

## *Commercial Advertiser and Journal*

OFFICIAL PAPER OF THE CITY.

**BUFFALO:**

**FRIDAY EVENING, AUGUST 13, 1841.**

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MORE OF THE LOST. — Mr. Jones of the Buffalo Steamboat Hotel says five or six persons left his house, and took passage on the *Erie*. These were not in the list reported. Two of the men, apparently 50 or 60 years of age, were traveling in company. One of them, a tall man from Ontario Co., had with him a checked blanket or coverlet, a valise and umbrella. The two were going to Racine, W. T., and thence about forty miles into the interior of that territory. The tall man left an old hat, made by *Leonard*, of New Jersey. The shorter man wore a grey coat.

CORRECTIONS.— The publication of our paper yesterday was unavoidably delayed somewhat beyond the usual time, and at last went to press with numerous typographical errors. We trust to the good sense of our readers to correct most of them. In justice to Capt. Titus, we must take notice of one of these errors. The report of his testimony, makes him say that he ordered the wheel to be put “hard to South” — a very unseamanlike order. — For “South,” the reader will please substitute “*starboard*.”

☞ We learn that JEROME MCBRIDE, whose name was published in the list of the saved, has died of his burns, and subsequent exposure in the water. He was buried at Erie yesterday.

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### **CORONER’S INQUEST**

INVESTIGATION OF THE CAUSES WHICH LED TO THE  
DESTRUCTION OF THE STEAMBOAT ERIE.

[*Continued.*]

*William G. Murray sworn.* — Is 30 years of age; has resided in Buffalo three years; is engaged in the painting business; shipped on board the *Erie* on Monday a quantity of paints, consisting of 4 kegs white lead, 5 jars green paint 25 lbs. litharge, about 60 lbs. paint in a tub, 2 demijohns of spirits of turpentine, 1 case varnish, half barrel oil, 30 paint pots, box containing about 20 paint brushes; the materials were taken to the boat between half past one and three o’clock; went to the boat about three o’clock; the half barrel of oil and casks of white lead were standing near the steerage cabin door, the remainder of the materials near the chimneys on the boiler deck; inquired of Mr. Sears, the foreman, if they were not too near the pipes, he replied that they were placed there by direction of some of the men belonging to the boat; were left in that position; said nothing to any on board about them; was not sure that they were in a dangerous place, but thought they might be in a more secure one, does not believe they would burst from expansion; if broke believes it must have been done by being capsized; thinks a rough sea would capsize a demijohn; the demijohns were secured with corks with a cap from the basket.

*Hiram De Graff Sworn.* — Farmer—resides in Jo Davies co. Ill.; I was on board the *Erie*; took passage at this place. When I first saw the fire, I was on the boiler deck, 12 feet from the fire when it broke out; heard an explosion on board resembling the escape of a cork from a beer barrel, only louder; half a minute after that heard a noise as if the deck was torn to pieces; sprang forward; cast my eye back and saw very black smoke and a little fire; smoke was blacker than that from common wood; rushed through the ladies' cabin toward the stern of the boat; the fire at this time was near the cabin; threw myself over the stern of the vessel ready to go in the small boat when it should be lowered down. While standing there some 50 persons jumped overboard. The small boat was then lowered, I and other got into her; soon after she capsized. Previous to the explosion, I thought that one of the screws of the boiler had been forced off. Several persons were lying sleeping on the boiler deck when the explosion took place; saw oil put on board before leaving port; it was in half barrels; saw no demijohns; the decks were very hot; a fellow passenger, *Mr. Sacket*, remarked, "that there cannot be any danger, as it holds water." The boiler deck was so hot that I could hardly sit upon it; the main deck also was quite hot; steam arising from it; had been sitting on the boiler deck about three minutes, when the explosion took place; I was on the starboard side.—Immediately after the alarm, and when crossing the shaft, I looked back but could not see for the smoke was so intense; no particular odor to the flames or smoke; was mostly on the upper deck; saw the captain after on the forward deck looking out; saw several of the Swiss women jump overboard; don't remember to have seen a single female than those just mentioned.

