

The Evening Star, Saturday, August 9, 1873, p. 1
The Wawaset Horror!
Fifty Persons Burned To Death or Drowned!!
The Terrible Story of the Disaster!!
Scenes at the Point of the Tragedy
Distressing Scenes in This City on the Arrival of the Bodies

Last night about half past eleven o'clock great excitement was produced by the report that the well-known Potomac steamer *Wawaset* had been burned down the river and that most of the passengers on board had perished. As the news flew from point to point in the city the excitement increased, and many hastened to the foot of 7th street to ascertain the particulars. The report was subsequently confirmed by an Associated Press dispatch from Fredericksburg stating that the *Wawaset* took fire about 11 o'clock yesterday morning at Chatterton's landing, Prince George county, and was entirely destroyed. The dispatch also stated that "she had about one hundred and fifty passengers on board, and between forty and fifty lives are lost. Six bodies were found up to 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon – three white ladies, one white child, and two colored children. Miss Virginia Marbury, of Glymont; Miss Bettie Saunders, and a child from Currioman are among the dead. Others have not been recognized. Geo. W. Cooke, of Warsaw, Va., is missing. Captain Wood did not leave the boat until forced to do so by the flames. The fire was first discovered in the engine room.

At about midnight several of the surviving passengers of the unfortunate *Wawaset* arrived in this city on the steamer *Express*, and from them it was learned that she left Washington on her regular trip to Cone river, and that all was well until near her arrival at Chatterton landing. When about to land for passengers flames were seen issuing from the hold of the vessel, and before anything could be done to extinguish them the entire steamer was consumed, and nothing remained of her but a broken shaft and smoke-stack to mark the place where she went down, about two hundred yards from shore.

The number of passengers registered on board is estimated when she left Washington at one hundred and ten, and she took on others at various landings on the Potomac. The crew numbered twelve. Out of this number probably fifty passengers and two members of the crew perished by water and fire.

Messrs. Dummer and McGuiggan, employes at the Chronicle office, Mr. Massey, Doc. McKenna, barkeeper on the *Wawaset*, a son of Mr. Wise, No. 221 4-1/2 street, Engineer Nash and son, and Clerk Watson Wheeler were among the saved. The survivors report the scene as heart-rending in the extreme during the burning of the vessel. The air was filled with the piercing shrieks of women and children, while strong men stood aghast at the hopelessness of the situation. Most of those who were lost met their deaths by water, leaping into the river as the flames became unendurable. Capt. John Wood, the commander of the *Wawaset*, behaved with commendable coolness throughout, and was the last to leave the burning steamer.

The *Wawaset* took fire from some unknown cause. As soon as she was discovered to be on fire she was headed for the shore, and struck on the Virginia side about two hundred yards from the shore, the pilot remaining in the pilot box until completely enveloped by the flames. There were many colored people on board, and many ladies and children who were en route to visit their friends at the different landings on the river. There were two boats belonging to the *Wawaset*, but in the excitement one of them was pitched overboard and lost, and of the life-preservers with which the boat was provided none seemed to have been secured in the panic and excitement.

The burning steamer was discovered at a little after 11 o'clock yesterday morning by the steamer Express, Capt. Jas. T. Barker, who was returning from Point Lookout to Washington, with a party of excursionists, composed of the "Painter's Union" and their friends. A short time after, the steamer *National* which had gone to the relief of the fated vessel, came alongside with the rescued passengers from the *Wawaset*.

The *Wawaset* was built at Wilmington in 1863, bought by the Potomac Ferry Company in 1864, and was brought to these waters, and ever since has been making regular trips to Cone river. She was insured in several companies for \$25,000. She was considered the finest excursion boat ever placed upon the Potomac.

A Sorrowful Burden

About 5:30 o'clock this morning the stern-wheel boat "*National*," Captain Gregg, brought up ten bodies, five women and five children, four colored children and one white child, the latter a little son of Joseph Reed, policeman. Mrs. Muse, whose husband lives on the corner of 7th and G streets southwest; Mrs. Julia Kelly, an aunt of policeman Reed's who had been visiting his family and was on her return to her home at Currioman. Three of the white women and the four colored infants were not recognized. On arriving at the wharf

The Crowd Rushed Around The Boat,

but were kept back, while some wharf hands brought them to the landing, and their bodies were ranged side by side in the warehouse of the ferry company. The features of the children and some of the women presented a calm and natural appearance, but in others there were signs of pain. Most all were somewhat bloody about the face, and on some were spots resembling bruises. The bodies were laid on some planks in the warehouse and the police guarded the door.

