

# CLAY COUNTY ARCHIVES

## ARMY REPORT ON THE LOSS OF THE MAPLE LEAF

[A copy of the original National Archives document is available at the Archives.]

The Proceedings of a Board of Survey which met at Jacksonville District of Florida, D.S., April 2d 1864, to investigate and report the circumstances connected with the loss of the transport steamer *Maple Leaf*.

Head Quarters District of Florida  
Department of the South  
Jacksonville, Fla.  
April 2nd, 1864

Special Orders

No. 60 (Extract.)

A Board of Survey, to consist of Colonel Joseph B. Hawley, 7th Conn. Vols., Lieut. Col. James Lewis, 144th N.Y. Vols., Major J. W. T. Appleton, 54th Mass. Vols., will assemble at the office of the Chief Quartermaster Dist. of Florida, at 11 o'clock a.m., this day or as soon thereafter as practicable to investigate and report the circumstances connected with the loss of the transport steamer *Maple Leaf*.

By orders of Brig. Gen. J.P. Hatch  
/signed/ R. M. Hall  
1st Lt. U.S. Army I.E.. Gen.

In obedience to the order of which the foregoing is a true copy, the undersigned met at the place designated at one and a half o'clock p.m. on the day therein appointed and having been duly sworn proceeded to obtain the following evidence concerning the matter in question.

**Captain Henry W. Dale being sworn testifies as follows:**

My name is Henry W. Dale of Chelsea, Mass. I have been in command of the side wheel steamer *Maple Leaf* 600 tons burden, since August - 1862. She had been in the service of the Government since Sept. 3, 1862, and in the Department of the South (the last time) since

Nov. 11, 1863. She was under a Charter from the first. Her last Charter was dated June 22d, 1863. To continue an indefinite time. The owners victual and man the boat and keep in repairs, the government furnishing the coal.

On Friday, (sic; it was Saturday), March 26th I received orders from Capt. Kelly A.Q.M. Hilton Head, and sailed from Hilton Head for Pawnee Landing to report there to Brig. Gen. Terry and take on board the camp and garrison equipage of Foster's and Ames' Brigade. I took the material on board at Pawnee Landing and was by my original orders to go straight to Jacksonville, but Capt. Atwood ordered me to stop at Stono. He put on board mails and passengers for Hilton Head. I finished loading at Pawnee at 10 and one half p.m. Sunday the 27th and reported at Stono after midnight. After receiving the mails and passengers as stated, I started immediately for the Head, where we arrived about 9 a.m. on the 28th, landed mails and passengers and reported to the Quartermasters. Capt. Kelly ordered me to go to Jacksonville immediately. I left that afternoon but encountered heavy weather and put into Fernandina Tuesday 29th. We left on the 30th and arrived at Jacksonville about 5 p.m. on that day. After discharging the deck load, I received on board 87 cavalry horses and about that number of men and officers, by order of Capt. Walbridge. By his order I left at 9 p.m. that day for Palatka. We arrived there about 4 a.m. on the 31st. I had a government river pilot on board, Mr. Romeo, who was ordered to report to me by Capt. Walbridge A.Q.M. After discharging the cavalry, I received orders to return at night to Jacksonville, from Lieut. Avery Acting Quartermaster at Palatka. I was detained to wait for dispatches until 11 and one quarter p.m. March 31 when I started down the river. The steamer, as to her speed, course & etc. was entirely under the direction of the pilot, of course. I had a sufficient crew and was well manned in every department. I had a first and second officer, two quartermasters or wheelmen & six men for the deck, two engineers and eight

