

THE SEMI-WEEKLY TELEGRAPH, ST. JOHN, N. B., WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1903.

## STEAMER DAVID WESTON BURNED; THREE LIVES ARE LOST.

St. John River Catastrophe One of the Worst in the History of Its Navigation—Vessel, All in Flames, Run On to Beach at Craig's Point to Save Lives—Fire Started in Hay.

Three lives were lost and many people were injured in the burning of the Star Line steamer David Weston at Craig's Point, about fifteen miles up river, Saturday afternoon. On her regular downward trip, fire broke out in some bales of hay on the lower deck. Fanned by the wind and fed by the dry and oily woodwork the flames spread with great rapidity, and in a few minutes the steamer was all ablaze amidships. Captain Day ordered her beached and she was run ashore promptly. Many thrilling incidents marked the catastrophe. The three people who lost their lives were drowned, having jumped overboard from the burning vessel.

**THE DEAD.**  
Etta Morrell, of Indiantown, aged about 21, a waitress on the steamer; body recovered.  
Fred Downey, of Indiantown, aged about 21, a deck hand on the steamer, badly burned, then leaped overboard; body recovered.

Stephen Hood-Rowan, of Manchester, (Eng.) aged 11, jumped overboard in fright from his aunt's arms and was drowned; body not yet found.

**THE INJURED.**  
Mrs. Spence, of St. Stephen, (N. B.) foot wrenched and back strained.  
Mr. Eldridge, of Boston, internal injuries.  
Miss Charters, of New Maryland, (York Co.) ankle hurt.  
Mrs. W. H. Shaw, of 5 High street, St. John, foot strained.  
Mrs. Susan Cavanaugh of Burton, (Sunbury Co.) ankle sprained.

Waldo Putnam, of Tilson Avenue, Boston, foot slightly injured.  
Wm. Whelpley, of Kennedy street, St. John, mate of the Weston, badly burned about head, shoulders and hand.

Wrapped almost from bow to stern in billows of flame, through which her forty passengers struggled frantically for safety, the David Weston, (the oldest boat on the river) was driven ashore at Craig's Point, near Westfield, about 3.30 o'clock Saturday afternoon. The disaster had not been without its fatalities, three lives have been sacrificed and the circumstances of each death were pitiful in the extreme. One, a lad of eleven years, became so terrified at the effects of fire and bursts of smoke that he rushed from out the stern of his aunt to leap directly overboard.

Another, a deck hand, after all but roasting from the smoke, jumped for safety, missed the boat that had come for him, and sank.

The third, a waitress, roused from sleep by shouts of fire, rushed to a window, clambered through and dropped. Her body was recovered an hour later floating face downward.

The boy was Stephen Hood-Rowan, son of Mr. and Mrs. Hood-Rowan, Manchester (Eng.). He was in company with his aunt, Miss Jennie Rowan, of the local school teaching staff. Accompanying them were Mrs. W. H. Shaw, Mrs. Douglas Austin, and Mrs. Amanda Atkin, all of Cedar street, North End.

**TWO BODIES HAVE BEEN RECOVERED.**  
The body of Miss Morrell, after being viewed by Capt. Day, corner at Day's Landing, was brought to the city Saturday night. The body of Fred Downey was found yesterday and brought to the aid-house. Up to last night young Rowan had not been found.

**THE PASSENGERS BROUGHT TO THE CITY.**

Of the forty odd passengers fifty-one months have received injuries of greater or less severity, and none but one suffering from the shock of a tragedy which will rank as one of the most thrilling in the history of the maritime provinces.

Mrs. Spence, and Mr. Eldridge, of Boston, two of the burned, remained at Westfield, but the remainder were brought to the city by the tug Champion and taken to their homes or hotels, coaches being called to the landing by the Star Line Co.

Others on board the boat were Thomas Lee, John N. Golding, R. E. Coote and his son, R. S. Coote, of St. John, Waldo D. Putnam and wife, of Tilson Avenue, Boston; Mrs. Brackett and son, of Rochester (N. Y.); Geo. W. Dean and wife, of Northbridge (Mass.); Mrs. Samuel Fowler, of the same city; Elwood W.

Westfield, of Palmer (Mass.); F. S. White and family of St. John; Wm. Kerr, of Queens county, and Miss M. W. Rogers, of Boston.  
The David Weston's company included: Edward W. Day, captain.  
Wm. Whelpley, mate.  
Peter Allan, purser.  
Herman Allen, engineer.  
Chas. Fleming, Frank Titus, Fred Downey and James Paisley, deck hands.  
Daniel Starkey, steward.  
Miss Grier, cook.  
Miss White, Miss Murdoch, of Fredericton, and Miss Morrell, waitresses.  
Miss Charters, stewardess.  
Robert Fries, of North End, kitchen boy.

**STORY OF THE DISASTER IS A TERRIFYING ONE.**

The story of the destruction of the Weston is a grim one. Old men, who from infancy have lived along the river, unite in admitting that within their memory a more tragic event has never occurred upon the stream.

To some of the passengers upon the boat there seemed, in their excitement, to be the choice of leaping overboard or burning, and to many, as they mounted the rail of the saloon deck, already on fire, and looked through twenty smoke-filled feet of water into not more than three feet of water, with the bottom strewn with jagged rocks.

