

THE TWO BASIC TEXTUAL VARIATIONS OF “THE HELMSMAN OF LAKE ERIE”

IN LIGHT OF THE DISCOVERY OF

THE *POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL & EAGLE*,  
THE *MAINE CULTIVATOR & HALLOWELL WEEKLY GAZETTE*  
& THE *MOHAWK COURIER*

BY

NORMAN BARRY

INTRODUCTION:  
THE NEW LAY OF THE LAND

The discovery of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” in the *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette* in April 2011 moved the first known date of publication of “The Helmsman of Lake” up exactly 35 days. The discovery of the *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle* on August 9, 2011 (the 170<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Erie* tragedy!) pushed the first known date of publication back yet another week. And the discovery of the *Mohawk Courier* only a few days later bridged the gap in August 1845 between the *Maine Cultivator* and the *Wisconsin Argus*:

	A-VERSION: DATE	NAME	PLACE	B-VERSION: DATE	NAME	PLACE
	<b>1845:</b>			<b>1845:</b>		
1	19 JULY 1845	POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL & EAGLE	POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK			
2	26 JULY 1845	MAINE CULTIVATOR & HALLOWELL WEEKLY GAZETTE	HALLOWELL, MAINE			
3	14 AUG. 1845	MOHAWK COURIER	LITTLE FALLS, NEW YORK			
4				30 AUG. 1845	BALTIMORE SUN	BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
5	02 SEPT. 1845	WISCONSIN ARGUS	MADISON, WISCONSIN TERRITORY			

The record of newspaper printings of the sketch is complicated by two basic textual versions of the original prose sketch of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” which was reprinted at least forty-four times in the years from 1845 to 1860. The two versions are easily recognized. Later printings of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” have been categorized as either belonging to group “A” or “B.” Only in the case of fragments has identification in some instances not been completely certain.

Before the discovery of the *Maine Cultivator* in April 2011, the two earliest known printings were the *Baltimore Sun* (Saturday, August 30, 1845) and the *Wisconsin Argus* (Madison, Wisconsin Territory – Tuesday, September 2, 1845). It was quickly discerned that the *Wisconsin Argus* and *Baltimore Sun* renderings differed in several major respects, and were



iii) When John Maynard is questioned by women passengers, one of the most important questions posed is deleted in the *Sun*, although the answer is afterwards provided.

A: “How far is it to land?” “How long shall we be getting in?” “Is it very deep?” “Is there no boat?” “Can they see us from the shore?” The helmsman answered as well as he could. There was no boat: it had been left at Buffalo to be mended....

- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle; Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette; Mohawk Courier; Wisconsin Argus*: “A”-version

B) “How far is it to land?” “How long shall we be getting in?” “Is it very deep?” [“-----?”] “Can they see us from the shore?” The helmsman answered as well as he could. There was no boat it had been left at Buffalo to be mended....

- *Baltimore Sun*: “B”-version

iv) When the captain asks John Maynard if he can remain at the wheel just a little longer, his response is deleted in the *Sun*. Also the modal auxiliary “could” becomes “can.” In some of the later printings of the “B”-version, Maynard’s missing response was detected by editors, and the gap was filled in by various and often quite intelligent guesses.

A: “John Maynard!” cried the captain.  
“Aye, Aye, Sir! said John.  
“Could you hold on five minutes longer?”  
“I’ll try, Sir.”

And he did try;....

- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle; Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette; Mohawk Courier; Wisconsin Argus*: “A”-version

B: “John Maynard!” cried the captain.  
“Aye, Aye, Sir! said John.  
“Can you hold on five minutes longer?”  
[“----, ---.”]

And he did try;....

- *Baltimore Sun*: “B”-version

## II. ALTERED WORDING IN THE *BALTIMORE SUN*

A deletion, even a major one, could be the result of sloppy editing or typesetting, or unintentional errors. An altered word, however, suggests that *intentional* changes were made. We have already seen two examples of changed vocabulary under “deletions:” “*can*” instead

of “*could*” and “*wintry*” instead of “*winter*.” There are, however, several more glaring differences in vocabulary.

i.) A: The Jersey – for that was the name of the steamer – was dressed **out** with many bright flags....

- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle; Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette; Mohawk Courier; Wisconsin Argus*:  
“A”-version

B: The Jersey – for that was the name of the steamer – was dressed **gaily** with many bright flags....

- *Baltimore Sun*: “B”-version

It goes without saying that there is no way to misread “*out*” as “*gaily*.”

ii.) Although “*hove*” is a hallmark of the “A”-version, the *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle* adopted the “B”-version.