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men for the engine. Nothing unusual occurred till 4 o'clock on the morning of April 1st. At that hour I was in bed and asleep but was awakened by a tremendous crash, and heavy report. The saloon was filled with a sickening stench, the timbers were breaking as there was a great tumult. I sprang out and in two minutes the water was over the floor of the saloon. The wheels turned perhaps five times after the crash. The steamer immediately sank, so as to leave about three feet of water in the saloon. It was about four fathoms water. There were on duty forward, the second officer and three men besides the pilot and quartermaster in the pilot house. All I can say of the course of the disaster, is that it must have been a torpedo. I judge that it opened the vessel about thirty feet from the stem, right under her bottom. Everything gave way amidships in that portion of the boat. The floor settled immediately. I think it was a torpedo entirely submerged as it burst so far under. Had it been on the surface where it could have been seen it would probably have burst at the bows and perhaps done little damage. We immediately got out all the boats, as soon as possible. We had four boats on board, one was under the saloon deck on the guard and could not be got at, two were on the cranes, one on each quarter, and one on the hurricane deck. We took off all the crew and passengers numbering fifty eight persons and the mails. Two deck hands and two firemen went down with the boat being in the forecabin at the time. They were colored men. We left the boat as soon as we could, about half an hour after the disaster and reached Jacksonville before eight o'clock and reported to the senior officer of the navy, Capt. Balch, and to Capt. Walbridge A. Q. M.

The disaster occurred about twelve miles from Jacksonville, and off Mandarin Point, about three quarters of a mile from the east bank of the river and perhaps a mile or a mile and a half from the west bank. I have been up and down three times before, but always in the night with one exception. I don't pretend to know positively, but I

think we were in the proper channel; we were so far as my observation goes.

I think that we could have done nothing more than we did to save the vessel or the cargo. All public property was under water. There was nothing in the saloon but the personal effects of officers and passengers. I expected to see the enemy's small boats put off after us and thought it the better part of valor to get away as soon as possible with the passengers.

After our getting to Jacksonville a gunboat was ordered to go up. The *Norwich* went up. I went on her with my officers and part of my crew. I could not see that anything had been done to the *Maple Leaf*. It was about noon when we got there. When I left at 4 and one half in the morning, we had just as much as the boat would carry and I left on the wreck three rebel prisoners of war. They had not been put under my charge and the military officers had got off first in a boat without taking them so I left them. They were there when the *Norwich* came up, and reported that one man had been there from the shore and taken a little property out of the cabin. But I could not see that anything had been disturbed. It was impossible to do anything to save any property of consequence. Perhaps if the saloon deck were torn off the main deck might be opened to let the cargo up; or perhaps a tug might wrench off the bows, and so let the cargo float. I consider the vessel and cargo a total loss and do not see how they can be saved. The expense and danger of working there are to be considered.

I saw lights going up the river and coming down, but neither saw nor heard anything unusual to excite attention. I do not know how it might have been in the day time but I do not see how in the night we could have done any better. We had no light burning but the one in the binnacle and that was obscured. Lights were put out when we left Palatka by my orders and according to instructions.

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The *Maple Leaf* would have been thirteen years old the coming summer. We considered her a staunch serviceable boat. I have been outside with her in very heavy sea. I consider her well built and strong. The shock of that explosion would have opened any vessel. It could not have come from the boilers for no steam escaped, and the firemen ran up from below because the water was following them. I do not know of any ordnance stores or ammunition of any kind on board. If there was anything of the kind it should have been put in the aft part of the boat away from all fire and would have been if any officers had known it. Tents and sutlers stores were in the hold in the part of the vessel where the explosion took place. This is all that I can say of the matter.

### **Samuel L. Johnson being duly sworn testified as follows:**

My name is Samuel L. Johnson of Bucksport, Me. I am 37 years old, by occupation a steamboat engineer. I have been in that business about fifteen years. I was engaged as chief engineer of the *Maple Leaf* at Baltimore, Sept. 14, 1863, and had served on her in that capacity from that date to the time of her loss. We left Palatka as Capt. Dale has testified shortly after 11 o'clock on the night of March 31st. All the machinery was in good usual working order. I was on duty when we left Palatka and remained so till 1 a.m. April 1st. I called the second engineer and after going on deck and looking out I turned in. When I looked out I saw a light on the west shore but it was nothing unusual. Telling the second engineer to haul the fires and blow the water when he got to Jacksonville, because we expected to clean boilers there, I went to bed and went to sleep. The crash waked me up. My first thought was of a collision. I jumped up, put my feet in my slippers, put on my coat and hat and stepped out on the main deck, about seven feet from the door of the engine room, I looked forward and saw that the whole forepart of the vessel was smashed to pieces like an old building kicked over. The water was just about coming on the main deck, which was ordinarily five or six feet above the surface of

the water. I stepped to the engine room and saw or heard that the engine was just moving and that was all. I let it alone so that the wheels man might turn her toward shore if he could. The engine room was dark. The fire had put out the light. I went upon the hurricane deck to clear away the boats. I was about the first man there.

