

STEAMBOAT ACCIDENTS, LOSS OF LIFE, &c.

LETTER

FROM

J. P. VAN TYNE TO THE HON. J. R. UNDERWOOD,

WITH

A schedule of accidents to American steam vessels since the year 1830, &c.

DECEMBER 21, 1840.

Submitted to the House by Mr. Underwood, referred to a select committee, and ordered to be printed.

DECEMBER 14, 1840.

The following schedule of accidents to American steam vessels is made up from the report of the honorable the Secretary of the Treasury to the 3d session of the 25th Congress, December 13, 1838, and from such other sources as seemed to afford the best information of all disasters that have occurred since that report, and is intended to include all accidents that have happened to steam vessels of every description, since the year 1830.

Date and name of vessel.	Injury to life.		Where the accident happened.	Causes of accident.
	Killed.	Wounded.		
1830.				
Car of Commerce -	28	29	Ohio river -	Explosion.
Caledonia -	11	11	Mississippi river -	Sunk.
Carolina -	1	-	New York harbor -	Explosion.
Fair Star -	2	-	Alabama -	Explosion.
Helen McGregor -	33	14	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Huntress -	4	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Kenawha -	8	4	Ohio river -	Explosion.
Porpoise -	Unknown	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Tallyho -	Unknown	-	Cumberland river -	Explosion.
United States -	9	-	Long Island sound -	Explosion.
William Peacock -	15	-	Buffalo, N. Y. -	Explosion.
Trenton -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Chief Justice Marshall -	-	-	Hudson river -	Explosion.
	111	58		
1831.				
Andrew Jackson -	2	-	Savannah -	Explosion.
General Jackson -	12	13	Hudson river -	Explosion.
Newburyport -	-	-	Lake Michigan -	Went ashore.
Sun -	-	-	Sandy Hook -	Fire.
Tricolor -	8	8	Ohio river -	Explosion.
Washington -	30	-	Long Island sound -	Collision of boats.
	52	21		

SCHEDULE—Continued.

Date and name of vessel.	Injury to life.		Where the accident happened.	Causes of accident.
	Killed.	Wounded.		
1832.				
Beaver - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Snagged.
Ohio - - -	5	Several	Hudson river -	Explosion.
Bristol - - -	-	1	Delaware river -	Explosion.
	5			
1833.				
Caspian - - -	40	-	Mouth of Red river -	Fire.
Chippewa - - -	-	-	Red river - - -	Snagged.
New England - - -	15	10	Connecticut river -	Explosion.
Ousatonic - - -	-	-	Near Leonardtown, Md.	Fire.
Peruvian - - -	-	-	Natchez - - -	Sunk.
Scotland - - -	1	4	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
George Washington -	1	-	Lake Erie - - -	Went ashore.
	57	14		
1834.				
Banner - - -	5	13	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Delaware - - -	-	-	Chicago - - -	Went ashore.
Davy Crockett - - -	-	-	St. Joseph - - -	Went ashore.
Detroit - - -	-	-	Lake Michigan - -	Went ashore.
Enterprise - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Globe - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Snagged.
Louisville - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Snagged.
Missouri Belle - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Collision.
Protector - - -	-	-	Alabama river -	Fire.
Pecria - - -	-	-	Illinois river -	Snagged.
Star of the West - -	2	Many	Alabama river -	Explosion.
St. Louis - - -	14	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Talisman - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Thorn - - -	3	-	Alabama river -	Explosion.
William Penn - - -	5	Many	Delaware river -	Fire.
	29			
1835.				
Boonslick - - -	4	9	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Chester - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Lady Franklin - - -	18	-	Ohio river - - -	Collision.
Marion - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Collision.
Oglethorpe - - -	9	-	Savannah - - -	Explosion.
Commodore Perry - -	6	-	Detroit, Michigan -	Explosion.
Royal Tar - - -	40	-	Coast of Maine - -	Fire.
Walk-in-the-water -	1	-	Natchez - - -	Fire.
William F. P. Taylor -	-	-	Near Michigan City, Ia.	Went ashore.
	78	9		
1836.				
Advocate - - -	-	-	Hudson river - - -	Explosion.
America - - -	-	-	Illinois river - -	Snagged.
Benjamin Franklin -	11	14	Mobile - - -	Explosion.
Commerce - - -	3	-	Ohio river - - -	Explosion.
Dolphin - - -	15	10	Coast of Florida -	Explosion.
Don Quixotte - - -	-	-	Lake Huron - - -	Went ashore.
Diana - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Snagged.
Free Trade - - -	5	-	Savannah river -	Explosion.
Franklin - - -	1	-	Hudson river - -	Explosion.
Flora - - -	1	13	Ohio river - - -	Explosion.
William Gibbons - -	6	-	Coast of Carolina -	Wrecked.
John Hancock - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Snagged.

SCHEDULE—Continued.

