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The Wawaset Tragedy

Not since the terrible explosion at the Arsenal years ago, carrying death to so many families in this city, has the community had such a shock as that experienced through the loss of the steamer *Wawaset* with its precious freight of loved ones – mothers, wives, daughters, sons, husbands, the hope, pride and support of so many homes.

It is too soon to fix the exact blame for this awful disaster, but there is already the usual painful tale of unavailable life-preservers, boats that could not be launched, fire apparatus that would not serve the purpose on the emergency, and a hopeless waste of life almost within a stone's throw of the shore.

It seems, however, that the steamer was not beached in shoal water before the fire had full possession, as was first reported, but though steam was put upon her when the fire was discovered, the engine suddenly stopped working through some derangement of the machinery by the fire, when the boat touched the shore in four or five feet water, subsequently, under the slackened impetus it seems probable that she did not ground at that point, but floated into deeper water before she finally sunk. This would account for the fact that so many were drowned. Another reason why so many women and children perished was that they were huddled aft, and were there exposed to the full force of the flames, as the strong draft carried the fire in that direction. The fire spread so rapidly in the middle of the steamer as soon to cut off all communication from the stern to the bows.

There were some five hundred life preservers on board, but they were in the gangways on the main deck, and few of them were reached. This shows the necessity that some more available place for their storage should be made, as well as that some better life saving apparatus than the usual boat should be provided for steamers. Two or three rafts, of some light material, that could have been readily dropped into the water without possibility of capsizing, would have saved every life on the *Wawaset*.