We went to work clearing away the boat on the port side. By the time we had the boat swung out, the water was up so that we did not have to lower at all, only to unhook. I unhooked aft, and ordered the forward boat out. I saw that the steamboat had touched bottom and leaving this boat to the passengers I went to the starboard boat and found the second mate lowering that. I told him not to hurry or shove boats. She was done sinking. We then turned over the metallic boat on the hurricane deck. We got all off but the three rebel prisoners. There was no room for them and there was no danger of their sinking.

It must have been a torpedo that blew up the boat. Nothing else could have done it. The injury was twenty five or at least twenty feet from any place where the steam would have hurt the boat. She was so smashed that there was nothing to be done but get away.

When I turned in there was 15 pounds to the inch of steam on and I left orders to carry that. That is a safe figure. Her boilers were inspected April 28th 1863. We were licensed to carry twenty one pounds and I sometimes put it up to eighteen when we were hurried. I think the main force of the explosion was about thirty feet from the stem, near the keel, a little on the starboard.

I went back on the gunboat *Norwich* to see the *Maple Leaf*. There was about three feet of water in the saloon. I could not see how we could be of any service or save enough to pay the expense of getting it. She was drawing eight feet aft and about six feet nine forward when she sunk. The mate and I looked to see at Palatka. She was a good serviceable boat for her age and excellent

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sea boat for her size. I do not think that any vessel, even if built of iron four inches thick would have stood that shock. When I went back on the *Norwich* I had to cut through the saloon deck or rather break it through to get my trunk from my room. The floors and the bows of the vessel were working loose in the water.

### **Lieut. George W. Roder was sworn and testified as follows:**

My name is George W. Roder, 1st Lieut. and A.Q.M. 13th Indiana, now Acting Assistant Quartermaster of Brig. Gen. Foster's Division.

When Gen. Foster's Division left Folly Island I remained there to take charge of the camp and garrison equipage and baggage of his brigade. When the *Maple Leaf* came to Folly Island I saw the material put on board on Sunday the 27th of March. In the hold we put tents, sutlers goods, and the ordinary baggage of a camp, and on the main deck some horses, wagons and baggage that could not be put in the hold. The main deck load was taken off here at Jacksonville. To the best of my knowledge and belief there was no explosive material of any kind in the cargo I put on board, and none on the vessel so far as I know.

I went up on the *Norwich* the evening of the loss of the *Maple Leaf* and looked at the wreck. I did not see that anything could be saved unless it might float out and be picked up. There was a large portion of the camp and garrison equipage of three regiments and of a brigade headquarters in the hold. It could have been taken off before the steamer left Jacksonville to go up. There was time but we had orders not to do it.

### **Romeo Murray, colored, was duly sworn and testified as follows:**

My name is Romeo Murray, at present I live in Jacksonville. I was raised near the mouth of the St. Johns River on Fort George Island. I am about forty-three years old. For sixteen years I have