A: But presently the anchor was **hove**, the paddles began to turn, the sails were set, and, leaving a broad track of foam behind her, the Jersey stood westward, and held on her course for the town of Erie.

- *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette; Mohawk Courier; Wisconsin Argus*: “A”-version

B: But presently the anchor was **heaved**, the paddles began to turn, the sails were set, and, leaving a broad track of foam behind her, the Jersey stood westward, and held on her course for the town of Erie.

- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle* and *Baltimore Sun*

iii.) Three variations, “*creaked*” – “*cracked*” – “*crackled*,” are particularly intriguing. The use of “*crackled*” as found in the *Baltimore Sun* was later rejected by many B-versions. The use of “*creaked*” as found in the *Main Cultivator* was frequently changed to “*cracked*” in the sense of “*snapped*.” In this context, the *Mohawk Courier* and – significantly – the *Wisconsin Argus* suffered from one minor deletion (“*---- hand*” instead of “*left hand*”) and the plural of “*flame*.” The *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle*, like the *Baltimore Sun*, uses the indefinite article before “*groan*.” It is possible that the *Wisconsin Argus* received the sketch from the *Mohawk Courier*.

A1a) Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his left hand, till the flesh shrivelled; and the muscles **cracked** in the flame; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or **a** groan.

- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle*

A1b) Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his [---] hand, till the flesh shrivelled; and the muscles **cracked** in the flames; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or groan.

- *Mohawk Courier and Wisconsin Argus*

A2) Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his left hand, till the flesh shrivelled; and the muscles **creaked** in the flame; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or groan.

- *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette*

B) Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his left hand, till the flesh shrivelled; and the muscles **crackled** in the flame; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or a groan.

- *Baltimore Sun*

iv.) The *Poughkeepsie Journal and Eagle*, like the *Baltimore Sun*, uses “**car**” instead of “**cab**.” This is at variance with all known “A”-versions.

“...**car**-drivers jangling for a larger fare;...”

- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle* and the *Baltimore Sun*

“...**cab**-drivers jangling for a larger fare;...”

- *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Weekly Gazette; Mohawk Courier; Wisconsin Argus*

### III. COLLATION OF THE *POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL & EAGLE* AND THE *BALTIMORE SUN*

Perhaps the easiest way to see the degree in which the A and B versions differ, is by checking the following collation. Should no difference in the item highlighted in magenta occur, this means that the *Poughkeepsie* text contains a “B”-version characteristic, e.g., “heaved” (instead of “hove”) and “car” (instead of “cab”).

	<i>Poughkeepsie Journal &amp; Eagle</i> (July 19, 1845)	<i>Baltimore Sun</i> (August 30, 1845)
	The First Known A-version	The First Known B-version
	<b>THE HELMSMAN OF LAKE ERIE</b>	<b>[---] HELMSMAN OF LAKE ERIE</b>
1	It was on a pleasant May morning that a steam-vessel was riding at anchor, opposite the town of Buffalo, on lake Erie. You	It was on a pleasant May morning that a steam vessel was riding at anchor, opposite the town of Buffalo, on Lake Erie. You



