

The Evening Star, September 2, 1873, p. 2

The report of the board of investigation on the burning of the steamer *Wawaset*, first given to the public in yesterday's Star, contains some good suggestions as to precautions against similar disasters in future, such as guarding against the charring and firing of wood-work by the heat of the boilers, and providing for the supervision of the government inspectors over the drill and discipline of steamboat crews. The inspectors of the *Wawaset* are commended in the report, and it is agreed that they were correct in their certificates as to the substantial character of the boat and her machinery and the thoroughness of her equipments in accordance with law. The question arises, however, whether it was not the business of the inspectors to ascertain if the officers of the boat were licensed according to law. If that is not a part of their duty it should be made so. The report seems to have ignored the strong testimony going to show the grounds on which the company or officers of the boat had reason to believe they were entitled to carry one hundred and fifty passengers. The Baltimore American referring to the report says that in the case of Engineer Nash he "is made the scapegoat for the sins of his employers and superiors." The American forgets that in all such cases public opinion in this country demands that somebody be "made an example of." Without arguing the question of the culpability of the officers of the *Wawaset*, one or all of them—that will be fixed by the coming judicial inquiries—it is safe to say that hundreds of steamers on American waters are daily navigated by men no wiser, no braver, no better qualified for their duties and no better fitted to meet a great emergency. This last mentioned test—fitness to meet a great emergency—is one which steamboat inspectors cannot apply at will, and it is the most important. Yet an inspection of the personnel as well as material of steamboats may do some good, as affording a partial answer, at least, to the important questions of the Philadelphia Ledger, "whether the other passenger boats plying on our rivers are equipped as the law directs, and whether those to whom their management is left are fit persons, or have to perform too many duties, or any extra duties inconsistent with the safety of the crowds of passengers they frequently carry."