been acting as a pilot on the St. Johns River, and between that and Savannah and Charleston. I have piloted the steamer *Carolina*, *Columbia* and *St. Marys* along the shore and between here and Palatka. I know the river between here and Palatka. Those steamers used to draw eight or nine feet. I was pilot of the *Maple Leaf* the night she was lost. I was and am regularly employed as a pilot by Captain Dunton Chief Quarter-master of the district. We left Palatka about 11 o'clock on the night of March 31st. I was holding the wheel on the starboard side and a quartermaster on the port side when we came off Mandarin Point, about twelve miles above here. The second mate was on the upper deck and two of the ships hands on the lower deck forward, all on duty on the look out. The moon rose about 3 and one half o'clock, and it was a right clear night. The river was still and perfectly smooth and I could see the shore well and make the channel easy, and if there had been anything as big as my hat on the water I could have seen it. I could see as plain as daylight the point two miles ahead that I was making for. There was a sand shoal about there running from the western shore, and the channel bears to the eastward. I was right in the channel a little to the eastward of the middle of it, so as to clear the point sure. There was a loud noise right under the boat and the pilot house lifted right up. I was raised up and my head struck the top of the pilot house and I fell down and lost my cap. The floor sunk right down. When I got up the wire had stretched and set the whistle blowing. I went out the starboard door and ran up the hog brace. I saw the second engineer forward and started for him supposing he went to let go the anchor. He said "get away from here pilot, all this part is under water." He was starting aft about that time. The whole deck, the main deck and the hurricane decked were settled right down and the pilot house fell forward. The mast which stood in the forward part of the pilot house was lifted up: the heel of it was knocked out of the keel row and it fell straight forward. The boat went right down head first. When I first got out of the pilot house I smelled powder. I went right away to help the chief engineer get off the boat on the port side,

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and when we got it ready to swing and lower the water was up to it. It could not have been any explosion of steam that did it. When it blew up the boat took a sheer to starboard and sunk a little athwart of the stream.

### **Gregor McGreor Breadalbane was duly sworn and testified as follows:**

I am the chief pilot of this District, employed by Chief Quartermaster Dunton. My name is Gregor McGregor Breadalbane, born in Jacksonville where I now live. I am a seafaring man by profession, and was in the lumber business here for a year or two before the rebellion. I have been nearly three years employed by the government as a pilot. I went north after the fall of Fort Sumter, to get out of the rebellion. I have known Romeo Murray, who piloted the *Maple Leaf* when she was lost, for fifteen years. I hired him for the government. I call him an honest man and the best pilot I know for the upper portion of the of the St. Johns River. He is perfectly competent to take any boat up there. He was a regularly licensed pilot and has his license now. I have heard the witness in this matter and am satisfied that it must have been a torpedo which sank the *Maple Leaf*. It could not have been a snag or anything of that description. I know the channel in that region, and have never known any obstructions of that kind there.

### **The Board adjourned to meet at the same place at 9 a.m. April 3rd. The Board met at the same place at the same time specified.**

### **Charles H. Farnham, being duly sworn testified as follows:**

My name is Charles H. Farnham, Chelsea, Mass. I am forty six years old, ship carpenter by trade. Had been on the *Maple Leaf* from Sept. 3d '62 till her loss, first as a carpenter, then as second officer. I was on the *Maple Leaf* at the time of her loss and had just been waked to go on duty when the explosion took place. My berth was on the port side, very

little abaft of the part struck by the torpedo. I was lifted up and jumped forward and noticed that the stove was knocked over and that the coals were burning the carpet. I lifted the stove up and stepped out. The Captain asked me how much water there was there and I went for the lead. I had got hold of the lead line when I found that the mast was settling forward and I thought I felt the vessel bring up on the bottom. I went on the hurricane deck and met the Captain and he asked if I had got soundings. I told him she could not go any farther. He says "clear away the boats" and he told me to stop the whistle. I cut the wire and stopped it. I then went to my state room in the saloon, and then aft on the hurricane deck to assist in lowering the boats and found the men getting in. When I came out of my state room I smelled burnt powder, and concluded immediately that a torpedo had exploded. The hog frame was broken and the whole side of the vessel was stove in. The force of the explosion was about thirty feet from the stem and on the starboard side. It could not have been steam that blew her up.

I superintended the loading of the boat at Pawnee Landing. I saw what was put into the hold in all this part of the vessel. It was sutlers goods of the ordinary kind tobacco, cigars, preserves, mackerel and such stores, and tents on top of the sutlers goods and then another layer of sutlers goods right under the fore hatch. I know there was nothing below them that could have exploded, unless it was concealed purposely in some can or box. A few old ammunition boxes were put aft, but they were light and I think they held only some soldiers traps. I asked if there was any ammunition in them and was told that there was not, and I lifted one of them and found it light. Nothing of this kind ever went forward of the shaft.