These Bodies Were Picked Up

at Chatterton and carried to Stewart's wharf, about one and a half miles below, and the *National* took them aboard at that wharf. These were all that had been recovered at 9:30 last night, the time the *National* left. Captain Reed, from Police headquarters arrived at the wharf about 6 o'clock and at once recognized the little son of Joseph Reed, his nephew; also, his aunt, Mrs. Kelly.

About this time Mr. J.W. Barker, undertaker, came and took the bodies of the two last named away in cases to prepare them for burial. The bodies of the adults were quite rigid, but those of the children were pliable, as if just dead.

About 6:30 o'clock Mr. Cobaugh and his wife came to the wharf, and recognized one of the dead bodies of the women as

The Sister of His Wife and Her Niece,

their names Mrs. Cora Walker and Miss Indiana Wills, whose family reside at the corner of 8th and I streets.

The sobs and lamentations of Mrs. Cobaugh could be heard for some distance, and finally she was persuaded by her husband to be led away. About this time several ladies from South Washington came in and recognized the body which Mrs. Cobaugh had just before thought to be that of her sister as that of

Mrs. Patty Sands,
of Westmoreland county, Va., who had been visiting friends in this city.

Statement of Henry Lewis, Deck Hand

Henry Lewis, colored, one of the deck hands of the steamer *Wawaset*, came up on the steamer *Georgiana* this morning to Alexandria, and took the first ferry boat to this city. He states that two colored women, Mrs. Shankland, living on Capitol Hill, and Mrs. Mahala Fleet, residing somewhere near the City Hall, came up as far as Alexandria from Taylor's Landing, and that each of them lost a child and were bound up to try and recognize the bodies. The ferry boat *City of Washington* arrived at 7:20 o'clock from Alexandria, and brought up Susan Parker, Mary Blackwell, and Hiram Blackwell, colored, who belong in Westmoreland county, Va. They were on board the *Wawaset*, and all three were

Badly Burned.

Mary Blackwell was badly burned on the neck and hands, which were covered with large blisters; Susan Parker, hands badly burned; and Hiram Blackwell, badly burned on arms and hands and clothing nearly burned off him.

Statement of Mr. John Reed.

Mr. John Reed, brother of Policeman Reed, also came up on this boat. He was on the *Wawaset*, and got badly burned on the face and head. He states that he was busy throwing overboard some planks for the women to catch hold of when the flames burst up the gangway and nearly smothered him, and he jumped overboard and swam ashore. His clothing was burnt, and he had a narrow escape with his life. He also states that when the fire was discovered the women and children were in the deck saloon, and it was not above three minutes before all communication was cut off between the bow and stern of the boat. He states that there were 117 registered passengers, besides 20 children not registered and the officers and crew of the boat, on board; and, in his opinion, not less than 50 were lost. One body of a woman was recovered after the *National* left last night, and it is thought that most of the bodies will be recovered during today.

Lieut. Gessford, with Sergeant Larrabee and Officers King, Auldrige, Shea, Dodge and Smoot, were in attendance this morning, and assisted in the removal of the bodies and in keeping order.

At 7:40 the *Georgeanna* arrived at the mailboat wharf, bringing Captain Wood and Engineer Nash, with some of the hands of the boat.

The Scenes at the Wharf

The scenes at the 7th street wharf last night as different persons arrived who had lost relatives and friends, were truly distressing. Among the first to arrive was Officer Reed, of the Metropolitan police force, who had a wife, three children, and a niece on board the *Wawaset*. His agony, as he ran frantically around trying to glean some ray of hope that some of his loved ones were saved, was fearful to witness. Seeing a group about Mr. McKinney, the bartender on the *Wawaset*, who was giving particulars of the tragedy, he inquired, in hoarse broken tones: "McKinney, for God's sake can you not tell me something about my family?" Mr. McKinney replied feelingly, "Would to heaven I could give you some encouragement, but it would be cruel to deceive you. Your family were all lost." Mr. Reed thereupon broke into a wail of despair, wringing his hands and showing such marks of hopeless agony as to bring tears to every eye. It was indeed a household wreck for Mr. Reed, who, at one fell swoop, loses his wife, three children and niece. The children were all under eight years of age; and the niece, Bettie Reed, was a beautiful and amiable young lady, about eighteen years of age.

Another Distressing Scene

Following upon Mr. Reed's terrible display of agony, was presented on the arrival of Mr. William Muse (a neighbor of Mr. Reed's), who had a wife and two children on the *Wawaset*. His distress was shown in a somewhat quieter form, but was almost more painful to witness from the convulsive workings of his face in his attempts to subdue violent expressions of grief, and, from the silent tears running down his face, and his almost inarticulate attempts to frame words of inquiry.

