

**THE ROAD TO BALTIMORE IN THE LIVES OF**  
**JAMES FENIMORE COOPER**  
**AND BENJAMIN BROWN FRENCH:**  
**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PLACE OF PUBLICATION OF A LAKE ERIE**  
**SKETCH AND BALLAD**

BY

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**INTRODUCTION**

The object of this paper is to examine the circumstances surrounding Baltimore, Maryland, as the place of publication of both the anonymous prose sketch entitled “Helmsman of Lake Erie” and Benjamin Brown French’s Lake Erie ballad by the same name.

This paper will examine the lives of two men, James Fenimore Cooper (1789 – 1851), and Benjamin Brown French (1800 – 1870), in terms of each man’s links with Baltimore. Given the fact that Baltimore may be viewed as the doorway to the nation’s capital, the “road” from Washington, D. C., to Baltimore, i.e., the *linkage* of Baltimore and the nation’s capital, will receive due consideration.

James Fenimore Cooper’s comments and contacts relating to Baltimore and Washington, D.C., both in his letters and his works have been investigated. Commodore William Branford Shubrick and his wife Harriet Cordelia Wethered Shubrick, the noted painter and inventor Samuel Finley Breese Morse, and even Cooper’s neighbor and friend Samuel Nelson, Associate Justice of the Unites States Supreme Court, play prominent roles in this analysis. The question of Cooper’s anonymity and his growing discontent with the American press will also be addressed.

The role of Major Benjamin Brown French (1800-1870) in national life and his contributions as a writer, poet, civil servant, corporate executive, and spiritual leader as the Grand Master of the Washington Free Masons will also be targeted. French’s legacy to an understanding of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is his eleven-volume journal of almost 4000 pages, which was begun in August 1828 and which was faithfully kept up until shortly before French’s death in the nation’s capital on August 12, 1870. Roughly one-third of French’s journal was published in one volume in 1989 under the title *Witness to the Young Republic, A Yankee’s Journal, 1828-1870, Benjamin Brown French* [henceforth referred to as *Witness*], edited by Donald B. Cole and

John J. McDonough (Hanover and London: University Press of New England). The remaining unpublished material comprising two-thirds of French's journal is housed in the Library of Congress, which is now situated on the very site where French's mansion, built in 1842, was located. The unique aspect of French's journal is the insight provided into political life in Washington. The workings and the key players of every Administration from that of John Quincy Adams to Ulysses S. Grant are faithfully recorded.

Particularly French's entries during his reappointment in 1861 as Commissioner of Public Buildings under President Lincoln provide intimate glimpses of the Lincoln Administration and Lincoln, the man. Even Mrs. Mary Lincoln's exorbitant and clandestine spending [cf. *Witness*, Dec. 16, 1861, p. 382] does not escape French's attention. Yet the aspect of burning interest in this research paper must center around a period much earlier in French's long and eventful Washington career: namely, what French has to communicate about his ballad published less than a week after the first publication of "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" in Maryland's *Baltimore Sun*.

In his *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, which Cooper wrote while in Paris and London, we read:

"The road between Baltimore and Washington is neither particularly bad, nor particularly good. It passes through a comparatively barren and a little inhabited country."

*Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* –  
Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter XVIII, p. 265

*Travelling Bachelor* was published in 1828, but the substance of the quotation just provided must refer to a period *before* 1826, the year when Cooper and his family left the United States for a lengthy stay of over seven years in Europe. The questions posed in this essay will attempt to show *how* that Baltimore – Washington axis related to two major figures in America's cultural and political history with particular regard to the Lake Erie sketch and ballad put out on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1845, and on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1845, respectively, in the *Baltimore Sun*.

## I. THE STATUS OF BALTIMORE IN THE EARLY DISTRIBUTION OF "THE HELMSMAN OF LAKE ERIE"

Research into the distribution and date of publication of the anonymous John Maynard sketch of 1845 has come a long way since the 1960's, when only two journals, *The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* (Sept. 12, 1845) and *The Western Literary Messenger* (Oct. 4, 1845), both of Buffalo, had been identified as having printed the sketch.

Early Distribution of the Anonymous Prose Sketch Entitled “The Helmsman of Lake Erie”		
	DATE	NAME OF PUBLICATION & LOCATION: <b>October 2019 UPDATE</b>
1)	07 June 1845 (Sa): A	The Church of England Magazine (London, England): <b>Discovered Oct. 2018</b>
2)	14 June 1845 (Sa): A	The Lancaster Gazette, and General Advertiser for Lancaster, Westmoreland, &c. (England): <b>Discovered October 2018</b>
3)	19 July 1845 (Sa): A	Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle (Poughkeepsie, New York) - <b>Discovered: August 2011</b>
4)	26 July 1845 (Sa): A	Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette (Hallowell, Maine) - <b>Discovered: April 2011</b>
5)	14. Aug. 1845 (Th): A	Mohawk Courier (Little Falls, New York) - (Vol. XII, No. 8) - <b>Discovered: August 2011</b>
6)	30 Aug. 1845 (Sa) : B	The <b>B</b> altimore Sun (Baltimore, Maryland)
7)	02 Sept. 1845 (Tu) A	Wisconsin <b>A</b> rgus (Madison, Wisconsin)
8)	04 Sept. 1845 (Th): A	The Pittsfield Sun (Pittsfield, Massachusetts)
	05 Sept. 1845 (Fr)	Benjamin Brown French's <b>BALLAD</b> “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” is published in the Baltimore Sun.
9)	08 Sept. 1845 (Mo): B	The Adams Sentinel (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania)
10)	09 Sept. 1845 (Tu) A	Daily Republican (Springfield, Massachusetts)
11)	10 Sept. 1845 (We) B	Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio) - preceded by B.B. French's ballad “The Helmsman of Lake Erie”
12)	10 Sept. 1845 (We): A	The Massachusetts Spy (Worcester, Mass.)
13)	12 Sept. 1845 (Fr): A	The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser (Buffalo, New York) <b>With Editorial Comment!</b>
14)	13 Sept. 1845 (Sa): A	Bellows Falls Gazette (Bellows Falls, Vt.)
15)	17 Sept. 1845 (We): B	Reprint of Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer (Sept. 10, 1845) in Cleveland Weekly Plain Dealer – again preceded by B.B. French's ballad, “The Helmsman of Lake Erie”

Yet the first printing of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was not in Buffalo, New York, but in London, England. In the United States, the first printing was in Poughkeepsie, New York, in the *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle*. Although first printed in *The Church of England Magazine*, it is clear from the sketch’s distribution that an American audience was the intended target of the anonymous writer, who, as will be seen, possessed detailed historical knowledge of America’s waterways. At the time of this October 2019 update, the list of newspapers and magazines publishing the original 1845 “Helmsman of Lake Erie” in the years between 1845 and 1886 totals 102.

For a consideration of the significance of the Poughkeepsie publication, see

[“The Poughkeepsie Factor: The Link to James Fenimore Cooper”](#)

The paradox that the *Baltimore Sun*, while marred with major deletions, was nonetheless the first known publication of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” may now be put to rest. The first publications of the “Helmsman” were all A-versions without the deletions found in the *Baltimore Sun*.

Although the conviction that Baltimore was the *first choice* for the publication of “The Helmsman” must now be jettisoned as premature, the fact remains that Baltimore stands out as the only major American city in the early distribution of “The Helmsman.” According to the 1840 census, the five most populous cities in the United States were the following:

RANK	CITY	STATE	Listing based on date of publication
1)	New York: 312,710	New York	#33 <i>The Sun Weekly</i> , Oct. 11, 1845: A-version
2)	Baltimore: 102,313	Maryland	#6 <i>Baltimore Sun</i> , Aug. 30, 1845: B-version
3)	New Orleans: 102,193	Louisiana	B. B. French's ballad: <i>Jeffersonian Republic</i> (Sept. 16, 1845)
4)	Philadelphia: 93,665	Pennsylvania	#54 <i>The North American and United States Gazette</i> , Nov. 3, 1847: B-version
5)	Boston: 93,383	Massachusetts	#32 <i>Christian Watchman</i> , Oct. 10, 1845: B-version

The flawed Baltimore rendering was copied in both Philadelphia and Boston.

The combination of the sketch with French's ballad also places the *Baltimore Sun* in stark relief as *the* newspaper which inspired French to compose the ballad. French's *Scrap Book* at the Library of Congress also has a clipping from the *Sun* of the anonymous prose sketch "Helmsman of Lake Erie."<sup>[1]</sup>

It is far from clear whether the Baltimore textual variation was a result of sloppy editorial or typesetter work, or whether the "B" textual variation was in fact submitted expressly for the *Sun*, and already contained the omissions.

Although new sources may yet be unearthed as historical newspapers of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century becomes ever more accessible through digitization, the simple fact that Baltimore, the second largest city in the United States at the time, was to be the major nexus in early distribution deserves attention. The logical location for greatest readership at first printing was then New York City, where – one would imagine – a sketch such as "The Helmsman" would be spotted immediately. <sup>[2]</sup>

The August 30<sup>th</sup> printing of "Helmsman of Lake Erie" in the *Baltimore Sun* was crowned with Major Benjamin Brown French's ballad on September 5<sup>th</sup>, expressly composed *for* the very same newspaper. The ballad was composed by a man already well-established in the nation's capital, Major Benjamin B. French, in 1845 the Chief Clerk of the United States House of Representatives.

French's ballad, which was conceived as approbation in verse form of the anonymous sketch, was, however, unable to acquire the readership of Horatio Alger's later ballad (composed in

the summer of 1866) entitled “John Maynard, A Ballad of Lake Erie,” which, though based on the shortened rendering by John Bartholomew Gough, could stand on its own. Apart from the *Baltimore Sun* (Sept. 5, 1845), the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Sept. 10, 1845), the *New Orleans Jeffersonian Republic* (Sept. 16, 1845), and the *Massachusetts Barre Gazette* (Oct. 10, 1845), French’s ballad seems to have been quickly lost sight of.

The earliest indirect [editorial comment on the August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1845 printing of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie”](#) is an introduction to French’s ballad in the September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1845 issue of *The Baltimore Sun*:

*The following stanzas present the reader with a very thrilling narrative which appeared in this paper a few days since, in a new form. They will be read with delight, the beauty and harmony of the verse imparting poetic effect to an incident, most worthy to be thus commemorated.*

[For the *Baltimore Sun*.]

Interestingly, the *Baltimore Sun* did not attribute either the sketch or the ballad to another paper.

## II. “HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE” [3]

James Fenimore Cooper was not, as many Americans might suppose, merely a writer of Leather-stocking novels. His literary accomplishments are, of course, too vast to give them proper emphasis in this article. Suffice it to say that no American in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had produced as many works, both of fiction and nonfiction, as Cooper. His role as the premier authority of America’s naval history in the 1840’s was established with the publication of *The History of the Navy of the United States of America* in 1839. There was only one aspect of the *Naval History* that aroused controversy: Cooper’s analysis of the Battle of Lake Erie and Perry’s and Jesse Duncan Elliott’s role in that battle. Perry’s subsequent claim (after first praising Elliott’s conduct!) that Elliott had *intentionally* not come to his aid so as to save the *Lawrence* was viewed by Cooper as unfounded for the simple reason that “*a want of wind*” had not “*enabled*” Elliott to engage the enemy. In *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* (1846), Cooper explains what happened so that even a layman can follow:

“The fact that the gun-boats had been kept astern by the lightness of the wind, is mentioned by Perry, himself, in his official account of the battle. He also says, “at half past two, the wind springing up, Capt. Elliott was enabled to bring his vessel, the *Niagara*, gallantly into close action,” leaving the unavoidable inference that a want of wind prevailed at an earlier period of the

engagement.”

*Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* – CSPCT, Vol. 45, “Oliver Hazard Perry,” p. 211 [Cooper’s life of Perry was first published in *Graham’s Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine*, Philadelphia: May & June 1843]

The upshot of the Perry/Elliott dispute was that Cooper was called upon to defend his analysis, which he did in the years following publication of the *Naval History*, and particularly in 1843 with the publication of his answer to his critics in the form of a pamphlet entitled *The Battle of Lake Erie*. Yet even Cooper’s objective response failed to stem the tide of scathing criticism by an overwhelmingly Whig-controlled press:

As for the Lake Erie affair, it was an easy task to show the rascality employed against me; but cui bono? Few persons read my pamphlet, and I am still vituperated as a falsifier of history. The coarsest calumny has been published against me, in connection with this affair has appeared since the explanations have been made. Unable to answer any thing, it runs into abuse and accuses me of *being hired by Elliott!*

*L&J*, Vol. IV, Letter 747, pp. 437-438, to William Gilmore Simms,  
From Otsego Hall, Cooperstown, Jan. 5<sup>th</sup>, 1844

Certainly, the lashing Cooper received from the American press, the very real loss of income, and the inestimable “moral effects” were a heavy price to pay for historical truth:

As for the money, not a human being who knows me, has the smallest idea, it, in any manner, influences my course. If *money* were the object, I own too much literary property not to understand how important it is to my pockets, to make friends among the newspapers. I have lost a fortune by the hostile influence of the American press, but its power has never induced me to court it, in any shape, or yield to it a single privilege. The calumny, in connection with the Battle of Lake Erie, has, of itself, cost me many thousands. It destroyed the sale of a work, that ought, and otherwise would have put into my pockets a very large sum; whereas I am five or six thousands poorer, than if I had never written it. The injury is irreparable. I have refuted that calumny, but much of its moral effects will remain long after I am dead, and, as for money, the loss once made, is made forever.

*L&J*, Vol. IV, Letter 713, p. 370, to Jerediah Hunt, Jr.,  
for *The Tomkins Volunteer*, From Cooperstown, Feb. 28<sup>th</sup> 1843

The following passage leaves no doubt as to the degree of Cooper’s disenchantment:

The eagerness and recklessness with which calumnious imputations, in connection with this history, have been circulated through the country; the avidity with which the public has received the most palpable falsehood, and the apathy with which it has listened to their triumphant refutation, has effectively cured me of any ambition to be an American historian. Having become committed, I shall, in justice to myself and family, leave on record such replies to the more conspicuous of my assailants, as will place them in no enviable position before posterity, whatever may be their better fortunes with their contemporaries; but were the manuscript of what has been printed now lying before me unpublished, I certainly should throw it into the fire as an act of prudence to myself, and of justice to my children.

(*L&J*, Vol. IV, p. 357, Letter # 709. To John Beauchamp Jones, for The Macedonian, From Cooperstown, Feb. 4, 1843)

“The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was a literary journalistic experiment in creating a credible civilian hero, who contrasted sharply with the warring factions of Oliver Hazard Perry and Jesse Duncan Elliott. [4] Needless to say, the unending dispute for the laurels of victory arising from the first American defeat of a British fleet in the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812 was fed by warring factions who showed little regard for the historical context. Cooper, the naval historian, was sucked into its maelstrom and nearly suffered shipwreck.

### III. WHAT WAS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE *BALTIMORE SUN*?

Cooper pointed out as early as 1831 the envious geographical location Baltimore enjoyed:

“I hope your work will continue to prosper – Baltimore is the very place for it – a sort of half-way-house between the Southern and Northern States, and the more we can bring the men of education together in America, the better for us all.”

*The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper* [henceforth referred to as *L&J*], 6 vols., edited by James Franklin Beard (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960-1968), Vol. II, Letter 213, pp. 113-114, To John Stuart Skinner, From Paris, June 26<sup>th</sup> 1831; ADDRESSED: Monsieur | Monsieur Skinner | Post-Office | <Baltimore> | [Forwarded to:] Post Master | at New York POSTMARKED [BALTIMORE?] | AUG | 23

There can be little doubt that the geography of Baltimore contributed in great part to the growth and importance of her most enterprising journal, the *Baltimore Sun*.

Established by 31-year-old Arunah S. Abell on May 17, 1837, the *Baltimore Sun* was the first penny paper in Baltimore. As such, it made the news accessible to many Americans and immigrants who would otherwise not have been able to afford a morning paper – the rates in Baltimore at the time were generally 6 cents a copy.

A second aspect of the *Sun* was that it could disseminate the news at least one day ahead of its competitors. Baltimore, about forty miles from the nation's capital, had, in 1845, over three times the population of Washington, D.C. Getting breaking news from the nation's rather sparsely populated capital and spreading it in a vast net across the country was a bread-and-butter issue for the *Sun*. Already in 1837, Martin Van Buren's 12,000-word message to Congress was transmitted from Washington to the *Sun*'s office in Baltimore in less than two hours, and printed in the *Sun* the day after delivery.

The secret behind the quick delivery was the completion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's line to Washington in 1835. Van Buren's message to Congress had been delivered by railroad express.

Circulation is the key to profit. The following quotation should give some idea of just how competitive the *Sun* was from the very beginning:

“The *Sun* was soon boasting about its circulation. The day it began it had ‘to double its corps of carriers.’ Then on June 19, in an item headed ‘Great Edition,’ it proclaimed: ‘The largest edition ever issued from any newspaper press in the city of Baltimore was issued from the Sun office on Saturday and disposed of before 10 o'clock in the forenoon. The success of the *Sun* is unparalleled. What a field for advertisers.’ In February 1838, it claimed its circulation was 11,000, ‘three times that of any Baltimore paper,’ adding that it was read mainly by the ‘mechanic class.’ Later it offered a \$1,000 forfeit if it did not print daily as many copies as all other Baltimore dailies combined.” - Harold A. Williams, *The Baltimore Sun: 1837-1987* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 13

The following description of the *Baltimore Sun*'s obsession with speed and fast dissemination of breaking news gives some idea of the *Sun*'s overriding importance in connection with the nation's capital:

“Baltimore saw itself as a wonderfully central location, the hub of ‘great arteries of travel’ and a ‘political pulsating center.’ Communications were revolutionized. A. S. Abell founded the *Sun* as a new-style ‘penny-paper’ in 1837, and he prided himself on using every means of speeding the news. In 1841 horse relays were organized to bring news of a court case in Utica, New York. Abell and John P. Kennedy maneuvered to get the Maryland legislature to appropriate money for Samuel Morse to build his experimental telegraph line between Baltimore and Washington. On 25 May 1844, in the B&O station, Alfred Vail received Morse's first message. The *Sun* commented on his ‘complete annihilation of space,’ and began using telegraph dispatches. In 1845 Abell organized an elaborate mechanism for hastening European news. A ‘horse express’ met mail steamers at Halifax, crossed the 150 miles of Nova Scotia, then took steamers to Portland and the railroad from Boston to Baltimore. In April 1849 the *Sun*



received news of the fall of Vera Cruz by special overland express a thousand miles long and telegraphed the news to the President in Washington. The Sun Building at Baltimore and South streets was itself a five-story marvel of mechanism symbolizing the nerve center of the nation. Its new-fangled eight-cylinder Hoe presses and their steam engines were in the basement, with business offices on the street floor. The second floor was occupied with telegraph companies – the Magnetic, the Western, and the Southern. It was elaborately lit up at night with gas light. As Baltimore’s first iron-front building, it was a model for a whole generation of downtown buildings.”