*John Hibbard sworn.*—My age is 40; an inspector of steamboats at this port; fully acquainted with the construction of the steamboat *Erie*; have resided in this city some 13 years; inspected the *Erie* last season; did not do so this; understood that she was inspected up the lake. When I inspected her there was a space of seven or ten inches between the boilers and deck above, which was not guarded by sheets of tin. Nearly all the lake boats have this guard. I have often been on board of boats that took fire, but it was observed and the fire quenched; have also known instances where boats took fire and the flames went out of their own accord for want of vent; know this by subsequent examination. I have seen the *Constellation* on fire; it is quite common that the deck above the boilers becomes greatly charred by intense heat, and boats are liable to take fire from the sparks which escape upward, and lodge between the interstices. I consider the present law in relation to the inspection of steamboats a *dead letter*, and not at all adequate to the object for which it was framed. There are five inspectors on the lake, viz: Buffalo, Erie, Cleveland, Sandusky and Detroit. I know instances where some of the boats have obtained certificates from an inspector without his even examining the vessel; the inspector did this without even going on board. The *Julia Palmer* obtained a certificate in this way, and so I think did the *Clinton* and the *Fulton*. The name of the inspector is *Peter Hotaling*, — a juryman here interrupted the witness and suggested the propriety of eliciting this description of evidence, and *Mr. Hibbard* had his attention called to other facts of a general nature. The witness then went into a minute description of the *Erie*, the position of her machinery tending to endanger the boat; and concluded by giving his opinion that the fire took place underneath the boiler deck, from sparks which escaped from the flues.

*Timothy Quinlin sworn.*—I am a barber; my age is 33; I was on board the *Erie* when she took fire; in the steerage cabin. When the alarm was given I ascended the stairs; at

that time the flames were coming out of the hold where they throw down the wood, (fireroom;) I ran to the bows of the boat, where the horse was tied, and ascended to the upper deck; saw Capt. T. there; I with others seized the boat, but were told by Capt. T. to leave it alone a few minutes; we did so a moment, but finding the flames increasing so rapidly we put over the small boat and got into it; she was filled with water; six or seven persons got into her, when she swamped the second time; three persons only got onto her after that time, among others the captain; my comrade, *Peter Finney*, was among the many who first go into the yawl; he was instantly lost. Saw no paints on board; there were very many old persons in the water; the children were too sick to make an effort to save themselves. A great many women were forward near the horse, crying aloud for assistance. As I ascended from the steerage, a very heavy body of flames came up from the fireroom.

*Alfred Harris sworn.* — I am 28 years of age; an engineer by profession; was intimately acquainted with the *Erie*. Last season, after the explosion of the steam-chimney, I observed her particularly. Do not think there was any tin-lining above the boiler, between it and the deck; it was more necessary to have linings below the boilers than above them. The lining is usually of tin or zinc.

[This witness also went into details of the position of the machinery of the *Erie*, and explained very lucidly and practically, the formation of the boilers, flues, &c. and the liability of boats to take fire; and concluded by giving his opinion that the fire on board the *Erie* originated from the explosion of some combustible matter, which communicated with the ashes lying in the pan below the boilers. Witness thought great danger arises from this cause.]

#### AUGUST 13, A. M.

On the opening of the Inquest this morning, the following letter was read by the Coroner from CHAS. M. REED, Esq. the owner of the *Erie*:

To J. L. KIMBERLY:

Sir:—I hope the Coroner will make a thorough examination into every thing relating to the destruction of the *Erie*, and give a full detail to the world—the public require it. If there has been neglect, (which I trust in God there has not been) it should be known—so far as regards the boat, I have the satisfaction of knowing that no pains or expense had been spared in putting every thing in perfect order, and the captain observed to me on our passage from this place to Buffalo, that she was in perfect order, better than she ever had been. I

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send the mate, MCBRIDE, and the engineer, who were saved, down, that they may be examined. —I hope to be down in the *Missouri*, to morrow evening myself. I wish the Coroner to be informed immediately of their arrival. I have directed Mr. HARRISON to remain at Silver Creek so long as there was any prospect of recovering any of the bodies, keeping boats out all the time, where the accident took place, to recover any bodies that might rise—he has direction to write daily to you and myself. Our town is filled with mourners.

