

STORM ON THE SOUND. STEAMER CONNECTICUT.

[A young man of this city, who was on board the steamer Connecticut on Friday night, last week, writes as follows:]

The steamboat Connecticut, of the Norwich line, left New York for Allyn's Point, Friday evening, 17th inst., at her usual hour. A fresh breeze had been blowing from the eastward since morning, and it was evident long before the boat left her pier that a stormy night was before her. In the face of this prospect, I took passage upon her, because I felt curiosity to see how a steamboat would behave in heavy weather; and supposed, too, that the commander would run no risk whatever, but, in the event of any danger, would go into Hart Island or Huntington, either of which harbors are easy of access, and immediately on the route before entering the broader part of the Sound.

It was dark by the time we fairly passed Hurlgate, and the wind had increased in violence. It blew so strongly even then that it was difficult to maintain an upright position on the deck. At Hart Island we saw the lights of perhaps fifty vessels, which had run in there for safety; but the commander steamed on. Concluding that we should stop at Huntington, I slept soundly until awakened by the noise made by one of the two smoke stacks going overboard. After the loss of this it was unsafe to keep up sufficient heat in the furnaces of that side, because of the danger of setting fire to the upper works of the boat. We were now ten miles beyond Huntington, and exposed to the heavy sea tossed up by the wind coming down the entire length of the Sound. The wind was nearly east, and therefore directly ahead. It had become dangerous to attempt to go about, and Captain Wilcox stood on his course, with just steam enough to give her steerage way, in the hope that the gale would moderate. Soon a huge wave boarded her over the bows, staving her bulwarks, bulkheads and fore hatch; washing as far aft as the ladies' cabin. The storm was assuming a serious look. Every wave now poured tons of water down the open hatchway.

The captain, with two seamen, made an effort to close and secure it with canvas, but a heavy surge swept them from their labor, lodging the captain under the capstan, injuring him so severely that he could hardly keep the deck. The men assisting him narrowly escaped going overboard. The word now came to throw the freight over, and crew and passengers labored with a will to execute the command. Heavy cases of goods, leather, flour, tobacco, and teas went out the gangways as fast at least as ever before. Next, the heavy arched brames, which pass over the upper deck, and constitute the main strength of the boat were broken in the middle, with a stunning crash. The backbone of the vessel was gone. Two more heavy seas would now suffice to break the boat apart and send her to the bottom. She would go down in five minutes, as she lay. If she could be got around she might perhaps be run before the wind, back to Huntington, but it was almost certain loss to try to go about.

The waiters were the first to show fear or betray cowardice. They began to break down the doors of the state rooms of the main saloon, to search for life preservers; then rushed to obtain possession of the boats. Great fellows, six feet tall, were running about, cased in rubber life preservers, wringing their hands and expressing the very natural wish to get ashore.

One passenger offered five hundred dollars for a life preserver. Another sat on the floor of the main saloon, with two preservers around him, a life seat tied to his waist, and a state room door under each arm. Another was flourishing a policy of life assurance for five thousand dollars. How this was to avail him is not evident; but generally, the behavior of those on board was better than could be reasonably expected.

If she would not go about we must go down, and if we went down, nothing would prolong life in the heavy sea and ice-cold water, eight miles from shore. When the captain decided to go about, at whatever risk, the movement was watched with the intense interest of men whose lives hung on its success. Four men were required to steer the laboring vessel. A smoother spot seemed to come along, and the engineer's bell was rung for all the steam that could be given her, and the helm put hard around. If the engine failed now, or the wheel ropes broke, we were cast away. She fell off more and more around into the trough of the sea, and there seemed to lay so long that all hopes of getting around grew cold. Every wave swept across her. But at last, under the whole power of her engine, she came around, and scud before the gale. The danger was passed, and the ten miles between us and Huntington gone rapidly over. We run around the light to an anchor close in shore. Here we found the boats which started in our company.

The Connecticut had just been overhauled, and very considerably strengthened by adding iron braces. She was perhaps as staunch as any of the Sound boats, but they are entirely unfit to encounter the weather to which they are exposed.—They draw only about six feet of water, while they expose an immense surface to the winds and waves. Their guards give the waves a great leverage, as they rise under the sides. All their top hamper could be easily stripped off, and their general construction is frail. Regular ocean steamships ought to be put upon the line. A little sea-going vessel, of one hundred tons, would have laid to safely all through the gale which so hardly used our steamboat.

