

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 down-river 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.

Two bodies have been recovered. The body of Miss Morrell, after being viewed by Capt. Day, coroner at Day's Landing, was taken to the city Saturday night. The body of Fred Downey was found yesterday and brought to the residence of his people in Douglas street. Up to last night young Rowan had not been found.

THE PASSENGERS BROUGHT TO THE CITY. Of the forty odd passengers fully one-third have received injuries of greater or less severity, and some are 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, considerable being called to the landing by the Star Line Co.

Others on board the boat were Thomas Lee, John N. Golding, R. E. Cooper and his son, R. S. Cooley, 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; Enoch W.

partly. A minute or so later, then from down on the main deck came the frightful screams of children, and the hoarse call of a deck hand to the effect that the bay was fire. Mr. Putnam did not notice anybody loitering in the vicinity of the bay as he passed, but from another source it is claimed that some children were playing hide-and-seek about the tables.

The cry of fire was heard soon by all along the main deck. They had scarcely time to comprehend its import, when the bay bales were blotted out in a shower of smoke. There was a rush for the companion ways and a similar scramble from overhead toward the top of the companionway stairs, for the shouts of fire had been taken up, and already screams and shouts were being heard from the companion way stairs.

Beach Her, the Captain's Order. Captain Edward Day, from the saloon deck called to the mate, William Whelpley, who was in the wheel house, steering to beach the boat, and shortly afterwards Whelpley called to the engineer, 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 shore. Already the Weston had swept to the right, and with steam at high pressure was driving swiftly toward the beach.

Whelpley Was a Second Jim Bludso. Captain Day called for all passengers to get forward, and as the Weston gradually neared the beach everybody to obtain a grip on whatever offered, as the boat would be likely to list heavily. In the meantime a man was showing himself in the wheelhouse. The mate, Wm. Whelpley, although he has emerged from the boat, is still in the wheelhouse. Whelpley was a Second Jim Bludso. Captain Day called for all passengers to get forward, and as the Weston gradually neared the beach everybody to obtain a grip on whatever offered, as the boat would be likely to list heavily. In the meantime a man was showing himself in the wheelhouse. The mate, Wm. Whelpley, although he has emerged from the boat, is still in the wheelhouse.

Captain Sticks Bravely to Work. Captain Day had gone quickly to work to get the boat out and then to the labor of rescuing the passengers he applied himself with a will. There were two boats, both commodious and strong, the custom-built motor launch, and the launch of the Weston. Only one was taken of the davits—and she was on the windward side; the other side being a sheet of boiling red-hot iron. When the launch was lowered it was a matter of time before it would be a mere scrap of metal.

Fire-Find's Work. The river at the point is not more than a half mile wide, the boat was about in the center, from the end of the Craig family first saw the steamer, as she flared 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. Blanketed in smoke, and flame, the latter showing in crimson waves through the smoky masses, and the former in giant clouds drifting sluggishly about, the Weston was approaching her final resting place, and she was approaching it fast.

WHAT FOLLOWED. THE CRY OF "FIRE." But the fact of her grounding was only the beginning of the worst for those on board. For the first minute after the outbreak was discovered, perhaps a few were influenced by the attitude of Capt. Day and his officers, who endeavored to impress upon the passengers the fact that nobody should become needlessly alarmed. The passengers were scattered all through the boat—some aft, some forward, some in saloon, or on saloon or main decks—more 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, struck the door, along by the engine room door, noted steam with particular interest.

Other Bats to the Rescue. By this time the steamer was about surrounded by small boats which had put to ward her from the various farms along the river for miles. With them was the tug Champion, which was not more than a mile away when the Weston caught fire.

There were boats in abundance but they could not ascend to the deck and bear those who were there. All the rescuers could do was to stand by and watch them as they pole forward and drag them on board.

It was a perilous leap. Those remaining near the stern of the steamer leaped three feet of water, meant more or less injury. The majority of those hurt are suffering from strained ankles, caused by landing on rocks.

MISS ETTA MORRELL'S LEAP TO DEATH. When the alarm was first given, Miss Etta Morrell, waitress, was sleeping. The noise awoke her, and starting up, just as the cry of fire was resounding through the boat and as frightened faces dashed past her in the gathering smoke, she ran to the side of the steamer and leaped overboard. She was not more than three feet from the water when she fell. Her body of fire was well known, as she has often expressed her timidity of such.

