

ALBUM INQUIRY STARTER SET - "FULL SPEED AHEAD: THE EXPLOSIVE HISTORY OF 19TH CENTURY STEAMBOATS"

Album Description



Background Information

In the 19th century, steamboats emerged as a revolutionary mode of transportation, drastically improving the efficiency of travel and commerce along the vast river networks of the United States. These vessels, powered by steam engines, significantly reduced travel times and costs, contributing to the economic boom of the era. However, the rapid advancement and competitive nature of the steamboat industry came at a high price.

Many steamboat crews, driven by the desire for speed and profit, often operated their vessels recklessly, pushing the engines beyond their safe limits. This practice frequently led to the overheating of steam boilers, which were already prone to explosions due to their high-pressure systems. The combination of inadequate maintenance, poor training, and the relentless pursuit of speed resulted in numerous catastrophic accidents.

These explosions were devastating, causing significant loss of life, injuries, and destruction of property. The impact of these disasters was felt deeply by the public, leading to widespread calls for better safety measures



and greater accountability from the steamboat industry. The tragic events eventually spurred the federal government to introduce its first regulations aimed at protecting public welfare, setting a precedent for future consumer safety legislation.

Lesson Objectives

1. Understand the causes and consequences of 19th-century steamboat explosions.
2. Analyze primary source newspaper accounts to gain insight into historical perspectives.
3. Develop critical reading and historical thinking skills through guided questions and discussion.
4. Draw parallels between historical events and contemporary issues related to technological advancement and safety regulations.

Lesson Procedure

1. Introduction

- Briefly introduce the topic of 19th-century steamboat explosions and provide the background information.
- Show images of steamboats and examples of boiler explosions to provide visual context.

2. Primary Source Analysis

- Divide students into small groups and provide each group with one of the sources.
- Distribute the [primary source analysis worksheet](#) to guide their reading and analysis.
- Encourage groups to identify key details, perspectives, and emotional responses in the articles.

3. Guiding Questions for Analysis

- What are the main causes of the steamboat explosion described in your article?
- How does the article portray the crew's responsibility and actions?
- What impact did the explosion have on passengers and the surrounding community?
- How does the article reflect public sentiment and demand for safety regulations?
- What language and tone are used to describe the disaster? How does it affect the reader's perception?

4. Group Discussion

- Have each group present a summary of their newspaper story and their analysis.
- Facilitate a class discussion on the common themes and differences found in the articles.
- Discuss the broader implications of these disasters for public policy and industrial regulation.

5. Extension Activity

- Assign students to research a contemporary technological advancement (e.g., self-driving cars, artificial intelligence, commercial space travel) and recent safety concerns associated with it.
- Students should prepare a brief presentation drawing parallels between the historical steamboat explosions and their chosen modern technology.
- Discuss as a class how lessons from the past can inform current and future safety regulations.

[Header image source](#)

[#InquiryStarterSet](#)

**EXPLOSION OF THE ALFRED THOMAS AT EASTON PA. MARCH 6TH 1860 / SKETCH FROM
NATURAL HISTORY GAZETTE, VOL. 1, NO. 1, 1860, PHILA.**



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/item/2013650026/>

Summary

- Print shows an explosion on the steamboat Alfred Thomas at Easton, Pennsylvania; a few people are standing on the shore of the river and Easton is visible to the left, in the background.

Created / Published

- Easton, Pa. : Published by Bixler & Corwin, [1860?]

Genre

- Chromolithographs--Color--1860

Notes

- - Title from item.
- - Purchase; 1958.

