



Item of the Week from the Long Island Collection

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TERRIBLE CATASTROPHE. EXPLOSION OF THE Steam Frigate FULTON. WOUNDED.

NEW-YORK, June 5, 1822.

Yesterday afternoon, about 3 o'clock, the Steam Frigate Fulton First, at the Navy Yard, Brooklyn, blew up, in consequence of fire, in a manner unknown, having communicated with her magazine, and the now lies a complete wreck. We heard of the accident a short time after it had occurred, and immediately hastened to the spot. The following particulars are all we could learn, amid the havoc and confusion of the dreadful scene, for which we are indebted to several officers of the station.

The Fulton, for several years, has been moored about 200 yards from the Navy Yard wharf, and used as a receiving ship. The gunner was discharged on Wednesday, and a new one appointed to fill his place, who, a few moments before the accident, had gone to the magazine, (which contained only three barrels of damaged powder) to procure ammunition to load the evening gun. In a moment, sparks and splinters, were seen by many persons in the neighbourhood, ascending the air, in all directions, enveloped in a thick smoke, which was followed by a report not louder than that of a 32 pound cannon. By the time we reached the dreadful scene, a great number of small boats, from various quarters of the city, had gathered around, and large masses of wreck were floating in the water. The vessel is completely shattered; her bows, where the magazine was situated, is blown to atoms; and the sheek has shattered her from stem to stern.

The number of men belonging to the vessel yesterday was 143, part of whom, however, were ashore, on duty; very fortunately, 45 were drafted only the day before, and sent to join the frigate Constellation, at Norfolk.

At the moment of the accident, the officers, and their guests, whose names are recorded in the list of wounded, were in the ward room seated at dinner; among whom, were Lieut. Platt, and his son, who had only yesterday returned from a month's leave of absence. Commodore Chauncey had been on board the frigate all the morning on a visit of inspection, who, with Captain Newton, left the ship only a very few minutes before the explosion. When we arrived at the scene, among the first we saw upon the wreck was the Commodore, directing the movements of his men, who were clearing the frigate and searching for the bodies of the dead and wounded.

In the confusion which naturally attends such a dreadful accident, all the particulars cannot be immediately obtained. As far as we could ascertain, of privates, 22 are killed, and 21 wounded; 5 lieutenants, a sailing master and 4 midshipmen, Mrs. Beckwith, and a son of lieutenant Platt, also wounded. The dead were in a most shocking mangled state, and presented a spectacle too horrid to look upon—they were placed in coffins, and a coconer's request held on them before we left the Navy Yard. The names of all, as far as ascertainable, follow:

KILLED.

Robert M. Peck, Marine; Wm. Kemp, Seaman; Alexander Cameron, Marine; Mrs. Neilson, N. Y. James Livingston, Seaman; Thomas Wallis, do.; Harman Vatel, N. Y.; William Brown, a boy; Mrs. Brown, a yellow woman; Franklin Ely, Marine; Mrs. Stockwell, N. Y.; Henry Logan, Corporal of the Marines; Peter Gillen, Landman; John Brown, Seaman; John M'Kever, Marine; Jacob Boie, Seaman; Charles Williamson, Marine; James D. Burgher, Seaman; Otto K. Fergatien, Marine; Sylvester O'Halloran, do.; Henry McGraw, do.; John Dolan Rayes, Barber; Gunner—name unknown.

Lieutenants Charles T. Platt, and S. M. Beckwith, both severely; Alexander M. Jull, slightly. Sailing Master, John Clough, severely. Midshipmen, Robert E. Johnson, David Dougal, Robert P. Welch, severely; Mr. Eckford, son of Mr. H. Eckford, thigh broken and otherwise bruised. Mrs. Brankridge and a son of Lieutenant Platt, slightly.

Also wounded—Robert Kilpatrick, Marine, severely; Thomas M'Calluck, Cook, slightly; Patrick Gilligan, Marine, slightly; Charles Scott, Seaman, severely; William Brown, Musician, severely; John Winslow, Marine, slightly; Z. Robertson, Seaman, severely; Joseph Moore, Seaman, slightly; Thomas Newbora, Seaman, slightly; Stephen Denton, a boy, severely; John Parrot, Marine, severely; Jacob De Hart, Marine, severely—22

Property, both public and private, has been destroyed, but what amount it is impossible yet to say. The complement of the ship, as stated was

Killed and wounded, as above,	45
Supposed to have been on shore,	98—73
Privates still to be accounted for,	70

Since the above was in type, Lt. Brankwith and two marines have died.

