

These two reports are taken from the Weekly Herald, New York City, August 14 & 21, and provide the closest thing to “national and international” coverage of the event. Any repetition arising will only serve to confirm previous reports.

The Weekly Herald

New York,

August 14, 1841

(Vol. V, No. 47)

p. 387, columns 3-5

Lines not [yet] found in other newspaper reports are highlighted in [blue](#).

[column 3]

The Melancholy Calamity—Destruction of the Steamer *Erie* by Fire and Loss of nearly two hundred Lives:

On Thursday morning we received from the West, the most heart-rending intelligence of the total destruction *by fire of the splendid steamer Erie, on Lake Erie, and the loss of nearly two hundred lives*, and a large amount of merchandize [sic].

We annex the particulars as received by us—

[Correspondence of the *Herald*]

RAILROAD OFFICE, SYRACUSE, AUG. 11

DEAR SIR: I learn from the passengers from the west this morning, that the steamboat *Erie*, was burned at the mouth of Silver Creek, with 160 persons on board, out of which only 27 are known to have escaped. I have my information from a gentleman who has seen some of those who were saved. The particulars of the disaster will reach us by this afternoon train.

I learn that the flames spread with rapidity in consequence of the bursting of some casks of varnish that were placed near where the fire originated.

Yours in haste,
N. GILLMORE
Collector of Syracuse and Utica Railroad.

DESTRUCTION OF THE STEAMBOAT ERIE, BY FIRE, AND LOSS OF NEARLY TWO HUNDRED LIVES.

The steamer *Erie* left Buffalo on Monday afternoon at 3 o'clock for Chicago. The precise number on board of her is not known, but it is estimated by the captain, from a glance at the register before leaving the harbor, to have exceeded two hundred souls. Amongst the number, were several painters, who with their materials were on their way to some port up the lake for the purpose of painting a boat lying there. A strong wind and rough sea prevailing at the time, Capt. Titus hesitated for some time to put out, but the *De Witt Clinton* having left about three hours previous, he was finally induced to start on the fatal voyage.

At about 8 o'clock the vessel was suddenly wrapped in flames from the bursting of a carboy of varnish on the boiler deck, whilst so sudden was the combustion that the passengers were at once forced overboard, in many instances without the slightest article to sustain them.

Fortunately the *De Witt Clinton* had put into Dunkirk, and discovering the *Erie* in flames hastened to her relief.

She picked up TWENTY-SEVEN only of the whole number on board, whilst about TWO HUNDRED fell victims to the devouring element. Only one female was saved, as also were the captain and one of the crew.

The *Erie*, in addition to a full compliment of passengers, had on board a large quantity of merchandize [sic] for Chicago and intermediate places.

About one hundred and fifty of the passengers, we learn, were German emigrants, going west to settle. Most of them, with their all, have thus been swept from the face of the earth.

It is said that the varnish on the *Erie* was not entirely dry, having but a short time previous been put on, and that when the fire took it, it spread with such rapidity that those on the upper deck had not even time to go below before they were enveloped in flames. The persons saved where [sic] taken from the wheels of the boat, pieces of furniture, chests, and the like.

We understand that the *Erie* was five years old, built and owned by Mr. Reed, of Erie, Penn., and cost \$90,000. She is said to be a splendid and fast boat, and of the first class. She was recently put in complete order, refitted and repainted in fine style. She was a great favorite and has encountered many a severe gale. To show her size we give the dimensions as follows:—

Length.....	180	feet
Breadth of Beam.....	27½	"
Extreme breadth.....	51½	"
Depth.....	12	"

Her power was two hundred and fifty horse, and her burthen six hundred tons. Her commander's name is T. J. Titus.

This is the third steamer burnt on the Lake within our recollection. The *Great Western* at Detroit, about a year since, and the *Geo. Washington*, several years ago, with three hundred passengers.

The *De Witt Clinton*, which rescued the twenty seven lives, is an old boat uded for freight and passengers.

Not since the burning of the *Ben Sherrod*, on the Mississippi, *George Washington* on Lake Erie, and the *Lexington*, on Long Island, have we heard of such a dreadful, shocking, and deeply to be deplored calamity as the destruction of the ill fated *Erie*, and more than a hundred and fifty men, women, and children.

Immediately on the receipt of the above painful tidings, we issued a third edition, and the city was thrown into a deep sensation.

What fatality! Nearly two hundred human beings, from all nations and of all ages and sexes, met together in Buffalo last Monday to be sent unprepared and without a moment's warning before their Maker!

BUFFALO, Aug. 10, 1841

Destruction of the Steamboat Erie by Fire—A hundred and eighty Passengers Lost

FRIEND BENNETT: —

The steamboat *Erie*, commanded by Captain Titus, that has been undergoing repairs at our harbor, left our port yesterday afternoon, loaded down with freight, and crowded with passengers, for the far West. In the early part of the evening a bright light was seen at a distance on the Lake, and fears were entertained that this boat had taken fire, but all anxiety however subsided, at the sudden disappearance of the light, which told that the fire had been timely arrested. But the feelings of our citizens can be better imagined than described, when this morning the *De Witt Clinton* brought the melancholy news of the destruction of the boat, with those who, by providence, has escaped to mourn the loss of their friends.

The number of passengers, together with the hands on board, is supposed to be upwards of two hundred, of which only twenty-seven were saved.

The principal part of the passengers were Germans, who had but lately arrived in this country, and were going to settle at the West. If any thing could excite the feelings of our natives, it was to see the survivors, bemoaning the loss of their friends and relatives.

Only a few short hours has elapsed since the farewell was spoken, and the hands of friends and kindred pressed each other. The spectacle that I saw this morning was enough to make the very stones cry out in sympathy; a mother weeping the loss of her only son, and as she passed along the street I could plainly see the tear startle in the eye of every beholder. Oh! what anguish is not human nature compelled to endure. This is the most afflicting occurrence that has ever happened on our lakes; and what is a little singular, this boat was burned in nearly the same place where the *Washington* met with a similar fate.

The fire originated from some turpentine and oil, that had been deposited near the boiler by some painters on board. The turpentine becoming heated, exploded the casks which contained it, and in a few moments the boat was enveloped in flames, leaving scarcely a moment for reflection.