- Sherry H. Olson, *Baltimore: The Building of an American City*. Revised and Expanded Bicentennial Edition, (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1997 – originally published 1980), p. 111

Although a one-penny newspaper catering to the “mechanic class” may be thought of as Jacksonian by its very nature, this did not stop the *Sun* from printing a less-than-complimentary caricature of Cooper’s writing in July 1845. The anonymous reviewer’s name: “Peter Purple-Plush:”

“Fenimore Cooper, they say, is coming out with a new work; it is entitled ‘Ca-out-Choue, or the Indian Rubber,’ which is Yankee, I suppose, for robber. The hero is represented as an elastic waterproof character, incapable of being influenced by anything less solvent than stiff alcohol. The Republic, therefore, need not reckon upon *his* assistance in the event of a war. The book will be illustrated, and will, doubtless, efface from our memories every trace of all former Columbian quills. N. P. Willis’s ‘Pencilings,’ by the way, will be annihilated, abraded and completely expunged by Indian Rubber.” *The Baltimore Sun*, Thursday morning, July 10, 1845, p. 1, c. 3

Cooper’s *Satanstoe, or The Littlepage Manuscripts: A Tale of the Colony*, the first volume of the Littlepage Trilogy of 1845-1846, was published about July 4<sup>th</sup>. The short burlesque of Purple-Plush does not even bother to name the new novel, let alone to consider its style and content. As Cooper pointed out in 1843:

“As a writer, I have never been supported by the written, critical opinion of my own country.”

*L&J*, Vol. IV, p. 346, Letter #705, To Rufus Wilmot Griswold, [10-18 January 1843?]

Lest it be thought that Cooper was on the warpath with barbs aimed at Nathaniel Parker Willis [1806-1867], it should be recalled that, in 1832, Cooper was even willing to lend young Willis, then in Paris, \$150, simply because he was “a countryman in distress” [*L&J*, Letter #301a, Vol. VI, p. 317; & Letter 298, Vol. II, p. 336 and p. 338, fn. 2]. In 1848, Cooper contributed a number of

letters to the editors of *The Home Journal*, edited by George Pope Morris and Nathaniel Parker Willis. Although Willis was neutrally designated an “acquaintance,” Cooper could include his name in a list of leading American writers headed by William Cullen Bryant [*L&J*, Letter #1028, Vol. VI, p. 108]. And, even as late as January 1850, it was Willis who offered the optimistic and well-intentioned hope that Cooper, already more seriously ill than he appeared, would “give us new *leaves* (of new books) for many a Spring to come” [*L&J*, Vol. VI, p. 253].

#### IV. WHY NOT NEW YORK?

The very fact that New York City was shunned also points to Cooper, who, as it turns out, had first-hand experience with the city and spent a good deal of his time there preparing his manuscripts for publication. Indeed, in 1845, James Fenimore Cooper was not merely hidden away in bucolic Cooperstown in upstate New York but was also professionally active in both New York City and Philadelphia. A brief look at Cooper’s surviving letters in the year 1845, reveals that 27 were written from Cooperstown, 21 from New York City, and 15 from Philadelphia.

As there are critics who may feel that Cooper was overly sensitive to criticism from the American press, Benjamin Brown French’s assessment deserves quoting:

“To what meanness, vulgarity & abuse is that champion of liberty, in proper hands, the press prostituted! With what lies and scandal does [sic] the columns of almost every political paper abound! I blush for my country when I see such things, & I often tremble with apprehension that our Constitution will no longer withstand the current which threatens to overwhelm it. Our government is so based that an *honest* difference between American citizens must always exist. But the rancorous excitement which now threatens our civil liberties and a dissolution of this Union does not emanate from an *honest* difference of opinion, but from a determination of an unholy league to trample down an Administration, be it ever so pure, & be its acts ever so just. It must not be. There is a kind Providence that overlooks the destinies of this Nation who will not suffer it to be overthrown by a party of aspiring office seekers and political demagogues.” *Witness*, Newport, N.H., Monday, September 15, 1828, pp. 15-16

Cooper’s opinion of the American press seems almost mild by comparison:

“Every honest man appears to admit that the press, in America, is fast getting to be intolerable.” *Gleanings in Europe: England* – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter XVIII, p. 213 “Licentiousness of the press;” 1837

Particularly the press in New York City was viewed by Cooper with less restraint:

“[William Leete] Stone [of the *New-York Commercial Advertiser*] admitted, publicly in his paper, that he had no reason to suppose that I had ever been guilty of any transaction to justify the charge that he endeavored to explain away as a joke! Yet, the public is willing to uphold such rascals. This Stone, moreover, though vulgar, and malicious and false, was a Saint compared to half the New York editors, who are certainly the worst in the country.”

*L&J*, Vol. IV, p. 120, Letter #855, To William Branford Shubrick, From Hall, Cooperstown, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1846

As early as 1832, Cooper, while residing in Vevay on Lake Geneva, wrote to his good friend Samuel F. B. Morse, warning him not to exhibit a painting in New York City. The reason: Morse’s close relationship with Cooper would be sufficient for the painting to receive unfair criticism!

“I doubt your success in New-York, and would advise you to try Philadelphia. Your intimacy with me has become known, and such is the virulence of my enemies in New-York, that I have no sort of doubt, of their attacking your picture in consequence. . . . Commence as far south as Philadelphia, and from there go to Baltimore and Washington.”

*L&J*, Vol. II, pp. 136-137, Letter #298, To Samuel F. B. Morse, From Vevay [Switzerland], September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1832

The only New York newspaper that Cooper may have considered as a viable option was the *New York Evening Post*, run by none other than William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878). Cooper’s pseudonymously published political editorials, called the “ABC Letters,” were put out in Bryant’s *Evening Post*, “New York’s most substantial Democratic newspaper” [*L&J*, Vol. III, p. 61]. Of course, Bryant *knew* who his contributor was, and, when scathing criticism was expressed of the ABC editorials, begun in December 1834, Bryant defended his paper by indirectly hinting at the identity of his contributor. As such, in spite of Cooper’s admiration of Bryant, the *Evening Post* was paradoxically “a bit too close to home.” In all fairness to Bryant, it should be remembered that his “Discourse on the Life, Genius, and Writings of James Fenimore Cooper” was the key speech delivered at Metropolitan Hall, N.Y., on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1852, to honor the American writer who had passed away on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1851, on the eve of his 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

## V. WHAT BALTIMORE STOOD FOR

Although all Americans can quickly identify with their national anthem, it may safely be asserted that not all are aware of the circumstances leading to its composition. Those circumstances are closely identified with Baltimore and the British attempt to capture the city after burning the nation's new capital in Washington to the ground. The defense of Baltimore, in other words, represented effective resistance to British encroachment and the British attempt to subjugate the recalcitrant colonies that had dared to declare independence and had shaken the established European order by creating a republican form of government. To quote from *Wikipedia*:

[“Defenders’ Day](#) is a legal holiday in the U.S. state of Maryland. It commemorates the successful defense of the city of Baltimore on September 12, 1814 from an invading British force during the War of 1812, an event which would lead to the writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the national anthem of the United States.”

The joy at dawn of seeing the American flag still waving after the British bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry inspired Francis S. Key to compose what would later become the national anthem.

Cooper, in his 1828 *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, points out the importance of Baltimore in the War of 1812. The concluding paragraph speaks well both of Baltimore and its women:

“You may remember that General Ross, after his successful attack on Washington, made a movement threatening Baltimore. Your countrymen possessed an incalculable advantage in the command of the sea, by means of which they not only directed their attacks against the most defenseless points, but they were also enabled to keep their adversaries in an embarrassing ignorance of their force. . . . The Americans say, that their ignorance of the force of General Ross alone saved him from destruction.

“But Baltimore was a far more important place than Washington, and time had been given to collect an army of citizens. The whole affair terminated in a hot skirmish between an advanced party of some two or three thousand Americans, and a portion of the British army. The former retreated, as had been expected, but the English commander lost his life in the *rencontre*. His successor wisely abandoned an attempt that must have terminated in the annihilation of his force, which was neither strong enough to carry the defenses of the place, nor to protect itself against an attack when suffering under reverses, and from an enemy who would soon have been apprised of his weakness. A bombardment of a fort, which was defended by regular troops, proved also totally useless.

“We have been pleased with our residence at Baltimore. It contains a great many polished and enlightened men; and, perhaps, there is no part of the Union where

society is more elegant, or the women handsomer. The latter circumstance soothed my feelings during the delay of a fortnight.” Letter XVII, pp. 262 – 263 (Cooper Edition/SUNY)

## VI. THE REEMERGENCE OF THE AMERICAN CAPITAL

In the final pages of his maritime novel *Jack Tier*, Cooper surprises the reader with a description of Washington, D.C. As the novel was first published in installments between 1846 and 1848, it is not clear whether Cooper already had penned the description in 1846, or whether it was perhaps done two years later. What should, however, be clear from the depiction is that Cooper’s intimate knowledge of the capital is undisputable.

“...Washington is scarce a town at any season. It is much the fashion to deride the American capital, and to treat it as a place of very humble performance with very sounding pretensions. Certainly, Washington has very few of the peculiarities of a great European capital, but few as these are, they are more than belong to any other place in this country. We now allude to the distinctive characteristics of a capital, and not to a mere concentration of houses and shops within a green space. In this last respect, Washington is much behind fifty other American towns, even while it is the only place in the whole Republic which possesses specimens of architecture on a scale approaching that of the higher classes of the edifices of the old world. The new Treasury Buildings are unquestionably, on the score of size, embellishments, and finish, the American edifice that comes nearest to first-class architecture on the other side of the Atlantic. The Capitol comes next, though it can be ranked, relatively, as high. As for the White House, it is every way sufficient for its purposes and institutions; and now that its grounds are finished, and the shrubbery and trees begin to tell, one sees about it something that is not unworthy of its high uses and origin. Those grounds, which so long lay a reproach to the national taste and liberality, are now fast becoming beautiful, are already exceeding pretty, and given to a structure that is destined to become historical, having already associated with it the names of Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, and Quincy Adams, together with the *oi polloi* of the later Presidents, an *entourage* that is suitable to its past recollections and its present purposes. They are not quite on a level with the parks of London, it is true; or even with the Tuileries or Luxembourg, or the Boboli or the Villa Reale, or fifty more grounds and gardens of a similar nature, that might be mentioned; but, seen in the spring and early summer, they adorn the building they surround, and lend to the whole neighborhood a character of high civilization that no other place in America can show, in precisely the same form, or to the same extent.”

*Jack Tier*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing Classic Texts [henceforth designated **CSPCT**], April 2010), Vol. 31, Ch. XVII, p. 341

## VII. THE DEFENDERS OF BALTIMORE IN THE YEAR 1845

By way of review, on August 30<sup>th</sup> “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was published in *The Baltimore Sun*. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, Benjamin B. French’s ballad was published, again in the same newspaper. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, the Old Defenders of Baltimore were received in the nation’s capital where they paid Mrs. Dolley Madison a courtesy visit and were received by President Polk and his cabinet. An excerpt of the occasion is taken from the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.):

“The Old Defenders marched from the cars in front of the depot, on Pennsylvania avenue, where, after being welcomed by the Mayor in a brief but cordial manner, they, preceded by their military escort from Baltimore, were saluted by the Washington Light Infantry, under Lieut. McKean, who were drawn out in line to receive the Baltimore visitors.

“As the Old Defenders marched along, receiving the salute of the light Infantry, we had a good opportunity of noticing their appearance, number, banners, &c. In number they far exceeded what we had been led to expect. There were at least two hundred and fifty men of different age and stature; some of them venerable indeed for their years and services in defence of the Monumental City in the hour of its peril and difficulty.

“We have never seen a more imposing and interesting spectacle than was presented by the Old Defenders marching in line and in sections along Pennsylvania avenue. Patriotic was their defence of Baltimore on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 1814; imposing and honorable was their appearance in Washington on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 1845. The procession of the Old Defenders will long be remembered as one of the most animating and patriotic spectacles that was ever witnessed in the metropolis of the nation; and insensible indeed to national feeling must that man be who could look upon such a spectacle with indifference.” (Saturday, Sept. 13, 1845, p. 3, c. 5-6)

At this point, the reader may justifiably wonder why the Old Defenders have been given such emphasis. The reason is that Benjamin B. French was the Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements of the Old Defenders in 1845! Among the toasts pronounced at the festivities in Washington on September 12<sup>th</sup>:

“Hon. B. B. French, chairman of the committee – his indefatigable exertions, on this occasion, fully demonstrate his high appreciation of the ‘Defenders of Baltimore.’  
[Cheers.]” - *Baltimore Sun*, Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1845, p. 4

French, himself, pronounced the following toast:

“The memory of Francis S. Key, Esq., and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’ The man and the subject are too intimately connected with the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 1814, to be forgotten here.” - *Ibid.*

Perhaps the most humorous toast was by James Lawrenson, Secretary to the Committee of Arrangements:

“The twelfth of September, 1814 - the British made a visit to Baltimore, and found the people *at home*. [Repeated cheering.]”

Apart from the ballad’s own inherent qualities, it was no doubt incumbent upon the *Baltimore Sun* to allow the verse a worthy reception, given French’s overriding role on Baltimore’s Old Defenders’ Day.

### VIII. MAJOR BENJAMIN B. FRENCH AND WASHINGTON, D. C.

French was not solely an organizer of a patriotic parade in Washington. The following somewhat lengthy obituary provides details of French’s life, although his work in the nation’s capital in 1845 is completely skipped over:

#### *The Late Major French – Sketch of His Life*

The Washington papers of yesterday contain lengthy obituary notices of the late Major B. B. FRENCH, whose death occurred on the 12<sup>th</sup> inst. The *Chronicle* says: “BENJAMIN B. FRENCH was born in Chester, Rockingham County, N. H., on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1800. He was the son of DANIEL and MERCY FRENCH. His mother’s maiden name was BROWN. She was the daughter of BENJAMIN BROWN, of Chester, and sister of FRANCIS BROWN, an eminent divine, who, at the time of his death in 1821, was President of Dartmouth College. Mr. FRENCH was the only child of his mother, who died when he was eighteen months old. His father was a lawyer of high standing, and was for several years Attorney-General of the State of New-Hampshire. He received a good common school and academic education, and it was the earnest desire of his father and friends that he should enter college, which he declined to do. In 1819 he went to Boston with a view of going to sea. Disappointed in obtaining a berth on a ship, he enlisted as a soldier in the army of the United States, and was stationed at Fort Warren, on Governor’s Island, in the harbor of Boston, with

a detachment of the Eighth Regiment of infantry. He was, soon after enlisting, appointed a Sergeant, and performed his duty faithfully for about four months, when, at the earnest solicitation of his friends, who provided a substitute, he left the army on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1819. He then returned to his father's, and, although contrary to his own inclinations, commenced the study of law, which he pursued with diligence for five years, that being the time fixed by the bar rules of New-Hampshire. At the February term of the Court of Common Pleas for the County of Rockingham, held at Portsmouth, in 1825, Mr. FRENCH was admitted an attorney at law, and in the month of March following, commenced the practice at Hookset, in the county of Merrimack, whence, in September, he removed to Sutton, and married ELIZABETH S. RICHARDSON, daughter of Hon. WILLIAM M. RICHARDSON, Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court of New-Hampshire. Mr. FRENCH entered immediately into full practice, and with his industry and natural business tact, would probably have taken a very respectable place at the Bar had he continued his profession. He was elected Assistant Clerk of the Senate of New-Hampshire in June, 1826, to which office he was twice re-elected. He was the first Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas and the Superior Court of Judicature for Sullivan County, New-Hampshire.

He was appointed Commissioner of Public Buildings under President PIERCE, and again under President LINCOLN'S Administration, continuing in that office until it was abolished under President JOHNSON'S Administration in 1868, since which time, until the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, he was employed in the Treasury Department until a few weeks since, when he resigned.

Besides the national offices of honor and trust he held, Major FRENCH was for many years President of the Board of Aldermen and Common Council respectively. He was also a member of Levy Court and the Oldest Inhabitants' Association. He was known throughout the country for his high standing in the Masonic fraternity."

Major FRENCH will be buried today, Sunday, at 4 o'clock P. M. in the Congressional Cemetery. – *The New York Times*, August 14, 1870

[ Cf. [An illustration of French's brown obelisk tombstone at Congressional Cemetery](#) ]

On January 18th, 1845, French was elected Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives. French held that office until December 1847. [5] On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1845, French's second child [6] was born:

"My wife named him Benjamin Brown, & now the prospect is fair that old Ben & young Ben will be often heard in future days, if we both live. He is a healthy, & a good child, & we think him handsome." *Witness*, p. 167, Sunday, April 19, 1845

French's commission as Justice of the Peace was renewed in July 1845:



## APPOINTMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT

Benjamin B. French, as a Justice of the peace in the county of Washington, in the District of Columbia; his former commission having expired on the 2<sup>nd</sup> inst.

- *The Southern Patriot* (Charleston, S.C.), July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1845, p. 2

French became ever more involved in the administration and construction work at the nation's capital. In 1850, for example, he was elected President of the Board of Aldermen. In 1854, he became Commissioner of Public Buildings. An extremely active man in public life, it is clear, as his obituary states, that he was "well-known and respected" in Washington, D.C.

As the following article indirectly attests, French – in spite of a setback – was well situated in the nation's capital in 1845:

"*Fire.* – About nine o'clock last evening, a fire broke out in the stable attached to the residence of B. B. French, Esq., Clerk of the House of Representatives U. S., on East Capitol street, which consumed the stable, and wood-house adjoining. So rapid was the conflagration, from the movement that the fire appeared upon the exterior of the building, that it was found impracticable to rescue the valuable horse and carriage and other property belonging to Major French, all of which fell a sacrifice to the raging element. Fortunately, the wind blew strongly from the northwest, carrying the flame directly from the elegant and costly mansion of Major. F. (erected by him about three years since), otherwise, from the great want of water in the vicinity, it would have almost inevitably been consumed. No insurance. Loss about \$700. At [this?] inclement season, would it not be well for the proper authorities to examine into the condition of all cisterns and pumps in the city?"

- *The Baltimore Sun*, December 17, 1845, p. 4

## IX. A DOUBLE BROADSIDE

The linkage of Baltimore and Washington, of American history during the War of 1812, of the sketch and the ballad, must strike the reader as either a singular coincidence, or – given French's role as Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements – an affair that might even have been *arranged*.