TERRIBLE POSITION OF FRED DOWNEY. A few minutes after the steamer grounded, a boat attempted to draw in close to her paddle box, where a figure was discernible trying to break off the state covering the paddle box. It was Fred Downey, deck hand. The men in the boat shouted to him to jump, that they would save him. Although he had the reputation of being a swimmer, he did not jump. With entreaties and jests they tried to make him jump, but he was not to be moved. He was finally rescued by the boat.

Word Sent to the City. Some came to the shore alone, some together. It was painful to hear the inquiries, the tearful searching through the crowd for the missing. The mate, Wm. Whelpley, who was in the wheel house, steering to beach the boat, and shortly afterwards Whelpley called to the engineer, Peter Allan, to get out the hose.

Body of Miss Morrell Recovered. About 5 o'clock, while the wreck was being floated down river, the body of Miss Etta Morrell was recovered. She was found in a small boat, which was pulled up to the shore. She was badly burned, but her identity was established by the fact that she was wearing a ring which she had given to her mother.

The Brava Mate. Wm. Whelpley, the mate and pilot, was seen yesterday at his home. He lay in the lounge and in plain, direct regard for the matter, but he was not taking care, however, to make himself a conspicuous figure.

A Boston Lady. Mrs. M. W. Rogers, of Boston, was returning to the city from a visit up river. With her was her cousin, Will Kerr, of Sumner Hill (N. B.). Miss Rogers was sitting when the steamer was beached and, seated by Mr. Kerr, she climbed over the rail and slid down a post to the small boat below. The presence of the officers of the Weston most likely for their brave work. Miss Rogers lost her dress suit case, which was in the saloon.

Kitchen's Close Call. Robert Friess, the kitchen boy, had a remarkable escape. The lad lay down in his bunk after the noon day work and soon was fast asleep. Either he or one knew he had gone there or else all forgot him, for he still slept while flames were fast destroying the steamer and a wild scene was being enacted on deck. At last the cracking of the fire

plank wandered, all that remained of the Weston was slowly falling apart. The upper woodwork had been destroyed; the smoldering ribs stood gauntly up in the crimson glow, the smoke stack had fallen over and lay pressing against the wreck of the paddle box, under which the body of Fred Downey was supposed to be floating.

CAPTAIN DAY TELLS THE STORY OF THE DISASTER. In the Craig home, Miss Rowan sat by the bedside of Mrs. Spence, and though her own anguish was almost greater than she could bear, endeavoring to soothe and quiet the patient.

awoke him and, quickly realizing what was wrong, he ran to mount the stairs to the deck. A wall of flame and smoke met him. There was but one chance and he took it. Returning to his room he climbed through the window and quickly escaped into the sea. He could swim and, as he was not far from shore, he was soon safe.

Tales of Other Passengers. R. E. Cooper and his son, R. S. Cooper, were passengers. They smothered the smoke shortly after hearing the cry, and hastened to see the extent of the outbreak. Mr. Cooper, endeavoring to calm those about him, and eventually, in company with his son, reached the shore quite unharmed.

The Finding of Fred Downey's Body. Mrs. Atkin, Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Austin, who, with Miss Rowan and the late Stephen Hood-Rowan, were spending Saturday at Evandale, were yesterday prostrated from the effect of their experience. The most heartily sympathizing will go out to Miss Rowan, of the bitterness of her bereavement but few can form a correct opinion. All Sunday she remained at the home of Parker Craig, while grappling parties searched for the body of the boy, and the body of Fred Downey.

Mrs. Susan Cavanaugh, when interviewed at Mrs. Holland's residence, Clarence street, was suffering from a strained ankle. She belongs at Burton, and was coming to the city with country produce. She was coming through the door of the saloon when she heard children screaming and saw the entire lower part of the boat was in flames. She gained the saloon deck, and when the boat grounded she lowered herself as far as possible, then dropped into the water, and was below the surface. A man and his wife helped her to the shore.

Mrs. W. H. Shaw, of High street, had an experience quite similar. Like Mrs. Cavanaugh, she retreated to the saloon deck. She could not see the water plainly for the smoke, but she was aware of the distance and of the depth of water. With great fortitude she waited until the steamer struck the beach, and then she jumped. I stood for a moment looking down," said Mrs. Shaw, "and thought, my God, have I got to leap down there. I could not see the entire lower part of the boat was in flames. I could see them lying in all positions. One woman's head I could see, she appeared to be up to her neck. Others were floundering.