My curiosity as to the behavior of a steamboat in rough weather being satisfied, I am,

Yours, &c.

Meriden Daily Record ~ April 14, 1869

Captain William Wilcox, formerly captain on the steamers City of Boston and the City of Lawrence, which ply between Norwich and New York, committed suicide by jumping overboard from the City of Boston on her down trip Monday night. He had been much depressed in spirits for some time past, and frequently expressed a desire to be rid of the troubles and vexations of this life. He gave his watch and the keys of his trunks to some friends, with the request that they would give them to his wife. His hat and cane were found on the after deck of the boat. He was fifty-seven years of age and universally respected.

NORWICH AND NEIGHBORHOOD.

ANOTHER SUICIDE.

Capt. Wm. M. Wilcox supposed to have Jumped Overboard from the Steamer City of Boston.

We have to record this morning the suicide of another gentleman, well known here. Capt. Wm. M. Wilcox left here on the steamboat train Monday evening, went on board the steamer City of Boston at New London, and when the boat arrived in New York Tuesday morning was nowhere to be found. He was seen on the boat by several of his acquaintances, and at about eleven o'clock was seen in the forward part of the saloon, on the larboard side, by Mr. Joel Kinne. His cane was found near the stern of the boat, and his hat was picked up on what is called the "fantail." It is supposed that he jumped overboard somewhere in the vicinity of the light boat.

The sad intelligence was conveyed by a dispatch from Capt. Williams, of the City of Boston, to a gentleman in this city, on Tuesday morning, and was soon known about the city. Many at first refused to believe it, but the dispatch silenced all doubts. Speculation was rife as to his motive for the deed, and the fact that two gentlemen so prominent as Capt. Wilcox and Col. Lester should have committed suicide by jumping from the same boat, at nearly the same locality and within a few days of each other, was freely commented on.

About a year ago Capt. Wilcox purchased a farm in North Stonington, to which he retired after disposing of his residence on Laurel Hill. He has lived there since, making occasional visits to Norwich to see his friends and relatives. For some time he has had periods of moodiness, as if brooding over troubles. Last Thursday he came to Norwich with his wife on a visit to his son-in-law, Mr. H. W. Lester. On Sunday his wife went to see some friends at the Trading Cove, returning to her daughter's yesterday. It is supposed that Capt. Wilcox seized the opportunity when she was away and would not be likely to learn of his suicide for some time after it was known publicly, to perform the rash act. His wife had urged him to take a trip to New York, which he had contemplated, with the hope that it would do him good.

Monday afternoon he read a part of the account of the suicide of Col. Lester, on Wednesday night last, and requested his daughter to finish reading it for him. When she had done so he remarked that he wished it had been himself. He spoke several times during the day of his troubled state of mind to his relatives and friends, but we do not learn that any one supposed he intended to commit suicide. Monday evening he rode to the Norwich & Worcester railroad depot with his son-in-law, Mr. Lester, to take the train for New London, and manifested a desire to reach the depot in good time. He gave Mr. Lester his gold watch, saying that if anything happened to him he wished him to keep it. Mr. Lester supposed that he meant that he might fall down in the street and some one might steal the watch from him, as he has been for some time troubled with a weakness in the knees which obliged him to use a cane. At the depot he conversed with Mr. Julius Webb, Alba F. Smith and others, and seemed to be in excellent spirits. He refused to wear his overcoat saying he should not need it and it was noticed made but slight preparations for the trip.

Capt. Wilcox was about fifty-nine years of age. He had spent almost the whole of his life on the Sound. His first experience was on board a regular packet plying between Norwich and New York. For thirty years or more he was employed as pilot and then as captain on Vanderbilt's steamers and on those of the Norwich & New York Transportation Company. Several years since he commanded a steamer running up the Connecticut to Hartford. He was one of Vanderbilt's pilots when the Commodore was running his boats on the Sound, and commanded the Worcester and the Connecticut. He was also captain of the old Norwich, and possibly of other boats. When the City of Boston was completed and was placed on the Norwich line, he was placed in command of her, and retained it until he was transferred to the City of Lawrence, then building. There was probably no man who knew the Sound as well as Capt. Wilcox. He could take his vessel through