List of the Saved

List of passengers saved, (white) – McAshton, J.B. North, O. Eddy, J.H. Wise, A. Melvin, Benjamin Bartlett, A.J. McGuiggan, Thomas Massie, Thomas Owen, W.T. Emmerson, E. Nash, John Reed, G. Emerlvie.

List of colored: R.D. Beckley, J. Tate, Wm. Saunders, James Brooks, Henry Street, George Parker, Samuel Blackwell, Charles Shankland, John Hughes, John Scott, Thomas Coxton, Lewis Scott, Robert Gaston, H. Taylor, Wm. Herring, Moses Gordon, Ed. Hawkins, J. Christopher, M. Walker, A. Strout, J.H. Wood, boy, Thomas Rich, H. Blackley, Wm. Johnson, Wm. Brooks, Lewis Woodie, James Newman, Lindley Jackson, Mrs. Ogleton Taylor, Laura Tayloa, Kate McPherson, Mrs. Price and child. The above were all saved, and some of them badly burned.

Susan Parker, May Blackwood, Eliza Mathews, Laura Barnard, Julia Christopher, Mary Campbell, Matilda Dunlop, Daffrey Winters, Mary Norman, Julia Shankland, Clara Jackson, Nancy Baylor, Sarah Payne, M. Ball, were all saved and more or less burned.

The white ladies and children known to be lost are Patsey Sands, Julia Kelly, Esther Griffin and two children, Miss E. Reed, Cordelia Hobbs, and Miss Marbury.

George Tibbs, a colored deck hand was lost, and Adeline Jenkins, the chambermaid.

George W. Cook, grocer, on 7th street, between D and E southwest, is thought to be lost, with a little child; he was seen to jump overboard with his child in his arms, and has not been heard of. One of his sons, a boy about 10 years of age, was saved. An old man named Henry Hazen, about 70 years of age, was on board, and is supposed to be lost.

Robert Nash, the engineer, came up this morning; he was saved by his son, Samuel Nash, a young man, who jumped overboard and swam ashore with his father. The son was assistant engineer on the *Wawaset*.

The captain was the last person who left the boat. He was on the bow, and did all in his power to render assistance to the panic-stricken women. Finally the flames and smoke drove him overboard, considerably burned about the head and face, and he swam ashore.

An inquest was held by the authorities near the scene of the disaster yesterday, and a verdict rendered in accordance with the facts. The jury entirely exonerated Capt. Woods from all blame in the matter, and gave him a certificate to that effect. When the captain saw there was no hope of extinguishing the flames, he took his station at the wheel, and heading for the shore prevented the rudder ropes from burning by pouring water on them, until finally they were consumed – a short time before she touched the shore.

Other Particulars

Officers of the steamer Wawaset state that many of the passengers bound to the different landings on the river were saved and started off through the country, and that there were not above thirty lost, including children; this, however, is quite uncertain. There were about this number of children aboard, and very few of them were saved. Captain Wood also says that as soon as the flames burst out he heard the steamer ashore. She was running at great speed, and all at once the engine suddenly stopped, from the shaft falling, and the passengers were under the impression that she had struck the land, and many jumped overboard where the water was quite deep; the steamer was still floating towards the shore from the impetus gained, it was several minutes before her bow struck the bottom. During this time many of the women who had leaped overboard sank, and were all lost. Everything movable about the decks was thrown out to the women in the water, but very few had presence of mind to avail themselves of these aids. Most of

The Life Preservers

were in the gangway and could not be reached by reason of the smoke and flames. The wife of Mr. J.W. Reed, who was lost was on the bow deck, and could no doubt have been saved but for her alarm and anxiety about her children. It is believed that she jumped overboard with them.

A Young Lady Burned to Death

Miss Cornelia Hobb, a beautiful young lady, residing on K, between 4th and 5th streets, was under the protection of Mr. McGuigan, and he went to her assistance; but before he could get here to the side of the boat her clothing took fire, and he was forced to leave her. She perished in the flames, and Mr. McGuigan swam ashore. Doubtless numbers were drowned owing to their frantic efforts to save themselves, within a few yards the water was shallow enough to wade in and the clerk of the boat, Mr. Wheeler, saved himself by wading.

Miss Bettie Reed

the niece of Officer Reed, was a young lady 17 years of age, and worked at Landsburg's. She was on her way to pay a visit to her relatives in Westmoreland county. She is spoken of as a most interesting and industrious young lady.

Mrs. Hester Griffin

(a daughter of Capt. Ragan of South Washington) now residing in Alexandria was drowned, as also her two children. Her body was brought up but the children are missing. The scene at the identification of the remains by the mother was one which brought tears to our eyes.

Mrs. Taylor, a widow lady, and her child with a small valise, jumped overboard, and was seen to reach shore, swimming and floating alternately. The other child is believed to have been lost.

