PANIC ON A BIG STEAMBOAT.

THE PLYMOUTH ROCK DISABLED IN A HEAVY SEA OFF THE ROCK.

Great Fear Averted by the Nearness of Gray's Home. Five Saloon Filled with Steam and the Engineers Stopped—Women and Children Trampled on in the Confusion.

The steamboat Plymouth Rock left Pier 3, N. R., at 10 o'clock yesterday morning, on her regular trip to the Long Branch iron pier. The weather was cool, and only about 500 passengers were on board. The most of these were in the main saloon. The passage was pleasant until the vessel had passed through the Narrows. Nothing after that many of the women became seasick. It was after 11½ o'clock before the boat arrived off Sandy Hook, and there she found a heavy sea sweeping in toward the shore. Her course turned her to roll in the trough of the waves, and there was a great deal of seasickness on board. The City of Richmond, which also runs to the Long Branch pier, left this morning at 10 o'clock, and turned back after about two hours of the seas. She had landed her passengers at the pier inside of Sandy Hook, where they could take the cars for Long Branch. Capt. Edward P. Curtis of the Plymouth Rock, however, relied upon the stanchness of his boat, and pushed forward for the pier.

The Plymouth Rock seemed to bear the strain well. Notwithstanding the rolling of the boat, the great majority of the passengers gathered in the main saloon near the piano to hear the music. The piano was a dozen feet in front of the structure which encloses the machinery. Through the glazed front of this structure one could see the steam chest in its hooped wooden jacket, and just beyond it the rise and fall of the great piston rod and its walking beam attachments. Almost the end of this structure, as well as near the piano, were gathered the passengers. A piano solo had just been applauded, and Prof. Salvatore di Mattao was beating time for a quartet of singers, when a crashing sound was heard, accompanied by the roar of escaping steam. Those that looked up toward the glazed partition just referred to saw that the enclosure containing the machinery was filled with steam, but before any of them could think twice there was a more immediate cause of alarm. The saloon was filled with steam. This was five minutes before noon. Then followed a scene of wild panic. From the cracks in the doors and windows of the enclosure in the middle of the saloon volumes of steam hissed.

"It felt like Niagara," said Pastor J. J. White of the Fourth Street Methodist Church, Williamsburgh. "I was being cooked with the steam."

Men, women and children rushed forward toward the saloon doors, but the doors were closed. Back of them they had seen the steam issue, which was enveloping them. Nearly four hundred people were crowded together. The cries of children were drowned by the shrieks of women and the cries and angry exclamations of men. The sliding doors were quickly opened, and the crowd was a mass of struggling humanity. Women and children were thrown to the floor and trampled in the rush for life. The saloon windows were broken, and many men found egress to the air through them. It could not be learned that any women or children were injured through the windows or outs the deck. Life preservers were called for. There was difficulty in getting them down from the ceiling, where they were held by stout wires, and when they were obtained they became, in many cases, the property of the strongest. In the midst of the terror robbery was committed.

"One lady," said the Rev. Mr. White, "had $25 in a satchel. When the excitement was over she found a thimble and a pood of thread that the satchel had contained under a seat in the saloon. The satchel and the money were gone. A package of money was snatched from a young colored woman. I lost my satchel, umbrella, and cane, but I caught a man carrying them off, and took them away from him."

Mr. White is a muscular man, above the average height.

"I heard," he continued, "some persons praying to the Virgin Mary and others praying to Jesus. A lady told me that she got two life preservers, one after the other, and each time a man took it away from her. I saw a lady lying across one of the benches on the saloon floor. I think the officers did what they could, but they couldn't do much. I can hear now the prayers of women: 'Help me; oh, Lord, help me!' and piteous appeals for men's assistance to put on their life preservers. I can hardly wait for the sermon. I felt as if I should faint. I felt I said to myself: 'Probably I'll have to go down under the waves.'

"I heard that a child had its arm broken in the rush, but I do not know that the report was true. Many women suffered rough treatment, but none, so far as I could learn, was seriously injured."