to New York in the densest fog by simply sounding to ascertain the nature of the bottom. He was thoroughly acquainted with every dangerous point, every light-house and light-vessel, and no matter how dark the night or how dense the fog, he could always tell where he was and what it was necessary to do. When the old Connecticut came so near going down, while passing through the Sound in 1856, Capt. Wilcox was her commander. A large amount of freight was thrown overboard to lighten her forward, where she was full of water, but it was found necessary to alter her course. Capt. Wilcox went to his engineer, Mr. Harvey, the only man he said he could rely upon, and told him to get on all the steam he could, and when he gave the signal to give her the full power. His orders were obeyed; when the favorable time came for the attempt to change her course the signal was given, the full head of steam was let on, and the old Connecticut, shivering and trembling, ploughing in and out of the sea, almost buried up, with her engines laboring to the utmost and every timber strained and creaking, came about and once more began her conflict with the waves. The coolness of the Captain was then the subject of admiration. He stood, calm and collected, giving directions to his men, with no more signs of nervousness than if the boat were gliding along as smoothly as in a calm. No doubt his conduct saved the boat and the lives of the passengers. Probably no man on the Sound had the confidence of his employees, or of the passengers on his boat, more than Capt. Wilcox. Every one felt safe with him, knowing his ability and seamanship.

Capt. Wilcox has borne that which would undoubtedly have killed other men. He has experienced many hardships and it is thought that his troubles were at the bottom of his action. He told friends in Norwich but a few days since that he wished he was dead. He was a man universally liked and his sad fate has caused deep regret on all sides.

Norwich Bulletin ~ April 14, 1869

ANOTHER SUICIDE.

Capt. William Wilcox Commits Suicide on the Sound Steamer City of Boston—Discovery of the Body.

Captain William Wilcox, a well known steamboat captain, who formerly resided in this city, but who for some time past lived on his farm in North Stonington, came into town on Thursday last on a visit to his son-in-law, Henry W. Lester, who lives on the West Side. For some time past he had been in depressed spirits and frequently spoke of suicide, but his friends have always talked cheerfully to him, and endeavored to drive such thoughts away. On Monday afternoon he spoke of the recent suicide of Col. Lester, and expressed his preference for such a mode of death. On Monday evening he gave the keys of his trunk and chest to his daughter, Mrs. Lester, telling her that he was going to New York, and wished her to give them to his wife in case he never came back. He also gave her his gold watch to keep for her little boy, and a pair of gold rimmed eye-glasses for a younger daughter, in case anything should happen to him, and he never should return. These acts excited some apprehension for awhile, but as he seemed to be in good spirits nothing more was thought of them.

About nine o'clock his son-in-law hired a hack and went with him to the depot. He declined wearing an overcoat, saying he did not wish to be encumbered with it. At the depot he met some old friends, with whom he chatted about old times on the Sound, and laughed and joked until he took the train.

Tuesday morning a despatch was received from the agent of the Steamboat Company in New York, stating that Capt. Wilcox was missing; that he had been seen to embark at New London; that nothing more was known of him, except that his hat and cane were found on the after-deck, and that it was believed that he had jumped overboard. The news spread rapidly about the city that another, tired of life, had ended its trials by a mad leap from the City of Boston into the blue waters of Long Island Sound.

The body of Captain Wilcox was found yesterday afternoon floating in the water near Fisher's Island, and towed ashore on the north side, where it now remains. James Brown, who is employed on the island, saw the body, and described it in such a manner as to leave no doubt that it is that of the unfortunate man. According to his account, there was a hole resembling a bullet hole in the temple, and as it is known that he carried a pistol with him, his friends believe that he placed himself in such a position that he would fall into the water, and then put the pistol to his head and discharged it.

Capt. Wilcox was born in 1812, and was consequently fifty-seven years old. In his youth he manifested an inclination for the water, and went on different vessels sailing from this place. He commenced steamboating on the first day of July, 1836, as wheelsman on the old Norwich, Capt. W. W. Cpit, running between here and New York. In 1838 he served six months as pilot on the Connecticut river between Hartford and Saybrook, and then came back to the Norwich. In 1839 he was promoted to mate, and in 1841 went as second pilot on the Worcester, on which boat he was made first pilot in 1845. In the spring of 1847 he went as first pilot on the Knickerbocker, and served in that position until October 15, 1849, when he was made captain of the Worcester. In four weeks he changed to the Cleopatra, and in the following spring went back on the Worcester. In 1851 he took charge of the Knickerbocker. On Nov. 7, 1854, he took command of the Connecticut and remained on her until the coming out of the City of Boston, in 1860, of which steamer he was captain until 1866. He commanded the City of Lawrence for several months after she commenced running, until November, 1867, when he resigned and retired to a farm in North Stonington, and has since made it his home.