Miss Marbury, of Glymont, who is among the lost, is a connection of the Marbury's of Georgetown, and the unfortunate young woman had many friends in that place who will mourn her sudden demise.

An Affecting Funeral

The funeral of the members of Joseph W. Reed's family who were victims of the accident of the steamer Wawaset that have been recovered will take place at the Mount Vernon Place church at 4 o'clock p.m. Sunday, the 10th inst. Friends and relatives invited to attend.

Search for the Bodies

Capt. Gedney started down at 6 o'clock this morning, on the tug "Gedney," with grappling irons and all the necessary means to drag for the bodies, and will send up those which he is fortunate enough to find on every passing steamer bound up. His intention was to return with the tug about 4 o'clock today.

LATER

Statement of Capt. Wood

A reporter of The Star this morning called on Capt. John R. Wood, commanding officer of the burnt vessel. He is burned around the neck and ears slightly. His account is substantially as follows: The fire broke out at twenty-five minutes past 12 o'clock, between Thorn's gut and Chatterton. I was in the pilot house at the time. A fireman came and told me that the boat was on fire below. I immediately came out, and found the flames reached quite to the hurricane deck along the walking beam. I then saw that it was impossible to get to the life-boats, which were on after-quarters on each, to lower them, although they were full of passengers. I threw water on the wheel ropes so as to keep her steerage all right, and passed buckets of water from below to the hurricane deck for the purpose, as I became satisfied there was no hope of saving the vessel, and that the only chance to save the passengers was to keep her going, she heading to the beach. The boat reached the beach in about twelve of thirteen minutes after the alarm was given – in less than five minutes after the alarm was given the fire was in the rear of the pilot-house – the engine refused to work about a half a minute before she struck the shore, and the boat ran a length before she came to a dead stop and grounded in less than five feet of water from the bow. I remained on the hurricane deck until the flames had burnt the window curtain in my room and the saloon windows, below, were shooting forth fiery darts. I then came down on the forward deck and did what I could to save the passengers. A great many were afraid to jump overboard. I assured them they were safe in jumping, as the water off the bow was not over their heads, and upon this assurance one or two made a leap, and many others seeing that the water was shallow followed their example, and were saved. It was with difficulty I checked them jumping over in large bodies, and drowning each other during the excitement. I am satisfied as nearly all was lost were lost in the stern of the boat, the flames driving that way, and forcing the passengers to jump or be burnt. Just before I left the boat I hard a lady (Mrs. Taylor, of Alexandria) crying for help from the rear of the vessel. I saw her clinging to the middle chains, and sent a boat to her rescue and saved her. I am satisfied the excitement caused undue loss of life and that every passenger was saved who jumped overboard forward. A great many lives were lost on the life-boats by being overcrowded. Before the boat stopped one of them was crowded with colored passengers and when she was cut loose the stern bulged out and swamped the craft. About a dozen small children were aboard, and I think five or six were lost. The fire caught in the hold, but it is impossible to say just where. The boat was very dry, almost like tinder, and the flames when they struck the oiled machinery, spread like a torch. The cargo was of a miscellaneous nature, and containing nothing inflammable except two barrels of whisky, which were in the forward hold, and were among the last things burned. It was entirely lost. The passenger list and manifest of the vessel were lost, it being impossible for the clerk to reach the office to obtain it. At the time of the accident but few of the passengers were asleep, and none in the staterooms. Some were lying down on sofas. The Georgeanna came along, on her way from Baltimore, and brought up a few of the passengers. Many went down through the country, and others are awaiting other boats to come home. All were well taken care of. The steamer's value I estimate at \$40,000.

The Clerk's Statement

Mr. J.W. Wheeler, the clerk stated that after leaving Alexandria they took aboard a white man at Liverpool Point named Robert Olive, bound for Longwood wharf, and this man he thinks was lost. At Glymont they took on board Kate McPherson and Miss Jennie Marbury. The latter was lost and the

former lived. One colored man got on at Evansport and was lost. Those landed were as follows -- one at Glymont, two or three at Sandy Point of whom he thinks one was a colored woman and two children; four white ladies and two or three children, and one or two white men and six colored men and women, also a white boy named Braxton, at Smith's Point. He also states that there were some adults on board not registered, and that the children younger than 9 or 10 years were on the register but these are not charged with fare, and he thinks there were about twelve of them. He thinks there must have been above thirty live lost and is afraid there are more but about 1 o'clock, after all had got ashore that could, an attempt was made to collect the passengers together to get a correct list of the saved, but many were wandering about the shore, and some had started off through the country, so that it is not possible to arrive at the correct number lost at present, as it is believed that many reported lost are among those named. Mr. Wheeler states that he was among the last to leave the boat.

