of being able

to stretch my neck about six feet without boots or socks. At length I succeeded in

getting the door open, and I can hardly say how I made my way to the steps that

led to the hurricane roof. I thought of the language of the great statesman &#39;sink or

swim, live or die,&#39; &amp;c. I believe I tried to swim and resisted dying to my utmost,

and &#39;such a getting up stairs you never did see.&#39; But enough of myself. Suffice it to

say, that next morning my suit had no less than seven owners, one of them, the

barber, claiming his Sunday go-to-meeting coat,--not one stitch I had on was my

own.

The mail was locked up in a sack ready for delivery and was fished up next

morning without serious damage, and I believe there was not a single letter lost.

Our genial friend &#39;Dit&#39; as he is familiarly called, was found paddling his own

canoe,&#39; and was taken up by some of the deck hands that escaped in the yawl. I

suppose there never was a more sudden emigration to Texas. The ununiformed,

shivering crowd presented a motley aspect indeed. Many anxious inquiries went

around, &quot;Who is lost?&quot;. You have already head the sad story that from eight to ten

of the crew had found watery graves. Four of the bodies have been recovered--Mr.

Poole, Mr. Carr and son, and young Mr. Henthorn. It is not known that there were

any of the cabin passengers lost. I have learned that Mr. Carr&#39;s family were left in

a destitute condition, being entirely dependent upon the labors of Mr. Carr and his

youngest son. I speak of this that the surviving river friends and others may know

where to lend a helping hand. We have no more kind-hearted, charitable set of

people anywhere than those of river families; not a few of them have had some

member of their family shipwrecked, and they know how to sympathize with the

needy.

The question has been many times asked, who was at the wheel? And too

many, as in time of all such accidents, are predisposed to misjudge hastily. Mr.

Harry Ollm\* pilot, was on watch, and all who know any thing about the disaster,

feel that he is not in the least to blame. He is also known to be one of the most

careful pilots on the river. He is a young man of more than ordinary coolness and

consideration and whose steady habits and moral worth, cannot be gainsayed. He,

of course is suffering more over this sad calamity than any of us can feel, because

he knows he is misjudged. Rather let us sympathize with him, than to find fault

without cause. The mates, Andy Harrison and Hughy Irwin, especially were

unceasing in their attentions to the living, and they were faithful to the last in the

kind ministrations to the lamented dead.

Capt. Harrison, with all his assistants, also Capt. Charlie Muheman\*\* (who

providentially came along in the night), could not do too much to alleviate the

suffering and provide for the needy. No doubt this is the turning point in the

history of many that were on board this &quot;ill-fated vessel.&quot; Indeed, it can hardly be

supposed that there was one but thought that he was being hurried into eternity--no

one that knew but that the boat would be entirely submerged, and no doubt many

were in earnest communication with their Heavenly Father to have mercy upon and

save them. Some were heard to speak out from the honesty of their hearts. One

old lady was heard to promise that if she got out safely this time, she was resolved

to lead a different life than that she had been living.

Quite a number spoke their minds freely, and who knows how many good

resolves and promises were silently made to serve the Great Sovereign of the

universe more faithfully for the remainder of life. May those good resolves not be

put off, nor be forgotten. I fear my letter is already too long and its fate may be to

hang on the dead hook. Do with it as you wish.

Yours, &amp;c., W.G.

Submitter&#39;s Notes:

\* This name was spelled HARRY OLLAM in the article from the Parkersburg

[West Virginia] Gazette dated 16 Dec 1869 about the inquisition.

\*\* The spelling of this last name should probably be MUHLEMAN, similar to

the Ed. Muhleman mentioned earlier in the article.

Source: The Spirit of Democracy, Monroe Co., Ohio; 14 Dec 1869

Sinking of the Rebecca.

The Steamer Rebecca was sunk at Parkersburg, the night of the 7th inst., by

running onto a barge that had been sunk by the Baltimore and Ohio R.R. Company.

The following persons from Monroe County are known to be saved:

Mrs. M. Morrison, Clarington, Ohio; Josephine Sage, Clarington, Ohio; Levi

Lehman; Chas. Lehman; W.O. Reid, Clarington, Ohio; E.D. Connor, Clarington,

Ohio; E.C. Connor, Clarington, Ohio.