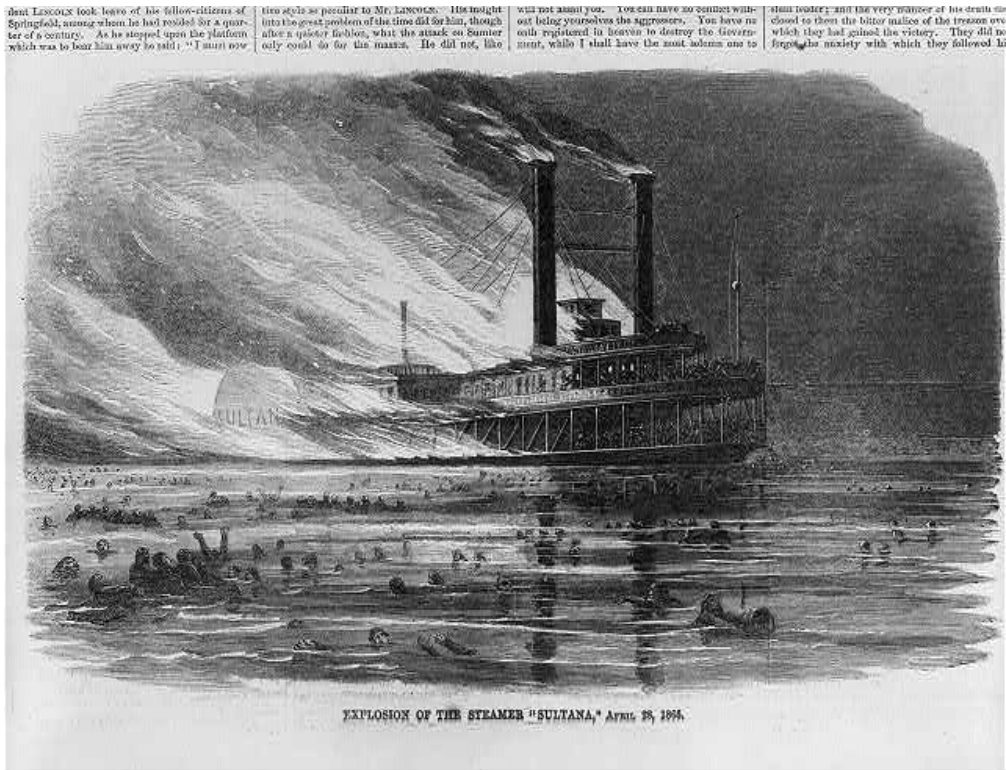
Repository

- Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>



Digital Id

- [pga 04059 //hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.04059](https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.04059)



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/item/2002699583/>

Summary

- Burning steamer with many people on board and in water.

Created / Published

- 1865.

Notes

- - Illus. in: Harper's Weekly, (1865 May 20), p. 316.
- - Ref. copy may be in 4427 B (R).
- - This record contains unverified data from caption card.
- - Caption card tracings: Ships Disasters; Steamboats SULTANA.

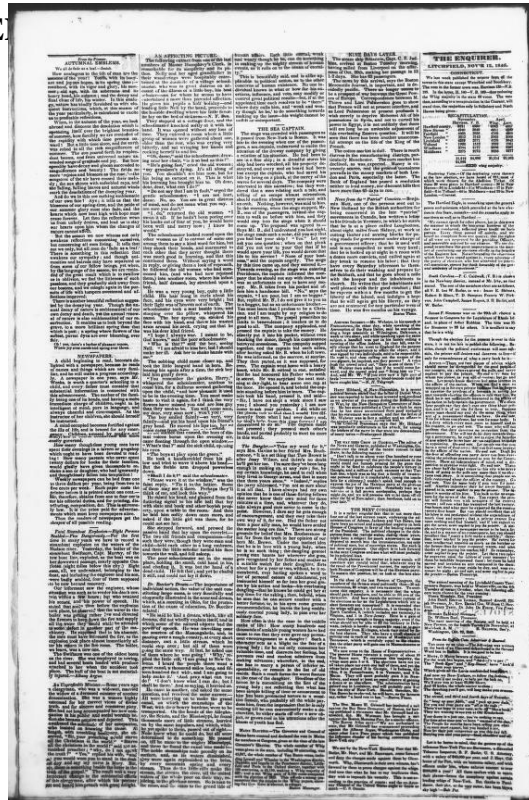
Repository

- Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

Digital Id

- cph 3b24360 //hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b24360

IMAGE 2 OF LITCHFIELD



N.), NOVEMBER 12, 1840

Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/sn84020071/1840-11-12/ed-1/?sp=2&q=steamboat+explosion&r=-0.082,0.9,0.621,0.378,0>

