



September 3, 2019

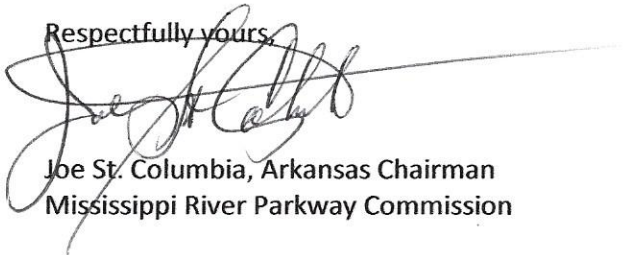
To whom it may concern:

The Arkansas MRPC met recently to consider an application to establish the Sultana Museum of Marion, Arkansas, as an interpretative center for the Great River Road. The vote was unanimous in support of this application.

As Chairman of the Arkansas Mississippi River Parkway Commission I am hereby submitting the application to the National office to begin the process for national approval.

Please find enclosed the application submitted.

Respectfully yours,



Joe St. Columbia, Arkansas Chairman  
Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Cc: Bobby Kennedy, Commissioner  
Kim Williams

## SECTION I – QUALIFICATIONS

**1. What story does your institution tell about the Mississippi River as part of its regular daily visitor experience? How does it relate to the themes for interpretation which are attached? Why do you feel that this significant aspect or relationship to the river is presented at a high level of quality? Describe the quality of the visit your guests receive.**

The Sultana Disaster Museum tells a story that most people do not know...that of America's deadliest maritime disaster, which took place on the Mississippi River near Marion in April 1865. On the early morning of April 27, 1865, the SS *Sultana* exploded on the Mississippi River near Memphis. It became America's greatest maritime disaster, killing nearly 1,800 of the nearly 2,400 passengers onboard. Many of those were former Union soldiers, on their way home following the end of the Civil War. The boat sank near Marion, where the Sultana Disaster Museum is located.

The museum relates to several of the themes of interpretation, including most specifically Theme 5 – The Mississippi River has profoundly shaped American history. The loss of the Sultana remains America's worst maritime disaster, yet most people don't know about it. Yet they know about the Titanic...although nearly 300 more people perished on the Sultana.

The Sultana Disaster Museum is one-of-a-kind, offering visitors an insight into the lives of those who perished in April 1865. Most likely, many people have never heard of the *Sultana* and do not realize the significance of the tragedy. One reason it escaped the attention of the citizens of the United States is because the country was still reeling from the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, a mere 12 days before. Of course, news was not as easily assimilated in 1865 as it is today. So the tragedy of the Sultana was overshadowed.

For years, numerous dedicated volunteers and staff worked on making the Sultana Disaster Museum a reality. Currently it is in a location that is considered temporary, but the community of Marion, including Mayor Frank Fogelman, and the staff and volunteers of the Museum are working tirelessly to raise money for a new, state-of-the-art facility. However, the current Museum definitely gives visitors a high-quality experience, featuring exhibits focused on the passengers and the crew, as well as items that actually survived from the Sultana.

The City of Marion has identified a site for the future museum and is working with Sultana Historic Preservation Society, Inc. and the Haizlip Studio of Memphis, TN, along with a team of architects, planners, and exhibit designers on the plans for construction.

**2. What is the length of stay for the typical visitor experience at your institution? Please provide what you consider an average time, what you consider a short stay and what you consider a long stay for regular attendance.**

The typical stay would be approximately 45 minutes. A short stay would be 30 minutes or less, and a long stay would be 1 ½ to 2 hours.

**3. What educational or interpretive programs beyond exhibits do you conduct that interpret the Mississippi River or some significant aspect or relationship to the river?**

Staff and volunteers from the Museum speak to groups around the Mid-South whenever possible. The Museum and the City of Marion host a yearly event in April, honoring the loss of the Sultana.

**4. What are your published and regular hours? Please describe hours for various seasons.**

Hours published on the website are Thursday – Saturday, 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Sunday hours are from 2 - 4 p.m. These hours are year-round in the current location.

**5. What is the annual attendance for regular museum house at your site, exclusive of special events? What is the admission fee?**

In the three years the museum has been open, yearly visitation averages 1200-1400 visitors per year. Admission is free although there is a \$5 suggested donation.

**6. What is your proximity to the Great River Road?**

The museum's current location is located less than ½ mile from Arkansas's Great River Road. Shorter if you just walk across the nearby railroad track.

**7. Did you enclose a letter of endorsement from your state Mississippi River Parkway Commissioner?**

Yes, although it is a letter from Arkansas MRPC chairman Joe St. Columbia

## **SECTION II – DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS**

**1. Members of the network must have a Great River Road map at their site, for reference, but preferably for distribution to visitors. One map will be provided as will an order form for additional maps, per availability by state.**

Yes. We have been told that Arkansas Tourism/Arkansas's Great River Road will provide maps.

**2. Members of the network must ensure that front line personnel who have contact with the public are knowledgeable of and will promote the Great River Road and the museums and interpretive centers I the region. Describe how you will ensure that your front line personnel will be trained, briefed and monitored.**

All front line personnel will meet with members of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas for training. All front line personnel are regularly monitored.

**3. Are you willing to display signage at your center showing that you are a member of the Great River Road Network? This may be inside or outside signage but must be prominently displayed. Where will you display the Interpretive Center sign?**

Yes. If easily moveable, the sign could be placed outside the current location. If not easily removeable, it would be place inside the current museum and placed outside the future location.

**4. Are you willing to secure the needed funds to have an officially approved Great river Road Interpretive Center sign erected at your site?**

Yes

**5. Are you willing to use and incorporate the Great River Road network language and logo on all future marketing and promotional materials?**

Yes

### **SECTION III – CAPACITY**

**1. Do you have access to the Internet? If your facility has a website, what is the address? Do you have the ability to post the [www.experiencemississippiriver.com](http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com) website on your website?**

The museum's website is [www.sultanadisastermuseum.org](http://www.sultanadisastermuseum.org). Yes, we would post the MRPC website on the existing website.

**2. Do you have traveling exhibit space? If so, what size is in in square footage?**

Not at the current museum location, although the future location will have an area of 480 square feet for traveling exhibits