Miss Augusta Greening, daughter of H. Greening, a dry goods merchant at 145 and 145 Woodward avenue, Detroit, who was going to Long Branch in company with her father, said: "I was with my father, near the piano when the accident occurred. I heard a sharp sound and a loud, continuous noise. Immediately afterward I was pushed one side and fell to the floor. My father did all he could to protect me. I was trampled upon by people run over me and I could not get up. My foot was lamed by somebody that fell on me, and my wrist was badly hurt."

Miss Greening is a delicate-looking young woman. Her wrist, when a SUN reporter saw her, was bound up, and she was pale from excitement and pain.

"My father," she said, "finally succeeded in lifting me up, and we got out through one of the doors and were then safe. I thought the people would never cease trampling over me."

"Some of the officers said to me," said Mr. George Gourie of Newark, N. J., who, with his wife and three children, was on board, "that it was only the bursting of a steam pipe, but I told him that it was the bursting of 500 people, and that is the true description of the accident. I do not think my daughter is seriously injured, but I cannot tell yet."

THE CAUSE OF THE PANIC.

The cause of the panic was, in fact, only the breaking of a steam pipe, but the steam pipe was twenty-two inches in diameter, and the explosion in which the passengers in the saloon were not burned by the vapor is that the great volume of escaping steam found free vent up through the six-foot aperture in the upper deck made to accommodate the walking-beam attachments. Otherwise it would certainly have forced its way through the saloon into the saloon in fatal volumes. The accident was not an explosion. The steam pipe that broke was seven-eighths of an inch thick, and an inspection of the breech showed no flaw or previous crack. The cause of this breach was as follows:

The boilers are placed on the guards, that is to say beyond the hull of the vessel, on either side. The instant before the accident water dashed over the prow of the boat, and the boat rocked to starboard or shoreward. The theory of officers is that as the boat rolled to starboard it met a rising mass of water on the same side. The result of this was that an enormous lifting strain was brought to bear on the outstretching guard beneath the boiler. The guard yielded slightly, and the boiler was raised. This would throw the top of the boiler in toward the centre of the boat. From the top of the boiler arises the steam pipe, which stretches half across the upper deck and then descends to the steam chest. This immense iron pipe would naturally share in the motion of the boiler and machinery, but to prevent just such an accident as happened yesterday a "slip joint" is made in the pipe. A slip joint is, in construction, similar to the joint of a stove pipe. It is intended that one part of the pipe shall slide in and out of a corresponding part. The joint is made steam tight by an ingenious arrangement of the packing. Sufficient motion was given to the steam pipe, however, by the lifting of the boiler that, notwithstanding the slip joint, the strain was caused in the pipe just below the throttle valve, and just above the steam chest. This point is below where the pipes from the two boilers unite, and so the strain from both boilers found weak. A volume of water and the vapor from a volcano shot up through the walking beam opening, and those who saw the resident from Sandy Hook had no doubt that the boiler had exploded. The steam chest is the large cavity between the steam valves through the automatic valves into the cylinder. All of the steam that escaped had to pass through the throttle valve.

The chief engineer, John A. Sherman, was after the main deck when he heard the first indication of danger. He says it was a slight, dry crack, accompanied with the sound of escaping steam. "I ran to the engine room," said he, "and just as I got there I heard a louder crack, and the steam came down from above in volumes. I guessed pretty nearly what had happened, and in any event, in order to take no chances, I closed the throttle valve. Just as I expected. This shut off the escaping steam. Had the break occurred above the throttle instead of below it, the fright would have continued longer, because all the steam from both boilers would have escaped. As soon as I had closed the throttle I went down on deck, because the fire room was filled with steam and we could not get in there, to lift the safety valves and thus let the steam out of the boilers. Then I hurried up into the saloon, and helped to allay the excitement thereby assuring the passengers that the danger had passed."

When the frightened passengers got out on deck they soon regained courage, notwithstanding the roar of steam from the safety valves. The second fright was caused by the drifting of the blue steamboat toward the shore, but the tug Germania, which was not far off, was whistled to for assistance before the steam was all spent, and she arrived in about twenty minutes. She had, in fact, started to render assistance on sight of the cloud of steam that had gone upward from the Plymouth Rock. She had all she could do to hold the big steamboat off shore. The Schuyler and the City of Richmond were soon in the neighborhood, and thereafter there was little feeling of danger. The Plymouth Rock was towed by the Schuyler and Barrows into still water. Then the City of Richmond was lashed alongside of her, a gang plank was shifted to connect the two, and the passengers boarded the Richmond with their baggage. The Richmond then proceeded on her regular trip to Long Branch. They were brought to Pier 3, North River, and landed. The Plymouth Rock was towed to the foot of East Twenty-third and slipped for repairs. Andrew L. Miller, agent and part owner of the Plymouth Rock, said last night that the damage done to the boat would be trifling. It is estimated that it will cost a thousand dollars to repair it.