Created / Published

- Litchfield, Conn., November 12, 1840

Genre

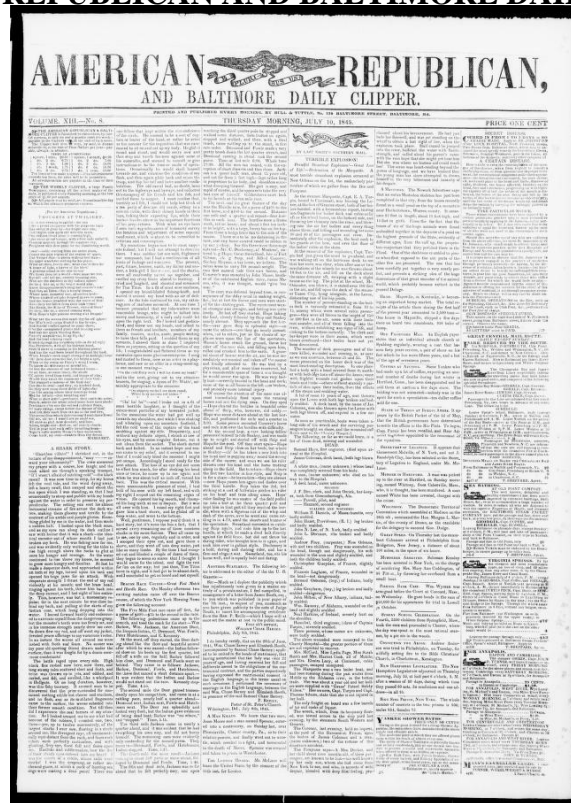
- Newspapers

Notes

- - Weekly
- - Vol. 3, no. 33 (Jan. 29, 1829)-v. 131, no. 51 (Feb. 9, 1956) ; 131st year, no. 52 (Feb. 16, 1956)-
- - Publishers: C. Adams, 1842-1845; Payne Kenyon Kilbourne, 1845-1853; Henry W. Hyatt, 1853-1856; Edward C. Goodwin, 1856-1857; Charles Adams and H.E.B. Betts, 1857-1859; James Humphrey, Jr., 1859-1865; Wing & Shumway, 1865-1866; A.B. Shumway, 1866-1869; G.A. Hickox, 1869-.
- - Editors: H. Adams, 1829-1842; C. Adams, 1842-1845; P.K. Kilbourne, 1845-1853; H.W. Hyatt, 1853-1856; C. Adams, 1857-1859; J. Humphrey, Jr., 1859-1865; H.E. Wing, 1865-1866; G.A. Hickox, 1866-.
- - "Whig." : "Republican. " : "Union. " : "Republican. " 1868-.

- - "Independent." Cf. Ayer, 1976.
- - Issues for 1829-Nov. 2, 1950 also called: Whole no. 137-6491. Issues for Nov. 9, 1950-Apr. 1, 1954 lack numbering, are called: Vol. 125-v. 128. Issues for Mar. 1990- lack numbering.
- - Available on microfilm from New England Micrographics, Marlboro, Mass.
- - Absorbed: Litchfield sentinel, May 1875., and: Litchfield star, 1891, and: Torrington leader, 1891, and: Cornwall news, 1891, and: Washington star (Litchfield, Conn.), 1891, and: New Milford observer, Nov. 28, 1940.
- - Published at the same office: Woodbury reporter, 193 -195.

IMAGE 1 OF AMERICAN REPUBLICAN AND BALTIMORE DAILY CLIPPER (BALTIMORE,



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83009567/1845-07-10/ed-1/?sp=1&q=Steamboat+explosion&r=0.177,0.177,0.921,0.561,0>

Created / Published

- Baltimore, Md., July 10, 1845

Genre

- Newspapers

Notes

- - Daily (except Sunday)
- - Vol. 11, no. 113 (Nov. 11, 1844)-v. 15, no. 147 (Dec. 31, 1846).
- - Also issued on microfilm from the Library of Congress, Photoduplication Service.
- - Archived issues are available in digital format from the Library of Congress Chronicling America online collection.
- - Weekly ed.: Ocean (Baltimore, Md.).
- - Baltimore clipper (Baltimore, Md. : 1847) (DLC)sn 83009568 (OCoLC)9086122

IMAGE 2 OF THE NEW YORK HERALD (NEW YORK, N.Y.), APRIL 30, 1850



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83030313/1850-04-30/ed-1/?sp=2&q=steamboat+explosion&r=-0.059,0.178,1.179,0.718,0>

Created / Published

- New York [N.Y.], April 30, 1850

Genre

- Newspapers

Notes

- - Daily, Jan. 9, 1842-1920
- - Vol. 6, no. 1565 (Sept. 21, 1840) ; v. 6, no. 2 (Sept. 22, 1840)-v. 87, no. 153 (Jan. 31, 1920).
- - Issues for Sept. 22, 1840-Jan. 31, 1920 called also whole no. 1566-30,476.
- - Also issued on microfilm from the Library of Congress, Photoduplication Service.
- - Archived issues are available in digital format from the Library of Congress Chronicling America online collection.
- - Weekly eds.: Weekly herald (New York, N.Y. : 1836), 1840-, and: Dollar weekly herald (New York, N.Y.), , and: Family herald, 1857-
- - Steamer eds.: Herald for Europe, 1846-, and: California herald (New York, N.Y.), 1848-, and: New York herald (New York, N.Y. : California ed.) . and: New York herald (New York, N.Y. : Pacific ed.).