Statement of the Pilot

A reporter of The Star also called on John W.L. Boswell, the pilot of the vessel. He is burned about the arms and legs. His statement is as follows: I have been a pilot on the Potomac upwards of nine years. The fireman, at 20 minutes of 12, came to the wheel-house and told me the boat was on fire. The captain was standing outside of the pilot-house at the time. I says, "Captain, the best thing we can do is to run her ashore the nearest place -- Chatterton's landing." I headed her for the shore, and she struck in five feet of water. I staid in the pilot house until the wheel ropes broke in two and the fire was coming into the pilot-house. I then jumped overboard and swam ashore with two ladies, whom I saved. I then brought out and landed six or eight passengers. I made a second trip with the boat, and took in three colored women, with a child, who were hanging to the rudder, and landed them safely. I then swam out again and made two unsuccessful attempts to rescue Officer Reed's wife, but she twisted away from me in each instance, I presume not knowing what she was doing through excitement. When I came back to the stern of the boat for the last time, three children -- two white and one colored -- were there. I tried to get at them, but the flames prevented me, and they were all burnt. I think two of them were Mr. Reed's children. I then went astern, and bailed out the life-boat, and took nine dead bodies to Stewart's wharf, four white and five colored. I remained at Stewart's wharf, and placed the bodies on the steamer National, which brought them to Washington. I came up in the Georgeanna. I kept the deck hands pouring water on the wheel ropes until the fire drove them off deck. The fireman told me the first place he saw the fire was in the forward bow. I don't think any but Mr. Reed's cousin, Miss Bettie Reed, were lost in jumping off the bow of the boat. She jumped before the boat struck, and was lost.

Statement of Robert Nash

Am engineer of the boat. The first intimation I had of the fire was from the fireman; he said he had seen smoke but thought it came from the cook room; he subsequently discovered the fire, and reported it. I tried to get in the hold to discover the place burning, but the smoke was so thick I could not. I then turned in a fire-extinguisher; I went on the forward deck and used buckets of water. After I saw I was of no further service I jumped overboard, and clung to a peach box until rescued by my son. Many were saved by clinging to the peach boxes which were thrown overboard. The excitement was intense. I think the fire originated in the back smoke-box from some unknown cause. The fireman says he is certain it originated in the back smoke-box. When in the water I saw a man and small child struggling. I tried to save the child by placing it on the peach box, but by some means both got away from me, and it was the last I saw of them. I presume both were drowned. The boats could not be used because the fire broke out amidships, and the flames prevented reaching them. One of the boats was so crowded before being cut away that she broke upon striking the water and swamped. I think many lives could

have been saved if the life-boat could have been reached by the passengers after she was finally thrown overboard.

Statement of Samuel A. Nash

Am an apprentice engineer aboard the boat. About half hour before the fire, was in the pilot-house talking to the captain. A fireman came up and stated the boat was on fire. It was some time before twelve o'clock. I ran down below, and found I could not get to the engine-room, because the smoke was in the gangway. I went on the forward deck and commenced throwing buckets of water on the fire; remained there until it grew so hot that I couldn't stand on the deck, so I jumped overboard. I did not swim ashore, but remained in the water to see what I could do. An old man jumped off about the same time I did, and asked me to help him. I got a beach box and gave it to him, and led him to where his feet could touch the bottom. I then got a second peach box, and went after my father, who was about exhausted, and took him to a safe place, where he could wade ashore. The pilot, Mr. Boswell, and myself, then got a small boat to pick up such passengers as we could. We rescued four from the rudder, three colored women and a colored child. I cannot give any idea as to the origin of the fire. I don't think anybody but Miss Reed and a man named Mr. Cook were drowned who jumped off the forward part of the boat. The engine stopped just before she struck, but was under fair head of steam. The small boats were useless, because we were getting ready to land passengers and had the little boat down at the side, with the block and tackle attached. There were two small boats aboard the boat.

Statement of the Steward

Charles Tolson, steward of the Wawaset, states that finding it getting too hot for him, he climbed over the stern and slid down the rudder shaft, catching hold of the curve in the top part, where he seated himself until the fire burned him out, and he struck out the best he could. Not knowing how to swim he went to bottom and gave a kick towards shore; that he same twice, when some one in a boat caught hold of him and pulled him in. During the time he was on the rudder some six women caught hold of the chain, and were pulled off by others trying to save themselves; that the screams and cries were so pitiful that it nearly made him frantic, but he could do nothing. The coals began to fall on his head, and the smoke and flames forced him off, and when he got ashore he was insensible for some time.

