

The S.S. Pacific

The sinking of the SS Pacific on November 4, 1875, off the coast of Washington, is an event that has been written about many times. Four people from the Greene area with their horses and dogs went down with that ship and the story bears repeating. There is nothing new to be added but perhaps some history of the families involved- the Cowles, the Hurlburts and the Rockwells- and the event itself would be of general interest to Greeneites today. All three families settled in this area very early in the 1800s.

The Cowles ancestor, Timothy, was a Revolutionary War Veteran, and is buried in the Cowles Cemetery in Smithville Center. His grandson, Myron, had six sons and three daughters. Five out of the six sons were horse trainers: Edward G., Orlando F., LeRoy, Charles and James Dallas Cowles, the youngest, affectionately called Dallie. Edward G. and Orlando F. owned farms on South Canal Street that extended north from the parking lot at the high school up to Wheeler Street and west to the top of the pinnacle. The street was informally called Cowles Flats or Cowles Avenue. Young people, whose job it was to fetch the cows that their families pastured there, complained that they often had to climb the pinnacle to get the animals.

On October 6, 1863, the following was in the *Chenango American*: 'Mr. E.G.Cowles is building a Race Course on his grounds known as "Cowles Flats". The track is a level grade, with easy curves, and is an exact ½ mile in length. It is located within the bounds of the village corporation. It is called the "Chenango Valley Trotting Course."' The course was where the Greene High School is now. March 20, 1873: 'There are few villages the size of ours which have so many valuable horses and colts, or which can rate better horse trainers, or more horsemen.' Aug 20, 1874: 'We have a number of promising young trotters in this village that are nightly speeded on the track.'

According to Mildred Folsom in *Echoes of the Past*, in 1868 LeRoy and James Dallas Cowles had two stallions driven without reins controlled by the motion of the whip held in the hand of the driver. They would drive, turn, stop, back up, and walk without a word being spoken. A troupe was formed with LeRoy, J.D. and Orlando F. Cowles to tour the country. In 1868, Edward G. and his son, William B. Cowles, were training horses for Barnum and Bailey's Circus.

At the same time, two other horsemen, Malcolm Douglas Hurlburt and Andrew H. Rockwell, were training horses in the Colesville area. Fran Bromley, a historian of that area, sent me a map that shows the Hurlburt farms and also an excerpt from the book *Fires, Famines and Festivals*, a Colesville History written by Leone Jacob. It describes Unitaria, an area where Route 79 and Route 7 converge. It no longer uses that name but that is where the barn was that stabled three famous horses from 1860 to 1866. A picture representing Tiger, Star and Mazeppa was painted on the door. Those celebrated horses were trained by Rockwell and Hurlburt to be driven without reins or any other harness except a surcingle (a girth) to fasten them to a carriage. They were trained in the same manner as the Cowles' stallions and it says that 'this training enabled their owners to give the only exhibition ever known at that time of driving three horses abreast without reins.'

By 1875, M.D. Hurlburt had bought another farm on the Page Brook Road in the town of Greene and had seven children.. Rockwell had married Hurlburt's sister, Elles, and he and M.D. Hurlburt had written a book titled *The Education of the Horse*; the Greene Historical Society has a copy of

it. They also formed a troupe with J.D. Cowles and toured the country giving exhibitions and horse-training classes. In fact, the three had been on a tour for about a year with Elles accompanying them when they boarded the ill-fated S.S.Pacific.

The S.S. Pacific was a 900-ton sidewheel steamer. The onset of a gold rush in northern British Columbia had the steamer on a regular run from Victoria, BC to San Francisco. She boarded passengers on November 4, 1875 and was loaded with coal, potatoes and gold as she was hauling prospectors also. Around 9:00pm, 40 miles south of Cape Flattery, she was hit by the S.S. Orpheus who continued on her course not stopping to see what damage was done. And no one on the Pacific had been aware of the damage until after the Orpheus was already sailing away. On the Pacific, there was chaos and panic. There weren't enough lifeboats, it was dark, the water was frigid, the ship broke up very quickly and more than 300 passengers drowned. Only two men survived, clinging to pieces of the wreckage. The troupe of Rockwell and Hurlburt was lost-Malcolm Douglas Hurlburt, Andrew H. Rockwell, Elles Hurlburt Rockwell, James Dallas Cowles, Mazeppa, Star, 4 other horses, and 2 grayhounds. The Victoria newspapers stated that they had just been playing to very favorable reviews. Fortunately one horse, "Morgan Tiger", was not on that trip and later was the sire of another Morgan Tiger, an exact counterpart owned by Jesse Rockwell, Andrew's brother.

It must have been a stunning blow to the families in Greene. In time, M.D. Hurlburt's widow, Lucy, married Richard Parker from Coventry. J.D. Cowles' widow, Susan, married H.J. Wood, a widower, who had run a drug store in Greene. The Woods went west.

David Parker Hurlburt, a brother of Malcolm Douglas, carried on the tradition of horse training and taming. He lived in Corning, NY and was considered an expert. In 1885 he appeared in Greene in a show called Hurlburt and Hunting's Consolidated Shows. There were trained horses, dogs, clowns and gymnasts. Before the show, he and Charles Cowles, the 5th Cowles' brother to be mentioned, performed in the streets of Greene with their horses without reins. In 1887, Mrs. Folsom writes that Charles Cowles' horse climbed the stairs to the Chenango American, then housed in the Empire Block where the Foo Chow Restaurant is now. In 1891, D.P. Hurlburt died in Iowa giving a horse taming and training exhibition in a tent. The death was caused by the explosion of a gasoline lamp.

There are many descendants of these families living in Greene. There are at least five that I know of who still carry the surnames although two of the females use their husbands' surnames: Nancy Cowles Doxey, Carlton Rockwell, his sister Kay Rockwell, Guy Hurlburt and his sister Liz Hurlburt Dickerson. Kay Rockwell owns one of the whips used by her great great uncle, Andrew H. Rockwell.

It's quite a story. So many people, places and events are intertwined and it all leads back to Greene. The S.S. Pacific still lies at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. It may be a shipwreck that will be explored by gold hunters because of the stories of money on board. And according to one report it is in only 13 fathoms of water, or 78 feet.

The next time you drive down Front Street in Binghamton, look for the small cemetery south of Margarita's restaurant on your left. It now has a white fence around it. A white obelisk near the front is a memorial to Andrew H. Rockwell and his wife, Elles.

One image keeps surfacing that seems to epitomize the senseless tragedy of this. A Victoria newspaper reported that the body of a horse was seen floating in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, with a saddle attached.



Tiger, Star and Mazeppa, driven without reins by A. H. Rockwell.

Andrew Rockwell with trained horses