Date and name of vessel.	Injury to life.		Where the accident happened.	Causes of accident.
	Killed.	Wounded.		
1836—Continued.				
Illinois - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Illinoian - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Junius - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Kansas - - -	8	4	Missouri river -	Explosion.
Nicholas Biddle -	17	16	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
O'Connell - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Sunk.
Phoenix - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Potosi - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Sunk.
Pioneer - - -	10	7	Altamaha river -	Explosion.
Randolph - - -	1	-	Cumberland river -	Fire.
Rob Roy - - -	3	25	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Sampson - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
St. Charles - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Fire.
Macon - - -	4	-	South Carolina -	Explosion.
	85	89		
1837.				
Ben. Sherrod - - -	130	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Belfast - - -	Unknown	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Black Hawk - - -	Unknown	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Boonville - - -	-	-	Missouri river -	Snagged.
Caroline - - -	3	-	Lake Pontchartrain -	Explosion.
Caroline - - -	5	-	Niagara Falls -	Fire.
Ceylon - - -	-	-	Ohio river -	Fire.
Compromise - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Chariton - - -	3	-	St. Louis -	Explosion.
Delaware - - -	1	-	Delaware river -	Explosion.
Dubuque - - -	-	14	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Emerald - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Home - - -	100	-	Coast of Carolina -	Foundered in a gale.
Ion - - -	9	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Monmouth - - -	300	-	Mississippi river -	Collision.
Monroe - - -	-	-	Lake Erie -	Foundered.
Majestic - - -	3	4	Lake Erie -	Explosion.
Mail Boat - - -	3	6	Louisville, Ky. -	Explosion.
Neosho - - -	1	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Ploughboy - - -	3	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Paul Jones - - -	-	-	Potomac -	Fire.
Privateer - - -	-	-	Red river -	Snagged.
Pioneer - - -	-	-	Altamaha -	Burnt.
Swan - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Steam ferry-boat -	8	6	Louisville, Ky. -	Explosion.
Tiskilwa - - -	12	-	Illinois river -	Collision.
Tow-boat - - -	1	-	Near New Orleans -	Explosion of steam pipe.
Union - - -	3	3	Potomac river -	Explosion.
Vicksburg - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Warrior - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Wave - - -	1	-	Illinois river -	Fire.
	586	33		
1838.				
Augusta - - -	20	12	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Ashley - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
General Brown - -	31	11	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Black Hawk - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
B. J. Gilman - - -	-	-	Ohio river -	Collision.
Belle of Missouri -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.

SCHEDULE—Continued.

Date and name of vessel.	Injury to life.		Where the accident happened.	Causes of accident.
	Killed.	Wounded.		
1838—Continued.				
Camanche - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Chilicothe - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Czar - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Champlain - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Delaware - - -	-	-	Cape Florida -	Went ashore.
Dart - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Sunk.
General Dodge -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Floridian - - -	-	-	Chatahoochee, Geo.	Snagged.
Friendship - - -	-	-	Illinois river -	Snagged.
Fulton - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Governor Dodge -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Irvin - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Iowa - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Not known.
John McLean - -	-	-	Near Florida -	Went ashore.
Logansport - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Missouri Fulton -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Sunk.
Motto - - -	5	4	Sabine river -	Explosion.
Miner - - -	-	-	Unknown -	Unknown.
Moselle - - -	129	16	Ohio river -	Explosion.
New England - -	1	-	Coast of Maine -	Collision.
Norfolk - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Navigation - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Unknown.
Native - - -	2	-	Tennessee river -	Explosion.
Oronoko - - -	130	Several	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Pulaski - - -	138	-	Coast of Carolina -	Explosion.
Platt - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Polander - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Unknown.
Planter - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Unknown.
Rolla - - -	1	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Relief - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Return - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Unknown.
Renown - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Sunk.
Swan - - -	-	-	Lake Chicot -	Foundered.
St. Louis - - -	3	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Governor Shelby -	-	10	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Tangipaho - - -	3	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Tempest - - -	-	-	Chatahoochee river -	Snagged.
Wilmington - - -	-	-	Florida Cape -	Went ashore.
Walter Scott - -	-	-	Unknown -	Unknown.
Water Witch - - -	-	-	Unknown -	Unknown.
Whig Victory - -	-	-	Unknown -	Unknown.
Washington - - -	50	-	Lake Erie -	Fire.
Washington - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Yazoo - - -	1	-	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
	507	53		
1839 and 1840.				
Wilmington - - -	4	12	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Erie - - -	6	Several	Detroit river -	Explosion.
Greenfield - - -	2	Several	- - -	Explosion.
Grampus - - -	Unknown	Several	At sea -	Explosion.
Swallow - - -	Unknown.	Several	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Kansas - - -	Unknown	Several	Mobile bay -	Explosion.
Commerce - - -	2	4	Florida coast -	Explosion.
Constitution - -	1	Several	- - -	Explosion.
Persian - - -	23	24	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Express - - -	6	14	Mobile -	Explosion.
James Gibbon - -	3	5	Near Richmond, Va. -	Explosion.

SCHEDULE—Continued.