- - Merged with Sun (New York, N.Y. : 1916) to form Sun and the New York herald.
- - Sun (New York, N.Y. : 1916) (DLC)sn 83030431 (OCoLC)9517450
- - Sun and the New York herald (DLC)sn 83030273 (OCoLC)9416945

IMAGE 2 OF BATON ROUGE TRI-WEEKLY GAZETTE & COMET (BATON ROUGE, LA.),



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/sn86053661/1866-02-06/ed-1/?sp=2&q=steamboat+explosion+reckless&r=-0.171,0.034,1.198,0.73,0>

Created / Published

- Baton Rouge, La., February 6, 1866

Genre

- Newspapers

Notes

- - Triweekly
- - Vol. 47, no. 1 (July 1, 1865)-
- - On Saturday published as: Weekly gazette and comet, Jan. 27, 1866-
- - Editor: Thomas B.R. Hatch, .
- - Has occasional supplements.
- - Archived issues are available in digital format from the Library of Congress Chronicling America online collection.
- - Tri-weekly gazette-comet (DLC)sn 88064484 (OCoLC)18099840

IMAGE 1 OF DAILY PRESS AND DAKOTAIAN (YANKTON, DAKOTA TERRITORY [S.D.]),



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/sn84022144/1878-09-28/ed-1/?sp=1&q=steamboat+explosion>

Created / Published

- Yankton, Dakota Territory [S.D.], September 28, 1878

Genre

- History
- Newspapers

Notes

- - Daily (except Sun.), Dec. 18, 1876-1880
- - Vol. 1, no. 167 (Nov. 5, 1875)-v. 5, no. 307 (Apr. 24, 1880).
- - Available on microfilm from the State Historical Society of North Dakota.
- - Archived issues are available in digital format from the Library of Congress Chronicling America online collection.
- - Weekly ed.: Yankton press and union and Dakotaian.
- - Press and daily Dakotaian (DLC)sn 91099608 (OCoLC)23459099

IMAGE 1 OF THE DA

), DECEMBER 2, 1885



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/sn88064499/1885-12-02/ed-1/?sp=1&q=steamboat+explosion&r=-0.563,0.345,1.457,0.887,0>