One need only consider the rendering of "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" by John Bartholomew Gough in the November 1863 monthly issue of *The British Workman*, a London illustrated magazine aimed at furthering the Temperance Campaign in England. [7]

The sketch's heading was "Brave John Maynard!" To lend emphasis to the tale, Gough had the cover of the illustrated adorned with a full-page portrayal of John Maynard at the helm of his burning ship. He also commissioned an anonymous poet named "Josephine" to compose a ballad of John Maynard to be placed beneath Gough's shortened prose sketch. Then, for good

measure, a similar tale of heroism was placed in the adjoining column with the title “Brave James Maxwell!”

Although the *Baltimore Sun* on August 30<sup>th</sup> and September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1845, confronts the reader with only one sketch and one ballad, the effect is similar to the *British Workman* in 1863. The reader is hit with a double whammy or broadside, the ballad reinforcing the sketch and – through the person of Major French, a celebrity in Baltimore – the anonymous sketch indirectly receives the blessing of the Old Defenders.

Only five days after French’s ballad was published, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, on September 10, 1845, placed both French’s ballad and the sketch in the very same column, beginning with the ballad by French. As was to be expected, the sketch was the “B”-version, the same used by the *Baltimore Sun*.

The question the reader at this juncture may pose is whether the ballad was sheer coincidence or whether other factors were at play.

## X. STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE’S MOUTH

French took a lifelong interest in poetry and was able to compose quickly and, if need be, for special occasions:

“Since he was prompt and reliable as a versifier, French’s talent was often called upon on dedicatory, celebratory, or funereal occasions.” - *Witness*, p. 24, fn. 2

One example of a special occasion occurred three months later in 1845; the resulting poem was entitled “New England.” Composed on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1845, the poem [8] was expressly created for the New England Society of the City of Washington, which met on December 22, 1845, to celebrate the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims:

“An entertainment was provided on the occasion, to which, at about eight o’clock, nearly two hundred persons sat down. Many distinguished gentlemen, invited guests, as we understand, were present on the occasion, and responded, as will be seen, to the sentiments offered.”

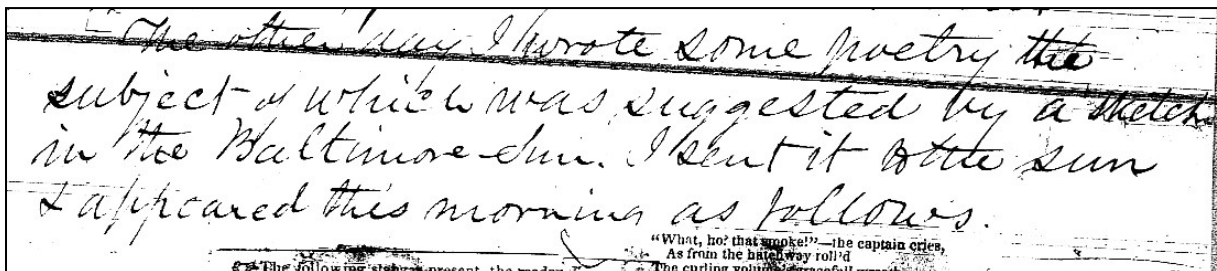
From “THE LANDING OF THE PILGRIMS. *Celebration of the Landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock*, by the NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY OF THE CITY OF WASHINGTON. DECEMBER 22, 1845” – *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), Dec.25<sup>th</sup>, 1845, p. 2

Cooper, the historian, would obviously have taken a keen interest in such a landmark celebration of his nation's history. Already in November of the same year, Cooper had even been sensitized to the New England Pilgrim Society in a postscript of a letter from Boston:

“Did I send you a small pamphlet upon Marsh’s address last year, before the New England Pilgrim Society, New York? If not, I will do so. It was by my second son, E. T. D.” From Richard Henry Dana, Nov. 10, 1845, in *Correspondence of James Fenimore-Cooper*, edited by his Grandson, James Fenimore Cooper, Vol. II, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), p. 559 [9]

Yet French’s ballad of John Maynard, a non-military Old Hero, does not seem to fit neatly into the agenda of the Old Defenders of Baltimore. In other words, it would seem in this instance that we are confronted with a poet who is quite simply inspired to “create.”

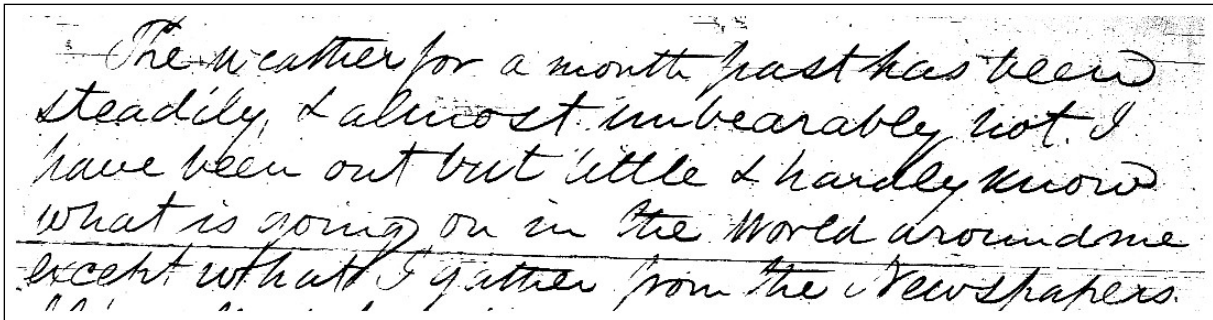
On the morning of September 5<sup>th</sup>, the very day French’s ballad appeared in the *Sun*, the following entry was made in French’s *Journal* :



“The other day, I wrote some poetry, the subject of which was suggested by a sketch in the Baltimore Sun. I sent it to the Sun & appeared this morning as follows.”

Courtesy of the MSS Division of the Library of Congress, *Journals of Benjamin Brown French*, 5 July, 1845 – Jan. 1854, No. 15,260, Container I:2: Sept. 5, 1845, p. 12

The entry of September 4<sup>th</sup> is also an eye-opener:



The weather for a month past has been steadily, & almost unbearably hot. I have been out but little & hardly know what is going on in the world around me except what I gather from the newspapers.

“The weather for a month past has been steadily, & almost unbearably hot. I have been out but little & hardly know what is going on in the world around me except what I gather from the Newspapers.”

Courtesy of the MSS Division of the Library of Congress, *Journals of Benjamin Brown French, ibid.*, p. 11, Container I:2: Sept. 4, 1845, p. 11

Both quotations are significant. Firstly, it is pointed out that French did not write the anonymous sketch himself. Secondly, he did not know the name of the author. Thirdly, social contacts in August were prevented by a very hot summer. In other words, French was not “commissioned” to compose a ballad to reinforce the thrust of the anonymous sketch but was in fact spontaneously inspired by the sketch to compose his ballad.

## XI. FRENCH’S “FITZ CLARENCE”

### A) A SHIP ON FIRE

The legend of John Maynard has often been linked to the loss of the steamboat *Erie* eight miles off Silver Creek on her way from Buffalo to Dunkirk, on Lake Erie on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1841. Although the circumstances of the conflagration of the *Erie* differ in many respects from those of the *Jersey* in the 1845 sketch, it remains a possibility that the loss of life was so frightening as to motivate a writer to create a sketch in which only one man died, the helmsman, who had heroically withstood both smoke and flames to steer his vessel to the saving shore. The unconfirmed statement of Captain Titus of the *Erie* that his wheelsman on duty, a man named Fuller, had resolutely remained at the wheel until burned to death was also thought to add weight to the *Erie* as a possible motivation or source of inspiration for a new telling with events radically altered to fit the circumstances of a catastrophe averted with no loss of life – apart from the heroic wheelsman.

Three years prior to the loss of the *Erie*, yet another steamer, the *Washington*, met with a similar fate off Silver Creek:

“It is a singular coincidence, that the *Erie* was burned at almost identically the same spot where the *Washington* was burned in June, 1838. Captain Brown, who commanded the *Washington* at that time, happened to be on board the *Clinton* and was very active in saving the survivors of the *Erie*.”

- *The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Tuesday, Aug. 10, 1841

Although the loss of the *Erie* has not been found in French’s journal, the loss of the *Washington* has. French was not insensitive to the danger steamboats represented to passengers and crew:

“The Nation must shake off its apathy about steam navigation and arouse itself; legislation must be had on the subject or nobody’s life will be safe who travels. Only last October the *Home* was lost with many valuable lives – recently the *Moselle* was blown up & hundreds of human beings hurried into eternity in a moment – the paper of today contains the account of the burning of the *Washington* on Lake Erie & the loss of more than 50 lives! Something must be done, or steam navigation had better never have been discovered – it will prove, to the human race rather a curse than a blessing . . . .”

- *Witness*, Thursday, June 21, 1838, p. 88

“Fitz Clarence: A Poem,” printed by Blair and Rives in Washington, in December 1844, was one of French’s most celebrated poems. [10] The First Canto of the 1844 printing was, however, not an inspiration of the moment but had a genesis of roughly fifteen years. It was a poem that was to occupy French much later in life, the second Canto being completed only about a decade before French’s death in 1870 (cf. *Witness*, Sunday, March 27, 1870, p. 613). There are several aspects of “Fitz Clarence” that tie in with the theme of “The Helmsman.” In his introduction “*To the Reader*” (p. 3), French writes:

“...the ship in which a friend had sailed for foreign climes, was burned at sea, somewhat under the circumstances attempted to be described in this canto. The writer had then seen no poetical description of the burning of a ship at sea, and his ambition to describe it, led him into a digression from his original design.”

In other words, the sense of personal loss due to the conflagration of a vessel had led to French’s interest in a “*poetical description of the burning of a ship at sea*.” The ship was struck by a bolt of lightning:

And now, as if all terrors to unite,  
A flash – a peal – like as a bolt were driven  
Right through that vessel’s hull: ’Tis so – her mainmast’s  
riven!

*Stanza XLI*

Ere yet the wildered ones who trod that deck,  
Robed in the garb of high authority,  
Had waked their energies to note the wreck  
The angry elements had made – the cry,  
“The ship’s on fire!” was shouted to the sky.  
In wild amazement, rushing from below,  
As if away from danger they could fly,  
Came those who, warm with expectation’s glow,  
Had sought their rest with joy, but to awake to wo [sic].

**B) HOMEWARD BOUND**

Young Fitz is rescued by a “friendly barque” and is taken to “a far and foreign shore.” Thus begin his sojourns in Italy, Russia, and finally England. The following lines allow room for conjecture:

*Last Lines of Stanza LIV* (p. 26)

At length he came to Albion’s sea-girt shore,  
Whence soon again upon the deep he rode,  
And, “Homeward bound,” swell’d far the water o’er,  
Till the sweet notes were drowned amid the Atlantic’s roar.

Was “*Homeward bound*” placed in inverted commas with *Homeward* capitalized as an implicit reference to Cooper’s novel *Homeward Bound*, published in 1838? If so, French was not the last writer to play games with Cooper’s title. Herman Melville, in *White Jacket* (Jan. 1850, London), in the chapter “The Pitch of the Cape,” makes a direct allusion to Cooper’s Navesink [=Neversink] in his novel *Homeward Bound* by creating the ship *Neversink* and transforming the title of Cooper’s novel into dialogue! The element of patriotism in the quote is understandable.

“What ship’s that?”

“The Sultan, Indiaman, from New York; and bound to Callao and Canton, sixty days out, all well. What frigate’s that?”

“*The United States ship Neversink, homeward bound.*” [=my emphasis]

“Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!” yelled our enthusiastic countryman, transported with patriotism. Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* [Library of America Edition, including *Redburn* and *Moby-Dick*], Ch. 26, “The Pitch of the Cape,” pp. 457-458

Cooper’s makes use of the imagery of a “cloud,” described as “a dim, ill-defined, dark body of vapor,” in presenting the Highlands of New Jersey, referred to as Navesink (often corrupted to “Neversink,” i.e., “the land will never sink”), that first bit of the American continent ships from Europe glimpse before the coastline becomes distinct. The image of the hovering Highlands was used by Cooper as early as *Travelling Bachelor*.<sup>[11]</sup> The following is from *Homeward Bound*:

“Have the kindness to look over the stock of that anchor,” said Paul, glad of an excuse to place himself nearer to Eve; and you will discover an object on the water.”

“I do,” said Eve, “but is it a vessel?”

“It is, but a little to the right of that vessel, do you not perceive a hazy object at some elevation above the sea?”

“*The cloud, you mean — a dim, ill-defined, dark body of vapor?*” [=my emphasis]

“So it may seem to you, but to me it appears to be land. That is the bluff-like termination of the celebrated high lands of Navesink. By watching it for half an hour you will perceive its form and surface grow gradually more distinct.”

Eve eagerly pointed out the place to Mademoiselle Vielville and her father, and from that moment, for near an hour, most of the passengers kept it steadily in view.

As Paul had said, the blue of this hazy object deepened; then its base became connected with water, and it ceased to resemble a cloud at all. In twenty more minutes, the faces and angles of the hills became visible, and trees started out of their sides. In the end a pair of twin lights were seen perched on the summit.

*Homeward Bound* – CSPCT, Vol. 18, Ch. XXXII, p. 332

French’s “Fitz Clarence” approaches Navesink in the following manner:

*Stanza LVI* (p.26)

“Land, ho!” at morning’s dawn the joyful cry  
Rang through the ship, and roused each sleeper there;  
All sought the deck – and every eager eye  
Was westward turned, to pierce the distance, where  
Appeared, between the ocean and the air,  
*A dim, faint outline – like a dream of land;*  
*To unskilled eyes no semblance did it bear*  
*To the firm soil [=my emphasis];* but as the morning, bland,  
Poured forth its orient beams, e’en landsmen hailed the strand.

### C) THE “HERO-CHRISTIAN”

On the last leg of his journey home, Fitz passes Mount Vernon. The following lines are a hymn to the “Hero-Christian,” George Washington:

#### *Stanza LXVIII (p. 30)*

That mount – that sacred mount now met the view  
Where lived the best, the greatest of his race;  
To God, his Country, and his Nature true,  
*The Hero-Christian there met Death’s embrace [=my emphasis];*  
And there the marble doth that form encase  
Which men did almost worship here below.  
Sacred, forever sacred, be that place  
O’er that lone tomb a Nation’s tears do flow,  
And generations yet unborn, to worship there will go.

The first two lines of Stanza LXX (p. 31) may also be quoted:

Oh may the shades of Vernon ever be  
His place of rest – *there let his ashes sleep [=my emphasis]*

The closing lines of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” have a similar ring:



“He had died the death of a Christian hero – I had almost said, of a martyr; his spirit was commended into his Father’s hands, and his body sleeps in peace by the green side of lake Erie.” (lines 174-178)

The death of the Old Hero, Andrew Jackson, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1845, places the sketch “Helmsman of Lake Erie” in the backdrop of Jacksonian literature in which John Maynard assumes the heroic proportions of *a nation’s dying hero*. Indeed, given the date of publication of *The Church of England Magazine*, one day before Jackson’s death, the anonymous sketch was crafted during that melancholy period as the Nation awaited the expiration of their greatest Hero. [12] A common theme is the deep gratitude to the deceased, who – viewed in the context of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” – represented the helmsman of the ship of state, who had so selflessly guided his vessel – and all Americans – to a safe harbor.

Not since the death of George Washington had America been so moved by the loss of a national leader who had become a legend in his own time. Whether an allegorical intent is indeed read into the “Helmsman” as the “Helmsman of the Ship of State” with the “passengers and crew” on board the citizens of the United States (while completely ignoring the immigrants from Europe on the ill-starred *Erie*), the fact remains that the sketch dovetails neatly with the period of mourning for the Old Hero – who, in his final years, was subject to severe pain and who stoically bore the agony with Christian equanimity and faith in his Redeemer.

Although Cooper is not mentioned by name once in French’s journal (Herman Melville is also not cited), French’s most popular poem “Fitz Clarence” contains a possible allusion both to Cooper’s *Homeward Bound* and to Cooper’s maritime treatment of the Jersey Highlands. The clear motifs of a “ship on fire” and “Christian heroes” with the veneration of George Washington make French’s susceptibility to poetic inspiration upon reading the anonymous sketch easy to grasp – here, after all, were themes he could readily identify with in the backdrop of the recent death of yet another American legend, Andrew Jackson. Here were themes which had been worked and reworked in the back of his mind for years!

Only a few days after the Old Defenders had sallied forth to Washington, a committee had been formed to honor the memory of President Jackson. “A colossal equestrian statue, in imperishable bronze” was envisioned.

“...I was notified to meet at the President’s office at ½ past 2 P.M. to take into consideration the most proper manner of proceeding to cause a statue to be erected to the memory of the illustrious Andrew Jackson. So, after dinner, I walked up and found the President (Mr. Polk), Mr. Buchanan, Secy. of State, Mr. Walker, Secy. of the Treasury, Gov. Marcy, Secretary of War, Mr. Cave Johnson, P. M. General, Mr. Mason, Atty. General, Mr. Kendall, Mr. Ritchie, Mr. Dickens, Secretary of the Senate, and Mr. J. L. O’Sullivan. The propriety of forming a central committee, to consist of

the President, Heads of Department, Secretary of the Senate & Clerk of the Ho. Reps. [i.e., French] and two citizens of Washington (Mr. Kendall & Mr. Blair) was discussed at considerable length.” - *Witness*, Wednesday, September 10, 1845, p. 179

The equestrian statue of Jackson, the first equestrian statue ever cast in bronze in the United States, was unveiled on January 16, 1853 [cf. *Witness*, p. 228] with, according to French, at least 20,000 spectators present. [13]

It should also be pointed out that none other than the Washington Monument was a project in which French played a decisive role. This was connected with French’s leading position in Washington Freemasonry:

“Freemasonry came to the fore in French’s life in 1846 when he was elected grand master of the Masons in the District of Columbia. On the occasion he reflected on his earlier Masonic membership in New Hampshire, where, because of the Anti-Masonic excitement of the 1830s, it became expedient to close the ledges. Dormant for a time, the craft was now active again. As grand master he was often called on to officiate at special events, such as the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington Monument on July 4, 1848.” - *Witness*, pp. 165-166

Indeed, the monuments of our Nation’s capital owe a great debt to the French family. Benjamin B. French’s nephew, Daniel Chester French (1850-1931) will be remembered for his 1920 sculpture of the seated Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial! [14]

In the final stanza of his Lake Erie ballad, French calls for the creation of a monument to John Maynard. Given French’s accomplishments in providing worthy memorials for the Nation’s Heroes, a call for a monument to John Maynard may also be regarded as a call for a memorial for a *National* Hero.

## XII. COOPER’S ROAD FROM BALTIMORE TO WASHINGTON

Cooper was obliged to spend time in Washington for his research in the Navy Archives. His best friend, Commodore William Branford Shubrick, whom he often visited and who often visited Cooper at Cooperstown, New York, resided in Baltimore at least from 1827 (perhaps much earlier) to 1838. Consequently, the Shubricks and Baltimore blended into one.