The following officers, residents of this county, were saved:

Capt. Harrison, Ed Muhleman, Clerk; Lu Muhleman, 2d Engineer.

Source: The Parkersburg [West Virginia] Gazette; Thursday morning, 16 Dec

1869

THE REBECCA DISASTER

We give the following additional particulars of the unfortunate accident to the

steamer Rebecca, on the night of the 8th instant.

On last Wednesday and Thursday, Squire Taggart held an inquest on the body

of Richard Poole -- The first that was found -- and the Jury rendered the following

verdict:

WOOD COUNTY, TO WIT:--

An inquisition taken at the wharf in the City of Parkersburg, in said county,

on the 8th day of December, 1869, before G.W. Taggart, a Justice of Parkersburg

Township, in said county, upon the view of the body of Richard Poole there lying

dead, the Jurors wrote to enquire when, how, and by what means the said Richard

Poole came to his death, upon their oaths to say (having adjourned til Dec. 9th,

1869,) that the said Richard Poole came to his death by drowning, caused by the

sinking of the steamer Rebecca at about 11 o&#39;clock, P. M., on Dec. 7th, 1869, (on

which boat said Richard Poole was engaged as deck hand) from striking a barge

fastened to the Virginia side of Pier 3 of the Bridge being erected over the Ohio

River at Parkersburg by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company. It is the

opinion of the Jury that the said Railroad Company is very reprehensible for

neglecting to place proper signal lights at night on barges attached to the piers of

said Bridge and it appears in evidence that the barge with which the steamer

Rebecca collided and which caused the sinking of said boat and consequent death

by drowning of Richard Poole and others, had no light on it. The Jury is of opinion

that Harry Ollam, the pilot on duty on said steamer Rebecca at the time of this

accident, by mistake passed between piers Nos. 2 and 3 instead of 3 and 4 which

were designed by proper signals as to be the regular channels of the River, most

likely causing the collision as aforesaid.

In testimony whereof the said coroner and jurors have hereonto set our hand

this 9th day of December, 1869.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \* G. W. TAGGART.

Justice and Acting Coroner.

JURORS

J. C. Rathbone, Joseph Sims,

M. Coleman, David Murphy,

E. P. Chancellor, Jacob Hiteshew,

Edward Coleman, Martin Mar,

John Guess, James Shanklin,

I. W.\* Montgomery, B. F. Butcher.

So far as we are informed, the verdict is in accordance with the facts. There

are five piers in the river, for the bridge the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company

is constructing across the Ohio, numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, from the Virginia side.

The spans between piers 3 and 4, and 4 and 5, are three hundred and fifty feet

wide, are at the deepest part of the river, and are called the &quot;channel spans.&quot; The

piers are closer between 1, 2, and 3, and boats are not expected to pass. Piers Nos.

3, 4 and 5 are marked with red lights at night, to indicate the channel spans. The

other piers are marked with white lights. The persons at work on the bridge,

supposing that all boats would pass through the channel spans, did not put a light

on a stone barge used by the bridge builders, and which had been tied up on the

side of pier No. 3, opposite the channel. There is a turn in the river above the

bridge that makes it much easier for boats coming down in high water, to pass near

the Virginia shore than through the channel spans, and the pilot of the Rebecca,

seeing the light between the piers, supposed the coast was clear, passed between

piers Nos. 2 and 3, and the accident occurred. From the best information we can

obtain, these are the facts in the case.

The following is a list of the names of those that were on board the boat and

were drowned:

Richard Poole, deck hand, from Monroe county, Ohio;

Mr. Carr and son -- firemen -- a Mr. McIntire and a Mr. Patterson -- deck

hands -- first names unknown -- from about Sardis, Ohio;

George Henthorn, who came aboard a port above, to see a friend, and

remaining on board was drowned;

Another young man was on board whose name was unknown, and is

unaccounted for. He is supposed to have been lost.

The boat was insured for $15,000, at Wheeling and Cincinnati. The insurance

companies are busily engaged in removing the freight, furniture and other

valuables from the boat preparatory to raising her.

\*Submitter&#39;s Notes: It was not clear whether there were words before the G.W.

TAGGART. My copy looks like words backward from the reverse side of the

paper. But since G.W. TAGGART was to the right side, not centered, perhaps

these are words. The juror I. W. Montgomery could be L. W. Montgomery.