Created / Published

- Monroe, La., December 2, 1885

Genre

- Newspapers

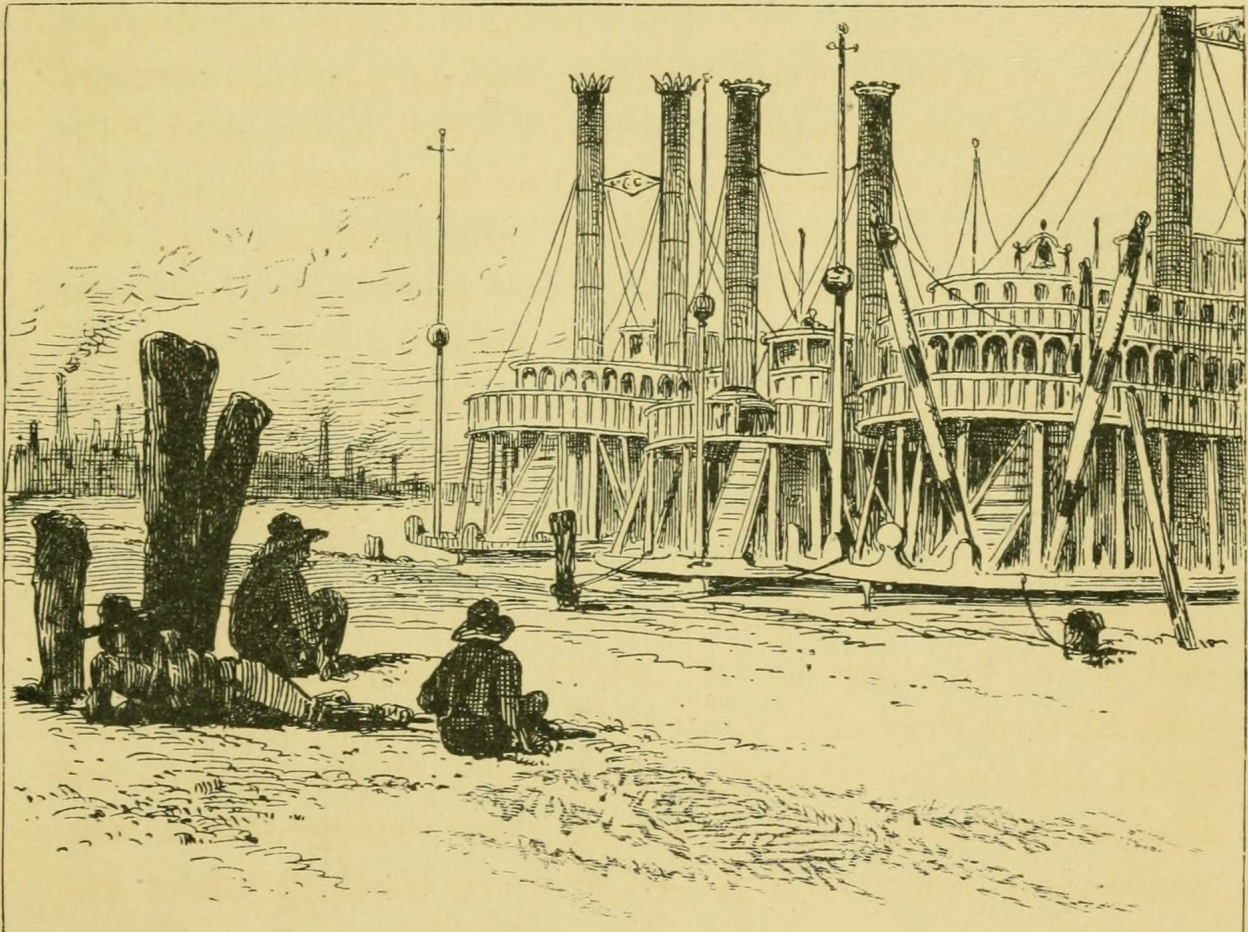
Notes

- - Daily (except Sun.)
- - Vol. 1, no. 1 (Dec. 13, 1870)-v. 1, no. 205 (July 5, 1886).
- - Three issues are called "Vol. 1, no. 1": Dec. 13, 1870, Oct. 2, 1883, and Oct. 27, 1885.
- - Archived issues are available in digital format as part of the Library of Congress Chronicling America online collection.



Teaching Notes:

And one more! My personal introduction to steamboats growing up and still my favorite: Life on the Mississippi by Mark Twain (1903). There is no richer portrayal of the day-to-day business, adventure, and sometime terror of the era of steamboats. The author really did work on Mississippi River steamboats.



“SOUND-ASLEEP STEAMBOATS”



Teaching Notes:

Great addition to this [#InquiryStarterSet](#)



Teaching Notes:

So many resources!



Teaching Notes:

Great resources. Thanks for enhancing this [#InquiryStarterSet](#)



Teaching Notes:

