

## Between a Rock and a Hard Place

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In October 1836 the *Royal Tar* was a new steamer carrying a circus, a menagerie (a collection of living wild animals), a brass band, and passengers from St. John, New Brunswick, to Portland, Maine. Some of the animals were horses, camels, lions, an elephant, and a tiger. Because of stormy seas, the *Royal Tar* stopped at Eastport. It stopped again behind Fox Island (Vinalhaven) in Penobscot Bay. On October 25, while the ship was anchored off Fox Island Thoroughfare, the pilot's son discovered that the boilers were dry. He told the second engineer, but the man did not believe him. The empty boilers got red hot and started a fire in the elephant's stall. The fire was soon out of control.

The stern (rear) boat was lowered, and when it was filled with men, the wind blew it to shore. The revenue cutter *Veto* sent a gig (small rowboat) to rescue the passengers, but the pilot was afraid to get too close to the burning ship and turned around. Several men build a raft out of deck boards, but just as they were ready to leave the ship, the elephant fell overboard, smashed the raft, and drowned the men.

At the same time, the *Royal Tar's* captain took charge of the *Veto*. The captain of the *Veto* was afraid to bring the cutter close to the burning steamer because the *Veto* had gunpowder stored on deck. Captain Reed brought the cutter close enough to save many of the passengers. Almost 100 people were on the *Royal Tar*. Thirty-two of the people and all of the animals died. The *Royal Tar* finally sank.

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