Yours &c.

CHAS. M. REED

ERIE, AUG. 15 [13!], 1841

*Dennis McBride sworn.*—My age is 22; a seaman, have followed that calling seven or eight years on lake Erie; was three seasons on the *U. S. Cutter*; four seasons on the *Erie*. The past season I was first mate after 12<sup>th</sup> June, previously the second. It is the duty of the mate to stow away the freight, shipping the men and when the boat's under way he acts as pilot. Was on board the *Erie* when she left port (described her cargo) did not see any paints or oil on board; saw about a dozen empty paint pots, on the boiler deck; saw also a few trunks, &c. belonging to a lady. This luggage was afterward stowed in the baggage room by *Mr. Hughes*, the 2<sup>d</sup> mate, by order of Capt. TITUS; saw nothing else on the boiler deck. If other articles had been there I should have seen them, I think. The paint pots were near the middle of the deck, near the forward part; within 5 or 6 feet of the chimney. I saw some of *Miller's* men on board; the foreman I think. Do not know that these men had paints or varnish with them; was forward of the boilers in the forward part of the boat, in the mate's room asleep, when the fire broke out. Saw fire coming up thro' the sky light of the promenade deck and around or near the pipes; was 12 or 15 feet distant. The flames seemed to arise from the boiler deck, thro' the sky lights; the flames arose 6 feet above the deck; heard no explosion before I heard the cry of fire; heard no noise while lying in my berth, previous to the alarm. Fire might possibly be communicated from the heat of the boilers. If any thing should burst and be spilt upon the boiler deck, it must first run thro' the deck which was not caulked. Paints could not have been placed over the boilers unless carried there by the painters themselves. Do not know that the paints were there; passed along the boiler deck several times during the evening, but did not see any paints; went past half an hour before going into my room. Saw the pots brought on board about 2 o'clock, P. M., a short while before the boat left port; don't remember to have seen them afterward. The conversation between Capt. T. and the 2d mate took place about 5 or 6 o'clock, after leaving port; frequently put freight over the boiler deck and it remains there during the trip; has known the boiler deck on the *Erie* to take fire before the new deck was put on; the new deck was put up on last August. The new deck differs from the old by being raised midships more; no particular difference between the old and new deck, except the new was made stronger; come out of the birth [sic], went to the after part of the boat, saw the hooking on the starboard small boat; then went to the opposite side of the boat; saw passengers round the boat there, trying to hook the tackles on the boat but did not know how to go to work; took out his knife and cut the rope yarns, and hooked on the tackles; gave orders to hoist the boat; they hoisted bows, one man at the stern tackle and he could not hoist her; then saw the flame rushing through the after sky lights; then looked on the side and saw it come out through the quarter deck staunches. The man let the boat go, and ran to the other side; went to the other side and saw the first boat in the water; jumped down the rail, off the promenade deck and jumped on board; did not see the captain after the fire broke out, till I jumped into the water; swathe first boat lowered away into the water; didn't see any of the officers of the boat getting the small boat away; thinks it was about three or five minutes after he came out of his berth before he jumped into the water; does not know how the old boiler deck took fire; the old boiler deck took fire in all three times, during the time he was on board; the boat has never taken fire in other places since he has been on board as an officer. The 2d mate stowed the freight on the forward part of the boat; was off duty; it was the second mate's watch from Buffalo to Dunkirk; was on board the *Erie* last summer when the accident occurred to her; says it is common for passengers to

sleep on the boiler deck; the smoke pipe does not get red hot where it comes out of the hurricane deck; emigrants are not allowed to move their baggage after it is on the boat; could not know personally all the freight that is placed on the boat; did not see the steamboat *Rochester* that evening; says there was a fire engine on board, kept forward the wheel house; says the engine was in order; saw it used on Friday before the fire; thinks the engine was enveloped in flames in half a minute after the fire broke out; it can be got ready for use in a moment.

]To be continued.]