Captain Titus and some few belonging to the boat, saved themselves in the small boat, after being once upset. Hopes are entertained that some more have saved themselves, by miraculously swimming a few miles.

Those who had life-preservers were saved by the *De Witt Clinton*.

A young man was just taken to the American, badly burned. As to the probably lost, various statements are afloat; but, from what I have just learned, it is certain that over two-hundred are lost.

These are nearly all the particulars that I have been able to learn.

[column 4]

BUFFALO, Aug. 10, 1841.

Awful Conflagration—Burning of the Steamboat Erie—Nearly Two Hundred Lives Lost—Only 27 Saved

JAMES GORDON BENNETT, ESQ.

DEAR SIR, —Our city, this morning, was thrown into the most intense excitement by the announcement of the burning of the beautiful steamboat *Erie*, Captain Titus, which occurred last evening about 9 o'clock, near Dunkirk. By this terrible catastrophe nearly two hundred human beings have suddenly been hurried before the presence of their maker! I have just returned from the *De Witt Clinton*, and am indebted to the Engineer of the *Erie*; and several others of the survivors, who were rescued from their perilous situation by the *De Witt Clinton*, for the imperfect particulars I give. It was a painful and sad picture to look upon. Most of those saved were still on the *Clinton*, some of whom were badly burned, and in some instances completely destitute of clothing, having barely escaped with their lives!—Here were fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and other relatives, many of whom betrayed the most poignant agony! I trust in God that it may never fall to my lot to witness or record the particulars of a similar conflagration! Many ladies [sic] —some from this city—were on board, only *one* of whom was saved, by means of a life preserver.

Capt. TITUS, the engineer, and one or two of the crew, are among the saved. The largest portion of the passengers were German emigrants, some of whom, I learn, had but just arrived in this country. Had I time, I would endeavor to give a full list of the unfortunate passengers of this truly ill-fated steamer, but that you will get in a short time from our city papers. I learn that the fire originated from a demijohn of copal varnish, which by some means, perhaps being too near the fire, exploded.

I have many other matters which I wish to communicate, but must delay them until my next.

[From the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* of Tuesday (Aug. 10) .]

Little did we think yesterday in penning a brief paragraph in commendation of the *Erie*, that, to-day we should be called upon to record the destruction of that boat, together with a loss of life unequalled on our own or almost any waters. The *Erie* left the dock at ten minutes past 4, P.M. loaded with merchandise destined for Chicago. and, as nearly as now can be ascertained, about two hundred persons, including passengers and crew on board.

The boat had been thoroughly overhauled, and although the wind was blowing fresh, every thing promised a pleasant and prosperous voyage. Nothing occurred to mar this prospect till about eight o'clock when the boat was off Silver Creek, about 8 miles from Shore, and 33 miles from this city, when a slight explosion was heard, and immediately, instantaneously

almost, the whole vessel was enveloped in flame. Captain Titus, who was on the upper deck at the time, rushed to the ladies cabin, to obtain the life preservers, of which there were from 90 to 100 on board, but so rapid had been the progress of the flames, he found it impossible to enter the cabin.

He returned to the upper deck, on his way giving orders to the engineer to stop the engine, the wind and the headway of the boat increasing the fierceness of the flames and driving them aft. The engineer replied that in consequence of the flames he could not reach the engine. The steersman was then directed to put the helm hard a starboard.— She swung slowly round, heading to the shore, and the boats — there were three on board — were then ordered to be lowered. Two of the boats were lowered, but in consequence of the heavy sea on, and the headway of the vessel, they both swamped as soon as they touched the water.

We will not attempt to describe the awful and appalling condition of the passengers. Some were frantic with fear and horror, others plunged headlong madly into the water, others again seized upon any thing buoyant, upon which they could lay hands. The small boat forward had been lowered. It was alongside the wheel, with three or four persons in it, when the captain jumped in, and the boat immediately dropped astern filled with water. A lady floated by with a life preserver on. She cried for help. There was no safety in the boat. The captain threw her the only oar in the boat. She caught the oar and was saved. It was Mrs. Lynde, of Milwaukie, and she was the only lady saved.

In this condition, the boat, a mass of fierce fire, and the passengers and crew endeavoring to save themselves by swimming or supporting themselves by whatever they could reach, they were found by the *Clinton* about 10, P. M. The *Clinton* left here in the morning, but in consequence of the wind, had put into Dunkirk. She laid there till nearly sunset—at which time she ran out, and had proceeded as far as Barcelona, when just at twilight, the fire of the *Erie* was discovered at 20 miles astern. The *Clinton* immediately put about and reached the burning wreck about 10.

It was a fearful sight. All the upper works of the *Erie* had been burned away. The engine was standing, but the hull was a mass of dull, red flame. The passengers and crew were floating around, screaming in their agony and shrieking for help. The boats of the *Clinton* were instantly lowered and manned, and every person that could be seen or heard, was picked up, and every possible relief afforded. The *Lady*, a little steamboat lying at Dunkirk, went out of that harbor as soon as possible, after the discovery of the fire, and arrived soon after the *Clinton*. It was not thought by the survivors that she saved any.

By 1 A. M. all was still except the dead crackling of the fire. Not a solitary individual could be seen or heard on the wild waste of waters. A line was then made fast to the remains of the *Erie's* rudder, and an effort to tow the hapless hull ashore. About this time, the *Chautauque* came up and lent her assistance.

The hull of the *Erie* was towed within about four miles of the shore, when it sunk in eleven fathoms water. By this time it was daylight. The lines were cast off.—The *Clinton* headed for this port, which she reached about 6 o'clock. Of those who are saved, several are badly burned, but none are dangerously injured so far as we have heard.

ORIGIN OF THE FIRE—Among the passengers on board were six painters in the employ of Mr. W. G. Miller, of this city [Buffalo], who were going to Erie to paint the steamboat Madison. They had with them demijohns filled with spirits of turpentine and varnish, which unknown to

Capt. Titus, were placed on the boiler deck directly over the boilers. One of the firemen, who was saved, says he had occasion to go on the deck, and seeing the demijohns, removed them. They were replaced, but by whom is not known. Immediately previous to the bursting forth of the flames, as several on board have assured us, a slight explosion was heard. The demijohns had probably burst with the heat, and their inflammable contents, taking fire instantly, communicated to every part of the boat, which having been freshly varnished, caught as if it had been gunpowder.