“I [Jacob Harvey] met Shubrick in Baltimore where he was on a visit to his family after his return from the West Indies – he requested me to enclose you a letter for Mrs.

Cooper from his wife. – He has given up his command for the present, owing to her ill health.” *Correspondence*, Vol. I, From Jacob Harvey, To Cooper, From New York, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1827

Afterwards, apart from relocating to Pensacola, Florida, while in command of the West-India Squadron and a stay in Norfolk, Virginia, Shubrick’s permanent home became Washington from 1843 until his death. His wife, Harriet Cordelia Wethered Shubrick, throughout the period, maintained close ties with Baltimore (possibly the home of her sister and nieces) and would sometimes set off on her own to visit that city.

In May 1845, several weeks were spent by Cooper at the Shubricks’ in Washington. As Cooper often moved in high and relatively elite governmental circles as an impassioned Jacksonian Democrat, who even termed Polk’s inauguration “St. Polk’s Day” (Polk himself was sometimes called “Little Hickory”), the likelihood of Cooper making the acquaintance of French does not seem farfetched. French was, after all, the newly appointed Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives, enjoyed a reputation as a man of considerable literary attainment, and – like Cooper – was a devoted admirer of Jackson. Cooper, highly qualified as a maritime historian, could have accepted several overtures to become Secretary of the Navy, had he been willing to hold public office. When French, together with the Old Defenders, was received by the Washington Secretaries, George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy, was present. Bancroft and Cooper were in close contact. In July, Cooper was busy collecting material for an article on *Old Ironsides* from Bancroft’s office.

Cooper’s lifelong friend and neighbor in Cooperstown, Judge Samuel Nelson, should also not be forgotten. An Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court naturally must spend time in Washington. It is quite likely that Nelson would have been aware of the Presidential appointment making French a Justice of the Peace in the District of Columbia.

And, it should not be forgotten that Nelson, then the Chief Justice of the State of New York, was at Buffalo on August 9, 1841, the very day the *Erie* conflagration took place! The news coverage of the cool behavior of the eleven-year-old Levi Beebe during the tragedy received more nation-wide coverage and praise than coverage on the wheelsman *Augustus* Fuller, mistakenly listed as “Luther” Fuller in the Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser* under “Lost” on August 11, 1841. [15]. Judge Nelson had personally escorted young Levi to Buffalo from Cooperstown, where he had been attending a military academy although his parents resided in Cleveland. The question why Nelson would personally accompany the boy to Buffalo [16] can be answered by the fact that the Beebes of Cooperstown and the Nelsons were quite close. Indeed, Nelson’s son Rensselaer R. Nelson (1826 – 1904) was, in 1858, to marry the widow Mrs. Emma F. Wright, née Beebe, originally of Cooperstown [17]. Although Levi Beebe’s parents were located in Cleveland, the reason for his attending a military school so far away from his parental home was that part of his family was located in Cooperstown. Apparently the Coopers also knew Emma:

“Miss Beebe passed the evening with us, to take leave of us □”

*L&J*, Vol. V, JOURNAL XXXIII, Tuesday, 15 February 1848, p. 284 [18]

### XIII. BEWITCHING BALTIMORE

As early as 1824, in a letter to Shubrick, the handsome ladies of Baltimore were already casting their spells upon Cooper. Mrs. Shubrick’s sister is mentioned in glowing terms:

“Will you mention me to Miss S[arah Isabella] Wethered who has quite captivated me, by her goodness and kindness.”

*L&J*, Vol. I, Letter 70, p. 111, To William Branford Shubrick, From New-York, 25-30? January – 5 February 1824

Cooper’s first two maritime novels, *The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea* (1823) and *The Red Rover* (1828) were dedicated to his friend Shubrick. For the sake of completeness, it should perhaps be mentioned that the first two letters of *Gleanings in Europe: England* and the first letter of *Gleanings in Europe: France* (both published in 1837), were to Shubrick. *Ned Myers* also contains a reference to Shubrick (Cooper Edition/AMS, p. 158).

But what about the third of Cooper’s maritime novels, *The Water-Witch; or, The Skimmer of the Seas* (1830)? Although no official dedication was given, some enticing lines were sent to Shubrick from Paris on May Day, 1831:

“As to my having your wife in my eye, when the last chapter [of *The Water-Witch*] was written, that is a great secret, you may tell Madam Harriet [=Shubrick’s wife, Harriet Cordelia Wethered Shubrick].”

In other words, *The Water-Witch* was inspired by Mrs. Shubrick, and – if a dedication had been ventured – she would have been the recipient. In the very same letter, Cooper closes with the following remark:

“Mrs. Cooper sends kind things to your wife, in which I desire to unite – Tell her not to covet the fine things of Paris, since a Baltimore lady went to court this winter in a *Baltimore dress* [=Cooper’s emphasis] and she looked as well as any of them.”

*L&J*, Vol. II, Letter 203, p. 81, To William Branford Shubrick, From Paris, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1831; ADDRESSED: Captain William B. Shubrick | U- States Navy | <Washington> | [Redirected in another hand:] Baltimore

Thomas Philbrick, a Cooper scholar specializing in Cooper’s sea fiction, makes the following statement about Cooper’s *The Water-Witch*:

“By contrast, the *Water-Witch* is characterized as intensely feminine. The girl Eudora masquerades as her commander, and her crew is ruled, not by flogging and curses, but by the injunctions of her mysterious figure-head, the sea-green lady. Her seamen regard the brigantine as their mistress and speak of her in sexual terms. . . .Just as the *Coquette* symbolizes masculinity and authority, the *Water-Witch* is the emblem of a freedom that Cooper conceives of as feminine. The brigantine pursues no set purpose but ranges the seas at the whim of her commander, defying the rules and conventions of society. She is resourceful, independent, spirited, daring – everything that orthodox criticism finds wanting in Cooper’s female characters.”

Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 76-77

One wonders if Harriet might not have been much like *The Water-Witch’s* Eudora. Indeed, the Harriet-Baltimore link remained intact throughout Cooper’s life. Roughly one year after publication of “The Helmsman,” Cooper personally escorted Mrs. Shubrick to Baltimore from Philadelphia. Her only surviving child, Mary Clymer, with whom Cooper’s daughter Charlotte was particularly close, was about to give birth [19]:

“At present I am doing pretty well, and should do very well if I could be quiet, but this evening I take Mrs. Shubrick to Baltimore, to return to-morrow. . . .

“Her [=Mrs. Shubrick’s] mind now turns to Mary, and she is impatient to reach her.”  
*L&J*, Vol. V, Letter 872, p. 164, To Mrs. Cooper, From Head’s, [Thursday], 27<sup>th</sup> [August] ‘46

Four and a half years earlier, Cooper had added the following remarks to a letter to Shubrick:

“Tell Mrs. Shubrick to kill the fatted calf. If we come, our stay will be short, and the living must be in proportion....

“Tell Mary I wish she were ten years younger”  
– [Mary was 21 at the time and Cooper 52!]

*L&J*, Vol. IV, Letter 658, p. 225, To William Branford Shubrick,  
From Hall, Cooperstown, January 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>?, 1842

As late as 1851, the year in which Cooper passed away, Shubrick could write:

“We are well – my wife for the last fortnight in Baltimore, And Dr. Aymer in Pennsylvania – Mrs. Aymer keeping house for me.”

*Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 705, From W.B. Shubrick, Washington, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1851

Apart from a Harriet – Eudora link, the role played by Jersey’s Sandy Hook as a safe harbor is central to the novel’s plot. The following excerpt provides ample evidence of just how well-versed Cooper was with regard to America’s waterways:

“Between the bay of Raritan and that of New-York there are two communications, one between the islands of Staten and Nassau called the Narrows, which is the ordinary ship-channel of the port, and the other between Staten and the Main, which is known by the name of the Kills. By means of the latter, vessels pass into the neighboring waters of New Jersey, and have access to so many of the rivers of that state. But while the island of Staten does so much for the security and facilities of the port, that of Nassau produces an effect on a great extent of coast. After sheltering one half of the harbor from the ocean, the latter approaches so near the continent as to narrow the passage between them to the length of two cables, and stretching away eastward for the distance of a hundred miles, it forms a wide and beautiful sound. After passing a cluster of islands at a point which lies forty leagues from the city, vessels can gain the open sea by another passage.

“The seaman will at once understand, that the tide of flood must necessarily flow into these vast estuaries from different directions. The current which enters by Sandy Hook (*the scene of this tale*) [– *my italics, Cooper’s parentheses*] flows westward into the Jersey rivers, northward into the Hudson, and eastward along the arm of the sea that lies between Nassau and Main. The current that comes by the way of Montauk, or the eastern extremity of Nassau, raises the vast basin of the Sound, fills the streams of Connecticut and meets the western tide at a place called Throgmorton, within twenty miles of the city.”

*The Water-Witch or, The Skimmer of the Seas* – Cooper  
Edition / AMS, Ch. XXVIII, p. 325, 1830

Given Cooper’s undying love of Italy, it may not appear strange that *The Water-Witch*, written while in Italy, was his most imaginative novel and the one in which he tried the reader’s faculty of imagination to the utmost. Yet Cooper’s thoughts were always “*Homeward bound*,” and both Sandy Hook and the Highlands of New Jersey (Navesink), provided the coordinates not just of America’s mariners but also of Cooper’s own sense of identity. The deeper meaning behind the steamboat named the *Jersey* in “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” is closely tied to Cooper’s native state, to the setting and action of *The Water-Witch*, and to America’s maritime history. Kinship between the imaginative *Jersey* and the bewitching *Water-Witch* could, with a pinch of black magic, transpose “the skimmer of the seas” to a freshwater “sea-lake” by the name of Lake Erie. [20]

#### XIV. BALTIMORE'S OTHER DELIGHTS

Culturally, Baltimore ranked high in Cooper's estimation. When Moses Marble decides to show his old, but newly discovered, mother "the world," Philadelphia and Baltimore come to mind:

"Yes, I'll take her to Philadelphia, and perhaps to Baltimore. There's the gardens, and the theatres, and the museums, and lots of things that I dare say the dear old soul never laid eyes on."

*Afloat and Ashore or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford* –  
Cooper Edition/AMS, Pt. II, Ch. III, p. 38, 1844

It can hardly be a coincidence that Cooper mentions Baltimore in *Gleanings in Europe: England* in Letter II, "To Capt. W. B. Shubrick, U. S. Navy:"

"Canterbury itself is a place of no great magnitude, but it is neat. Coming from France, the houses struck us as being diminutively low, though they are very much the same sort of buildings one sees in the country towns of the older parts of the middle states. Burlington, Trenton, Wilmington, Bristol, Chester, &c. will give you a very accurate idea of one of these small provincial towns, as will Baltimore, its night-caps apart, of one of the larger. It is usual to say that Boston is more like an English town than any other place in America; but I should say that the resemblance is stronger in Baltimore, as a whole, and in Philadelphia, in parts."

*Gleanings in Europe: England* – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter II,  
"To Capt. W. B. Shubrick, U.S. Navy," p. 15, 1837

An aspect that is all too often underrated but is of first importance was Baltimore's culinary ranking in American society:

"Believing as we do that no small portion of the elements of national character can be and are formed in the kitchen, the circumstance may appear to us of more moment than to some of our readers. The vacuum left in cookery, between Boston and Baltimore for instance, is something like that which exists between Le Verrier's new planet\* and the sun.

*The Oak Openings* – CSPCT, Vol. 32, Ch. XIV, p. 147, (first published Aug. 1848)

\*Neptune – discovered September 23, 1846

In 1844, Cooper's praise of Baltimore as "*the paradise of the epicure*" even deleted Boston:

"In abundance and excellence of food in the native form, America is particularly favored; Baltimore being at the very nucleus of all that is exquisite in the great business of mastication. Nevertheless, the substitution of cooks from the interior of New England, for the present glistening tenants of her kitchens, would turn even that paradise of the epicure into a sort of oleaginous waste. Enough of cookery."

*Afloat and Ashore or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford* –  
Cooper Edition/AMS, Pt. II, Ch. VI, p. 81, 1844

In May 1845, Cooper received not a box but a *barrel* of Baltimore wine biscuits from Shubrick, which was shipped to New York to be picked up at the "Office of the New York and Baltimore Packets." Cooper's response:

"Thank you for the biscuit, which I shall certainly look after. You call them Wine biscuit, and they will do to go with Elliott's wine, which promises to be really good."

*L&J*, Vol. V, Letter 806, p. 35, To William Branford Shubrick,  
From Hall, Cooperstown, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1845

Commodore Jesse Duncan Elliott, second in command during the Battle of Lake Erie, resided in Philadelphia. The three locations where Cooper did most of his writing after his return from Europe in 1833 were Cooperstown, New York, and Philadelphia.

## **XV. A NATIONAL SKETCH – A NATIONAL BALLAD DEFINED BY AMERICA'S FRONTIERS**

The Old Defenders parading in Washington, D.C., at the time of publication strongly suggests that the creation of the Old Hero of the *Jersey* represented an ambitious effort to establish a New American Hero from those that had gone before. Certainly, an earmark of the legend of John Maynard is its intermingling with other icons. In an American context [21], the heroes of the War of 1812 [June 18, 1812 – December 24, 1814] are very much alive and kicking in the hot summer of 1845. Whether the Battle of Fort McHenry, the Battle of Lake Erie, or the Battle of New Orleans, the memory of those singular military victories and the Old Heroes, the Old Defenders, seem to be slumbering only slightly beneath the surface and between the lines of the anonymous sketch.



Yet Old John Maynard is anything but a military hero. He is a hard-working, underpaid laborer, who is nonetheless able to find contentment in his life and, when he can, is prepared to help others. Placed in an extreme situation, he is capable of mustering the courage to do what many a military hero could not do, given the pain and endurance necessary to save passengers and crew. Honesty and civil courage in “The Helmsman” issue directly from Maynard’s “love of God” and constitute the essential attributes of the Lake Erie helmsman. Although God as the foundation of both honesty and civil courage might be questioned nowadays, “The Helmsman” readily accepts this position:

a) “He was known from one end of Lake Erie to the other, by the name of honest John Maynard; and *the secret of his honesty to his neighbors, was his love of God* [my emphasis].” *“The Helmsman of Lake Erie,”* lines 57-61

b) “It is easy to do good to them that do good to us; but it tries the heart sorely to do good to them that do us evil. I have spoken to you of the Son of the Great Spirit. He came on earth, and told us with his own mouth all these great truths. He said that *next to the duty of loving the Manitou, was the duty of loving our neighbours* [my emphasis]. No matter whether friend or enemy, it was our duty to love them, and do them all the good we can.” J. F. Cooper, *The Oak Openings* – CSPCT, Vol. 32, Ch. XXIV, p. 267

c) It is one thing to be a deacon, and another to be devoted to the love of God, and to *that love of our species which we are told is the consequence of a love of the Deity* [my emphasis]. J. F. Cooper, *The Sea Lions* – CSPCT, Vol. 33, Ch. II, p. 17 [first published April 1849]

Cooper’s *The Pathfinder or, The Inland Sea* of 1840 was set on Lake Ontario. *The Oak Openings or The Bee-Hunter* of 1848 is also set on the Great Lakes: on Lake Michigan and the Kalamazoo River, Lake Huron, Lake St. Claire and, finally, Lake Erie. The bee-hunter’s final destination is Erie, Pennsylvania. The Great Lakes in both novels are pictured as a watery wilderness surrounded by endless primeval forest. If Lake Ontario was treated in 1840, Lake Erie in “The Helmsman” in 1845, then the particular emphasis on Lake Michigan in 1848 was yet another step farther west....and deeper into the psyche of the pioneer.

It will be remembered that the *Jersey* of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was also bound for Erie, Pennsylvania (unlike the *Erie* of 1841, which was bound for Dunkirk, N. Y.). That the end of the bee-hunter’s voyage by canoe in *The Oak Openings* should be the very same harbor as in “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” might make one wonder what was so special about the town of Erie. The following excerpt provides an answer:

“The whole coast of Ohio – for Ohio has its coast as well as Bohemia – was mostly in a state of nature, as was much of those of Pennsylvania and New York, on the side of the fresh water. The port which the bee-hunter had in view was Presque Isle, now

known as Erie, a harbor in Pennsylvania that has since become somewhat celebrated in consequence of its being the port out of which the American vessels sailed about a year later than the period of which we are writing, to fight the battle\* that gave them the mastery of the lake.” *The Oak Openings* – CSPCT, Vol. 32, Ch. XXIX, p. 325

\*The Battle of Lake Erie was fought on September 10, 1813. Oliver Hazard Perry was in command of the American fleet. As a result of his victory, Perry acquired the sobriquet “Hero of Lake Erie.”

Perhaps the notion of the “diamond in the rough” cast into a pioneer environment can explain the unusual site of the printing of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” in Madison, Wisconsin Territory, on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, only three days after the *Baltimore Sun*. By 1848, with the advent of statehood, Madison could boast of all of 626 inhabitants (undeniably more than in 1845). Did the sketch pay its courtesies to the frontier community named after James Madison, the 4<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, just as the Old Defenders were to pay their respects to his widow in the nation’s capital? Certainly, if Madison was a *choice*, it could be interpreted as putting New York City in quarantine, given the diminutive size of Madison while, at the same time, flagrantly ignoring New York City,

## XVI. THE BALLAD OF 1845

French’s ballad is not an attempt to rewrite the sketch in verse. The harbor scene at Buffalo is deleted. Indeed, neither Buffalo nor Erie, Pennsylvania (the latter, the destination of the steamer) is mentioned. The “*gallant vessel*” is left unnamed and anonymous. Apart from her “*heaving breath*,” one might even wonder if it a steamer was intended. Dialogue (apart from the captain’s cry, “*What ho? that smoke!*”) is nonexistent. Even the explanation of how the fire began, or a description of the efforts to “*quench the flame*,” or Maynard replying to the ever-more-insistent questions of the panicking women passengers is disregarded. John Maynard does not utter a single word in French’s ballad, neither to passengers nor to the captain. The Helmsman’s views on God, his fellow man, on working for “*scanty pay*” are bracketed out. Indeed, the ballad is more a eulogium of Maynard than an attempt to render the sketch in verse. French’s ballad represents an exercise in reflection upon “*the brave old pilot*,” who is left unnamed until the penultimate line of the closing stanza.

French’s poetic effusions on home (stanza 3 - cf. **Annotation 8**: French’s poem “New England”) and the transience of life in general (stanza 4) are not to be found in the anonymous sketch. But, most significantly, French’s almost contemporary sounding characterization of a civilian hero stands in sharp contrast to those so-called military heroes who would use their countrymen as cannon fodder.

