

# *Commercial Advertiser and Journal*

OFFICIAL PAPER OF THE CITY.

**BUFFALO:**

**TUESDAY EVENING, AUGUST 17, 1841.**

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☞ The *Buffalo* has gone on a tour of observation along the north shore, and will cross to Silver Creek and return this evening. The *Missouri* took the south side of the lake, so as to take up any bodies that may be discovered in that direction.—Mr. REED went up in her and will communicate with the *Vermillion* off Dunkirk, this evening.—All that can be done therefore, toward securing the bodies or effects of the unfortunate, will be attended to promptly.

☞ The *Chautauque* brought down last evening a male child, about 18 months old, that was picked up in the lake some distance from the city. It had on a pink calico frock and one woolen sock, and had every indication of being one of those last found from the *Erie*. Its parents must have been American.

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## **CORONER'S INQUEST.**

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

[Continued.]

[In the hurry of going to press a number of typographical errors escaped detection in the testimony of Mr. Clemens. We re [sic] publish it with the necessary corrections:]

[Edgar Clemens' testimony was recorded in the *Advertiser* on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1841, page2, column 2. Prominent additions are marked in red; replaced words are crossed out.]

*Edgar Clemens sworn.*—Aged 27 years; I was 1<sup>st</sup> engineer of the steamboat *Erie*; acted in that capacity three years; was on board on Monday last at the time of the fire; did not see any demijohns of turpentine on board. Half an hour before the fire, went down below to examine under and about the boilers to see if all was safe, as was usual every watch; watch is six hours, There had been some new brick work laid under the boiler or ash pan; while below he could see the under side of the boiler deck; saw no fire; had no light with him. The side of the boat is covered with whitewash and salt, as a protection against fire; twenty inches between boilers and boiler deck; round the smoke pipe, the boiler deck is lined with tin or zinc; grating in boiler deck to let off heated air; deck gets hot, but could lie upon it. There are holes in the corner of the boiler deck to try water in boilers, which is done every fifteen minutes; he looked into these holes and tried water 15 minutes before; he was standing by the engine by the starting bars, when the fire broke out. There was 2½ inches water in the ash-pan; when fire broke out had just been oiling and fixing machine **framing; fearing** a stormy night; heard an explosion like the light blast of rock; instantly saw fire just aft of the smoke pipe, on boiler deck; he was looking in the direction of boiler deck at the time; attention called by the cry of children;

explosion, fire and rolling of paint kegs were all seen and heard at the same instant. Saw painter put pots on the deck, but nothing else; after black smoke passed off saw fire; smoke had the odor of turpentine; odor was strong; attempted to stop engine; did not; fire burnt his face; bewildered with smoke; something got under the **bow lever**; could not see what it was; people rushing past prevented him, and filled up gangway; half minute trying; pulled pin out of throttle lever; effect to shut off steam, make her run slower; went aft to go on to promenade deck; met Capt. T. on stairs, he asked if I could stop the engine; I told him I could not and get back alive. Went on the upper deck, captain came up and said he thought she was lost, there was no chance of saving her; went to get over the yawl boat; captain, 2d mate, 2d engineer and one passenger; got the boat over; passengers jumped in from main deck; she struck a sea; she swamped and carried cranes and tackle with her; thinks the crane struck the 2d engineer, if so killed him; flames were now bursting out of the boat in every direction; pulled up a piece of a bench, threw it over; two men seized it and made off; put hands on rail, it was on fire, and burnt my hands; I intended jumping over; I let go, then ran and jumped over; this was at the stern. Explosion with turpentine he thinks; carpenter told him after that he had taken two demijohns off from his tool chest; carpenter wanted to get out his tools; carpenter after the fire told him he did not think turpentine would expand so; thought it was oil; witness directed carpenter to make some plugs; it was now 7 o'clock; it then became necessary for carpenter to go to his chest—tool chest was on boiler deck, under stairs, (so many Dutch people on deck and from the position of the demijohns off the chest and on boiler deck, they would not be discovered) on the chest they would; carpenter said they (the **Duteh Demijohn's [sic]**) were not on chest a short time before; carpenter's name is Harrison Foster, was saved, but is not here; demejohn [sic], if broken, the fluid would run between boilers and into furnace doors; my opinion is that the fire originated from the demijohn of turpentine; believes the expansion of turpentine burst the demijohn; two persons were laying within two feet of demijohn, two children at their feet; demijohn must have been within two feet of smoke pipe; six families in all, one saved; we ordinarily carry 18 to 20 inches of steam, at this time 17 inches; safety valve weighted for 20 inches, would expand in 15 minutes by such a fire, so as to stop engine; if the boiler had burst, I should have known it; it could not have been the case.

MONDAY, August 16, 3 P. M.