Mr. Andrew Reed, shipwright and caulker, says that some year after the war, when he was employed at the Navy Yard, Gravesend Bay, he helped rebuild the Plymouth Rock. Then New York was in 1863, and the boat was launched in March. The timbers of her hull were all removed and, after inspection, she was pronounced seaworthy. The new machinery was put in that year, and the vessel sailed for Long Branch on July 4. Again, last fall, she was taken to the Navy Yard, and it required four months and a half to repair her. It required sixty-seven new beams, 134 flooring timbers, and an entire set of new sections. This overhauling lasted her, with the exception of a few houses on the iron frames forward and aft, and a few outpatches or patches in the hull. Last year, there were three lengths of the hull and 13 skin were taken out, and a new one was put in.

"I consider her hull," said Mr. Reed, "as strong, if not stronger than any excursion vessel on the coast."

Chief Engineer Sherman, and his first assistant, William Lenahan, were burned on their faces and hands with the steam, but not seriously. Mr. Sherman says the Plymouth Rock was carrying twenty-eight pounds of steam, and he thinks that the explosion was caused by the pipe being twenty-five pounds.

Capt. Curtis ran from a mile gun on the after deck to the engine room with a rifle crossed and crying for her to stop. He took her by the hand and led her to my office. Soon afterward he found a man looking wildly for his little daughter in the main saloon deck. He sent him to his office, and it turned out that they were father and daughter. The Captain says that although the Plymouth Rock was built in 1863, every timber in her is sound. Every important timber in her was hewed into shape two years ago, by Mr. Reed, and these timbers, which are perfectly sound, are yet preserved in the hull of the Steamboat Inspectors.

The Plymouth Rock was built for the Stonington line, owned by the Narragansett Steamship Company, and took Sam Sloan, for whom she, in 1864 built, James Fisk, Jr., and Jay Gould bought her and fitted her up in princely style. Next Mr. Joseph H. Foster bought her for $65,000 for Jarvis A. Palmer, and ran her successfully. On the dissolution of that firm she was sold to G. W. Schofield, who is now her owner. Schofield, it is said, conceived the project of sending the Plymouth Rock to Europe, but he never carried his plan into execution.

THE STATEMENT OF CAPT. CURTIS.

Capt. E. P. Curtis of the Plymouth Rock has been a steamboat captain in New York waters for fifty years, and for nearly all of the time since 1857 he has been Captain of the Plymouth Rock. He said last evening: "We were off Sandy Hook, and it was 11½ A. M. when the steam pipe burst. I was in the pilot house. A puff of steam came up amidships. The engines were stopped by the accident. My officers, with myself, set to work, after ascertaining that the damage was slight, to quiet the fears of the passengers. We had 2,500 life preservers on board, besides the wooden floats. Seven boats are also carried. We have 85 men drilled to certain things in case of a panic, and their actions were perfectly satisfactory."

"Did you hear any truth in the statements of some of the passengers that men took away life preservers from women?" the Captain was asked.

Capt. Curtis smiled and said: "The officers took the life preservers from the people, women and men alike, everybody, without any discretion, I regret to say, but I think there was not the slightest danger to any one. This was done to prevent the alarm from spreading, and I think the movement was a good one, judging from its results. My engineer, Mr. Sherman, was the only man hurt, and he had a slight steam burn.

"The City of Richmond came up to us without signalling, and, fortunately, two tugs were at hand to tow us up the bay. The passengers from the Plymouth Rock were transferred to the City of Richmond off Staten Island, on the starboard side of the Narrows. The passengers who demanded their passage money back received it, and those who did not got it may receive it at the offices of the company."

Capt. Curtis and other officers of the boat declined positively that any child suffered a broken arm in the panic.

INCIDENTS AS RELATED BY PASSENGERS.