Not a paper nor an article of any kind was saved. Of course it is impossible to give a complete list of those on board. Of cabin passengers, Capt. Titus thinks there were between 30 and 40, of whom 10 or 12 were ladies. In the steerage were about 140 passengers, nearly all of whom were Swiss and German immigrants. They mostly in families with the usual proportion of men, women and children. The heart bleeds at the thought.

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

[column 5]

time, happened to be on board the *Clinton* and was very active in saving the survivors of the *Erie*.

LATER.— By the *Robt. Fulton*, Capt. Hart, we learn that two men more persons were saved by the people of Dunkirk. One was Fred. Parmelee, the bar-keeper of the *Erie*, and an American, name unknown.

The *Fulton* also picked up two boats, one belonging to the *Erie*, and the other a sail-boat, belonging to Dunkirk, which was swamped on its way to the rescue. Those on board were picked up.

We annex a list of the lost and saved so far as we have been able to ascertain;

LOST.

W. M. Camp, Harrisburgh, Pa.

Willet Weeks, Brooklyn.

John C. Pool, New York city.

E. S. Cobb, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Otto Torp, New York, wife and three children.

Lloyd Gelston, Erie, Clerk.

Mr. Joles, Steward of the boat.

Mrs. Giles Williams, Chicago.

Charles. J. Lynde, Milwaukie.

Watts S. Lynde, Homer, N Y.

Mrs. Wm. H. Smith, and child, Schenectady.

A. Sears, Philip Barbier, Henry Weaver, Wm. Thomas, ——Evarts, Peter Finney, painters, Buffalo in the employ of Wm. G. Miller.

Miss. A. Miller, Buffalo, sister of Wm. G. Miller.

J. D. Woodward, New York.

Wm. Griffin, Mississippi.

D. S. Sloane, Geneva.

F. Stow, Canada.
 William Sacket, Michigan.
 Mrs. Spencer and two children.
 Mrs Dow.
 Mrs. Robinson, Ballston Spa, N Y.
 Miss Robinson, do. do.
 Miss King, do. do.
 Mr. Moore, lady and two children, from Yates Co. moving to Michigan.
 Orin Green, Rushville, Yates Co.
 Roome Button, from near Fort Plain.
 Charles S. Mather, Mt. Clemens, Mich., has got a family at that place.

List of Swiss passengers shipped by Messrs. P. L. Parsons & Co.

Names.	Number.	Destination.
Geo. Zuggler	& family 6	Akron, O.
John Flang,	" 2½	"
Martin Zulgen	" 2	"
Geo. Rettenger	" 3	"
Geo. Christian	" 5	"
Geo. Neigold	" 7½	"
M. Reibold	" 3	"
Geo. Steinman	" 2	"
Peter Kling	" 2	"
Peter Schmidt	" 1	"
John Netzel	" 1	"
Peter Schneider,	& family 5	Cleveland, O.
J. Newminger	" 4	"
S Schapler	" 5½	"
R Filing	" 2	"
Mr Obens	" 1	"
J. Korten	" 1	Dover, O.
C. Durler	" 1	"
Mr. Lithhold	& family 5½	"
C. Deitherick	" 2	"
C. Wilbur	" 6	"
C. Palmer	" 5	Masillon, O.
J. Garghum	" 5½	"
J. Mulliman,	3	"
C. Kellerman,	1	Chicago.
C. Mintch	& friend 2	"

Mintch was recently from Europe, and left his family in this city. He was on his way west to secure land for ultimate settlement.

This list comprises names of 87 persons; and as it is customary to pass children at half price, the whole number on this list must have reached one hundred souls. Only four persons of the whole, including Durler and three others, whose names we could not learn, were saved.

SAVED.

We are indebted to Mr. Gibson, clerk of the *De Witt Clinton*, for the following list of persons saved by that boat.

Jerome McBride, wheelman, badly burnt.

James Levery, do.

Hiram De Graff, passenger.

Dennis McBride, 1st mate.

Theodore Sears, painter.

J. H. St. John, passenger to Chicago.

C. Hogg, do. badly burned.

Wm. Wadsworth, one of the Erie band.

Alfred O. Wilkinson, East Euclid [sic], Ohio.

William Hughes, 2d mate.

Luther B. Searls, fireman.

Thomas J. Tann, Pittsford, N. Y.

John Winchell, Buffalo.

Edgar Clemens, 1st engineer.

Son of George Beebee, Cleveland.

Harrison Forrester, Harbor Creek, Pa.

Thomas Quinlin, Middlefield, Mass.

Three German passengers burned badly.

Robert Robinson, colored man, barber.

—Johnson, do. 3d cook.

Giles Williams, Chicago.

Capt. Titus, captain of the boat.

Mrs. Lynde, of Milwaukie.

Christian Durler, Holmes Co. Ohio.

—Rice, Hydraulics, Buffalo, badly burnt.

[By Pomeroy's Express last evening, we received Buffalo papers of Wednesday, in advance of the mail. They contain further particulars of the awful affair on Lake Erie.](#)

We hoped that we should learn something today to relieve the details published yesterday, but every thing we hear serves to deepen the horror. All that the imagination can conceive of the terrible and heartrending was realized in the awful destruction of the *Erie*. Scores sank despairingly beneath the wild waters, but there is reason to fear that many, very many, strong men, helpless women and tender children perished in the flames.

“Alexander Lamberton, musician, from Erie, and Frederick Parmalee, bar keeper, were picked up by a small boat after the *Clinton* had left. Parmalee was on the water seven hours, and showed great presence of mind in exerting himself to save Mr. Gelston, the brother-in-law of Col. Reed. He gave Mr. Gelston a plank, which he had secured for his own preservation – and when the boat had ceased to move, after waiting to find some one else to whom he could render assistance, he took one of the fenders of the boat, and by managing to keep upon it, he succeeded in preserving his own life. Small pieces of charred wood and portions of the boat were found floating, as well as part of the goods that remained without being entirely consumed. The boat also picked up the wheat measure, which was the means of saving Mr. Williams. This is about all that has not already come to your knowledge.”