Statement of Mr. McKenny

Mr. Peter McKenny, the bar keeper, states as follows:--I was in the bar, and about 11:25 o'clock heard the cry of "fire;" rushed up on deck and then to the hurricane deck, and saw smoke and flames leaping from the engine room, near the walking beam. The women were running back towards the stern, screaming and shouting, but most of the passengers were cool, as also the deck hands. At this time the hose had been put in service, and they did the best they could, and the fire extinguisher was also turned on, but the flames were too fast, and buckets were then taken, some of the passengers working as well as the crew with the crew. The boat's head was headed to the shore as soon as the alarm was sounded, and she was making her way rapidly in; the flames in the meantime enveloping the whole after part of the vessel. She ran in to within 150 yards of the shore, and many passengers jumped over from the bow and waded ashore, but by this time numbers had jumped overboard from towards the stern of the boat, where the water was deeper, (about 9 feet at the stern,) and were drowned. I can vouch that the captain and crew, as well as the passengers, were perfectly sober, and I have never seen men work better, but the fire spread very quick and spread rapidly. Wood and most of the crew remained on board until it was impossible for them to remain longer. I got to shore after 12 o'clock, and when I jumped overboard the steam struck me and knocked me senseless, but a boat picked me up and I recovered. When we reached shore some of the passengers had been taken off by the neighbors, who

had been attracted by the smoke from the burning boat, and we were all treated kindly, the people offering every assistance in their power.

Statement of J.W. Reed

Was a passenger on the boat. Got on in Washington for Curriman. The fire, I think, broke out about five or ten minutes before twelve o'clock. After the excitement became general I advised the passengers to keep cool, as the boat I knew would ground in low water. Many jumped overboard before she struck, and I threw planks to them. I don't think a single person was drowned off the forward deck after the boat struck. Capt. Wood was the last man that left the boat. I don't think there was a live passenger afloat when Capt. Wood left the boat. I don't think anything was left undone by the officers to save lives and the boat. I told many of the passengers, "For God's sake, don't jump overboard; we will be aground in low water soon, and you can wade ashore." They would not heed me, but jumped excitedly into the water. I had a cousin who jumped overboard before the boat stopped, who was lost. If we could have got all the plans overboard many would have been saved. The shrieks of the women and children were enough to appall the stoutest heart.

The Wawaset

Is a total wreck. She lies in about 12 feet of water at high tide, with her bow stuck fast on the gravel bottom, at about four or five feet low tied. The Wawaset was 129 feet long, 26 feet wide, 9 feet depth of hold, and was 328.90 tons, custom-house measurement. She was fitted up to suit both freight and passengers. She was built in 1863 at Wilmington, Del., for the purpose of running fruit from Duck creek and Smyrna to Philadelphia, but was chartered by the government and brought to this river to be used as a transport for troops..

The ferry company purchased her from the government, and she had been used on the line between this city and Cone river for freight and passengers. Last spring she was completely overhauled on the way at Baltimore, a saloon cabin put on her upper deck aft, new furnished and newly upholstered and painted throughout, making her one of the most convenient as well as stanch boats on the river. Captain Wood is an experienced seaman and the full corps of officers and men are old and careful hands at steamboating.

No one can give any information as to how the fire originated, but all agree that it started in the boiler room below about her machinery, and that in two or three minutes all about midships was on fire, the flames bursting up through the decks and gangway, thus cutting off all communication, between the stern and after parts of the boat. In less than twenty-five minutes from the time the fire broke out the steamer was destroyed. As the windows and doors were all open the draft was intense, and the doomed boat was soon a sheet of flames.

The List of the Officers

Of the boat is as follows: John R. Wood, captain; Robert Nash, engineer; J.W. Wheeler, clerk; Robert Gravett, mate; John W. Boswell, pilot; and Samuel Nash, 2d engineer. There were also four deck hands, two firemen, one steward, one cook and the chambermaid. One of the deck hands and the chambermaid of the number mentioned were lost.

Mr. Samuel Nash, assistant engineer, swam ashore with an old man before he returned and saved his father. He does not know the name of the old gentleman, but describes him as short and stout.

Mr. Robert Nash, the chief engineer, states that the scene of terror among the women and children exceeds anything he ever witnessed in his experience of thirty years steamboat engineering; that the situation was such that it was utterly impossible to do anything to save them more than was done; that the fear of the women of the fire caused them to jump pell-mell into the water. He thinks several of the children were burned to death.

The Insurance of the Wawaset

Amounts to \$25,000, distributed as follows:--Insurance company of North America, Philadelphia, \$2,500; Phoenix, of Hartford, \$5,000; Virginia Fire and Marine Insurance company, of Richmond, \$2,500; Aetna of Hartford, \$5,000; Atlantic, of New York, \$5,000; Potomac, of Georgetown, \$5,000.