Build high a monument to him,  
Let not his humble name  
Perish, for he has nobly earned  
The richest meed of fame!  
Ye give them monuments who send  
Their millions to the grave!  
Then build John Maynard one, who died  
A hundred lives to save!

Unlike French's final stanza, the anonymous sketch concludes with no exhortation for a monument. (One almost wonders if French's preoccupation with an equestrian statue for Jackson might not have provided the cue for the proposed monument...) The body of Maynard "*sleeps in peace by the green side of Lake Erie,*" whereas French states that Maynard "*now sleeps amid that blackened wreck, 'Neath Erie's rolling wave!*" Although French places emphasis upon George Washington as the "*Hero-Christian*" in "Fitz Clarence," his Lake Erie ballad sees John Maynard's reward in terms of fame and the need of an appropriate monument. The sketch, on the other hand, closes with Maynard dying "*the death of a Christian hero – I had almost said, of a martyr.*" Maynard's true reward lay in a very different realm: "*his spirit was commended into his Father's hands.*"

French's criticism of military heroes who unthinkingly "*send millions to the grave*" and his exhortation to "*build high a monument to him,*" signals – in the context of the maritime history of Lake Erie – an implicit awareness that Lake Erie already had her hero: The sobriquet, "The Hero of Lake Erie," was Perry's. His statues and monuments already adorned cities and towns, many even receiving his name. His flagship, the *Lawrence*, had been disabled during the naval battle fought on September 10, 1813. In spite of Perry being obliged to abandon the *Lawrence*, victory was nonetheless secured against a British fleet by taking command of Jesse Duncan Elliott's *Niagara* and by Elliott coordinating the attack of the smaller vessels.

## XVII. THE *LAWRENCE* AND THE *WASP*

The *Lawrence* was named after Captain James Lawrence [b. Oct. 1, 1781; d. June 4, 1813], who was famous for the saying, "*Don't give up the ship,*" which became the War of 1812 slogan. It is perhaps a singular coincidence that both Lawrence and Cooper were born in Burlington, New Jersey. The Coopers of Burlington also personally knew the Lawrences:

"Indeed, the house where Cooper was born adjoined that of Lawrence's family, although the Coopers left Burlington so soon after his birth [Sept. 15, 1789] that Cooper did not know Lawrence until much later."

– Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years* [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007], p. 566, fn. 43

That James Lawrence was Cooper's commanding officer when, Cooper, a midshipman, came aboard the *Wasp* in November 1809, reveals a personal interest Cooper, the historian, would later take in the fate of the *Lawrence*. There was also a deep sense of loyalty to Lawrence:

“All his younger officers became singularly attached to him” – especially the midshipman, in whom (as one of them recalled) he took extraordinary interest (*History of the Navy*, Vol. 2, p. 253). In 1821, from a perspective closer to his own navy years and Lawrence's death, Cooper remembered his tragic commander's “kind and liberal friendship” but then choked up and could say no more about him (*Early Critical Essays*, p. 13). – *Ibid*, *The Early Years*, pp. 124-125

It was while on board the *Wasp* that Cooper would become acquainted with William Branford Shubrick (October 31, 1790 – May 27, 1874), a young man of 19 (Cooper was not quite one year his senior), who was to become Cooper's lifelong and dearest friend.

### XVIII. FURTHER SOURCES OF COOPER'S DISCONTENT

It is perhaps one of the greatest ironies of American literature that the first and foremost writer of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was demonized by the press and, even before the 1840's, bereft of a large part of the American market. Most of Cooper's income was, interestingly, not from the United States but from the sale of his books in England. Roughly one year prior to publication of “The Helmsman” in London, England, Cooper could write:

Now, this country [=the United States] pays me nothing worth mentioning, in the way of money, and I should be wrong to risk losing the English market without some sufficient consideration. . . .

Authors are not much considered in America, and I less than common.

(*L&J*, Vol. IV, Letter 764, p. 464, To Johann Gottfried Flügel, From Otsego Hall, Cooperstown, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1844

Cooper had often been dissatisfied with the reception his works had received at home. Already after publication of his thought-provoking *The Bravo* in 1833, a sinister Orwellian tale of a tyrannical Venetian oligarchy masquerading as a republic, he was so disappointed

that he had actually announced in his *Letter to My Countrymen* that he would give up writing fiction entirely and turn only to nonfiction, a promise which he fortunately failed to keep. Certainly the five journals of his travels in Europe (*Gleanings of Europe*), aimed at presenting Europe from an American perspective, did not receive the reception Cooper had anticipated. And, as already noted, the manuscript of his *Naval History* he would gladly have burned.

The domestic scene only led to further disillusionment. Already upon his return to the United States, Cooper sensed that American values were in a state of flux. Particularly galling were the so-called anti-renters in New York State and the politics of the State of New York itself, which did precious little to curb a movement that Cooper regarded as endangering private property and the very foundations of American society. Although not a landlord as his father William Cooper had been with tenants paying rents, he nonetheless viewed squatters as unacceptable, even if they made “improvements” upon the land they had illegally settled. The Littlepage Trilogy (1845-1846: *Satanstoe*, *The Chainbearer*, and *The Redskins*) was Cooper’s literary attempt to expose the moral weakness of the movement.

The complexity of the theme of squatting is one that had preoccupied Cooper as early as *The Pioneers* (published in 1823). In this, his first Leather-stocking novel, Natty Bumppo had lived on the land much like a Native American even before the so-called “lawful owner,” Judge Marmaduke Temple, took possession. It might be added that “Judge Temple” of *The Pioneers* clearly represents Cooper’s own father, Judge William Cooper, who made his fortune through land speculation. In other words, *The Pioneers* is largely autobiographical, a literary attempt to justify lawful ownership of the pioneer community of Cooperstown, the “Templeton” the “Judge” founded.

“Civilization,” for Natty, was not a positive concept but connoted encroachment, loss of privacy, and – most importantly – loss of his freedom through senseless laws and nosy villagers. To protect his privacy, Natty was obliged to make a radical decision: he put a match to his cabin, pulled up stakes, and set out west with his beloved dogs.

The twin motifs of “possession” and “loss” run like silver threads through much of Cooper’s work. The question of whether squatters, settlers, or both, should be damned was never satisfactorily resolved by Cooper. Perhaps Cooper was especially sensitive to the issue of property in the 1840’s as he had only been able to reacquire the parental mansion in Cooperstown after his return from Europe.

Cooper did not unconditionally defend “legal” settlers if they engaged in wanton destruction of the environment. *The Pioneers* provides sufficient examples of ecological waste to serve as an indictment and – indirectly – a defense of Natty. The novel represents one of the earliest appeals for conservation and environmental protection in American literature.

The religious point of view (i.e., letting go of the “chains” of this world and one’s possessions to accept the promise of Christianity, as in *The Chainbearer*) is a salient feature in many of Cooper’s works. Here again, the question of what the good man should “hold on to” when he comes face to face with his Maker was a question that Cooper dared to pose, but which he left for the conscience of the reader to decide. It would seem that Cooper was of two minds

regarding property, and was ultimately unable to disentangle the legal, environmental, moral and religious ramifications of property ownership.

The question of the merits of American society is dealt with in *Homeward Bound* and its revealing sequel, *Home as Found*. Particularly the latter, containing criticism of the superficiality, ignorance and even manipulation of the government (already referred to as “a press-ocracy” in *Homeward Bound*, p. 164) epitomized in the despicable person of the newspaper editor Steadfast Dodge, and Americans’ lack of respect of property rights, the attempt by villagers to contest the Effinghams’ ownership of the “Point” (an autobiographical allusion to Three Mile Point by Cooperstown) and the scene with a village ball game on the Effinghams’ lawn (without their permission) again picks up the motifs of possession and loss.

### **XIX. OFF TO EUROPE!**

The Coopers departed from New York on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1826. The passage took a month. They landed on the Isle of Wight on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1826. England, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy made up the bulk of their lengthy itinerary. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1833, they began their homeward voyage from London, arriving in New York on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1833. During their seven-year absence from the United States, Europe had significantly given both Cooper and his family increased objectivity and distance in the way they were to view American society upon their return. Although deeply attached to his native country, Cooper’s intellect had been extensively shaped by his encounter with Europe. Less than three years after his return, William Cullen Bryant could write,

“...he appears quite discontented, and talks of going back to Europe. He has just published a book about Switzerland. I have not read it. Mr. [Fitz-Greene] Halleck says it is a good book.” Excerpt from Bryant’s letter of May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1836, quoted in *L&J*, Vol. III, pp. 142-143

Just as European society had been regarded with American eyes, American society, on his return, was regarded by Cooper with European eyes. His heart strings were tied in many respects to Italy:

“My heart is in Italy and has been ever since I left it. Bad as so many of the Italians are, they are not worse than our people have got to be. All my family agree that the lies, frauds, and meanness that used to disgust us, at Florence, have been enacted here before our eyes. Of the two I prefer the *dolce far niente* to go-aheadism. The first may be gentlemanly, commonly is; the last is almost always vulgar. I have seen too much of the world to expect impossibilities, but, being a sincere lover of nature, I could wish to die in Italy. Were I a single man, I would be with you in sixty days.

There is very little attachment to home, in my family. The tastes and habits of the girls are above the country, and they take refuge in themselves against ill breeding, coarse flirtations and ignorance. They try to love their country, but duty lies at the bottom of the effort, and not feeling. They have been ill-treated too, and that does not increase the attachment. The fact cannot be concealed, it is a country of mediocrity of a high order, but, after all, of mediocrity. Nothing that is above the common mind is, or can be, appreciated, and, while that common mind as such, is unusually respectable, it is nothing but a common mind. The extraordinary prosperity of the nation has forced so much dross to the surface, that it is difficult to get at pure ore. Then high qualities of every sort, are too much scattered by distances, to make head against the enemy. America is no country for a man of tastes, sentiments, affections, or tone. All would be annihilated in the social pêle mêle. A century may change this, but in a century you may live in marble perhaps, but I shall be forgotten, and my children with me – I could like to live while I do live, and a state of society that is all means and no end, is not a state to make me happy.”

*L&J*, Vol. III, Letter 499, pp. 329-330, To Horatio Greenough, From Otsego-hall, Cooperstown, June 31<sup>st</sup> [1 July?] 1838

Apart from Cooper’s Orwellian *The Bravo* [published in 1831], a study of an oligarchy thriving under the mask of the Republic of Venice, Cooper’s major depiction of Italy is to be found in his *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* [not published till 1838]. Yet the maritime novel *The Wing-and-Wing* [1842] allowed Cooper to relive in his imagination many of the scenes that had so endeared him to Italy with its “*air of decayed gentility*.”

“A Mediterranean morning, at midsummer, is one of those balmy and soothing periods of the day that affect the mind as well as the body. Everywhere we have the mellow and advancing light that precedes the appearance of the sun--the shifting hues of the sky – that pearly softness that seems to have been invented to make us love the works of God’s hand and the warm glow of the brilliant sun; but it is not everywhere that these fascinating changes occur, on a sea whose blue vies with the darkest depths of the void of space, beneath a climate that is as winning as the scenes it adorns, and amid mountains whose faces reflect every varying shade of light with the truth and the poetry of nature. Such a morning as this last was that which succeeded the night with which our tale opened, bringing with it the reviving movements of the port and town. Italy, as a whole, is remarkable for an appearance of quiet and repose that are little known in the more bustling scenes of the greedier commerce of our own quarter of the world, or, indeed, in those of most of the northern nations of Europe. There is in her aspect, modes of living, and even in her habits of business, an air of decayed gentility that is wanting to the ports, shops, and marts of the more vulgar parts of the world; as if conscious of having been so long the focus of human refinement, it was unbecoming, in these later days, to throw aside all traces of her history and power.

*The Wing-and-Wing* – CSPCT, Vol. 22, Ch. IV, p. 51

On February 19, 1844, William Mather, a chemistry lecturer, was invited to Cooper's house for dinner. In 1889, forty-five years afterwards, only one year before Mather's death, recollections of the encounter were jotted down. Here an outside observer relates how absorbed Cooper was both in the War of 1812 and in his travels abroad:

“After dinner Cooper invited Judge Nelson and me into his study. He talked about the late war (1813) with Great Britain and about his experience on ship board . . .

. . . .

“Another subject upon wh[ich] he conversed was his travels in Europe. He had maps and charts around his apartment in wh[ich] as he pointed out I could trace the different routes he took among the European Kingdoms and nations. Of all the rivers of Europe the river Rhine in his opinion had the preference. He considered it as the Hudson of Europe.”

- William Mather, “[An Unpublished Reminiscence of James Fenimore Cooper](#),” edited and introduced by Constantine Evans, 1989, p. 4.

Not quite eight months after publication of “The Helmsman” in *The Church of England Magazine*, Cooper, now 56, was still dreaming of Europe, although he seemed to realize that it was only a dream. He was financially strapped and trapped in Cooperstown. The severe winters in Cooperstown are also a cause of concern. It is difficult to read the following letter without thinking of Cooper's mother, Elizabeth Fenimore Cooper (1752 – 1817), who had detested the bitter cold of Cooperstown and – without the coercion of her headstrong husband and the pleading of the boys for the forests around the pioneer community – would have moved back to her hometown of Burlington, New Jersey, never to return.

“For myself, I am very certain as to how, or where my future life is to be passed. I am afraid this climate is too severe for Paul, and I think all but myself would be better could they take more exercise in the open air in winter. If I could afford it, I would return to Europe for a few years, at least, but I cannot afford that, now. My pen, which added so largely to my income when abroad before, now produces nothing worth naming in this country, and would produce literally nothing [were] I absent. It is true, that the difference, might and probably would be made up by the additional receipts [sic] in Europe, but there <was> would still be a large deficiency in means to encounter the cost of movements with a family so large – I am obliged, therefore, to abandon hope. If I quit my present home, there is no one to hire the house, and some \$20,000 invested here, would become useless to me; or nearly so. Sell it, I do not like to, nor do I believe I could, if disposed, at half its value. These considerations give me great uneasiness at times, for I really begin to think the winter climate will affect all the children, in the end; Paul certainly can not pass next winter here, unless there is a great improvement in the course of the ensuing summer. We have great advantages, it is true, in the size of this house, which is airy and admits of a good deal of exercise. We can live in it, too, without the use of stoves, which destroy thousands as used in this part of the world. The country is not unhealthy of itself, though working and sitting over stoves, and going out into severe cold, brings many to their beds, and some to



their graves. Five young persons have been buried in this village, within a few days, and nearly all from colds thus taken. If I could get a tenant here, I think I would try a change for a few years.”

*L&J*, Vol. V, Letter 855, pp. 121-122, To William Branford Shubrick, From Hall, Cooperstown, Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1846

The bitterness evident in the following statement shows just how deeply estranged Cooper was from American society. It should perhaps be pointed out that when Cooper was fifteen years younger, he *was* in Europe. The implicit attack upon Americans rejecting their own country as a source of literature while unduly admiring European, and in particular, English authors, can also be made out in these lines.

“ If I were fifteen years younger, I would certainly go abroad, and never return. I can say with Wolsey, “if I had served my God with half the zeal I’ve served my country” it would have been better for me. You and I have committed the same error; have been American – whereas our cue was to be European, which would have given us success at home. The time was, when these things pained me, but every interest seems so much upside down, here, that another feeling has taken the place of even regret.”

*L&J*, Vol. V, Letter 859, p. 132, to James Kirke Paulding, From Hall, Cooperstown, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1846

Cardinal Thomas Wolsey’s famous lines in Shakespeare’s *King Henry the Eighth* [Act III, sc. ii, ll. 454-457] were used and reused in two of Cooper’s final maritime novels:

“O Cromwell, Cromwell!  
Had I but serv’d my God with half the zeal  
I serv’d my king, he would not in mine age  
Have left me naked to my enemies.”

The final three lines are quoted verbatim not only in *The Crater* [CSPCT, Vol. 30, Ch. XXII, p. 243] but also in *The Sea Lions* [CSPCT, Vol. 33, Ch. XXIX, p. 310].

One year later, the relinquished dream of spending his final years in Italy had hardly been forgotten:

You are to be envied – a man who has an ample excuse for quitting America to pass his days in Italy! Adieu – it makes me melancholy to think of it – Take care of Campbell.

*L&J*, Vol. V, Letter 897, pp. 213-214, To Horatio Greenough [Florence], From Globe Hotel, New York, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1847

*Jack Tier* was first published in *Graham’s Magazine* (Philadelphia) in installments beginning in 1846. As such, it represents the first maritime novel Cooper wrote following first

publication of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie.” One passage depicts a young couple, Rose Budd and Harry Mulford, about to wed, forging plans for their future:

They next conversed of the future, which to them seemed full of flowers. Various were the projects started, discussed and dismissed, between them, the last almost as soon as proposed. On one thing they were of a mind, as soon as proposed. Harry was to have a ship as quick as one could be purchased by Rose’s means, and the promised bride laughingly consented to make one voyage to Europe along with her husband.

*Jack Tier*, CSPCT, Vol. 31, Ch. XI, p. 248

At the end of the novel, the reader is jarred to learn that, contrary to the young couple’s initial romantic plans, Harry “was absent in Europe when his son was born,…” [*ibid.*, Ch. XVII, p. 342]. Such scenes provide insight into Cooper’s own deep longing for Europe and his family ties, both of which become sublimated in his fiction.

Even in America’s greatest natural wonders, Cooper’s mind would succumb to the “*softness and witchery*” of Italy. In *The Oak Openings*, Cooper describes his visit to Niagara Falls “*in the pleasant month of June, and in the current year of 1848:*”

The gulf below was more imposing than we had expected to see it, but it was Italian in hue and softness, amid its wildness and grandeur. Not a drop of the water that fell down that precipice inspired terror; for everything appeared to us to be filled with attraction and love. Like Italy itself, notwithstanding so much that is grand and imposing, the character of softness and the witchery of the gentler properties is the power we ascribe to Niagara, in preference to that of its majesty.

*The Oak Openings* – CSPCT, Vol. 32, Ch. XXX, p. 327

## **XX. THE COOPER - MORSE – NELSON - FRENCH CONSTELLATION, OR**

### **“THE LIGHTNING LINES FROM WASHINGTON TO BALTIMORE”**

Just as *The Baltimore Sun* had recognized the importance of rail express in transporting breaking news from Washington to Baltimore, yet an even faster method was to revolutionize communications in the United States: the advent of the magnetic telegraph. And, as has already been seen, the *Sun* had immediately recognized the potential of Morse’s revolutionary new invention.

The following is a description of the project from *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Friday morning, April 19, 1844, p. 1:

“Professor Morse is again at work upon his magnetic telegraph between Washington and Baltimore. The wires are conducted along the tops of posts running parallel with the railroad. Several miles of continuous lines are now put up. By means of this telegraph, news may be conveyed in an instant between the two cities, along the wires. The telegraph will be in operation before the adjournment of Congress. Recent experiments upon the finished part leave no doubt of its complete success.”