Notwithstanding the heroic and self-sacrificing act of Parmalee, we fear there is no reason to hope that Gelston was saved. In addition to what is stated respecting Parmalee's gallant conduct, we learn from the *Republican* of this morning, that Mr. Edgar Clemens, too, the engineer, abandoned a plank on which he was floating to three children, and after some search found a box or bale, which he also resigned to an old man, and after being some time in the water, at length reached the boat to which Capt. Titus was clinging.

We learn that Mrs. Lynde, too, the only lady saved, evinced as much coolness and intrepidity as any one on board. Her presence of mind never forsook her for a moment.

We give below a corrected list of the lost and saved. It is far from being perfect – the full extent of the calamity will probably never be known – but after diligent investigation it is as full as we could make it.

John C. Poole, who is lost, was formerly a clerk in Atwill's Music Saloon in Broadway.

We have also gathered the following facts and additional names from Parsons & Co.—On examination of the eighty-seven names of Swiss immigrants given yesterday, they actually count one hundred and eight persons, to which must be added some ten or twelve infants, not before enumerated, of whom no charge was made. To this list must also be appended the following from the same house, omitted yesterday:

A. Strugler, Cleveland,	2	persons
Mrs. M. Stemper, Zanesville,	3	do
Mrs. Bargest, Portsmouth,	3	do
J. F. Byer, Chicago,	2	do

This swells the number of persons shipped by Messrs. PARSONS & Co. to one hundred and thirty. A mere fraction of whom were saved.

The following persons composing the crew, &c. may be also added to those lost:

Mr. Miltemore and wife, dentist, of Chicago.

Von Ockerman, a German, tinner.

Mr. Sherman and daughter, Hamburgh, Erie co.

Mr. Nelthrope, a Danish gentleman.

Henry Freeman, on his way to Milwaukie, clerk of a drugstore, formerly of Jamestown, Chautauque county.

Ansel Ricker, young man, farmer, formerly of Hamburgh, Erie. co.

John Harrington, late of White's Corners, Erie co. entered as fireman on the day she left port.

Luther Fuller, wheelsman.

William Cheats, waiter, colored.

Wm. Winters, do

James Read, do

Robert Smith, head cook do

Henry Vosburgh, 2d do do

David Mills, 3d do do

Israel Vosburgh, porter do

Wm. Sparks, 2d do do

Doctor Hackett, Thompsonian physician, of Lockport, (colored.)

Willet Weeks, of Brooklyn, who was reported as among those who perished, it is said was not on board, having taken the boat for the Falls:

There were also lost Rob. Hughes, James Heck, Jos Sterritt, John C. Cluff, Phillip, a German, and Dimm, of Buffalo.

The loss of property by the *Erie* was heavy. She had on board the first large invoice of merchandise shipped for the upper lakes this season. Some 30 tons, worth at least \$20,000. The immigrants had also a large amount of specie, not far from \$180,000, and the boat herself must have cost all of \$75,000, making in all a little short of \$300,000 loss.

The Weekly Herald

New York,

August 21, 1841

(Vol. V, No. 48)

p. 396, columns 3-6

Lines not [yet] found in other newspaper reports are highlighted in [blue](#).

[column 3]

The Conflagration of the Steamer *Erie* on Lake Erie—Further particulars—The Cause of the Fire.

We have received the annexed particulars describing the horrible conflagration of the Erie steamer. They possess absorbing interest to the whole civilized world.

The liability of steamers to take fire is beginning to alarm the public. The burning of the *Lexington*—the fires that have been generated but put out in the Atlantic steamers—and now the horrible conflagration of the *Erie*, are enough to shock the stoutest heart, and fill the public mind with despair.

From the evidence already given on the inquest of the *Erie*, it appears that her conflagration did not originate in the explosion of the carboys of turpentine; but that it must have been produced by *carelessness or ignorance of the managers of the boat*. In fact, the loss of the *Erie* too nearly resembles that of the *Lexington*—mismanagement somewhere—neglect somewhere—either among the officers, engineers, or owners.

[From the *Buffalo Commercial Journal* of August 12]

We continue to receive the names of those on board the *Erie*, on her last fatal trip, and who have undoubtedly perished. When all shall have been ascertained, the number will probably be found to exceed *two hundred*. Nothing like it was ever known on this continent, and the destruction of the *Erie* can scarcely be equaled by any similar event on the broad ocean. If our memory serves us, the loss of life was less in the memorable burning of the *Kent*, *East Indiaman*. It was far less in the fearful burning of the *Lexington*. In the United Kingdom, throughout continental Europe, in the farther India, wherever a journal is printed, the account

of the destruction of the *Erie* will be published, and read with a thrill of horror. We have thus far simply given the facts, without any comment. We were not in a mood for comment. The naked recital was too appalling, and we are not yet prepared to go into an examination of the sad affair as coolly & fully as could be wished. But the interests of our Lakes, above all of humanity, demand that there should be the most rigorous investigation. Hundreds of human beings cannot thus be awfully hurried into eternity without some more satisfactory explanation than has yet been given.

An investigation has been commenced, and a portion of the testimony will be found in another column. It may be improper to remark upon that testimony until the whole is taken, but we cannot refrain from distrusting somewhat the universally received opinion that the fire originated solely with the turpentine and varnish carried on deck. Such was the belief of the survivors as they told us last Tuesday, and so we stated at the time. *But how could fire be communicated to these inflammable articles?* They were carried in demijohns and kegs, secured as such vessels usually are before fire could reach them it must have broke [sic] out below. In their position they were not sufficiently exposed to heat to cause an expansion sufficient to burst the vessels containing them, nor were they exposed to sparks of fire which might ignite. *Spontaneous combustion is not very probable. What then did cause the fire which so suddenly enveloped almost every part of the boat in flames?* The question is of difficult solution, but it should be remembered that the *Erie* had just been repaired, freshly painted and varnished. *The boat was contending against a head wind and a heavy sea. Brisk fires were necessarily kept up, and considerable, though probably what was deemed perfectly safe, pressure of steam was on. A slight explosion was heard, and simultaneously burst forth in the immediate vicinity of the boilers.* In an instant in [sic] the ladies' cabin was enveloped in flames—the wind and headway of the boat driving them aft, and the fresh varnish serving as a conductor, and giving out in combustion, the peculiar odor spoken of by survivors. The oil, turpentine and varnish, above spoken of, of course served to increase the fierceness of the conflagration. *Were there any shavings about the boat? and was the explosion heard, owing to the giving way of a steam pipe? What caused the stopping of the engine so soon after the fire broke out?* The engineer, it will be remembered could not stop it, when ordered to do so.