Women, frantic with fear, would partly venture over the rail, then in a bewildered moment of horror draw back to vainly search for some other means of escape. In many instances they were helped by husband or brother, bodily lifted over and dropped.

Women almost overcome at the knowledge that their children were in some other portion of the boat, literally fought their way through fire, that they might find all that was precious to them.

Practically all the survivors told the same tale. A sudden burst of fire, a great smoke and an orange gleam down amongst the bales of hay on the main deck, then a panic among the passengers and the captain's order to jump.

At the moment of the panic, the pilot of the boat, who was standing at the helm, was thrown overboard, and his body was found floating in the water.

At the time the wheel house was almost hidden behind a wall of smoke, and the face that looked into the snapping snarl, would be stung with whirling embers.

When the smoke cleared, Whelpley, whose condition now warranted immediate care, succeeded in making his way below, and hastened to assist in the work of lowering the boat.

Craig's Point is about four miles above Westfield Beach on the same side of the river. The home of Parker Craig, a small white frame house, stands on a grassy road about fifty yards, with a long grassy lane stretching down from it to the river. The bottom of the lane is fringed with a row of poplars, and a path leads from the house to the beach, slightly crescent shape, the shore broad and sandy.

It was pleasant weather up river Saturday, water sparkling and clear. Mr. Craig was at work near his farm, the family were performing the customary chores, on the river a yacht or sail boat cruised idly past, or a woodboat lumbered heavily along, the time was about 3.30 o'clock. Presently from up stream came a steamboat, white, several sharp blasts. Those of the Craig family looked and saw the David Weston, master of the river, steaming down the main channel, then round and round, and finally coming to rest, with smoke vomiting from her sides.

**Fire-Flend's Work.**  
The river at the point is not more than a half mile wide, the boat was about in the centre, when the fire broke out. The family first saw the steamer, as she flung round, until she struck the shore, not more than eight minutes could have elapsed.

The sight viewed by the family was little less than appalling. Blanked in smoke, and flame, the latter showing in crimson waves through the thick smoke, the former in giant clouds drifting sluggishly along, the Weston was approaching her final resting place, and she was approaching it fast.

With bubbling water at her prow she ran toward the shore, and in a long grove through the rocks and sand of the river bottom, then with her nose fairly fixed upon the beach, stopped. Her beam ceased its movement, the machinery became silent, her thirty-seven years' work had ended.

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The passengers were scattered all through the boat—some aft, some forward, some in saloon, or on saloon or main decks—none with any thought of impending danger—except one man named Waldo Putnam, of Boston. He was on the saloon deck with his wife and a friend when he had occasion to go down stairs to the main deck. This was about, as near as he is able to recall, about 3.15 o'clock. He passed by the bales of hay, stacked two deep along by the engine room door, noted them with particular interest.

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Captain Day called for all passengers to go forward, and as the Weston gradually neared the beach, everybody to obtain a grip on whatever offered, as the boat would be liable to list.

In the meantime a hero was showing himself in the wheelhouse. The mate, Wm. Whelpley, although he has emerged from the sea, and will live, as the second edition of Jim Bludso. Perhaps he did not employ the language of Secretary Hay's famous creation, but the circumstances of his escape, and the dramatic death, and those surrounding Mr. Whelpley's deed, are singularly similar. Perhaps Mr. Whelpley did not shout like the mate, but he did shout his own battle cry.

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The passengers were scattered all through the boat—some aft, some forward, some in saloon, or on saloon or main decks—none with any thought of impending danger—except one man named Waldo Putnam, of Boston. He was on the saloon deck with his wife and a friend when he had occasion to go down stairs to the main deck. This was about, as near as he is able to recall, about 3.15 o'clock. He passed by the bales of hay, stacked two deep along by the engine room door, noted them with particular interest.

"I thought," said he, "about what the consequences would be if those bales would happen to catch fire."

He expressed just that, then re-ascended the stairs, where he met Mr. Dean, of Northbridge (Mass.), and Mrs. Samuel Fowler, of the same city; Elwood W.

party. A minute or so later, then from down on the main deck came the frightened screams of children, and the hoarse call of a deck hand to the effect that the hay was on fire.

Mr. Putnam did not notice anybody loitering in the vicinity of the hay as he passed, but from another source it is claimed the children were playing hide and seek about the bales.

The cry of fire was heard soon by all those on the boat. They had scarcely time to comprehend its full import, when the hay bales were blotted out in a shower of smoke. There was a rush for the companion ways and a similar hurrying from overhead toward the top of the companionway stairs, for the shouts of fire had been taken up, and already streams of smoke floated lazily up the companionway stairs.

**Beach Here, the Captain's Orders.**  
Captain Edward Day, from the saloon deck called to the mate, William Whelpley, who was in the wheel house, steering the boat, and shortly afterwards Whelpley called to the purser, Peter Allan, to get out the hose. This was attempted, but before an effective stream could be obtained the flames had eaten through the hose, rendering it useless.

There was nothing to do now but race for the beach. Already the Weston had swept to the right; and with steam at high pressure was driving swiftly landward. Whelpley was a Second Jim Bludso.

When the alarm was first given, Miss Etta Morrell, waitress, was sleeping. The mate, Wm. Whelpley, although he has emerged from the sea, and will live, as the second edition of Jim Bludso. Perhaps he did not employ the language of Secretary Hay's famous creation, but the circumstances of his