

The Lost Oconto news article
The Brooklyn [NY] Union, v 1, xxiii, no 99, p 1,
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Saturday evening, 12 December 1855
Transcribed by Gaynol Fales on 8 April 2026

[transcription begins]
“The Lost Oconto,” *The Brooklyn Union*,
December 12, 1855, p. 1, col. 1, Newspapers.com

FOUR O'CLOCK

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THE LOST “OCONTO.”

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HER STEWARD AND SIX PASSENGERS REACH EAST TAWAS.

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**The Hardships of Forty Persons Left on
Charity Island in Shanties—The Need of
Prompt Relief—Thrilling Narrative of
Engineer Teiper.**

EAST TAWAS, Mich. December 17, —
Charles Reardon, first mate of the wrecked
steamer “Oconto,” arrived here yesterday with
the steward and six passengers.

Reardon reports that the crew and passengers of the “Oconto” numbered forty-seven. The crew was composed of Captain G. W. McGregor, of Lexington, Mich.; first mate, Charles Reardon, of Port Huron; second mate, Jas. Ross, of Detroit; steward, David M. Leary, of Rochester, N. Y.; Clerk, R. Van Slyke; second clerk, John Van Slyke; coo, James Levi; porter, Fred. Stevens; pantryman, A. McCarty. The deckhands were all colored, from Detroit. The captain, first engineer, and passengers are in shanties on the island. There re provisions for a few days. All are very downhearted. They have one deckhand and one passenger very sick but no medicines. The mate and steward left Charity Island in a yawl boat yesterday morning and walked from Point Lookout here. There are two lady passengers and one child. Captain Plough and the life saving crew have started for the island. The following names of passengers are all that are obtainable at present:

G. Douglas, Lexington, Michigan; Fred. Wolf, Forrestville; Wm. Carr, Canada; Wm Bradley, Lexington; Mr Richmond, Sand Beach; Moses Lauer, wife and child; Alpena: Miss Henry, Muskegan; Thomas Dixon, Alpena; James Farley, Sanilac; Phillip Medlaugh, Alpena; William Savage, Detroit; Nicholas Pott, Forrestville.

The mate says their experience the night of the storm was frightful, and that the danger was greatly augmented by a number of horses and some cattle which were on board breaking from their stalls and stampeding. Several of the animals were so badly injured that they had to be killed.

There is a report that seven of the crew left the islands in a boat on Tuesday and have not yet turned up, but this lacks confirmation.

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Detailed Report of the Shipwreck

DETROIT, Mich., December 12,--The steamer "Oconto" left Oscoda on Friday, December 4, at 4 P. M., and soon encountered a terrible gale. When the storm set in it became impossible to see, and the lights went out. There were twenty-two passengers and twenty-five members of the crew on board. At 12 o'clock Friday night Charity Island light was sighted. Within fifteen minutes the "Oconto" struck bottom at the southeast point of the island. Frank Teiper, first assistant engineer, who arrived here yesterday, describes the wreck as follows:

Out starboard bulwarks were stove in and all the upper railings; two of the lifeboats, and all the light freight on the hurricane deck were washed away. We were in a gale of wind and a blinding snowstorm. The sea was so heavy that we could not keep the boat going. Finally a light was sighted. In fact, it was the Charity Island light. The Captain set the boat around to feel for the entrance, and the next thing we knew there was a terrible shock. We had grounded in about six feet of water, but whether on rocks or sand we could not tell. We could see that we were about a mile from land.

As soon as the boat struck the crew began dealing out life preservers. After we got ready for the ice bath, in which none of us could have lived fifteen minutes, we discovered that there was no leak. When day broke we set our colors at half mast and began blowing the whistles. At about 10 o'clock we sighted the lighthouse keeper and his assistants on the shore. We got our small metallic lifeboat over the side and in it five of us went ashore. There we found two fish huts. We then brought the passengers—twenty-two in all—ashore. Two ladies and a child were taken direct to the light-keeper's house, and the men began keeping house in the fish hut. They have food

enough to last them two or three weeks, and plenty of blankets. On Monday morning our party cam away in a large yawl. The party consisted of John Van Slyke, son of one of the owners of the 'Oconto;" Tom Crocker, John Cavannaugh, Walter Bostwick, James Ross, all of the crew; Anthony Potts, of Forrestville, and myself. We took aboard a compass, two bushels of salt and some provisions. We started in the midst of cake ice. Every minute or two the spray would dash over us and freeze as it struck.

When we got within four miles of Caseville, we found that the ice was frozen solidly, yet was not strong enough to walk upon. We hoisted out storm signal and began cutting our way with axes. Two boats started out to help us, but could not reach us. To add to our misery, we fund that the solid ice, detached from the main shore, was increasing in thickness every minute, and that it was drifting down the bay, taking us with it. We cut, parted, rowed and struggled like mad, reaching shore at last at 6 o'clock Monday evening, eight miles below Caseville, having drifted that far in the ice.

Just before the "Oconto" struck, Charles Brown, a colored cook, died of fright. He was buried on Charity Island.

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[NOTE: Frank Peiper is the correct surname, not Frank Teiper.]