*Harrison Foster*, sworn, aged 26 years, was on board the steamboat *Erie* on Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> inst., in the capacity of a carpenter; had occasion to put a cleet [sic] on cat head [sic] before we left port; went to my chest which stood on the boiler deck, under the stairs; there was no demijohn on the chest at that time; I was directed by the Engineer Clements [sic] to make some plugs for the scupper holes, to keep water out: I went to my tool chest and found standing upon it a demijohn and paint pot; something in the paint pot that looked like molasses and two paint brushes; *I set them off the chest on the boiler deck*. Paint pots and demijohns were setting all round on the boiler deck next to the chest; I should think there were 7 or 8 paint pots and 3 or 4 demijohns; not certain as to the number; this was about 6 o'clock in the evening; I did not know what was in the demijohns; I heard no one say any thing about what was in them; some oil had got on top of my chest; I suppose it came from the paint pot; the mate also called on me to put a plank athwart ships, to keep the water, (which came on deck from high sea) from running

aft; from one or two hours from the time I moved the demijohns the boat took fire; when the fire broke out I was lying in a berth in the wheelman's room; it was about 8 o'clock; ran forward and jumped over the bow of the boat and hung on to a small chain attached to the bow of the boat; finally got on a fender, (a round piece of wood some 6 or 7 feet long,) together with several others; we had a line tied to the small chain at the bow, and remaind [sic] setting [sic] upon the fender and holding on to the rope, until I was picked up by the *De Witt Clinton*. I should think the demijohns could not be seen while setting [sic] upon the chest by persons passing by; they might or might not be seen when placed on the boiler deck; there were several Swiss on the deck; I saw many persons jump overboard; *I should not think there were many persons burnt on board*; I believe they mostly jumped overboard.

The testimony here closed.

### VERDICT OF THE JURY.

STATE OF NEW YORK, Erie County, ss.[sworn statement]: The undersigned, qualified by law to serve as jurors, and not exempt from such service, having been duly summoned to appear before Francis L. Harris, one of the Coroners of the said County at the city of Buffalo, in the Common Council Chamber of said city in said county, to make inquisition concerning the sudden death of a person whose name is to the jurors aforesaid unknown, and having been there on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of August, A. D. 1841, sworn by the said Coroner to enquire how and in what manner and when and where the said person (whose name is unknown to the jurors aforesaid) came to her death, and who the said person was, and into all the circumstances attending the said death, and to make a true inquisition according to the evidence offered to them , or arising from the inspection of the body, they the undersigned, upon the inspection of the said body of the said person dead, and after hearing the testimony, have then and there found and hereby find, present and say, upon the oath aforesaid, and certify that the body of the said person was found in Lake Erie about thirteen miles from Buffalo Harbor, and about eighteen miles from the place where the steamboat *Erie* was burned on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> instant, and that said person was a German by birth; was on boad [sic] of said boat at the time it took fire; that the said person came to her death in consequence of the burning of the said steamboat. And we further certify that the said fire, in our opinion, on said boat, was caused by the bursting of one or more demijohns of Spirits of Turpentine standing on the boiler deck and communicating with the fire in the furnace of the boilers. We further certify, that it appears to us from the testimony that said demijohns burst by reason of the heat of the boilers over which they were placed; and that said boat had been lately painted and varnished, and this, together with a high wind, drove the flames so rapidly through the entire boat that it was impossible for the persons on board to stop the fire or prevent the destruction of said boat.

And we further certify, that the destruction of said boat was accidental, and that no person is guil-

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ty of the death of said person either as principal or accessory.

Given under our hands at Buffalo aforesaid, this 16<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1841.

**S. S. Case,  
S. N. Callender,  
S. Chamberlin,  
S. Mathews,  
E. D. Efner,  
T. R. Stocking  
L. Storrs.**

**JOSEPH CLARY, Foreman  
Jas. Hollister  
H. R. Seymour,  
Robert Pomeroy,  
Nathaniel Vosburgh,  
R. H. Maynard,  
Chas. C. Haddock,**

**F. L. HARRIS, Coroner**

The following resolutions were passed by the Jury:

*Resolved*, That the Steamboat *Erie* was a first rate boat; that she was in all respects well forund [sic], and completely furnished with means for extinguishing fire, and that more than ordinary means for the safety of the boat and passengers had been provided.

*Resolved*, That in view of the great destruction of human life by the *burning of steamboats*, we recommend boat owners to furnish their boats with a sufficient number of LIFE BOATS to sustain all passengers they may carry; also, as auxiliary, to carry a suitable number of pine or whitewood plank (say 10 feet long and 12 to 16 inches wide,) with rope loops, and a rope sufficient long to reach the water from the deck; (the object of which is to aid those who cannot swim in reaching the plank they may throw over,) and that they be so placed as to be easily thrown overboard; also, Life Preservers sufficient for one hundred passengers, and that they be inflated and placed in the berths immediately after leaving port.

☞ Our exchanges from various parts of the country, give the names of sundry persons in their region, who it was known were intending to go up the lake about the time the *Erie* left on her last fatal trip, and as nothing has since been heard from them, it is feared they took passage on that boat and were lost. We shall probably never know the full extent of the loss, but there is every reason to believe that nearly two hundred and fifty persons, men, women and children were engulfed in the waters of Lake Erie, or perished amid the flames in that awful night.