Date and name of vessel.	Injury to life.		Where the accident happened.	Causes of accident.
	Killed.	Wounded.		
1839 & '40—Continued.				
Le Roy Washington -	6	8	Chatahoochee river -	Explosion.
Monarch - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Empress - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Fire.
Swiftsure - -	4	1	North river - -	Explosion.
Elba - - - -	-	-	Mississippi river -	Snagged.
Farmer - - -	2	10	Mississippi river -	Explosion.
Lexington - -	150	-	Long Island sound -	Fire.

The following are a few cases of explosion and loss of life on locomotives and stationary engines, that have come to our knowledge.

Date.	Where the accident happened.	Injury to life.		Causes of accident.
		Killed.	Wounded.	
1830	McQueen's furnace, N. York city	2	-	Water too low in the boiler.
1834	Harlem and New York railroad -	1	1	Explosion.
1834	Eagle cotton factory, Pittsburg, Pa.	5	3	Explosion.
1836	Baltimore and Ohio railroad -	1	1	Water too low in the boiler.
1837	Saw-mill, Louisville, Ky. -	3	5	Explosion.
1840	Sugar-house, Philadelphia -	1	-	Explosion.
1840	Sugar-house, Louisiana -	1	-	Explosion.

RECAPITULATION.

Whole number of accidents (ascertained) since the year 1830	-	185
Whole number of lives lost	-	1,733
Whole number wounded	-	379

Thus, in the short space of ten years, we have the enormous sacrifice of 1,733 human beings, and 379 wounded; a large portion of whom probably died from the effects of the wounds received.

If to this number of 1,733 we add the number ascertained to have been lost by explosions previous to the year 1830, viz: 72, the aggregate is 1805.

This shows a large amount of human happiness sacrificed to the cupidity of a few reckless steamboat owners, whose occupation and habits of life are such as to lead them to place but little value on the lives of their fellow-men, when brought in competition with their own pecuniary interest.

It will be seen from the above statement, that the laws already passed to prevent accidents on board steam vessels have done but little towards diminishing their number, or the disastrous consequences arising from them. This may arise from the fact that the primary cause of those

accidents is seldom known, and that legislation has been done in ignorance of the causes which produce the most disastrous effects.

This statement also shows that, though steamboats are liable to a great variety of accidents, yet the lives of passengers are subject to injury by only a few. *Explosion of boilers, and fire,* are the two great causes of the destruction of life; which would seem to imply that but little legislation is required to preserve the public from such disastrous results, inasmuch as all other accidents are easily avoided by ordinary care of officers and owners of boats.

This is doubtless true. And could our legislators be satisfied of the true causes of those accidents, I think they would find that the enactment of a few laws would be sufficient to protect the public, and guard against so great a destruction of life and property.

In making up this statement, an attempt has been made to ascertain the amount of property destroyed; but, owing to the confused returns made up by those from whom we have sought information, and in many cases the utter impossibility of knowing the amount destroyed by many accidents, where the boat and cargo were entirely lost, we have ascertained the exact loss of but few.

Those given below are believed to be correct, as given by individuals present at the time of the accident:

Don Quixotte	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,500
Ion	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,500
Missouri Fulton	-	-	-	-	-	-	50,000
New England	-	-	-	-	-	-	40,000
New England	-	-	-	-	-	-	17,500
Oliver Ellsworth	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,000
Oglethorpe	-	-	-	-	-	-	24,000
Patriot	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,000
Paul Jones	-	-	-	-	-	-	4,000
Royal Tar	-	-	-	-	-	-	200,000
Vicksburg	-	-	-	-	-	-	100,000
George Washington	-	-	-	-	-	-	60,000
William Penn	-	-	-	-	-	-	90,000
Pioneer	-	-	-	-	-	-	35,000
Pulaski	-	-	-	-	-	-	150,000
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							790,500

The returns from which the above statement is made show a total loss of twenty-five steam vessels; averaging each vessel at \$18,000, (which is a small estimate,) we have

Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	<hr/> <hr/> 1,240,500
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This, it is supposed, does not exceed *one-tenth* of the amount of property destroyed by accidents to steam vessels since the year 1830; but it will serve to show the necessity of legislation on the subject, and I hope will so far enlist the attention of the present Congress, that they will no longer hesitate to enact such laws as may seem proper to secure the personal safety of our citizens. Without it, "life has no enjoyment; and, unless it is afforded, Government but half does her duty."

If this statement shall have a tendency to induce such legislation as will secure protection to our fellow-citizens in our widely extended and increasing country, I shall feel a happiness in knowing that my humble efforts have contributed to the welfare of mankind, which will amply repay me for the trouble I have incurred in furnishing the information it contains.

I am, sir, most respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. P. VAN TYNE.

Hon. J. R. UNDERWOOD,
House of Representatives.

If this statement shall have a tendency to induce such legislation as will secure protection to our labor citizens in our widely extended and increasing commerce, I shall feel a happiness in knowing that my humble efforts have contributed to the welfare of mankind, which will amply repay me for the trouble I have incurred in furnishing the information contained herein.

I am, sir, most respectfully, your obedient servant,
J. P. VAN DYKE

Hon. J. R. Underwood

House of Representatives