

Captain Reed's Letter

Captain Reed was the captain of the *Royal Tar*. The letter he wrote to the owners of the steam boat was printed in several papers.

On October 25th he wrote, Dear Sir. I am sorry to tell you the *Royal Tar* was destroyed by fire about 2 p.m. yesterday about two miles from Fox Islands (Vinalhaven). The fireman had accidentally let the steam down (the water go out of the boiler), so they had to anchor, but the area around the boiler caught fire. They started using the pump to put the fire out, but the smoke was so bad the men had to leave the boiler room. When they realized they couldn't put the fire out, I took one boat and 16 passengers took the other. The other boat headed for shore.

I stayed near the steam boat for awhile, then started to sail to the nearest island because of the wind. I saw a schooner coming toward us. It was a small cutter from Belfast. I boarded her and put all my passengers on her, then I returned to the steam boat, which was all in flames and managed to save about 40 people. I think about 25 were lost. I don't want to blame anybody. I think it was an accident.

We're hoping to get a schooner tomorrow for the passengers. I hope you will send the deck passengers to Boston for free because they have lost everything. So have I. I didn't even save my money. There was no time to think of anything except living. Mr. Waite, from Portland, barely escaped with his life. He was hanging on to the stern for about an hour and a half.

We had the caravan (the circus) on board, 6 horses, 1 elephant, lions, etc. The wild beasts burned. The elephant and the horses jumped overboard and I don't know where they went.

I'm going to go back to St. John with the crew as soon as I can. We lost two men and one woman from the crew. If the fire engine had been on the deck, we could have put the fire out. It was a mistake to have the fire engine (pump) below deck.

People have been very kind.

Signed, Thomas Reed

"Particulars of the Loss of the Steamboat Royal Tar." Bangor Daily Whig and Courier 31 Oct. 1836: 46.

[Edited and rewritten for fourth graders by Ann Dodd-Collins]