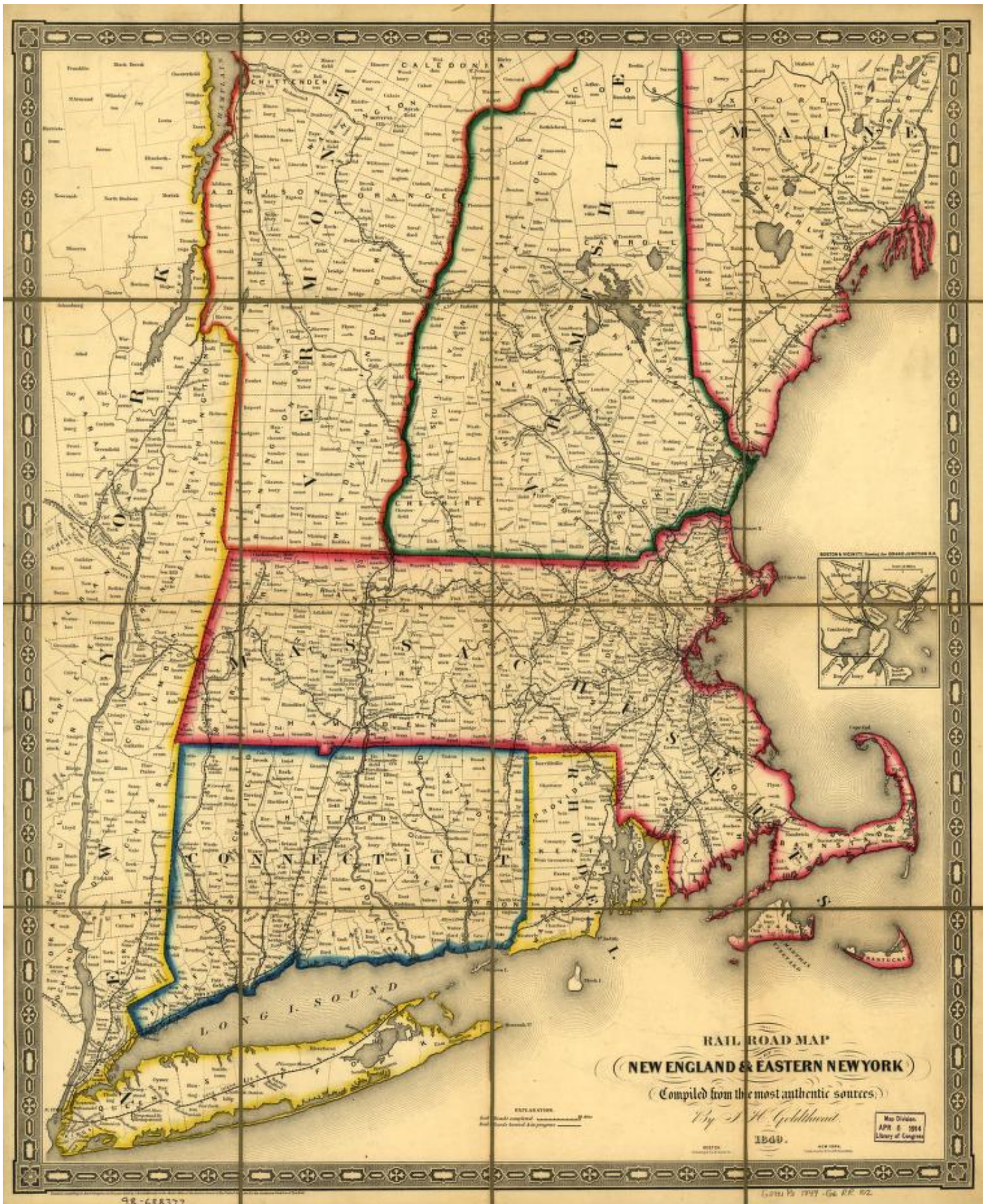
I've added both the online exhibit and the inquiry starter album to the resource set - [Today in History: Federal Patent for Steamboat Awarded](#).



Teaching Notes:

Check out our online exhibit on the [Steamboat Barnet!](#) Pushing upstream past rapids on the Connecticut River in 1826, the Barnet was of the first successful steamboats. We added a link to this #InquiryStarterSet to the site.

How did steamboats come out of nowhere to revolutionize transportation? What was their competition? What impacts did they have on the communities along their routes? What happened to steamboats? (Strong hint below.) This exhibit has long been the most popular feature on the EmergingAmerica.org website!






Teaching Notes:

For more on steamboat explosions and disasters, check out these 19th-century periodical articles.

- "[Steamboat Disasters](#)" *The North American Review* Volume 50, Issue 106, January 1840
- "[Steamboat Disasters](#)" *Manufacturer and Builder* Volume 4, Issue 10, October 1872
- "[Steamboat Boiler Explosion](#)" *Manufacturer and Builder* Volume 11, Issue 11, November 1879
- "[The Farce of Steamboat Inspection](#)" *Manufacturer and Builder* Volume 12, Issue 7, July 1880
- "[A New Phase of Steamboat Inspection!](#)" *Manufacturer and Builder* Volume 12, Issue 9, September 1880
- "[Steamboat Disasters](#)" *The North American Review* Volume 131, Issue 286, September 1880



Teaching Notes:

Great lesson  [Peter Pappas](#) and a really wonderful extension activity!



Teaching Notes:



[Eric Salmons](#) Thanks and welcome to TPS!



Teaching Notes:

It is unique seeing a print from this era depicting technology failure and destruction. Normally these scenes are very placid, depicting man-made innovation integrated seamlessly into nature. Great find and lesson.