Scenes at the Wharf Today

By early morn the news of the terrible disaster had received general publicity, and, either to gratify curiosity or to receive intelligence of friends known to be on board, thousands flocked to the wharf. The stern-Wheel steamer National, a dilapidated craft, which had brought the bodies of the dead to the city, was the object of general observation: groups collected here and there discussing the probable cause of the fire and the fatal results arising from it. The early boats from Alexandria brought up hundreds each trip to augment the already expectant and excited multitude. Women, and men, walked to and fro with a distracted look, awaiting anxiously the arrival of some further details from the holocaust. Toward eight o'clock the crowd became so great as to render it necessary to close the large gates of the wagon entrance to the Alexandria boats, and without stood a packed assembly of men, women, and children, waiting, aye, many waiting for tidings which would pierce the heart.

The Dead Bodies

The bodies of the dead were placed in a small wooden house on the company's wharf, on a wide wooden platform. Cold in death, at 8 o'clock this morning, lay six bodies, four having been previously removed. The most touching appeal to the sympathetic was perhaps the body of a little girl not over two years of age who lay in the center. Around its mouth played a smile, and the features were most perfect in composure. A wet sheet covered the bodies, and as they lay motionless awaiting identification, it reminded one of the morgue of those cities whose daily calamities require such a depository. Two policemen guarded the door, but admitted all to view the remains who had reason to believe they had relatives or friends on the ill-fated boat. Almost every moment women passed in, and raised slowly the sheets which concealed from public gaze the distorted features of the dead, and breathed a sign of relief when the inspection developed that thus far they had reason to hope for the safety of those dear ones in whom they were most interested. The office of the Potomac Ferry Company was also besieged, and almost incessantly new inquiring parties arrived, who were given the fullest information in possession of the company's agents.

The Dead

At 11 o'clock there were two bodies of the women and three of the children laying at the wharf. One of the former was recognized as that of Patsy Sands, but the other one is unknown. Capt. Wood called to see if he could identify it, and thinks she belongs to the neighborhood of Smith's landing, but does not know her name. All the children have been identified except one. The appearance of the bodies has changed very much since morning, being nearly black in the face, with evident signs of mortification. The body of the woman unidentified is dressed in a dark striped muslin dress, with breastpin and eardrops of gold, has dark hair, and appears to be a middle-aged woman.

About 10 o'clock Mr. Henry Lee, undertaker, sent a coffin and removed the remains of Patsy Sands to his place on Maryland avenue for the purpose of embalming the body previous to sending it home to her friends in Currioman, Westmoreland county, Va. Her relatives are prominent and wealthy people, and one of her brothers keeps a large store in Essex county, Virginia.

Bodies Recognized

About 9:30 o'clock Mahala Fleet, colored, came up on the steamer Georgeanna and recognized one of the colored children as hers, and soon after another one was removed by Mr. R.W. Barker, undertaker, but the name of the child or its parents could not be learned.

Dr. Hartigan arrived at the wharf about 10 o'clock with the view of holding an inquest, but as the disaster took place outside of the jurisdiction of the District, has not yet determined what to do. In the meantime he will issue certificates of burial to the friends of the deceased and hold the investigation afterwards.

A Mission of Mercy

Captain Hollingshead, of the steamer Arrow, would have dispatched his boat early this morning to the scene of the terrible disaster, had it not been that he had engaged the boat to convey the soldiers and sailors orphan children on a free excursion to Mount Vernon. He, however, got the Charlotte Vanderbilt in readiness and left for the scene of the disaster about 12 o'clock today to render any aid in his power to sufferers and bring up both the dead and living who may be found in the vicinity; also to take down persons who desire to look for the bodies of their deceased friends, and care for them. He will return about 6 or 7 o'clock this evening.

An Artist on Hand

An artist of the New York Graphic arrived at the wharf, in company with Col. Hinton, the correspondent, and sketched the scene of the bodies at the 7th street wharf. He left on the Vanderbilt to take sketches of the scene of the disaster and the wreck.

A Household Wreck

The crushing blow that wiped nearly a whole family out of existence in the case of Officer Reed, of the Metropolitan Police, appears to have been even more sweeping in its effect than first reported. Mr. Reed not only loses his wife, three children and niece, Bettie Reed, but also an aunt, Miss Julia Kelley, whose name appears elsewhere among the victims. The Mrs. Reed who perished on the Wawaset, was his second wife, to whom he had been married only about a year, and who at the time of her death was near confinement.

An Affecting Incident

Among the victims was Mr. George Cook, grocer, 7th street southwest, between D and E. He had two little children with him, and while he was struggling in the water making a fight for life, he was seen holding his youngest child to the surface crying "Oh my God, save my baby!" It was supposed that the older child had already perished. There was a report that Mr. Cook was subsequently seen alive on the shore, but there has been nothing received to confirm the rumor, and it is probable that he and his two children all perished.