In the November 12, 1845 issue of the *Baltimore Sun*, Mr. B. B. French, Secretary of the newly established Magnetic Telegraph Company, the world’s first telecommunications company, is submitting proposals for rates:

“A general meeting of the stockholders of the magnetic telegraph company, formed for the purpose of erecting a line of Morse’s telegraph between the cities of New York and Philadelphia, with power of extension to the cities of Baltimore and Washington, was held at the magnetic telegraph office in Washington on Saturday last. The Hon. Amos Kendall was elected president [22]; and B. B. French, Esq., secretary. Mr. French, one of the trustees of the company, in conformity with the 11<sup>th</sup> article of the agreement of association, submitted the following rates of charge on the magnetic telegraph between the cities of New York and Philadelphia.

.....

*Resolved*, That, in the present state of our information, it is inexpedient to adopt any system to regulate the transmission, by telegraph, of news and congressional and legislative proceedings; but being anxious to consult the convenience of the newspaper press, we invite its managers, of all sects and parties, to a free interchange of views on the subject, that, before our line shall be extended to Baltimore and Washington, we may, if possible, digest a system which shall be just to ourselves, and acceptable to them.”

French’s influence, in other words, extended far beyond the confines of the nation’s capital. [23] Between 1847 and 1850, French was no longer Secretary but President of the Magnetic Telegraph Company. [24]

Amos Kendall, the newly elected president of the Magnetic Telegraph Company in 1845, may have even experienced first-hand just how swiftly tragic news can be conveyed by means of the magnetic telegraph:

By Morse’s Magnetic Telegraph.

The following intelligence, says the *Baltimore American*, of Tuesday morning, was received by Morse’s Telegraph, from Washington:

“Washington. 6 o’clock, 30 minutes, P.M. Mr. William Kendall, son of Amos Kendall, was, a few minutes ago, met upon the Avenue, and shot dead by Rufus Elliott, brother-in-law of John C. Rives.”

*Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, Georgia), Friday morning, August 22, 1845, p. 2

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* makes the following comment on the relationship between Cooper and Samuel Morse (1791 – 1872), who was both a noted painter and inventor:

“Although often poor during those early years, Morse was sociable and at home with intellectuals, the wealthy, the religiously orthodox, and the politically conservative. In addition, he possessed the gift of friendship. Among his friends in his middle years were the French hero of the U.S. War of Independence, the Marquis de Lafayette, whose attempts to promote liberal reform in Europe Morse ardently endorsed, and the novelist James Fenimore Cooper. Morse and Cooper shared several traits: both were ardent U.S. republicans, though both had aristocratic social tastes, and both suffered from American preference for European art.”

*Micropaedia*, Vol. 8, p. 340, c. 3, Fifteenth Edition, 1986 printing.

In 1849, Cooper came to the aid of his lifelong friend, when a question of the date of Morse’s invention was being challenged:

“It is our good fortune to be an intimate acquaintance of the distinguished citizen who has bestowed this great gift [the telegraph] on his own country – one that will transmit his name to posterity, side by side with that of Fulton. In his case, as in that of the last-named inventor, attempts have been made to rob him equally of the honors and the profits of his very ingenious invention . . . .

“We pretend to no knowledge on the subject of the dates of discoveries in the arts and sciences, but well do we remember the earnestness and single-minded devotion to a laudable purpose, with which our worthy friend first communicated to us his ideas on the subject of using the electric spark by way of a telegraph. It was in Paris, and during the winter of 1831-1832, and the succeeding spring, a date when we were daily together; and we have a satisfaction in recording this date, that others may prove better claims if they can . . . .”

*The Sea Lions* – CSPCT, Vol. 33, Ch. X, pp. 104-105. Also referred to in *L&J*, Vol. VI, p. 43, note 1 to a fragment of Cooper’s letter # 992 to Samuel F. B. Morse, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1849

It is nothing less than remarkable that Cooper’s defense of Morse was integrated into his final maritime novel, *The Sea Lions*, published in 1849. Described in *Letters and Journals* as a “*personal tribute*” to Morse [Vol. VI, p. 43], the defense was tied to the plot by means of the following sentence:

“Had Morse set his great invention on foot thirty years earlier, Roswell Gardiner [the hero of *The Sea Lions*] might have communicated with his owner [Deacon Pratt], and got a reply, ere he again sailed, considerable as was the distance between them.”

*Ibid.*, p. 105

In 1847, Morse purchased the estate of Locust Grove, only two miles south of Poughkeepsie, New York. *The Poughkeepsie Journal and Eagle*, it will be recalled, tops the list of known printings of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” in the United States. In the following excerpt of a letter to Cooper written from “Locust Grove, Po’keepsie,” on May 3, 1849, S. F. B. Morse heartily thanked Cooper while pointing out that the date Cooper had assigned to the invention was, in his opinion, not quite correct:

My dear Sir,

I have just been reading your *Sea Lions*, and I write you a hasty line for the double purpose of thanking you for your friendly mention of me in its interesting pages, and to correct an error in the date of my invention which you have inadvertently committed, and which I think is easily accounted for. The first idea of my Telegraph I had on board the Ship *Sully* in October 1832, but as I was intimate at your house after your return, and had many conversations with you on the subject of the Telegraph, as well as on other subjects in our rambles *à la mode de Paris*, in New York, you have undoubtedly blended the Parisian with the New York incidents, and antedated my invention. When did you return? Was it not in the Spring of 1833? \* I have forgotten, and I should be pleased to know.

How do you do, and your family? I am again a married man, as you are doubtless aware, and a happy one I assure you, in the relation. Mrs. Judge Nelson and her daughter were several weeks with us in the same house in Washington. . . .

*Correspondence*, Vol. II, pp. 620-621

\* “...the Coopers disembarked from the *Samson* in New York on 5 November 1833 with their four Swiss servants and a magnificent tiger cat Coquelicot.” – *L&J*, Vol. II, pp. 3-4

The unexpected link with the Nelsons of Cooperstown can only deepen suspicions that a Cooper – Morse – Nelson – French connection cannot be ruled out, even if French’s Lake Erie ballad was not influenced as a result.

Cooper, in his response of May 18, 1849 [Letter #992], stuck by his opinion that Morse had first revealed his conception of a magnetic telegraph while in Paris. Cooper also received backing from his wife and his eldest daughter Susan. The statement by Cooper, whose powers of recall had always been phenomenal and of great service to him as a writer, received further

confirmation in September from Professor James Renwick [*L&J*, Vol. VI, p. 43], a noted engineer and Professor of Natural Philosophy (Physics) at Columbia College.

In 1846, Cooper, alluding to Morse's magnetic telegraph, could write to his wife from Head's, Philadelphia:

“But the lightning so far ou[t]strips the mail, that you must have all the news.”

*L&J*, Vol. V, p. 141, Letter # 862, To Mrs. Cooper, From Head's, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1846.

In April 1823, three years before leaving for Europe, Cooper founded the Bread and Cheese Club in New York City. Among its members were William Cullen Bryant, Samuel F. B. Morse and William B. Shubrick. As Wayne Franklin points out in the first volume of his informative and comprehensive biography:

“Probably the single most important shared interest was the belief on the part of most of the members [of the Bread and Cheese Club] that the kinds of cultural efforts then being undertaken in New York City represented a serious attempt to establish cultural independence from Britain.”

Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years*, Ch. XII, p. 368

It goes without saying that Samuel Morse was associated with and knew the men who ran the Magnetic Telegraph Company. It is also a fact that Cooper knew Morse. It is, however, far from certain as to whether the triangle led to contact with French. In the following excerpt, Cooper states he had not seen Morse from May 1844 to May 1847. All of this notwithstanding, contact with French could conceivably have been sparked either through or because of Morse.

“Last evening I met Morse on the battery, not having seen him in three years. The man is astride of streaks of lightening half his time, and one can never *fix* him. We had a long talk, and I am happy to find he is beginning to realize. I should think \$10,000 will hardly cover his receipts the coming year.”

*L&J*, Vol. V, p. 213, Letter # 897, To Horatio Greenough, From Globe Hotel, New York, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1847

## XXI. “A WANT OF MODELS”

In *Home as Found*, the following question is asked – and answered:

“What do you deem our greatest error – our weakest point?”

“Provincialisms, with their train of narrow prejudices, and a disposition to set up mediocrity as perfection, under the double influence of an ignorance that unavoidably arises from a want of models, and of the irresistible tendency to mediocrity, in a nation where the common mind so imperiously rules.”

*Home as Found*, CSPCT, Vol. 19, Ch. XXV, p. 281

The great goal in Cooper’s works was the creation of role-models. A point often overlooked is that the models created did not simply cater to the taste of Americans but, rather, that of the world. Yet America was either Cooper’s starting point or, as in his European novels, there was still an American lesson to be drawn. A few lines later, the question of honesty is entertained:

“...men have got to be afraid to speak the truth, when that truth is a little beyond the common comprehension; and thus it is that you see the fulsome flattery that all public servants, as they call themselves, resort to, in order to increase their popularity, instead of telling the wholesome facts that are needed.”

*Ibid.*, pp. 281-282

A bluff John Maynard does not hesitate to state the facts, no matter how frightened the women passengers on board the *Jersey* may be. It is simply part of his makeup to tell the truth. He, like Natty Bumppo, does not know how to lie, and – more importantly – he does not want to know how. Religion not only provides peace of mind but also a direction in life. Just as the Helmsman guides his vessel, or the Pathfinder guides his party, each of them is also guided by something much higher that tells them what is right and what is wrong. Here again, their actions come instinctively, without hesitation or deliberation. Roughly one week after “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was published in Poughkeepsie, Cooper, in a letter to George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy, stated in his concluding sentence:

“This country has not a very high appreciation of abstract integrity.”

*Letters and Journals*, Vol. V, p. 50, Letter 815, To George Bancroft, From Hall, Cooperstown, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1845

The question, how to make *abstract integrity* a quality that the masses could tangibly feel and even be grateful for, had found an eloquent answer in the “The Helmsman of Lake Erie.”

## XXII. THE MYSTERIES OF COOPER'S CORRESPONDENCE

In 1922, 71 years after Cooper's death, the first serious attempt to publish a *selection* of Cooper's letters was made. The result was a two-volume work that contained not merely letters by Cooper but also, and most importantly, letters he had received. The edition was edited by Cooper's grandson, whose name was also James Fenimore Cooper. On page four of the Introduction to that work, there is the following passage:

“Fortunately there are in the possession of Cooper's family some hundreds of these letters, in great part written by him to his wife; most of them are the letters of a man temporarily absent in the cities of Albany, New York, Philadelphia, *Baltimore* [*my emphasis*], and Washington, to his wife at home in Cooperstown, giving an account of his own activities, the news of mutual friends, and the gossip of the towns; a few others are to other members of his family, and some to friends and acquaintances.”

*Correspondence of James Fenimore-Cooper*, edited by his Grandson, James Fenimore Cooper, Vol. I, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), p. 4

From 1960 to 1968, further progress was made with the publication of the six-volume work, *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, edited by James Franklin Beard [Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press]. Over 1100 letters by Cooper are in these volumes, the drawback being that the letters received by Cooper are generally not included. Also, letters by family members and particularly by Cooper's wife receive no consideration. And, strangely, neither the *Correspondence* of 1922 nor the *Letters and Journals* of the 1960's contains one letter from Baltimore written by Cooper! The question one might ask is whether the statement in the introduction to the 1922 work was mistaken, or whether there is still sensitive material being withheld.

Two concrete examples of “gaps” in correspondence may suffice. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1844, Cooper was made a member of the Maryland Historical Society, yet there is no letter by Cooper in 1844 expressing his gratitude and acceptance. [25] Only in a note appended to letter #944 (Vol. V) to Brantz Mayer of Baltimore, the founder of the Maryland Historical Society, dated May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1848 is mention made of a letter written by Mayer to Cooper on 8 June 1844.

Perhaps the most glaring example of a letter left unanswered is from James H. Miller of Baltimore, dated February 14, 1845, and printed in the *Correspondence* (Vol. II, pp. 532-534) but not included in the six-volume *Letters and Journals*. Not even a passing reference to the existence of the letter is made. Strangely, not one single letter written by Cooper in the whole month of February 1845 is to be found in Vol. 5 of *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*. Three excerpts from Miller's letter in the *Correspondence* are included below:



i. Sir, Knowing and indignantly feeling the unjust censure passed upon you for your noble, generous and efficient defense of my early and most inhumanly persecuted friend Com. J. D. Elliott, I am in a manner urged over any delicacy in obtruding upon the attention of one of the most distinguished writers in our language, in presenting my feeble testimony in behalf of our common friend . . . . (p. 532)

ii. On a visit to Washington during this period of unsettled affairs with France, I visited the President in company with a distinguished Senator. We found the venerable chief alone and smoking his pipe; he invited us to join in the smoke, and then the senator left us to make some other calls in the neighborhood. In the midst of a lively and interesting converse, a messenger entered and presented the Pres. a packet, which he promptly opened, read and handed to me. It was from our Minister in France, declaring the refusal of that Gov<sup>t</sup> to pay the indemnity claimed. After I had read it, he familiarly asked what I would do. "Just what you will," said I; "that is, compel them to be honest." "Yes," he rejoined, "I'll sink some of their ships." "Permit me," said I, "to suggest that duty for my friend Elliott." "It shall be so," said he, and drew paper to him and wrote a note to the Sec. of the Navy to that effect.

On Elliott's return he presented me individually and as President of the Washington University of Balt. a number of antiquities, amongst which was a mummy from the Catacombs of Memphis, which, as Professor of Anatomy, I unwrapped and demonstrated to a large concourse consisting of my class and other literary and scientific gentlemen of all professions. Portions of this I have presented to my distinguished friends and still retain an appropriate portion for your acceptance. (Please inform me how and when I can transmit it safely to your hands, provided you honor me so far as to receive it.) . . . . (p. 533)

*Later in the same letter: an appeal to Cooper to help realize a proposal to create hospital ships for people with respiratory ailments:*

iii. What I wish is that some large vessels with ample accommodations should be placed under the charge of competent physicians to accompany the patients wherever they may deem most salutary and be thus enabled to choose the climate, season, etc., best adapted to their exigencies. I believe that it might be made a matter of profit, or at least would be no expense to the gov't having ships lying idle or rotting in ports. (p. 534)

In the first excerpt, Cooper is congratulated not only on his defense of Elliott but also on his attainments as a writer. This alone would warrant a response.

The second excerpt could not have failed to interest Cooper, whose unflagging interest in the attempt to achieve a republican form of government in France and whose intimate association with that giant of both the American and French Revolutions, General Lafayette [1757-1834] have been amply documented in Cooper's *Letters and Journals*.

Then there is Elliott's mummy! It is not a common gift to receive a "portion" of a mummy, and Cooper's response would be of considerable interest. In conjunction with antiquities that Elliott brought back to the United States after serving in the Mediterranean, there is also the notorious sarcophagus that Elliott hoped would be an appropriate receptacle for the mortal remains of Andrew Jackson. [26] As it turned out, Jackson rejected Elliot's offer claiming that a sarcophagus was more suitable for an Emperor than a President. The heated debate that ensued from the sarcophagus affair also placed in question where exactly Jackson should be interred and whether he actually required a monument of stone, or whether Jackson's "monument" might not already be inscribed in the hearts of all Americans. One wonders whether Miller's mummy might not have been the mortal remains in the sarcophagus offered to Jackson!

And finally, the unusual suggestion of creating hospital ships for people suffering from respiratory ailments would surely have interested Cooper. His son Paul had been suffering from such an ailment for several years. The following lines to his son, also written in 1845, even suggest sending him to sea:

"Next month, I shall go down, when you can accompany me, and we will decide where you shall winter. *Perhaps it may be well to send you to sea, somewhere* [- my emphasis]. Every thing depends on checking such a disease, if it really exist, at once."

*Letters & Journals*, Vol. V, Letter 837, p. 90, To Paul Fenimore Cooper [Cambridge, Mass.], From Hall, Cooperstown, Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> 1845

Mrs. Cooper also had hereditary asthma. And to top it off, apparently some of the girls were afflicted.

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1846, only a little more than one year after receipt of Miller's letter from Baltimore, Cooper wrote to his London publisher, Richard Bentley, informing him of the following:

"I am negotiating here to publish a nautical tale in a Magazine – *Graham's* [located in Philadelphia] and I should like to know what could be done with it, on your side of the water."

It is a safe assumption that Cooper already had at least the first installment completed (ten were agreed to). The "nautical tale" was published in *Graham's* under the heading *The Islets of the Gulf, or Rose-Budd*. The title of the novel published in book form is *Jack Tier, or The Florida Reefs*. Already, quite close to the beginning of the very first chapter of *Jack Tier*, Cooper wrote:

“Rose is ailin’ – pulmonary they call it, and her aunt wishes to try the sea for her constitution. ”

“Rose Budd has no more of a pulmonary condition than I have myself,” interrupted the mate.

“Well, that’s as people fancy. You must know, Mr. Mulford, they’ve got all sorts of diseases nowadays, and all sorts of cures for ’em. One sort of a cure for consumption is what they tarm the Hyder-Ally. ”

“I think you must mean hydropathy, sir. ”

“Well, it’s something of the sort, no matter what; but cold water is at the bottom of it, and they *do* say it’s a good remedy. Now Rose’s aunt thinks if cold water is what is wanted, there is no place where it can be so plenty as out on the ocean. Sea-air is good, too, and by taking a v’y’ge her niece will get both requisites together and cheap.” *Jack Tier* – CSPCT, Vol. 31, Ch. I, pp. 4-5

In other words, the question of sea-air and an ocean voyage occupied Cooper’s mind to such a degree that the motif was incorporated into his “nautical tale” the year following receipt of Miller’s letter!

That Cooper was also in complete agreement with Miller’s statement that ships were “*rotting in ports*” dovetails with the very wording Cooper had used in one of his pseudonymous A.B.C. Editorials nine years earlier:

“With every requisite to form a great naval power; with two thousand miles of coast to defend; *with ships rotting at the Navy Yards* [my emphasis]; with a treasury full of money; with the question of peace or war still undecided; with a semi-hostile fleet observing us within ten days’ sail; with officers getting to be rusty for want of employment; with a call from the Secretary for more vessels, to meet even the ordinary wants of trade; in short, with every inducement that can influence men to take the promptest measures of preparation, there is not a single cruising vessel in commission, of the size of a frigate, between the Bay of Fundy and the mouth of the Mississippi!” *LJ*, Vol. III, Letter 414, A.B.C. Editorial, p. 190, To William Cullen Bryant and Charles Mason, for *The Evening Post* (New York City), [16? January 1836]

In short, there was every reason for a response to Miller’s evocative letter, whose contents Cooper would have been hard put to ignore. Did Cooper immediately set out to discuss the points in person with Miller in Baltimore? Or has a revealing response been either destroyed or withheld?