Julius Roth, jailer of the Tombs, was on the Plymouth Rock. He said last evening that just before the accident occurred he was relating to Ticket Agent Thomas Krouped and two other officers of the boat a dream which he had had, that it was on the Plymouth Rock, when she suddenly blew up. "Just then a hissing was heard, and I asked what it was," Mr. Roth continued. "The officers laughed at me, and said that I needn't be frightened because of my dream. The hissing grew louder, and then a dense volume of steam burst from the panels and filled the saloon."

Mr. Roth describes the noise of the explosion as having been like that of the blowing up of a mine in a trench.

"Men ran wildly about," Mr. Roth said, "tearing down the life preservers and buckling them on themselves, without a thought for the women or children. The deck hands acted like cowards. Some of them snatched life preservers away from the passengers. Nearly all the musicians seized life preservers, except some of the singers, who shouted, 'We are not going down! Keep cool, Nov. ladies, come this way, and see the men make fools of themselves.' This little speech had a wonderful effect. One of the officers called for one band to play, and it was funny to see the big musicians striking up their music, each man with one, and some with two or three life preservers on. One of them had tied a life preserver to his brass horn. After the accident the floors were littered with valises, umbrellas, hats, and other articles."

Mr. Andrews, a merchant in Chicago, who was on the boat, said that the life preservers were so tightly wedged between the seats overhead that the slats had to be torn off before the life preservers could be got down. A woman in Mr. Andrews's company, he said, snatched at a life preserver in the hands of one of the uniformed employees of the boat, and falling to get it from him rushed through the saloon door, and was mounting the guard rail, to jump overboard. He followed her and dragged her back, when she sank fainting on the deck. I then tore off my shoes and coat, expecting to have to take to the water, as I heard cries of 'Fire!' in the saloon."

Mr. George Gourie of Newark, N. J., who, with his wife and three children, was on board, said that the life preservers were firmly held in their places, and the slats holding them had to be torn away. "Several of the panic-stricken musicians," he said, "shouted at the top of their voices that the boat was on fire. One of them attempted to get through a window with a brass instrument, and succeeded in fairly, but after the excitement, he had to be pulled out by his comrades."

Mrs. Gourie said that she was in the ladies' saloon when the panic broke out. She made several efforts to get life preservers for herself and children, but was rudely pushed aside by the panic-stricken men. At last her little son Willie, 12 years old, got a life preserver and insisted upon putting it on his mother.

Mr. George Lampardier, 126 Broadway was a passenger. He said that the panic was one of the greatest he had ever witnessed. "The deck hands," he continued, "were the first to get hold of life preservers and put them on. They told the passengers that there was no danger after that fact was plainly evident."

Mr. George W. Hall of 312 West Twelfth street says that he saw one of the waiters encircled by four life preservers. He had heard that an infant's arm had been broken.

Mr. Thomas Ambrose of Fort Bragg, Cal., who was on his way to Long Branch, said: "On the lower deck I found great difficulty in getting at the life preservers. They were in racks on the roof and could not be reached from the deck floor. They were fastened in such a way that they could not be got down. I saw a number of people try to secure them. They did not succeed until two men came along and tore down the racks."

Mr. Owen M. Cabe of Washington, D. C., said that he heard that a woman was badly scalded by escaping steam.

Mrs. Sheridan, who was with her husband, said: "I saw one man jump overboard. He had a life preserver on, I think."

"Did you see anything of him again?" she was asked.

"No; that was the last I saw or heard of him."

A Farmer's Daughter Missing.

Miss Eva Powell, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Charles T. Powell, a well-to-do farmer of Deer Park, has been missing from her home and friends since Tuesday of last week, under peculiar circumstances, and it is feared that she has met with foul play. Her disappearance was first noticed by her father on Thursday morning, he being then about to start for Deer Park, expecting to return home on Friday. She did not visit her friends, and was not seen in the city by any one who knew her. She had about $20 with her.

An Explosion in Brooklyn.

A still at Pratt's oil works at the foot of North Twelfth street, Brooklyn, exploded early yesterday morning, causing about $1,000 damage. The explosion of the gas took place in the still called the agitator. Adjacent to the still called the agitator. Adjacent to the still called the agitator. Adjacent to