It was something like 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon of March 30th when we got to Jacksonville. Our deck was loaded with 32 horses, four army wagons, four carts and various

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boxes. It took from an hour and a half to two hours to get the deck load off. It might have been done quicker of course. The hatches forward and aft were about four feet square and most of the stuff below would have had to be taken out with tackle. I should not wish to undertake to unload the whole of the cargo as we then were and as men ordinarily work under eight hours. If it was necessary for us to take on eighty or ninety horses and as many men and get them up to Palatka, sixty miles, by daylight next morning, it was altogether impossible to take that cargo out of the hold that night. The hold was very nearly full. When we got the deck load off it was perhaps an hour, I should think not more before the cavalry for Palatka began to come on board. I knew what was coming and there was no lost time. I think there were eighty seven horses that came aboard, it was so reported. I never saw so many horses loaded so quickly and well. A quantity of hay, said to be twenty bales and about twenty bags of oats came on board. Fifty or seventy men, perhaps more, came aboard. After the cavalry were aboard there was perhaps half an hour delay before the boat started. It was a short time.

The *Maple Leaf* was in tolerable good condition as to strength. Her bottom was good. Her hog frames were strong. The paint wasn't started on them, though she was old of course. No vessel could have stood the shock of that explosion.

### **Frank A. Dale being sworn, testified as follows:**

My name is Frank A. Dale of Chelsea, Mass. I am nineteen years old - son of Captain Dale of the *Maple Leaf* and second mate of that vessel since June '63. I was on duty at the time of the explosion. Our duty in such a place is to look out to keep the boat straight and to take care generally. We are not obliged to keep any particular place. I had three of the crew on duty, two passing coal and one on the main deck to keep the boat trimmed by rolling barrels, etc. I had no man forward on the bows to look out. There was no man there at that time. Just after eight bells struck, I went inside to wake up the

first mate who was to relieve me, and I was inside the saloon when the explosion took place. I had just got inside and shut the door. I had before this been standing on the saloon deck side of the foremast which came up through the deck right before the pilot house. I had been looking down the river in the direction we were going. I don't recollect whether the moon was up or not, I don't think it was very light or pleasant. The water was still - not much wind - the water was not ruffled much. I don't think I could have seen any small object, a board or stick floating on the water. We never have kept a man on the bows on a look out no need of it. Sometimes on a very dark night we do have. I know nothing more of the cause of the explosion or the character of it than the others who have testified.

### **Charles H. Farnham being recalled testified as follows, in addition to his previous testimony:**

I was on duty the night of the explosion from eight till one and a half o'clock. I felt a little anxious and stayed over my time. I had no reason for my anxiety except seeing more lights than usual. Nearly two hours sail this side of Palatka on the west bank I saw two lights, one apparently a torch and the other a lantern moving. I saw the same kind of lights when we went up the same side of the river. I saw nothing else unusual. The officer of the deck keeps what watch there is kept besides the pilot and wheels man. From the pilot house we can see much better ahead on the water than from any place on deck. We keep no man at the bows looking. The mast is about twenty feet from the stem. The officer of the deck generally keeps between the pilot house and the stem on the saloon deck: that is his place. It is his duty to run down occasionally and take a look at the lights, the hold, and to see that there is no fire or smoking, but only to be gone a few moments unless something needs attention there. And when he calls the watch he goes right back to his post and stays till he is relieved.

I think our practice is the same as that of other vessels of our class. At sea sometimes if it is very

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dark we keep a man at the stem to look right ahead. The *Maple Leaf* could be stopped in going three times her length, or perhaps even less if necessary. In less than that distance you must sheer to avoid any trouble.

### **Frank A. Dale being recalled testified as follows, in addition to his previous testimony.**

During the two and a half or three hours that I was on duty that night I saw nothing unusual, either on the shore or in the water.