The index to the six-volume *Letters and Journals* contains only *two* references under “Baltimore.” Unfortunately, the work has never been digitized for ready reference. The index was also prepared in a pre-PC age lacking in search machines. In any event, some 40

references to “Baltimore” have been located in the six volumes, suggesting the dire need for CD versions.

Although the collection of letters is a gold mine for any researcher into the life of Cooper, it is a great shame that so much has been excised from the material out of fear that Cooper’s family could afterwards suffer harassment and calumny. Indeed, in a number of cases, a researcher is encouraged not so much by what the letters say, as by what is left *unsaid*. Cooper was a fast and prolific writer. Although six volumes of letters may sound like a lot, I would suggest that the present collection cannot constitute more than two thirds of his letters.

[27]

If, for example, August-September 1845 is checked (the sensitive date being the first printing of “The Helmsman” on August 30<sup>th</sup>), Cooper’s last letter in August was to his old friend Shubrick on the 19<sup>th</sup>. His next letter was to his son Paul on September 8<sup>th</sup> (and even part of that letter was cut away). This constitutes a 20-day period of silence.

If the death of the Old Hero, Andrew Jackson on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1845 is considered, there is a letter to George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy, on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1845, then another to Rev. Eigenbrotg on June 7<sup>th</sup>. The next letter, dealing with the De Lancey family tree, does not follow until June 26<sup>th</sup>. Here again, there is a gap of 19 days, and not one word is breathed regarding that watershed event of the year 1845. 67 letters survive from 1845. If distributed evenly throughout the year, one could expect a letter every 5.4 days.

If the conflagration of the *Erie* on August 9, 1841 is checked, there is a letter from Cooperstown dated July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1841. The next letter is on August 29<sup>th</sup> from Philadelphia to Mrs. Cooper, a gap of 46 days! 51 letters survive from 1841. An even distribution throughout the year would allow a letter every 7.1 days.

### XXIII. THE VIRTUES OF ANONYMITY WHEN LAUNCHING *ELINOR*

The most talented of Cooper’s four daughters, Susan Augusta Fenimore Cooper (1813-1894), was also a writer. Her first novel, *Elinor Wyllys*, was published anonymously in 1845, just as Cooper’s own very first novel, *Precaution*, had been published anonymously a quarter of a century earlier.

As might be expected, Cooper was eager to help Susan launch her novel. In his capacity as editor and as the noted author of the preface to her work, he naturally took a keen interest in its success. It is the *Preface* Cooper wrote in August 1845, which deserves attention. Cooper considers the advantages of anonymity, not merely for the anonymous writer but with special emphasis upon the reader, in the following lines:

“Writing may be a very pleasant pastime; but printing seems to have many disagreeable consequences attending every stage of the process; and yet, after all, reading is often the most irksome task of the three. In this case, however, the remedy is generally easy; one may throw aside the volume, and abuse the author. If there are books which must be read, stupid or not, owing to the claim of some great name on the binding, the present story is not one of the number; and perhaps the perfect liberty enjoyed by the reader under the circumstances – to like or dislike independent of critics, to cut every leaf, or skip a dozen chapters at a time without fear of reproach – will incline him to an amiable mood.”

James Fenimore Cooper, *Family Writings* – CSPCT, Vol. 48, p. 25

An answer to the central question of why the publication of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” was anonymous is suggested in the lines just quoted.

It will be noted that anonymity, according to Cooper, frees the reader from outside influence by critics, who themselves may already be prejudiced by a “*great name*.” In fact, the “*perfect liberty enjoyed by the reader under the circumstances*” allows the reader to form his or her own opinion “*independent of critics*” and “*without fear of reproach*.” The resulting independent assessment by the reader can, according to Cooper, “*incline him to an amiable mood*.” The whole question of Susan’s anonymity and its advantages may well have led Cooper to consider the advantages of his own anonymity should he set out on a modest literary enterprise, a short sketch. After all, Cooper did possess a “*great name*” and had been *subject to reproach* by the press for years. In other words, the advantages of anonymity were even greater for Cooper than for his daughter, who – as a new writer – would not necessarily be condemned simply on the basis of her name – unless, of course, “the sins of the father” should be visited upon the daughter. That Cooper’s lines dealing with the advisability of anonymity were written only a few months after publication of the anonymous Lake Erie sketch, suggest that Cooper was thinking not only of his daughter’s new work but also about his own unsatisfactory position as an American writer confronted by a hostile American press. The hope of achieving “*an amiable mood*” among his American readers, once they were freed from the bias of newspaper critics, may well have served as the catalyst leading to the conception of “The Helmsman.” In other words, the “good ship” *Elinor* may well have been anonymously launched with a consort: the *Jersey*.

#### XXIV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Susan’s *Elinor Wyllys* was not a success. She is best known for her *Rural Hours*, published in 1850, and revised by her in 1887. Her introductions to excerpts from her father’s novels entitled *James Fenimore Cooper: Pages and Pictures* (1860) have also provided insights into

Cooper's life and writings. The only monogram dedicated to the memory of "Rear-Admiral William Branford Shubrick, A Sketch," was published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in August 1876. Its author: Susan Fenimore Cooper. Shubrick had passed away in the nation's capital on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1874. His lengthy naval record was incredible. *The Cincinnati Gazette* (June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1874) summed it up in one sentence:

"His total sea service was 18 years and 5 months, and 'shore and duty' 38 years and 5 months."

A personal friendship can last a lifetime, but the Shubrick-Cooper connection was not merely a friendship between two men, but between two families, which continued long after the deaths of both Cooper (1851) and his wife (1852). The Shubricks' only surviving child, Mary, was wed to Dr. George Clymer (1804-1881) on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1845. Could it have been otherwise that their son, appropriately named William Branford Shubrick Clymer, was to write a biography entitled *James Fenimore Cooper*? It was published in Boston in 1900.

Each place dear to our hearts conjures up associations. Baltimore, to Cooper, was no exception. Its history was central in creating a sense of national identity. Washington needed her "Old Defenders," just as the country needed a national anthem.

The Shubricks, and especially the "*Baltimore lady in her Baltimore dress*," were dear to both Cooper and his family. The attachment can easily be made out in the dedications Cooper made to Shubrick and that secret compliment to Mrs. Shubrick, the Eudora of the *Water-Witch*. [28]

The "*personal tribute*" to and defense of Samuel F. B. Morse in Cooper's final maritime novel *The Sea Lions* (1849) provides a further example of Cooper intertwining ties of personal affection and friendship into his writings. One might even wonder if the choice of the *Sun* might not have also been eased due to the self-serving efforts of the *Sun* to help Cooper's old friend by achieving allocations for Morse's new invention through the Maryland legislature. The motive behind the *Sun*'s "activism" was, of course, the vision of Morse's "lightning lines" disseminating the news. To hearken back to Sherry H. Olson's wording (cf. excerpt, p. 5), the *Sun* was "the nerve center of the nation."

The role played by Benjamin B. French in paying tribute not just to the sketch but, indirectly, to its anonymous author, singles out *The Baltimore Sun* as of major importance in the sketch's distribution. From 1845 to 1860, 38 out of 97 known printings of "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" were "B-version," i.e., derived from the *Sun*.

The fact that the people Benjamin B. French associated with in Washington governmental circles were the same Democrats Cooper also knew personally; the fact that both men were ardent Jacksonians [29]; French's linkage with Baltimore as the organizer of the 1845 Old Defenders; and contact with Morse in the context of the magnetic telegraph; Cooper's further links to Washington through Shubrick, Bancroft [30] and Nelson – the summation of these

links would suggest that an encounter between French and Cooper took place at one time or another. On the other hand, the amazing and absolute silence of both men in their journals regarding one another and French's own statements in his journal leave no other conclusion to be drawn than that French's ballad was the result of pure inspiration without outside coaxing or influence. No matter how tempting a Cooper – Morse – French connection might appear, the fact remains that French's ballad was drawing upon motifs that had occupied French for years and would continue to receive his attention.

In 1835, Shubrick could write to Cooper,

“When shall we see you in Baltimore on your way to Washington? for I take it for granted you spend part of the winter there – I have much to say to you on many subjects, and really long to see you.”

*L&J*, Vol. III, p. 180 (note), To James Fenimore Cooper, From Wm. B. Shubrick, Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1835

By 1846, the directions had changed. Cooper could write to Shubrick, assigned to the Washington Navy Yard:

My best regards to all hands – your son and daughter, and for ought I know grand children. I rather think I shall look at you in March, for a day or two. The magnificent distances of Washington form its curse, or one might like to pass more time in it. You stay there by the year, do not feel how much the stranger is oppressed by being obliged to go forty miles of a morning. Adieu

*L&J*, Vol. V, Letter 855, p. 123, To William Branford Shubrick, From Hall, Cooperstown, Feb 1<sup>st</sup> 1846

In 1843, Cooper expressed his disdain of the nation's capital in the following terms:

“I hardly think I shall see Washington this winter. Saving your presence [i.e., Shubrick's], it is such a blackguard hole, more especially about its taverns, that I think gentlemen can have little motive for wishing to visit it.”

*Letters and Journals*, Vol. IV, Letter 746, p. 428, To William Branford Shubrick, From Hall, Cooperstown, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1843

The importance of a town's “taverns” determines in great measure its quality as a town. The notion of going “*forty miles of a morning*” sounds very much like the distance from Baltimore to Washington, or from that “*paradise of an epicure*” (i.e., Baltimore) to “*a blackguard hole*” (i.e., Washington). Yet, however, the reader may wish to interpret the lines above, it remains as plain as day that Cooper was well initiated into that leg of the journey stretching from

Baltimore to Washington and back again. Indeed, Cooper's intimacy with "a very high class of inns" in Baltimore (Barnum's), in Washington (Gadsby's) and in Philadelphia (Head's), the latter of which was something of "a home away from home," must surely suggest sufficient familiarity with the corresponding towns. [31]

It is clear that in 1845, Baltimore, on the basis of its population, would not have been Cooper's, or any other writer's, *first choice* for publication. Yet, as this study has shown, circumstances gravitated against New York City, and this, in itself, significantly points to Cooper.

To accept "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" as Cooper's is to accept the disquieting fact that, apart from the much longer and less successful "Lake Gun" of November 1850, relegated to a forgotten anthology [32] and earning Cooper all of \$100, a token sum compared to the early 1830's [33], only two short stories had issued from his pen. Yet in light of his invention of the American maritime novel – his first three dedicated to the Shubricks – a maritime short story set on Lake Erie is hardly a daring feat in itself. And Cooper not only treated Lake Ontario in his 1840 *Pathfinder* but also the rest of the Great Lakes in his 1848 *Oak Openings*. Apart from his fascination with America's great bodies of fresh water, America's crowning attraction, Niagara Falls, is a recurrent theme in Cooper's works. In other words, not just the open sea but also "sea-lakes" were a topic of special interest. All of these works were ultimately works of the imagination – history was romanticized and idealized in order to create a sense of American self-identity. That Cooper generally opted for length (some would claim "wordiness") when writing for remuneration is hardly a legitimate objection to a sketch that was done free of charge and, given the turmoil arising from the contending Perry and Elliott factions, was to serve a dual purpose: a) to test the American press and b) to allow the nation's legend builder to create a new legend of Lake Erie for American readers. Those who would claim that Cooper could not write a clear, even simply worded but thrilling tale, should consult the sleigh ride on the frozen Hudson in *Satanstoe*, also penned in 1845, which exhibits revealing parallels. [34]

Of course, the notion that "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" was done *for free* seems hardly in keeping with Cooper. Yet, as he himself pointed out, most of his income came from abroad and not from the United States. Furthermore, British reviewers dealt with Cooper much more gently than those in America, assuming Cooper's compatriots even bothered. It is perhaps a great irony that Britain saw much of value in Cooper that his American critics were blind to. As most of his novels were also translated into other languages, particularly German and French, his works were ultimately not merely a part of American or British, but of *world literature*.

Although Cooper was deeply disillusioned as a writer, he could not stop writing. It was, so to speak, in his blood. If the American press (say in the form of a Peter Purple-Plush) could only heap ridicule upon him and laugh at him behind his back, on the one hand, or else keep "mum" [35] on the other, and ignore his contributions to American and, indeed, world literature, why not give it something else to chew – a short piece of anonymous maritime literature, tightly woven, celebrating the Resurrection of the Old Hero, and just sit back and watch the show? If the sketch was full of suspense, masterfully conceived as only a writer of



Cooper's caliber knew how, if it could create a role-model in the person of a John Maynard, which might heighten "*appreciation of abstract integrity*," well – who, among the press, could possibly imagine that Cooper still had enough vim and vinegar in him to play such a cunning prank? For Cooper, the suspense of it all lay elsewhere: the question of reception by an unsuspecting press that could not discard a piece of solid literature solely on the basis of the writer's name, an idea clearly stated in his Preface to *Elinor Wyllys*. Instead, an anonymous "Helmsman" could only be judged on its own merits – by its style and content. The resounding message: the advent of a new "Old Hero," who would show Americans the foundation of every heroic act – the love of one's fellow man as an outpouring of our love of God. The overwhelmingly positive reaction to the sketch from the very beginning, as well as the long line of reprints, was payment enough for America's premier writer.

OCTOBER 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2010,  
BAD SCHUSSENRIED, GERMANY  
UPDATED OCTOBER 2019

**ANNOTATIONS:**

- a) *The Church of England Magazine* (London, England), June 7, 1845:  
<https://johnmaynard.net/CofE.pdf>
- b) For "The "Helmsman of Lake Erie," [A-version], cf. [scan of the first page of \*The Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle\* \(Poughkeepsie, NY\), July 19, 1845](#)
- c) For "The "Helmsman of Lake Erie," [B-version], cf. [scan of the first page of the August 30th, 1845 issue of \*The Baltimore Sun\* \(Baltimore, Maryland\)](#)
- d) For Benjamin B. French's ballad, cf. [scan of the first page of the September 5th, 1845 issue of \*The Baltimore Sun\*](#)

\* \* \* \*

1) The anonymous prose sketch in the August 30<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Sun* was dutifully cut out and pasted into French's scrapbook [Library of Congress, *Scrap Book of B. B. French*, Reel 13 of 13; Container I:14]. The clipping follows "The Shoemakers" by the Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who also once practiced the craft. The virtues of the honest laborer in "The Shoemakers" blend well with the "*honest John Maynard*" of "The Helmsman of Lake Erie."

2) Cf. *Wikipedia*, "[Largest Cities in the United States by Population by Decade](#)" and "[Demographics of Washington, D.C.](#)"

3) The *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette*, which published “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” (July 29, 1845), had, in December 1844, published the following article with a provocative heading placed in quotation marks:

**“HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE”**

After many years’ delay, the State of Rhode Island has erected a monument to the memory of commodore Oliver Hazard Perry – the gallant hero who achieved the victory of Lake Erie. This monument is placed in the burial ground at Newport, and occupies the centre of a mound fifty or sixty feet square. “It is an obelisk, with a pedestal of four, and a shaft of twenty one feet, cased with Italian marble.” The inscription is as follows: –

**OLIVER HAZARD PERRY,**  
at the age of 27 years  
He achieved the victory of  
Lake Erie.  
Born in South Kingstown,  
August 23, 1785.  
Died at Port Spain,  
August 23, 1819,  
aged 34.

*Erected by the State of Rhode Island.*

The memory of this distinguished naval commander is dear to every American bosom. **And yet J. Fenimore Cooper has sacrilegiously attempted to darken its lustre, and to detract, by his dastardly assaults, from the honor due from every patriot, to one of our most devoted and distinguished sons.** [my emphasis in red]

– *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette*, Dec. 14, 1844, p. 2, c. 1

The heading of the *Maine Cultivator* article was chosen as an attack upon Cooper, who steadfastly defended Jesse Duncan Elliott against Perry’s later (and unwarranted) charges of cowardice during the Battle of Lake Erie. *To whom was honor due?* To Perry? To Elliott? Or, if we may judge by Cooper’s distraught state of mind in late 1844, perhaps the whole affair should be rewritten to create a civilian hero, a John Maynard. And it should be a hero who would not require a monument of stone, let alone an obelisk.

The *Maine Cultivator*’s assault on Cooper was based on an article which only contained information on the new monument and was already in circulation in May 1843, while a lengthy assault on both Elliott and Cooper, following the information on the new grave site, can already be found in June 1843. [An example of a completely neutral article without any remarks about Elliott or Cooper appeared in the *Alexandra Gazette* (Virginia) on May 29, 1843 (p. 1). The *Gazette* made a reference to the *Newburyport Mercury*. On the other hand, an example of an article bristling with acrimony is the *National Aegis* (Mass.) of June 7, 1843 (p. 2).] It should be emphatically pointed out that the heading of each of these earlier articles (whether neutral or abrasive) was not “Honor to Whom Honor Is Due,” but “Monument to Commodore Perry.”

In other words, the indictment of Cooper in the *Maine Cultivator* comes roughly one and one half years *after* the first run of such articles, and only about one half of a year before

publication of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” in the same paper. What is striking is both the delay and the heading.

A check for further articles with the heading “Honor to Whom Honor Is Due,” reveals that the catchy headline, without quotation marks, was already used in August 1842 to commend the heroic crew and captain of the American packet ship *Columbus*:

### HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE

It will be recollected that an account was published at the time, in 1840, of the saving of the crew of the British ship *Leonidas*, by Capt. Cropper, of the American packet ship *Columbus*. The crew was in a state of starvation, of imminent peril, almost despair. – There were many unhappy beings on board, sinking fast into the deep, and when the *Columbus* came up with them, the terrible storm which placed them in that fearful condition had not subsided, nor much abated. Owing to the state of the wind and sea, it was at the risk of their own lives that the crew of the *Columbia* could attempt to board the unfortunate *Leonidas* and take off her passengers and crew. But, summoning his men, Capt. Cropper submitted the question of life or death to their own decision, and they answered him by – THREE CHEERS – and the lowering of the boats instantly into the angry billows! They succeeded, after the most determined and skillful efforts, in saving every living being. The boat which the no less humane than brave mate commanded, being the last to leave the wreck with the last of the human beings to be saved, discovering just after it left the vessel that a poor dog was still on board, was instantly put back under the seamen’s cry, that “not a living thing shall be left to die!” The dog, the faithful companion of distress, was saved, and not a living thing was left to the fate of the foundering ship, but all were brought safe into the port of New York, and generously provided for by Captain Cropper and his friends.

