Gazelle disaster

TERRIBLE ACCIDENT!!!

Steamboat Gazelle blown up this morning at Canemah—twenty-three killed and twenty-five wounded!!!

After a portion of our edition had been struck off, we received the following from Willamette Falls Co.'s steam-drawer Gazelle. We stopped the press, and despatched a messenger to the scene of this melancholy disaster, for the purpose of obtaining the particulars. Our reporter gathered the following:

The Willamette Falls Co.'s new steamer Gazelle left her wharf this morning at half past six o'clock, and had just hauled at Canemah, at fifteen minutes before seven, when a terrific explosion of her boilers took place, blowing up her upper works, cabin and all.

The following is a list of the killed and wounded so far as could be ascertained when our reporter left, at a quarter p. m.:

LIST OF KILLED.

David Page, of San Francisco, the Co.'s superintendent.
Thomas Marshall, of Michigan.
David C. Miller, of Albany, O. T.
John Bateman, deck hand.
Joseph Hatch, of Michigan, surveyor.
Meriwel Hatch, deck hand.
John Daily, cabin steward.
John Clemmens, pilot.
David Failing, of Portland.
Dr. Wentworth, Milwaukie, O. T.
Jacob Kamm, of Oregon City.
Joshua Wilkin, of Salem.
John K. Miller, deck hand.
J. M. Fudge, juror of Wallamet.
Mr. Magnes, of Lacreole, O. T.
Mr. Hill, of Albany, O. T.
Daniel Lane.
Spanish boy, name unknown.

Missing.

Charles Kamm, formerly of the steamer Wapiteach.
David McLane, and others whose names were not ascertained.

Wounded, Scalded, &c.

Capt. Hereford, of Gazelle, scalded.
Mr. Hereford, scalded.

...and thought there would be in our Territory who would control the entire principle allowing Women to Vote in Territorial E...
Mr. Bradford and M... lighted three durations, the children being duly ...tonch the name as who ...
The clause prohibiting ... was rejected by a vote ...
The bill as amended ... whole, was reported to ... Council by the following ...
Ayes—Hatch, Bigelow ...
Nays—Pratt.
Mr. Bigelow gave notice ... introduce at an early ... date.
Mr. Tappan withdrew during a bill locating ... and it was deemed ... expedient at this ...
Council Bill, No. 2 ... Territory—was read a third ...
First reading of House ... act to provide for the ... ing of the county and T... ...
H. B. No. 49—an act ... of the peace for Ch... ...
Council and Bill passed.
Message from the H... passage of a memorial ... Harbor may be created ...
On motion, rules suspended and ...
Consideration of Mr. Bo... Members and Pa... as thus amended, passed ...
First reading of H... relative to prosecuting ... pended, bill read a second ... and passed third reading ...
Adjourned till to-morrow ...

WEDNESDAY

Council met pursuant ...
Absent, Moore, Cuff ...

The worst steamboat accident on the Willamette River happened on April 8, 1854, in Canemah, just above the Willamette Falls (now part of Oregon City). At seven o'clock in the morning, workers were loading freight onto the *Gazelle* when the vessel's two boilers exploded, killing twenty-four of the sixty people aboard and injuring approximately thirty others. Many of the survivors suffered scalding burns and broken bones, including the *Gazelle*'s captain, Robert Hereford.

A coroner's jury found chief engineer Moses Toner guilty of "gross and culpable negligence . . . in knowingly carrying more steam than was safe, and neglecting to keep sufficient water in the boilers." Some witnesses reported that Toner fled the *Gazelle* moments before the explosion and escaped prosecution by leaving Oregon Territory.

The *Gazelle*, a two-engine sidewheeler built by Page, Bacon & Company, was owned by the Willamette Falls Canal, Milling and Transportation Company of Linn City (now West Linn, about eleven miles south of Portland). It had been launched less than a month earlier and was on a route from Willamette Falls to Corvallis. After the accident, the company sold the wreck of the *Gazelle*, which was rebuilt as the *Senorita*.

While authorities and newspapers blamed the engineer for Gazelle's explosion, one well-known boat builder and businessman, Jacob Kamm, suspected poor boiler construction was at fault. Early steamboat travel in the West could be hazardous, and boiler explosions were one of the most common causes of accidents.

Written by Kathy Tucker

Further Reading:

"Explosion of the Gazelle," *Oregon Statesman*, April 18, 1854.

"The Cause of the Explosion of the *Gazelle*," *Oregon Statesman*, April 24, 1854, 4.

Corning, Howard McKinley. *Willamette Landings: Ghost Towns of the River*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1947.

Mills, Randall. *Sternwheelers up Columbia*. Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1947.

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