Among the American passengers there is a feeling that the Star Line could be made responsible for the loss of their baggage. Mr. Orchard says that unless it can be proved there was willful negligence by the ship's company this cannot be. Mr. Orchard says the requisite number of life preservers were aboard. In the excitement, they were not used.

Valued About \$25,000 Insurance About \$10,000. The David Weston was built at a cost of \$55,000 at the old fort, Carleton, by John Retalick, for Small & Hatheway, in 1898. Her first captain was David Weston, and she was thirty-seven years old when she was wrecked. She was considered a marvel. For several years Robert Humphreys had charge of her, then Richard Retalick and Captain Ludlow Estabrooks until she became the property of the Star Line. She was built along the lines of the old Rothesay. She raced her once to Fredericton, and the Rothesay was won by four minutes. The Weston was valued at about \$25,000 and insured for \$10,000 or \$11,000.

A FORMER DISASTER IS RECALLED. It is recalled that the last serious accident on New Brunswick waters was on the Miramichi river some six or seven years ago. The steamer Miramichi was going up the river, and the captain had allowed his mate to go ashore at Black Brook. Posing up the river the captain went below, leaving a deck hand at the wheel. The schooner Ossola, owned by J. Wilbur Smith, of this city, was coming down the river. The man at the wheel of the Miramichi concluded that he knew enough about navigation to cross the bows of the boat below, and he did so. The result was that the bowprit of the schooner passed across the deck of the steamer, and the schooner's crew, excepting the captain, were killed. There were five ladies on the steamer's deck, and all of them were swept overboard. Two were saved by the schooner's crew, and the others were drowned. The captain lost his certificate for three years, and was tried for manslaughter, but was acquitted.

Body of Third Victim. Information reached the city Monday night to the effect that the body of Stephen

Scenes of Terror on the Doomed Vessel—Heroism Marked the Officers' Work—Remarkable Escapes of Many, Though Several Sustained Injuries—Official Inquiry.

Several of the passengers, while giving Captain Day and his officers abundant praise for their noble conduct during the fire, are yet of the opinion that carelessness was shown because of the fact that the inflammable bales of hay were piled in such proximity to the furnace.

Concerning the question of carrying half on passenger boats, there is general opinion at Indiantown that no more should come down or go up the river by boat intended for the conveyance of passengers, and the men who talked were not those to whom a stringent law forbidding the carrying of hay on passenger boats, would benefit.

George Macinnis's deck with Wm. Thomson & Co. was one of the survivors of the burned steamer David Weston, and is now confined to his bed at his home, 55 Clarence street. Mr. Macinnis is suffering from swollen and strained ligaments of the right leg. He was one of the last to leave the steamer, jumping from the forward part, where he had been assisting other passengers to land. It was some time after he reached the shore that he became lame. Mr. Macinnis will probably enter a claim for damages against the Star Line company. He will be confined to his bed for some days yet.

Wm. Whelpley, of Indiantown, "the man who saw his duty a dead sure thing, and went for it like a man," is recovering. His hand, however, may never be of much use again. His neck and shoulders, head and cheeks are still severely damaged, and for the remainder of his days he will carry the marks that now show on his face, neck, chest, and arms. He will be confined to his bed for some days yet.

Wm. Whelpley, of Indiantown, who did "brave work in the David Disaster." He's "Jim Bludso" did on the old Prairie Belle on the Mississippi river and there's a good deal of similarity to the action of Miss Whelpley on Saturday last.

The fire burst out as she cleared the bar and burst a hole in the night and made And quick as a flash she turned and made for the water bank on the right. There was running and cursing, but Jim yelled out: "The last galoot's ashore!"

Through the hot black breath of Jim's barran' 'till the last galoot's ashore!" Jim Bludso's voice was heard. And they all had trust in his commandment. And sure's you're born, they all got off. Above the mountains fell. And Bludso's ghost went up alone. In the smoke of the Prairie Belle. He weren't no saint, but at judgment 'till the last galoot's ashore!"

"I'd run my chance with Jim 'Londie of some pious sentiment. 'That wouldn't shock hands with him. He seen his duty, a dead sure thing. And sure's you're born, they all got off. On a man that did for men."

"Said an indignant mother to her little son: 'Why did you strike little Elias, you naughty boy?' 'Pick, indignant in his turn, exclaiming: 'what did she want to cheat for, then?' 'How did the chest' asked mamma, more mildly. 'Why,' exclaimed Dick, 'we were apples to tempt me with, and she never tempted me, but went and ate it up herself.'"

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