We would not in the present stage of the investigation attach the slightest blame to any one, but we wish the investigation to be broad and embrace every fact that can be ascertained. Such an investigation is due to the public and those more directly interested in the result. — There is one thing, however, that deserves the sharpest censure. Past events — and in this case most lamentably — have abundantly proved that little or no reliance can be placed, in any emergency, upon the ordinary small boats carried by our steam vessels. They cannot live in a rough sea, in the haste of lowering they get swamped, and they have not capacity sufficient to take half the passengers that not unfrequently [sic] crowd the steamboats. *Francis's Life boats should be promptly substituted.* It would entail some additional expense, but if instead of laying out so many thousands upon mere gew-gaws, or splendid drapery or furniture, the money was expended in obtaining a supply of Life boats adequate to any exigency, the public interest would be better promoted. In view of the business of the lakes, and the prices charged for passage, the public have a right to insist that every possible precaution should be taken to insure safety. It is true that few, very few, accidents have occurred on our lakes, and we take pleasure in bearing testimony to the safety and general good conduct of our boats, but this is not enough, such an awful destruction of life, as that we are now called to deplore, should be rendered impossible. It must be so rendered, or every man in Buffalo, or engaged in the commerce of the lakes will have reason to repent the omission.

FURTHER PARTICULARS

THE LOST.—We have to add the following to the last list of those lost on the *Erie*:—

Silas K. Green, fireman, of Erie, Pa. He left the *S. B. Missouri*, on her way up, and went aboard the *Erie* then fitting out.

Oliver Nadeau, of Montreal—A Canadian Frenchman, bound to Dubuque, where he has a brother. Aged about 19. Has friends in Montreal.

Peter Vaughart, wife and three children of Buffalo. Has 6 other children at Erie, Pa.

Eliza Pakenham, cabin maid.

Rev. William Morris, an Evangelist.

Miss Griffin, in company of Mr. [€.] E. Griffin of New York, before mentioned.

John Allen, 2nd Engineer.

Carpenter, the owner of a race horse, which was on board.

Maria Jones, an abandoned female.

SINGULAR OCCURRENCE.—A letter from Dunkirk, to the editor of the *Buffalo Commercial* [Transcriber's note: Aug. 11th: "Editor's Correspondence"], relates the following incident in relation to the destruction of the steam boat [sic] *Erie*:—During the alarm and confusion of the first discovery of the fire at Dunkirk, a poor inebriated Irishman rushed down to the wharf and said he was going to swim off to the burning boat—plunged into the water—and was drowned.

Ancel [Ansel] Ricker, whose name was mentioned as one of the lost, did not go on board. He is now in Hamburg.

THE ILL FATED ERIE. There was one deed of heroism on board this boat which should not be left unrecorded. A letter from Buffalo informs us that the Pilot stood to his post at the wheel, keeping the head of the steamboat to the shore, until he *burned to death*. His name, we believe, was LUTHER FULLER.—*Albany Daily Advertiser*.

DARING DEED.—The late shocking conflagration upon the lake, gave rise to an incident that should not be lost. Young Wilgus, of this city, who is already so well known as a successful artist, was at Irving, mouth of Cattaraugus Creek, (where he is just now engaged painting some of the aborigines, who still inhabit the Indian reservation, there,) upon the fatal night of the conflagration of the *Erie*—which, it will be recollected, took place opposite that point of the shore. We learn that on discovering the fire, about 8 o'clock in the evening, Wilgus immediately repaired to the shore, and, with others, put out in an open boat, only 14 feet in length. On reaching the mouth of the stream, however, two of them feared to encounter the wind and waves, both of which were high, and left the boat, urging the rest to do so, or they must be inevitably lost. The two men were landed, when our townsman persuaded the rest to venture in the cause of humanity, and they committed their frail bark to the lake. Several hours of constant effort with the oars, aided by sail, brought them in the vicinity of the doomed boat, which they reached, at about the same moment as the *Clinton*, and the little steamboat *Lady*. After sailing round the wreck, in various directions, for some hours, in search of any that might still be left alive, the frail bark was finally headed for shore; but this could now only be approached by beating, as the wind had changed, and was strong off shore; so that the efforts of the venturesome [sic] band—and we omit all the names save that of Wilgus with regret, but from necessity, as they have not reached us—were painfully protracted until six o'clock in the morning, before a landing could be effected.

Only one other boat ventured from shore, upon that awful night, and she was capsized, in the early part of her voyage. This, as a deed of daring, in the cause of humanity, has few parallels.

Should a representation of that heartrending scene be desirable, the glowing pencil of Wilgus could give it interest, but little short of the sad reality, for he witnessed it all; and could readily transfer it to canvass, in blending of light and shade that would speak, trumpet-tongued, to every beholder. —*Buff. Com.*

THE LOST. —The following is an [sic] accurate account of the number of persons on board the steamboat *Erie* when burned, as can be procured. We never wish to exaggerate numbers, but we used a great deal of exertion to procure the following list, which we are confident will be found to be correct.

Swiss passengers	130
Cabin "	50
Deck " Americans, &c.	50
Crew	25
Musicians	10
	————
	265
Saved	33
Total Loss	232

[column 4]

We learn that Jerome McBride, whose name was published in the list of the saved, has died of his burns, and subsequent exposure in water. He was buried at Erie yeaterday.