On so melancholy an occasion, it is but natural that various reports will be in circulation, to some of which, it may be improper to give currency. We are indeed to believe that the unhappy event was the result of carelessness or inexperience of the Gunner, but as he is among the dead, nothing certain upon this point can ever be known; his recent appointment to the office does away the ground for suspicion of design; there had been no time for the occurrence of personal animosity, and if contemplating self destruction, it is not likely that so dreadful an explosion would have been adopted. He was charged by one of the Officers previous to his going below, to be careful to place the light in the location invariably provided for it on such occasions, behind a reflecting glass in the partition, through which the rays of light are thrown: it is probable that he was careless in this particular, and having carried the candle into the magazine, some of its sparks were communicated to the powder. It is proper to state, that every information received proves, that the accident is not in the slightest degree attributable to the inattention of the officers. The room in which the company were dining was situated about midships. Every person was forced by the concussion, against the gunroom, with such violence as to break their limbs, and otherwise cut and bruise them in a most shocking manner, and it is a remarkable circumstance, that although several escaped with their lives, not a vestige of the table, chairs, or any of the furniture in the room remained. Every thing was blown to atoms. Many of the guns were thrown overboard, and some of them, of large dimensions, now hang as it were by a hair. The escape of Midshipman Eckford seems miraculous. When Commodore Chauncey, got on board, the first object he saw was young Eckford hanging by one of his legs between the gun-deck, whither he had been forced by the explosion. A jack-screw was immediately procured, by means of which the deck was raised, and he was extricated from his perilous situation.

Printed and Sold, wholesale and retail, by C. Brown, 211 Water-street, near Fulton, N. Y.

"Explosion of the Steamship Fulton" 1829

The words "terrible" and "explosion" stand out on this broadside (or poster) from 1829, just one day after the explosion of the steam-powered warship *Fulton* in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. However, how this ship met its demise did not occur at the hands of war.

Originally known as the *Demologos*, meaning "voice of the people," the *Fulton* was built in response to the War of 1812, whereby the United States declared war on the United Kingdom. Congress approved its construction in 1814, and it was built by Robert Fulton; an American engineer and inventor credited with developing the first successful steamboat and first practical submarine.

Launched in 1815, the *Fulton* was a steam-powered catamaran with two side-by-side hulls containing a boiler in one hull and a steam engine in the other. A paddle wheel was located between the two, which protected it from gunfire. The hulls were also connected by an enclosed gun deck, which accommodated twenty-six 32-pounder guns. Twelve guns could fire from each side of the ship, with one gun firing straight ahead, and the other directly behind. Rudders at both ends also allowed for easy maneuvering in the water.

As can be judged from its description, the ship's design was unusual and it could not make long voyages out on the open ocean, but was considered capable of engaging with British blockading warships in coastal waters, such as Long Island Sound. On calm and windless days, sail-powered enemy warships would have been slow-moving targets for the *Fulton*.

By the time the ship was completed, however, the war had ended and the *Fulton* only saw one day of active service carrying President James Monroe on a tour of New York Harbor. After years of waiting in reserve, it was eventually moored at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1825 to be used as a floating barracks. One June 4, 1829, a group of men were dining on board the ship when the ship's gunner went to the powder magazine to "procure ammunition to load the evening gun." Shortly thereafter, the ship exploded with no known cause for the explosion. Over twenty people were killed, with twenty-four wounded and in need of immediate medical attention.

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Gina Piastuck joined the East Hampton Library in 2007 as a librarian and archivist and has served as the Head of the Long Island Collection since 2009. She's a graduate of LIU Post's Palmer School of Library and Information Science and holds both an M.L.I.S. degree and a Certificate in Archives and Records Management. Her responsibilities managing the Long Island Collection include providing reference and research assistance to patrons on and off site, as well as the acquisition, arrangement, description and conservation of rare and new materials pertaining to the history and people of Long Island.

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