A Sad Death

The Miss Marbury who was lost was a daughter of Capt. Leonard Marbury, of Glymont, Md., and was also a relative of the Georgetown Marburys. She held a clerkship in the Treasury Department, and is described as a young lady of many attractions and accomplishments.

Why So Many Women and Children Were Lost

It may seem strange that so many women and children were upon the Wawaset, as she was not running as an excursion boat and was making only her regular trip to Cone river and intermediate landings; but it seems that quite a number of families were seeking country resorts for the heated and sickly term during the present month. There were therefore comparatively few male passengers on board, and the females, without experience to guide them, and not knowing what to do in the emergency, were capable of little more than frantic but useless efforts to save the lives of their children.

Arrival of the Keyport

The excitement, which had nearly quieted down in the vicinity of the wharf, became aroused about half-past twelve o'clock, when the United States mail steamer Keyport was seen off Alexandria. Quite a crowd gathered on the wharf of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac railroad company, and in order to keep back the surging multitude the gates had to be closed and guarded with policemen. Expectation, which ran high, was quieted upon her arrival and the fact being known that she brought no additional tidings from the scene of the disaster.

Why the Boats Were Useless

The life-boat, which was in the stern of the Wawaset, as soon as the fire gained headway was crowded by excited men, women and children. It was impossible for the officers of the vessel to reach it and lower the same to the water's edge. It finally broke under the weight of those in it, and bulged in the stern, and was swamped. Nearly all who had taken refuge in it were lost. There was a second boat almost as large as the life-boat, which was thrown overboard by the passengers while the steamer was under headway, and only a few were able to reach it. Some of the passengers jumped from the steamer into it, while others who were in the water were drawn in by those already within it. In an attempt to jump into it one passenger was struck by the wheel and sustained slight injuries.

The Origin of the Fire

This seems to be a question of doubt. The Captain thinks it originated in the forward end of the bow, but his opinion conflicts with the statement of others. He thinks sparks from the smoke-box were blown into the hold, and coming in contact with the dry wood easily ignited into flames and the boat being almost as dry as a tinder was soon ignited. Taking all the statements published, it is generally conceded the fire broke out in the hold amidships, and spread with alarming rapidity. From the time of the discovery of the fire, the boat was burnt to the main deck and water's edge within less than twenty minutes – indeed, as the engineer told a reporter of The Star, “in less time than I can give you my statement.”

Anxious Enquirers

The steamer Keyport, Captain Carter, arrived here about 12:30 from Fredericksburg, and Captain Carter states that he tendered to Mr. Howison, president of the Potomac Ferry company, who came up with him from Fredericksburg to Alexandria the use of one of his boats belonging to the lower Potomac steamboat company, to render any assistance in his power to the friends of the deceased persons, but that Captain Howison did not think it necessary to send another boat down, as Captain Gedney was at the scene of the disaster and would attend to all that was necessary. As President Howison knew but very little of the extent of the disaster and only what was told him by the passengers on the Keyport,

considerable dissatisfaction was manifested by those who were anxious to hasten down to hunt for their friends. Captain Hollingshead, who had generously tendered his services to pilot the Vanderbilt down, of course then declined to go with her. Mr. Howison had not arrived in this city at 2 o'clock, but Captain Carter, of the Keyport, decided to keep up her fires until his arrival, which is anxiously looked for by many distressed relatives of passengers on the Wawaset.

Heedlessness of the Passengers

The excitement which existed can be judged from the fact that the boat had nearly five hundred life preservers aboard, and only two were used – one placed by Mr. Emerson upon a small child (his daughter), and one which he used himself. They were both saved. Mr. Emerson felt so grateful for his preservation by its means, that he took it with him to Alexandria, and said to several friends who congratulated him upon his lucky escape, that he would keep it as long as he lived.

The last colored child is supposed to have been identified. An old colored lady called at two o'clock and said, "fore God, it is Aunt Betsy's child." She immediately made off, no one knew wither. She said it belonged to Aunt Betsy, in Uniontown, and must have made hast to inform her.

No Blame Attached to the Officers of the Boat

From the statements of those on board the boat, it seems that the officers stood firmly by their parts and did everything in their power to save lives and allay excitement. On all sides their conduct has been commended, and no blame for the disaster seems to attach itself to any of them.

The Passenger List

No names of either the saved or lost can be further ascertained until the arrival of the tugs, which are expected to return at 7 o'clock this evening. The passenger list, as well as the manifest of the vessel was destroyed, the clerk being unable to save it on account of the flames being in close proximity to his office.

Identified

The remaining colored child has been identified as the child of Malinda Day, residing in Uniontown.