A piece of information has come to us here, accidentally, which suggests a horrid picture. We are informed that Mrs. Lynde, the lady passenger saved, has written to her friends at Homer, Cortlandt co, that her husband and herself both put on and inflated their life preservers in their state room, and went to the side for the purpose of jumping over together. Mrs. Lynde took the leap as she thought, in company with her husband, but saw him no more. The mystery of the affair is, that on one of the persons saved was found the life preserver belonging to Mr. Lynde. How this person came by it, and what fearful and criminal struggles for life were made during this appalling scene, none can tell.

[From the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Aug. 14.]

We continue to add such names as we are enabled to gather of the unfortunate sufferers by the *Erie*. Capt. Zham has furnished us the names of the following Germans, not before mentioned:

Anthony Weichel and family of 8 persons, Buffalo.	
Peter Stein,	do.
A. Siegel, wife and three children,	do.
George Kraft,	do.
...John Long and family of four persons,	do.
Michael Kreis,	do.
Philip Freigent, one of the band from Erie.	
John Voegele, a Swiss emigrant, wife and nine	

children, had in his possession 25,000 florins.

John Angell, Providence, R. I.

We find the following in a Detroit paper:

Miss Sherman, and father, lost.

CORONER'S INQUEST

COUNCIL CHAMBER,
Aug. 11, 3 P.M.

The following gentlemen composing a Jury, were called together and empanelled by the Coroner, Dr. F. L. Harris, to investigate the causes which led to the destruction of the Steamboat *Erie*.

JOSEPH CLARY, Foreman

E. D. Efner,	C. C. Haddock,
William Williams,	N. Vosburgh,
Thos. R. Stocking	S. Chamberlin,
S. S. Case,	R. H. Maynard,
S. N. Callender,	L. Storrs,
R. Pomeroy,	S. Mathews,
H. R. Seymour,	E. Hathaway,
—Alcott.	

John H. St. John sworn.—Resides in Mississippi; arrived in Buffalo three weeks ago; took passage in the *Erie*. In the cabin, when the alarm was given; first saw fire at the cabin door; heard a report first; the report sounded like a pistol; heard fire called immediately following; the fire came from the forward part of the vessel; no particular odor or smoke. Two minutes after the report I ascended the companion way; ran toward the stern of the boat; not many persons in the cabin when I left it; only two or three; many were sea-sick; many on the deck when I gained it; did not see Captain Titus; on reaching the stern of the boat, jumped overboard; saw many in the water; boat was under headway; did not observe if the boat changed her course; was three hours in the water, clinging to the yawl; there were also four others; saw Capt. T. frequently during the evening, previous to the accident; the lake was rough, causing much sickness—thinks most of the lady passengers were in the state rooms when the fire broke out. Saw no demijohns or kegs forward; did not learn that there was any paint or varnish on board; one minute after I reached the deck I jumped overboard; among those I saw in the water were several females; saw the lights of the *Clinton* coming to our rescue some time before she reached us.—Passed the evening mostly on the hurricane decks; do not recollect seeing the captain at the tea table; there might have been a dozen sitting at the table; the majority were prevented from partaking of this meal by sickness. Whenever I saw the capt. he appeared to be attending to his duties; saw no omissions on the part of the officers. Saw many jump overboard; thinks some passengers never left the vessel. Saw much dense and dark smoke when I ascended the companion way; the flames did not appear to be confined to the floor, but came in a body from the fore part of the vessel; saw a man standing upon the wheel house, which was on fire; about thirty minutes after I got overboard. It was starlight; do not know what became of him; he was dressed. When I reached the boat there were 10 or 12 persons hanging to it—among others the mate; heard no orders given by the

officers during the fire. The wind was dead ahead, and carried the flames fiercely toward the ladies' cabin; would not deem it prudent to have gone back for luggage.

Cross-examined by Tillinghast.—Entered my name shortly after going on board; the list appeared to be quite full; did not look on the ladies' way-bill; knew nobody on board; did not see any other boat except the one I took hold of; the *Erie* might have swung around, but did not observe it.

Theodore Sears sworn.— I reside in this city; I was on board the *Erie*, on my way to that place. Myself and 7 others were going up to paint the steamboat *Madison*, in Miller's employ; did not see any turpentine. — There were oils and varnishes put up; demijohns contained varnish, oil in half barrels; did not see the paint on board the boat, nor do I know where it was placed; it was taken to the forward gangway. Spent much time on the promenade deck after the boat left port; passed a couple of times forward on the main deck; was in the after part of the boat, on the main deck, near the ladies' cabin, when the fire broke out. The flames came through the gangway forward; the smoke was so intense I could not see over ten feet; saw the clerk's office; the smoke obstructed the view between myself and the office; heard a sound like something that fell heavily; I jumped down and ran aft to the ladies' cabin; the fire was then coming *around the ladies' cabin, both ways at once*; only time to pull off my boots and cap. The fire and flames followed the report instantly; the sound appeared on the same side that I was on. When I reached the stern of the boat there was a crowd there already; could not perceive any particular odor to the smoke. About five minutes after the alarm, I got overboard.—The last time I saw Miss Miller she was standing with my brother on the railing; my brother attempted to try to save her.— Saw Capt. T. frequently during the evening, constantly. Jumped as far as I could over the heads of those in the water to avoid the crowd, and swam away; saw a couple of men, one black, clinging to a seat; saw many standing in the after part of the boat at intervals, when the flames would predominate over the smoke. The boat was in motion when I jumped overboard, she shortly after appeared to be changing her course. My opinion is that *many Swiss children who were seasick on the forward part of the boat, were burned to death*. Twenty or thirty persons were overboard when I went over; many jumped overboard after; I heard no directions from the officers to lower the boats. Our brushes were all put together in a box, but I did not see it after being put on board. My brother was foreman, and had charge of the articles on board; my brother was lost. I took Miss Miller to the boat; did not hear Mr. Miller give my brother any directions as to the disposition of the paints, or the object of their journey. Saw two small boats on the upper deck of the *Erie*; they were aft; think I saw a boat forward also, on the right-hand of the wheel-house, starboard; knew none of the hands belonging to the boat; think there were ten lady passengers on board; saw that many in the cabin when I passed Miss. M. on board. The varnish on board was prepared. Ten or twelve gallons of turpentine would answer our purpose; did not observe how the bung-hole of the cask was secured; a spark of fire falling into a cask of turpentine would not set it on fire; it requires a flame to ignite it.—When I jumped overboard I think smoke from oil or paint predominated; have no opinion as to how the fire originated; when I first heard the sound it occurred to me that the boiler had burst; I was sitting on a box of merchandise when the explosion took place; turpentine set on fire would emit a flame, not smoke; raw linseed oil was in the barrels; did not direct my attention to the odor of the flames; the pitching of the boat might have scattered a few drops of varnish from a demijohn and communicated fire to the jar itself; never said any thing as to the inflammable nature of the paint on board, or its tendency to endanger the lives of passengers.