Excerpted from *Madisonian for the Country*, August 27, 1842, p. 3

It will be recalled that the fire on board the *Erie* on August 9th, 1841, led to a tragic loss of life. In 1840, Capt. Cropper and his heroic crew were able to save every single life on board the *Leonidas*, even the life of a dog! It has remained a mystery how the anonymous writer of “The Helmsman” came up with the idea of standing the *Erie* tragedy on its head to create a happy ending. Possibly the daring rescue by the *Columbus* (so symbolic of the discovery of America and, by extension, what America should stand for) may well have given the writer his cue. Certainly, the notion of a Lake Erie oral tradition preceding the publication of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” in which a brave helmsman saved all passengers and members of the crew of his steamer, was already found devoid of fact by George Salomon in the 1960’s. [Cf. George Salomon, “John Maynard of Lake Erie: The Genesis of a Legend,” *Niagara Frontier*, Autumn 1964, vol. 11, no. 3, p. 78: <http://johnmaynard.net/LegendGenesis.pdf> (p. 8)]

4) Cf. Norman Barry, “[The Battle of the Heroes: The Creation of a New Hero of Lake Erie in the Backdrop of the Year 1845: The Jackson – Elliott – Cooper Connection.](http://johnmaynard.net/MaynardJackson.pdf)”

5) Cf. “Office of the Clerk: U.S. House of Representatives /List of Clerks:”  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clerk\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_House\\_of\\_Representatives#List\\_of\\_clerks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clerk_of_the_United_States_House_of_Representatives#List_of_clerks)

6) Cf. *Witness*, p. 41, fn. 9:

“Francis Ormond Jonathan Smith (1806-1876) was born in Brentwood, N.H., and had attended Phillips Exeter Academy. He served in Congress as a Democrat from Maine, 1833-1839. While still a congressman, he became involved in a partnership with S.F.B. Morse for the promotion of the telegraph. Smith and French became very close friends and business associates. French named his first son after him – Francis Ormond French [born in 1837].”

7) Cf. a [scan of Gough’s shortened sketch in \*The British Workman\*](#) and [the ballad by the anonymous “Josephine.”](#) For “[Brave James Maxwell](#),” cf., p. 15 of “Fontane’s ‘John Maynard’: History in the Role of Poetry’s Handmaid: A Close Look at Literary and Historical Precedents” by Norman Barry. The full-cover illustration of John Maynard is on p. 13 of the same article.

8) B. B. French’s poem “New England” and introduction were printed in the *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.) on Dec. 22, 1845 (p. 3):

### ***TO THE EDITORS***

GENTLEMEN: As I perceive by an annunciation in the papers that the New England Society propose this evening to celebrate the anniversary of the Landing of the Pilgrims by a public dinner in this city, the following patriotic and poetic morceau, from the pen of our fellow-citizen B. B. FRENCH, Esq., may, if you please to insert it, be acceptable to many of your readers. It offers to the mind’s eye a singularly beautiful yet touching reminiscence.

Yours, truly,

J.E.

### **NEW ENGLAND.**

New England – oh New England!  
My birth-place and my home!  
How oft my thoughts revert to thee  
As o’er the world I roam!  
I love thy sunny summer dells □  
I love thy wintry snows □  
I love each rill from thy pure springs  
That in the sunlight glows.  
The places of my youth are thine,  
The noisy brooklet’s foam,  
And the narrow mazy forest paths  
Where my boyhood’s feet did roam.  
The rock, upon whose sunny height  
I’ve lingered many an hour □

The greenwood where, with gay young hearts,  
I sought the shady bower,  
Shall live within my memory  
When my latest years have fled,  
As lives the bright chrysanthemum  
When all around is dead.

New England's lakes – New England's hills,  
Her bright and sparkling fountains,  
Her spires, that point the path to Heaven,  
Her forests and her mountains,  
The places where she keeps her dead □  
Where "the mossy marbles" tell  
Of those who, in a glorious cause,  
Heroes and Patriots fell:  
All – all are dear, and memory  
Shall from my brain depart  
Ere I forget my own birthright,  
A true New England heart!

DECEMBER 17, 1845

**B. B. FRENCH**

9) Richard Henry Dana, Sr. (1787-1879) urged Cooper *not* to present an address before assembled Bostonians on the subject of the Elliott-Perry controversy as feelings in Boston were so pro-Perry that Dana even envisioned the possibility of "the lecture room [...] turned into a battle-ground" [vol. 2, p. 558]. Dana's son, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., was the author of *Two Years before the Mast* (1840). Cooper's work in presenting recollections of an old shipmate named Ned Myers was no doubt in response to young Dana's book. The title of Cooper's book suggests that Cooper was not to be outdone by Dana's stint of "two years." *Ned Myers or, a Life before the Mast* (1843).

10) Cf. [the entire first Canto of B. B. French's "Fitz Clarence: A Poem"](#) (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1844).

11) Cf. James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, Editor-in-Chief James Franklin Beard (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1991), Letter III, p. 27 (& p. 29):

"My eager question of 'Where is America?' was answered by Cadwallader, who silently pointed to a little, blue, cloud-like mound, that rose above the western horizon in three or four undulating swells and then fell away to the North and to the South, losing itself in the water. I believe I should have expressed my disappointment aloud, but for the presence and, more particularly, for the fond air of my companion. His eye was riveted on the spot with all the fondness of a child who is greeting the countenance of a well loved parent." (p. 27)

Cooper also makes use of “cloud” imagery when describing his first encounter with Mont Blanc (cf. *Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*, Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter II, p. 13). His comment on such phenomena is profound:

“I shall never forget the thrill of that moment. There is a feeling allied to the universal love of the mysterious, that causes us all to look with pleasure at any distant object which insensibly leads the mind to the contemplation of things that are invisible.”

12) Cf. Norman Barry, “[The Battle of the Heroes: The Creation of a New Hero of Lake Erie in the Backdrop of the Year 1845: The Jackson – Elliott – Cooper Connection.](#)”

<http://johnmaynard.net/MaynardJackson.pdf>, Section I: “The Death of the ‘Old Hero’ on June 8<sup>th</sup> 1845”

13) For spectacular photos of the equestrian statue in Lafayette Square, cf. [http://www.dcmemorials.com/index\\_indiv0000800.htm](http://www.dcmemorials.com/index_indiv0000800.htm)

14) Cf. an article on [French’s nephew Daniel Chester French](#) (1850-1831). Daniel Chester French was the son of Henry Flagg French (1813-1885), Benjamin’s half-brother by his father’s third wife. Henry Flagg French was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Treasury by General Grant and served in that capacity until his death in 1885.

15) Cf. Norman Barry, “[Why Luther?](#)”. Cf. Scan of the August 11, 1841 issue of the [Buffalo Commercial Advertiser](#).

16) Cf. “BURNING OF THE ERIE” in *Salem Gazette* (Salem, Massachusetts), Friday, August 26, 1841, Vol. LV, No. 71, p. 3, column 2:  
<http://johnmaynard.net/Eyew1.pdf>

and

Norman Barry, “[An Investigation of American Source Material Used by the \*Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen in Leipzig, Germany on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1841, under the Heading “Loss of the Steamboat Erie:\*” pp. 12 - 17](#)”

17) Cf. “[First Presbyterian Church Marriages: 1800-1863, Cooperstown, NY,](#)” compiled by Hugh MacDougall:

“Groom: Wright, William F (S. Louis) – Bride: Beebe, Emma F. (Cprstn) – Date: Sep. 27, 1849, Page: 90” That Rensselaer had known Emma at Cooperstown in his youth may be regarded as established.

18) Cf. *L&J*, Vol. V, Footnote 1 to the Feb. 15, 1848 journal entry, p. 284:

“1. Miss Beebe may have been Emma F. Wright Beebe whom Rensselaer R. Nelson, son of Judge Samuel Nelson, married on 3 November 1858 (*DAB*).”

The name “Wright” before her maiden name is mistaken as Emma did not marry William F. Wright until the following year (Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1849). Her name in 1858, before her marriage to Rensselaer, was obviously Emma F. Wright. It would seem that the fact that she was a widow when she married Judge Nelson’s son was not considered in *Letters and Journals*.

See also Norman Barry, “Two of the *Erie*’s Lost and Saved: James Fenimore Cooper’s Personal Links with the 1841 *Erie* Tragedy.” [http://johnmaynard.net/LINKAGE\\_2.pdf](http://johnmaynard.net/LINKAGE_2.pdf)

19) Cooper, in a letter to Shubrick, did not mince words:

“Lest any accident may have occurred to your letters, I will here state that your daughter was confined of a boy, in Nov. which lived only an hour. Mary was confined to her room for a good while, but is slowly recovering, and I doubt not, by this time, is out again.” *L&J*, Vol. V, Letter # 889, to William Branford Shubrick, From Hall, Cooperstown, Jan. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1847, p. 186.

In the same letter (p. 186), Cooper wrote:

“When I returned from Baltimore, on quitting your wife, Mr. Buchanan [Ftn. 2] travelled with me, as far as New York. I saw plainly that he expected Santa Ana would bring peace.”

Ftn. 2 (p. 193): “Apparently James Buchanan, Secretary of state in President Polk’s cabinet.” The ease with which Cooper could move in governmental circles should be apparent.

20) For an in-depth consideration of the name “Jersey,” cf: Norman Barry, “[The Author’s Signature: The Good Ship \*Jersey\* in “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” and the Significance of the Geography of New Jersey in the Works of James Fenimore Cooper](#)”

It should also be noted that the *Winkelried* of *The Headsman* also sails on a freshwater “inland sea:” Lac Lemane (Lake Geneva).

21) Looking beyond an American context, Cooper found in Switzerland other role-models suitable for emerging democracies. Cf. Norman Barry, “[James Fenimore Cooper’s \*The Headsman; or, the Abbaye des Vignerons\* and the Legend of Arnold von Winkelried: John Maynard’s European Roots.](#)”

22) French had known Kendall since 1833:

1) “I was this day introduced to Amos Kendall [ftn. 1] for the first time.”  
*Witness*, Washington, Saturday, Dec. 21, 1833, p. 35

Footnote 1: Amos Kendall (1789-1869), born in Massachusetts and a graduate of Dartmouth College, moved to Kentucky where he became a tutor in the household of Henry Clay. He then edited *The Argus* of western America in Frankfort for a number of years but gave it up to serve in Washington as Andrew Jackson's fourth auditor of the Treasury. One of the most influential of Jackson's "Kitchen Cabinet," he eventually became Postmaster General and remained in that post under Martin Van Buren. He later became a business associate of S. F. B. Morse and of Benjamin Brown French in the operation of the Magnetic Telegraph Company. *Witness*, p. 35, fn. 1

Only one letter to Kendall, in his function as Postmaster General (1835-1840), was sent by Cooper:

2) *L&J*, Vol. III, p. 250, Letter #454, to Amos Kendall, From The Hall, Cooperstown, Dec. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1836. Cooper requested that provision should be made "for the transmission of proof-sheets by mail." Under prevailing regulations Cooper wrote: "[It] has caused me to pass six weeks in Philadelphia this year, which to me has been so much time lost."

On p. 251: "Kendall's reply to the novelist's letter has not been located."

23) French was involved in other enterprises. An example from the year 1849:

"At a meeting of the stockholders of the Plymouth Branch Railroad Company, held on 3d inst. at their office, 109 Washington street, the following were chosen directors for the ensuing year, viz.: Richard Rantoul, Jr., David Dyer, William B. Dorr, James French, Benjamin French. And at a subsequent meeting of the said board of directors, David Dyer was chosen President, and Benjamin French, Treasurer of the company."

*Daily Evening Transcript*, December 8th, 1849

A further example of B. B. French's organizing talents is in connection with his work with the Knights Templar:

#### "HISTORY OF THE ORDER.

"The history of Templarism is full of legend, and in the faith of members of the order runs back many centuries. Its history in this country really dates from 1816. In June of that year delegates from eight commanderies met in New York and formed the grand encampment. De Witt Clinton was chosen grand master and served until 1829. He was succeeded by Jonathan Nye, who, in 1834, gave the seals of office into the keeping of James M. Allen, who held the place until 1843. Archibald Bull held the office from 1844 to 1847, and was succeeded by W. B. Hubbard, who in 1859 gave the place to Benjamin B. French. French was selected at the fourteenth convention, or triennial conclave, which met in Chicago, all previous conclaves having met in New York. At this conclave 5,743 members attended, and the most important business was the adoption of a Templar uniform."

– From "KNIGHTS TEMPLAR. Preparations for the Triennial Conclave at St. Louis. THIRTY THOUSAND KNIGHTS EXPECTED." *New York Herald*, September 17th, 1886, p. 3



24) Cf. *Witness*, Ch. 4, p. 165:

“His career in the Magnetic Telegraph Company also had its ups and downs. Already a director of the company, which operated the line between Washington and New York, he was elected its president in 1847. In the business world of the time this did not prevent French from going out on the line in the middle of a February snowstorm and working for three days, stretching new wire across the Susquehanna River and securing it from the breakup of ice. Earlier he had been on an expedition up the Hudson River, examining both shores for a suitable route for the telegraph. When, despite such efforts, the stockholders refused to reelect him in 1850, he spoke of his hurt in his journal. “I never had anything,” he wrote [Dec. 21, 1850], “which cut me to the very quick as that refusal...did!”

25) Cf. William Branford Shubrick Clymer, *James Fenimore Cooper* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company: 1900), “Chronology,” p. xvii. It is understandable that the grandson, with relatives and ancestors from Maryland, would have kept a record of information pertinent to that state.

26) For [further material on the sarcophagus](#), cf. Norman Barry, “The Battle of the Heroes: The Creation of a New Hero of Lake in the Backdrop of the Year 1845: The Jackson – Elliott – Cooper Connection:” Section VIII, pp. 11-13: “A Proper Resting Place, or ‘How to Calm the Storm.’”

27) That the archive is incomplete is pointed out by Wayne Franklin in his *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007) with regard to Susan Fenimore Cooper’s custody of its contents:

“On the other hand, Susan’s management of the archive was at times counter-productive. There is probably little truth to rumors that she either burned ‘a great deal’ of her father’s surviving manuscripts or insisted that his most revealing journals be buried with her. Even so, she did a fair amount of damage to the collection. She freely clipped the novelist’s autographs from surviving documents and passed them out, donated several hundred pages from his literary documents for charity auctions, and cut others into strips that she gave away free to friends or importunate collectors. Dispersed as they were beyond easy recovery, these items might just as well have been buried or burned.” - “Introduction,” p. xiii

On page xiv of the same work, Franklin adds ominously:

“. . . . Even now, in 2007, a few items still remain in family hands, but it is clear that the transfers arranged by Paul Cooper finally lift one part of the novelist’s prohibition. “The other part had been lifted, in a sense, some fifty years earlier when James F.

Beard, an American literature scholar, was named the novelist's literary executor and therefore granted access to the archive."

The ambiguous wording Franklin uses when he writes, "the other part [of Cooper's prohibition] had been lifted, *in a sense*" [my emphasis], can only make one wonder just *how many items* and *what sort of items* are, after almost 160 years, still regarded as "too hot to handle."

28) Harriet Cordelia Wethered Shubrick published a 247-page love story entitled *Violet: Or The Times We Live In* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott & Co., 1858). Close to the conclusion of the novel, which on the a whole is very religious in tone, there is the following quote, which suggests that Mrs. Shubrick might, at the close of a busy day, have thought of the loss of the Coopers:

"Violet," said Eva, "it has always seemed to me that the thought of the earth to busy day belongs, and evenings like this, fraught with human love, bringing before us all dear to the heart – the living and the dead – past pleasures and past sorrows mingling with the present *now*, while the hushed holy hour of night has ever appeared to belong to *God*." - p. 246

29) Neither French nor Cooper had anything good to say about the Whigs:

"The Whig party must break up. . . . It was conceived in the filthiness [sic] of the brothel, hard cider & profaneness were its midwives, the compost that nourished it was formed of the odds & ends of disappointed factions – Abolition, Antimasonry, old Federalism & humbug, mingled with drunkenness & dissipation - & in this hotbed it grew with the outward show of health & vigor, while disease and corruption was at its heart, like the bloated invalid, who wears the hue of health upon his cheek, while the fingers of death are grasping his very heartstrings. The light of Truth has dawned upon it & it *must* wither and die. God grant it a deep grave & an immovable monument of infamy!" *Witness*, Sunday, August 15, 1841, p. 121

In the 1844 Presidential election campaign leading to the election of James Knox Polk, Cooper wrote the following:

"It will not be in my power to attend your meeting, having business of moment to keep me at home until later in the month. But I take the liberty to recommend that you stand shoulder to shoulder, until victory is assured. New York is democratic, and at this moment our political creed should be a determination to "beat the Whigs." It is a good creed at this particular juncture, and behind it lies the security of the State, the preservation of the public faith and the perpetuity of the institutions, in practice at least, if not in form." *L&J*, Vol. IV, Letter # 773, p. 473, To Charles A. Secor and Others, From Hall, Cooperstown, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1844.

30) An example of personal contact with George Bancroft is to be found in Cooper's letter #829 to Mrs. Cooper from Head's, Philadelphia, on October 11, 1845:

“Mr. [George] Bancroft is here, with his family. I believe one of his children is unwell. I have been asked by [Joseph R.] Ingersoll to meet him at dinner, but could not on account of clearing off my work. He is to pass an hour with me to-morrow morning.”  
*L&J*, Vol. V, p. 79

31) Cf. *LJ*, Vol. III, p. 6, and *Gleanings in Europe: France* – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter XIII, Ftn. p. 170 and “Explanatory Notes,” p. 288 (170.39-40).

32) Cf. *LJ*, Vol. VI, p. 226, ftn 4: . . . “The Lake Gun,’ first published in *The Parthenon* (New York: 1850), [I], 1-12.”

33) To get some idea of just how hard up Cooper was towards the end of his life, the failed attempt to allow Morse to repurchase Cooper's Rembrandt painting in November 1849 is roughly one year prior to the “Lake Gun” venture. Cooper had paid somewhere between \$300 and \$400 for the painting and was willing to sell it to Morse for all of \$400. [Cf. *L&J*, Vol. VI, Letter # 1015, pp. 79-80, To Samuel F. B. Morse, From Hall, Cooperstown, Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1849.]

In a letter dated December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1831, to Elizabeth Caroline de Lancey (Mrs. Cooper's sister), Cooper urged her to accept a passage to Europe to work as his copyist:

“You need not hesitate, for I tell you in *confidence*, that I have the prospect of receiving this year near or quite twenty thousand dollars.”  
*L&J*, Vol. II, Letter #241, From Paris, p. 159

34) Cf. Secion VIII, The Thrilling Tale of a ‘Floating Bridge’ in *Satanstoe* in “The Author's Signature:” <http://johnmaynard.net/Jersey.pdf> , pp. 16-20.

35) Cf. *L&J*, Vol. V, p. 101, Letter #844 To Mrs. Cooper, From Head's, Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1845:

“I can hear nothing of *Chainbearer*. *The papers are mum* [=my emphasis] as usual, but I know it sells pretty well. They cannot put me down entirely, though they do me infinite harm. A precious set of dishonest knaves are they!”