Capt. Wilcox was widely known as one of the best steamboat men on Long Island Sound. During his long term of service he met with not a single accident, and there was no officer more popular than he. There was not a nook or corner of the Sound with which he was not perfectly familiar, and whether the night was bright or dark, calm or stormy, he was always the same cool, selfpossessed officer, never losing his reckoning, and never failing to take every precaution to secure his steamer and the lives of his passengers from all risk of danger. At the time of his resignation he enjoyed the implicit confidence of his employers and the traveling public.

There will be many in all parts of the country who have known Capt. Wilcox, and accepted his hospitalities and enjoyed his society on board his steamers, who will receive the notice of his sad death with regret and sorrow.

THE LATE CAPT. WILCOX.—The son-in-law and other friends of the late Capt. Wilcox, started yesterday morning for Fisher's Island to procure his body for interment. On their arrival at New London, they were joined by some officers of the City of Boston and others, and proceeded on their sad errand in the tug Wellington. On reaching the island they found the body kindly cared for by Coroner R. R. Fox, the proprietor of the island, who had already held an inquest. It was brought to New London in the afternoon, arriving about three o'clock, and to Norwich on the half-past six train. The features were unchanged last evening, and with the exception of the hole in the right temple, made by the pistol ball, the general appearance of the deceased was the same as when he bade his friends farewell Monday night. The funeral will take place to-morrow afternoon from the residence of Henry W. Lester, Thames street, and the remains will be interred in Yantic cemetery.

Springfield Republican ~ April 15, 1869

The suicide of Capt William Wilcox of North Stonington, the well-known commander on the Norwich line of steamers, was very strangely inspired by the recent self-murder of his friend, Col Lester of Norwich. He spoke of that event on Monday with approval, and distributed several gifts, and in every act left evidence that his final leap into the Sound was premeditated. His body was found and towed to Fisher's island, Tuesday afternoon, and a bullet hole in his temple leads to the belief among his friends that he placed himself in such a position that he would fall into the water, and then put the pistol to his head and discharged it.

Norwich Bulletin ~ April 16, 1869

The flags on the steamboats were at half mast yesterday, out of respect to the memory of Captain Wilcox.

Norwich Bulletin ~ April 17, 1869

Funeral of Capt. Wilcox.

At two o'clock yesterday afternoon, the Universalist church was filled with those who had gathered to pay their last sad offices to all that was left on earth of Capt. William Wilcox. In the assembly were all the old and young steamboat-men of this city, and many from New London; those with whom he had been associated in life, and those who had time and again committed their lives into his keeping with implicit confidence in his ability to carry them safely over the water. The remains, encased in a handsome mahogany coffin, were deposited in front of the pulpit by the pall-bearers, Captains Edmund D. Roath, Wm. R. Brown, James H. Lovell, and Abiel W. Sherman. After the preliminary services the Rev. J. Riley Johnson made a short address. The circumstances under which we had assembled were indeed very peculiar. There is the human mind an innate horror at the thought of taking one's own life, but upon this subject the Bible was silent. It would be in bad taste for us to pass judgment upon any, and remembering the divine exhortations, it behooves us to leave all the characteristics of the deceased to the Judge of his soul. There were three characteristics of the deceased to which the speaker would allude: As a fair-haired boy, with heart ambitious and hopeful for the future, the delight of his parents, and the love of all who knew him; as the full grown man, struggling amid the perils and trials of a life upon the water, success attending him, and he winning confidence on every hand; his decline in life, when secret trials and troubles had borne him down, when a hidden canker was gnawing his heart strings, culminating in the scene on the last night of his existence on earth, when he fell into the blue waves, so long his home, doubtless intending to sleep there until the sea should be made to give up her dead. Whatever may have been lacking, none can say aught against the general good heartedness and nobility, the uniform kindness to those under him, of the deceased. The speaker closed by drawing some excellent moral lessons from the occasion, which he applied to those before him.

At the conclusion of the address the lid of the coffin was raised, and for three-quarters of an hour one after another came to take a last look at the face of the deceased. The head lay upon one side, the features appeared fresh and natural, and had it not been for the surroundings it would have been hard to realize that we were gazing upon a scene of death.

The remains were taken to Yantic Cemetery and interred in the family lot. There were many who turned away from this last scene with hearts saddened and eyes be dimmed with tears.