T. J. Titus sworn.— My age is 33; have been on the lake 16 years; have been master of a vessel 9 or 10 years; commanded the schooner *United States*, schr. *Aurora*, *S. B. Ohio*, *S. B.*

Sandusky, and the *Erie*. The *Erie* was built at Erie, Pa.; this is her fourth season out; she has been running constantly; I have had charge of her since her coming out. [A lithograph view of the boat was here exhibited, and fully explained by the witness, in order to obtain the precise *locale* of those on board, and the place where the paints were said to have been stored.] The *Erie* was between 500 and 600 tons; the draft of the *Erie* was very strong, equal to any other boat on the lake; I was on board the *Erie* when she left port; her cargo was mostly dry goods and hardware; the cargo is generally stowed by the chief and second mate; do not know if there were any paints on board; knew there were painters on board, but knew nothing of their materials; Col. Reed is principal owner of the *Erie* and the *Madison*. The *Erie* left port at ten minutes past 4. P.M., on Monday last; wind was fresh from south and west; the lake was rough; laid our course for Dunkirk; at ten minutes past 8 o'clock the same evening, heard a cry of fire; we were about ~~three~~ **[8►3?]** miles from Silver creek landing at this time; was standing on the forward part of the promenade deck, some ten yards from the wheelsman. First saw fire coming out back of the escape pipe; saw fire before I saw smoke, the hold of the *Erie* was eleven feet deep; the fire was fourteen feet below me; we were some seven or eight miles from shore; the wind was abating, but the sea was rough. When I heard the cry of fire I walked aft to the man at the wheel, and told him to put the wheel hard to south, which was done immediately; to remain at his post, to keep her to the shore; and I remained there until I saw the land distinctly. I saw Mr. Williams, he said, "Capt. don't be excited;" I made no reply, but walked aft toward the engine, meditating what to do; I finally, concluded to stop the engine; thought of the *Lexington*, and the necessity of stopping the headway of the *Erie*; our chance would be better if that was done; walked past the engine, but did not see the engineer; had he been at his post I should have observed him; attempted to descend the passage way, where I met him, I told him to stop the engine. he said, "Capt. Titus it is impossible—I can't unhook it." I then stood on the deck a short time; the men were preparing to get out the boat; I do not think much was done to accomplish this object. After attempting to hoist the boat, I told the men to desist as it was not time yet; many persons were ready to jump into the boat. An effort was made again to hoist out the small boat; I then walked down the after stairs; as I stepped down I saw much flames below, driving fiercely against the ladies' cabin. My object was [to get to the ladies' cabin](#) to obtain life preservers, several being there ready for use; the whole cabin was in a body of flame, and no females were near it. I then returned to the promenade deck, and saw the small boat put over; many jumped into it, and she instantly capsized. Every body rushed in her, and I was left alone on deck—not a soul was near me; I then went forward to another boat on the larboard side; the flames at the same time coming up in a body from below; I then went to the other boat forward; three or four persons were there; I took hold of the tackle and said, "boys, let us launch this boat," but thinking the engine still in motion, I told the men to stop a moment; they,

[\[column 5\]](#)

however, got the boat over the side, and all the men jumped over after her; those men did not belong to the *Erie*'s crew. I then walked aft, saw very many persons around the small boat in the water; did not feel a desire to leave the vessel; walked aft and found two end pieces of a bed post; picked them up, and was in the act of descending the stairs; on reflection, I thought to get off the doors of the wheel house, but my foot slipped; I then returned and descended the stairs; the smoke and flames were intensely thick; I stood at the gangway with the two pieces of bedposts; saw nobody, but heard great outcry of persons, apparently clinging to the after part of the boat. Before going over I saw the small boat in the water, and three men hanging to her; as soon as I jumped into her, she drifted astern; the engine was still in motion, but working slowly. The three men clinging to the small boat appeared to be middle aged; I told them to keep cool; the boat was right side up, but filled with water. I heard the cry of a

female; I reached down and seized an oar: the female then said she had on a life preserver, but would rather get into the boat; I told her I thought she was safer as she was; handed her the oar. The small boat then drifted astern, among many persons who were drowning. 15 or 20 caught hold of the boat and turned her over. I went with her but come [sic] up again, and took hold of the keel, the three men continued to cling to the boat, and were, I believe, saved. In twenty minutes all those who had seized the boat, had drowned and only the original three were left; the boat then drifted a mile a stern of the burning vessel. After being in the water one hour, I saw some persons drifting, four of us contrived to cling to the boat, we talked of our situations and of our families, but still endeavored to console each other. I frequently looked at the burning boat, which was enveloped in flames. Heard a voice to the leeward of us: recognized it to be Clemens, asked him "how he was doing, answered "not very well," I then replied "come to the boat." He was on a small box. Thinks the female continued to keep near: was the only female that I saw, she was Mrs. Lynde, and the only woman saved, that I know of. These men spoken of, got on the boat; Mrs. L. complained of exhaustion; I told the men to pull her in; she had an oar in her hand; the Engineer pulled her in. The small boat was eighteen feet long, eight feet eight inches wide. Soon after I saw the *Clinton* coming to us; think I also saw other lights on the lake, but not certain. She came near us and much outcry was made by us and others to attract attention, heard steam blowing off, and the small boats were got out; she then got under weigh and we feared she was going to leave us; she however circled round and came to us; I got on my knees on the keel of the boat and called loudly for them to come to us; the small boat then capsized, and the fireman was thrown at a distance from us, I was also thrown a considerable distance and sank twice; I however seized hold of a black man, and that saved me, the nine then clinging to the small boat were saved; am of the opinion that I was the last person who left the *Erie*, when I left her I heard much confusion but saw no person; think Fuller *remained at the wheel and never left it until burned to death*; he was always a resolute man in obeying orders. I was on the *Erie* when she took fire on a former occasion; think nearly every boat on the lake has at some time been on fire. (The witness here appealed to Mr. Hibbard the Inspector who corroborated the assertion.) Am of the opinion that the fire had its origin in something highly combustible. From the first alarm could not have been over ten or twelve minutes before I left the vessel; the flames flew in every direction almost instantaneously, there was one horse on board; when the boat lurches, it is often the case that flames and sparks will escape from the flues or forward part of the boilers; the exposed parts of the hold were tinned. In all boats there are more or less sparks, &c. which rise from the flames; the under part of the deck was forward of the chimneys, thinks it was seen from below the main deck, supposes there were about 200 persons on board, between 30 and 40 cabin passengers, 32 or 33 belonging on board, the remainder steerage passengers; was standing with Mr. Williams on the starboard side of the boat when the fire broke out, was about 40 feet from it, went towards the fire but could not approach near; the sky light was opened; the fire first came up through the sky light; thinks, the fire must have originated on the lower deck over the furnaces; thinks the demijohns exploded and the contents ran down on the lower deck and ignited; the boiler deck was not tight, water would run through over the boiler, it was not caulked; the dampers in the pipes are generally placed above the deck; **the boat had been newly painted and varnished, and the fire would spread rapidly; the sky light was six by four feet.**