### **Samuel D. Jones being duly sworn testified as follows:**

My name is Samuel D. Jones of New London, Conn., twenty five years old. I was hired as quartermaster of the *Maple Leaf* Feb. 10th or 11th. I was on duty at the wheel and had hold of it at the time of the explosion that destroyed her. I had been looking ahead steadily. At the moment of the explosion I had for a minute been looking right ahead of her bows on the water. The moon was up but dim, don't recollect but I think it was rather misty overhead, or cloudy. There was a little ripple on the water. I saw nothing whatever unusual on the water that night. Anything the size of half a barrel I could have seen, anything smaller perhaps I should not have seen. There was a heavy report, something like a clap of thunder or a great volley of musketry and a cracking of timbers. It raised the upper deck and lifted me up, throwing me against the top of the pilot house. I got out as soon as possible. I went right aft to the boat on the port quarter and stayed there. I shouldn't think it was over two minutes from the explosion till she settled to the bottom. Farnham being tom. The second mate was close by the pilot house on watch just a minute before the explosion and I think he was there at the time. I don't think there was anything that could have been seen on the surface of the water if it had been daylight. I am positive that the steamboat did not hit any timbers, ropes, or stakes before the explosion. There was the pilot Romeo, Mr. Dale, the second mate and myself on watch and

nobody else about that I know. I'm pretty sure there was no one else on the upper deck at the time.

### **Captain Charles L. Walbridge, being duly sworn testified as follows:**

My name is Charles L. Walbridge Captain 100<sup>th</sup> N.Y. Vols. and acting Assistant Quartermaster. At present and for the last three weeks I have been acting Chief Quartermaster of the District of Florida. The *Maple Leaf* arrived here about 4 and a half March 30th. I went down to the dock and saw the Captain and told him it would be necessary for him to go to Palatka that night. I told the stevedore to put all the men he had at work to unload her and requested the officers in charge of the baggage on her to put their men at work which they did. The deck load was off at 6:20 and she then moved down the wharf where the cavalry were then waiting for her. There were 87 horses, 75 men and some forage. Captain Richmond, Indp't, Battalion Mass. Cavalry was in command. As soon as the boat got to the wharf I left and went to tea. At 8 o'clock I gave the Captain written orders of which I have no copy, to proceed to Palatka following the steamer *Hunter* and to return to Jacksonville the following night. The *Maple Leaf* started a few minutes after nine o'clock. It is said to be sixty miles, some say farther to Palatka. There certainly was not time to take the cargo out of the hold before going to Palatka. It was intended to have all the boats start at 8 o'clock, but other boats were not ready at that hour. I had orders from Brig. Gen. Hatch commanding the District to furnish transportation to Palatka for Col. Montgomery's Brigade of infantry and a detachment of cavalry, and in obeying these I put the *Maple Leaf* on this duty.

### **Having duly considered the foregoing testimony we report as follows:**

The side wheel steamer, *Maple Leaf*, 600 tons burden, Capt. Henry W. Dale master, chartered by

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the government, having been sent from Jacksonville to Palatka on the night of March 30th, 1864, by orders from proper authorities, was returning as ordered on the night of March 31st. She was under the control of a capable government pilot, Romeo Murray, and was moving in the proper channel, nearly off Mandarin Point, about twelve miles from Jacksonville, about 4a.m. April 1st when a torpedo or some similar instrument of mischief exploded under her hull about thirty feet from the stem and near the keel on the starboard side, which completely shattered the forward part of the vessel and caused her to sink in about twenty four feet of water.

We believe and so report that the usual watch, (the men in the pilot-house and the officer of the deck) was kept on the deck of this vessel. At the moment of the explosion only the pilot and the wheels man were actually looking forward. We think that on all similar vessels in these waters a man should be kept on the extreme front of the vessel sharply looking out every instant that the vessel is in motion at night. But it is our opinion that in this case no care or skill would have avoided the disaster and that it was one of the inevitable incidents of war:

**The Board adjourned same day**

Jacksonville, Florida

April 3, 1864

/signed/ Jos. R. Hawley Col. 7th Conn. Vols.

/signed/ James Lewis Lt. Col. 144th N.Y. Vols.

/signed/ John W. M. Appleton Major 54th Mass.

Vols.

**Headquarters District Florida, Department of the South:**

April 3, 1864

Approved:

/signed/ J. R. Hatch Brig. General Commanding