

The Evening Star, August 13, 1873, p. 2
Carelessness on Steamers

As throwing some light possibly on the cause of the *Wawaset* disaster, we may relate an incident which lately occurred on the Delaware river. A party of Washingtonians on their way to Cape May took passage at Newcastle on the steamer *Ironsides*, running between Philadelphia and the Cape. Some time after going on board, two gentlemen of the party had occasion to go by or near the engine room, when they discovered the fact that neither the engineer or his assistant were at their post – that the engine was, in fact, running itself. How long this state of things had existed when they made the discovery, they had no means of knowing, but regarding the circumstances as singular, to say the least, they concluded to take some note of time and see how long it would continue. Twenty minutes passed, by the watch, without the return to his post of either absent officer, when the gentlemen referred to became somewhat uneasy for the safety of the boat, and sought the captain to make complaint of such criminal neglect of duty. At first that official was disposed to treat them as meddlers, interfering in matters with which they had no business; but they speedily gave him to understand that it was their business, that their friends and families were on board, and that they were interested in their safety to an extent that justified the laying of the facts before the government for official action. It is needless to add that one of the missing officers was soon hunted up and placed at his post, where he staid the remainder of the trip.

Now, where there is such neglect on the part of the engineer, it is safe to assume that there will be equal remissness on the part of the firemen and other subordinate employees; and it takes no stretch of the imagination to conclude that if from any cause fire had caught on the *Ironsides* that trip the loss of life would have been as great as on the *Wawaset*, and the origin of the fire as mysterious as that which destroyed that ill-fated vessel, with the usual verdict of “nobody to blame.”