MEETING OR THE RELIEF OF THE SUFFERERS ON BOARD THE *ERIE*.

At a meeting called to take into consideration the offer of Mr. Marble, of his Theatre, for the Benefit of those unfortunate sufferers who were rescued from the burning vessel, lately destroyed near our harbor His Hon. the Mayor was called to the Chair, and J. C. Bunner was appointed Secretary.

It was then Resolved That his Honor be empowered to appoint a committee of eight, of which he shall be the chairman, to make all proper arrangements for the proposed benefit, and to receive and disburse the moneys.

The following committee were appointed:

Capt. C. Blake, S. B. [=steamboat] *Illinois*.
" John Kline, brig *Indiana*.
" Peter Bark, brig *Illinois*.
" John Stewart, schr. [=schooner] *Wilcox*.
P. T. Smith, Mate S. B. *De Witt Clinton*.
Fred'k Wheeler, Mate, S. B. *Julia Palmer*.
Eng. John Hibbard, S. B. Inspector.

Resolved, That we sincerely return our thanks to Mr. Marble for his generosity, and to all those who have so kindly volunteered their services.

Resolved, That these proceedings be published in all the city papers.

I. R. HARRINGTON, Chairman.

J. C. Bunner, Secretary.

William G. Murrey sworn.—Is 30 years of age; has resided in Buffalo three years: is engaged in the painting business: shipped on board of the *Erie*, on Monday a quantity of paints, &c. consisting of four kegs white lead, five jars green paint twenty-five lbs. litharge, about sixty lbs. paint in a tub, two demijohns of spirits of turpentine, one case varnish, half barrel oil, thirty paint pots, box containing about twenty 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, (the 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 got 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.

[column 6]

[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.]

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 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.

CHARLES. M. REED

Erie, August 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 the 12th 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^d 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 five or six 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 twelve or fifteen feet distant. The flames seemed to arise from the boiler deck, through the sky lights; the flames arose six 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 through 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 two o'clock, P. M., a short while before the boat left port; don't remember to have seen them afterward. The conversation between Captain 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 midship more; no particular difference between the old and new deck, except the new was made stronger; come out of the berth, 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 skylights; 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.

Wm. Hughes sworn.—My age is 25; I am a seaman; have followed that business seven years, the last three on the lakes; entered as second mate on board the *Erie* this season. [Witness described the duties of that station, which are principally stowing away the cargo, &c.] Previous to leaving port on Monday last, saw a barrel of white lead and a smaller cask of oil, and assisted to stow it forward. There was a female passenger on board who was going to Milwaukie; among her luggage were some jars of pickles or preserves, which I directed the men to put on the boiler deck, and those only; saw no other articles on the boiler deck; if any had been there [I] would have seen them; saw no demijohns on board; saw, however, Miller's men come on board with small kegs, having the heads out, and such as are used for paint pots. Being informed that these men were going to Erie, I gave orders that their things should be stowed forward; one of the men said he would look after the things himself; thinks that if any paint pots had been placed on the boiler deck he should certainly have seen them; saw persons lying on the boiler deck; was forward when the fire broke out; saw Capt. T. conversing with a stout gentleman; heard a hissing sound, he jumped aft and saw the skylight windows illuminated from the flames below. The flames came up in a large body through the scuttle instantaneously; jumped forward and informed the captain of the fire; then ran to the passage way and called below for the men to get the buckets and rig the engine immediately; ran to the fire engine and found the flames coming fiercely from below, high as the walking-beam; ran forward to clear away the small boats; there I saw Mr. Clemens; saw several others at the bows, many Swiss were in the boats before they were clear of the decks. I ordered them out, but they did not obey, so I jumped in and threw them out; the boat was then lowered, and as she was on her way to the water many persons jumped in, and she soon filled. Heard Capt. T. calling out to "stop her," but could not see him for the smoke; jumped over among the others,

and was afterwards picked up by the *Clinton*; is of opinion that there were 300 persons on board at the time of the accident.

Edgar Clemens sworn.—Aged 27 years; is 1st engineer of the steamboat *Erie*; acted in that capacity three years; was on board 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 machinery framing; 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 face; bewildered with smoke; something got under the bow; 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 run [sic] and jumped over; this was at the stern. Explosion was 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 Dutch) were not on chest a short time before; carpenter's name is Harrison Foster, was saved, but is not here; demijohn, if broken, the fluid would run between the 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 weighed 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.

The evidence of Mr. Parmalee was taken after this witness, but did not show any very material or important fact that would tend to throw light upon the cause which led to the disaster.

Transcriber's Note: The names of vessels and newspapers have been placed in italics.