55	er, by the name of honest John Maynard; and the secret of his honesty to his neighbors, was his love of God.	er, by the name of honest John Maynard; and the secret of his honesty to his neighbors, was <input type="checkbox"/> his love of God.
60	The land was about ten miles off, when the captain, coming up from his cabin, cried to a sailor: "Dick Fletcher, What's all that smoke I see coming out from the hold?"	The land was about ten miles off, when the captain, coming up from his cabin, cried to a sailor: – "Dick Fletcher, What's all that smoke I see coming out from the hold?"
	It's from the engine-room, <b>S</b> ir, I guess," said the man.	It's from the engine room, <b>s</b> ir, I guess," said the man.
65	"Down with you, then, and let me know."	"Down with you, then, and let me know."
	The sailor began descending the ladder by which you go to the hold; but scarcely had he disappeared beneath the deck, when up he came with much greater speed.	The sailor began descending the ladder by which you go to the hold; but scarcely had he disappeared beneath the deck, when up he came with much greater speed.
70	"The hold's on fire, <b>S</b> ir," he said to the captain, who by this time was standing close to him.	"The hold's on fire, <b>s</b> ir," he said to the captain, who by this time was standing close to him.
75	The captain rushed down, and found the account too true. Some sparks had fallen on a bundle of tow: no one had seen the accident; and now not only much of the luggage, but the sides of the vessel were in <b>a</b> smouldering flame.	The captain rushed down, and found the account too true. Some sparks had fallen on a bundle of tow: no one had seen the accident; and now not only much of the luggage, but the sides of the vessel were in <b>[ - ]</b> smouldering flame.
80	All hands, passengers as well as sailors, were called together; and two lines being made, one on each side of the hold, buckets of water were passed and repassed; they were filled from the lake, they flew along a line of ready hands, were dashed hissing on the burning mass, and then passed on to the other side to be refilled. For some few moments, it seemed as if the flames were subdued.	All hands, passengers as well as sailors, were called together; and two lines being made, one on each side of the hold, buckets of water were passed and repassed; they were filled from the lake, they flew along a line of ready hands, were dashed hissing on the burning mass, and then passed on to the other side to be refilled. For some few moments, it seemed as if the flames were subdued.
85		
90	In the meantime the women on board were clustering round John Maynard, the only man unemployed who was capable of answering their questions. "How far is it to land?" "How long shall we be getting in?" "Is it very deep?" " <b>I</b> s there no boat?" "Can they see us from <b>[---]</b> shore?" The helmsman answered as well as he could. There was no boat: it had been left at Buffalo to be mended: they might be seven miles from shore: they would probably be in in forty minutes: he could not tell how far the fire had reached.	In the meantime the women on board were clustering round John Maynard, the only man unemployed who was capable of answering their questions. "How far is it to land?" "How long shall we be getting in?" "Is it very deep?" – <b>[-- ----- --]</b> "Can they see us from <b>[---]</b> shore?" The helmsman answered as well as he could. There was no boat: it had been left at Buffalo to be mended: they might be seven miles from shore; they would probably be in in forty minutes; he could not tell how far the fire had reached.
95	"But, to speak the truth," he added, "we are all in great danger; and I think if there <b>were less talking</b> , and a little more <i>praying</i> , it would be the better for us, and none the worse for the boat."	" <b>A</b> nd, to speak the truth," he added, "we are all in great danger, and I think if there <b>was a little less talking</b> , and a little more praying, it would be the better for us, and none the worse for the boat."
100	"How's her head?" shouted the captain.	"How's her head?" shouted the captain.
105		

<p>110</p> <p>115</p> <p>120</p> <p>125</p> <p>130</p> <p>135</p> <p>140</p> <p>145</p> <p>150</p> <p>155</p>	<p>“West-sou’-west, <b>Sir</b>,” answered Maynard.</p> <p>“Keep her sou <b>and</b> by west,” cried the captain. “We must go on shore any where.”</p> <p>It happened that a draft of wind drove back the flames, which soon began to blaze up more furiously against the saloon; and the partition betwix’ it and the hold was soon on fire. Then long wreaths of smoke began to find their way through the skylight; and the captain seeing this, ordered all the women forward. The engineer put on his utmost steam; the American flag was run up, and reversed, in token of distress; water was flung over the sails, to make them hold the wind. □ And still John Maynard stood by the wheel, though now he was cut off by a sheet of smoke and flame, from the ship’s crew.</p> <p>Greater and greater grew the heat; the engineers fled from the engine-room: the passengers were clustering round the vessel’s bow, the sailors were sawing planks on which to lash the women: the boldest were throwing off their coats and waistcoats, and preparing for one long struggle for life. And still the coast grew plainer and plainer; the paddles, as yet, worked well; they could not be more than a mile from the shore; and boats were even now starting to their assistance.</p> <p>“John Maynard!” cried the captain.</p> <p>“Aye, aye, Sir!” said John.</p> <p>“<b>Could</b> you hold on five minutes longer?”</p> <p>“I’ll try, Sir.”</p> <p>And he did try; the flames came nearer and nearer; a sheet of smoke would sometimes almost suffocate him; his hair was singed; his blood seemed on fire with the great heat. Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his left hand, till the flesh shrivelled, and the muscles <b>cracked</b> in the flame; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or a groan. It was enough for him that he heard the cheer of the sailors to the approaching boats; the cry of the captain, “the women first, and then every man for himself, and God for us all.” And they were the last sounds that he heard. How he perished was not known, whether dizzied by the smoke, he lost his footing in endeavoring to come forward, and fell overboard, or whether he was suffocated by the dense smoke, his comrades could not tell. At the moment the vessel struck, the boats were at her side; <b>the</b> passengers, sailors, and</p>	<p>“West-sou’-west, [---]” answered Maynard.</p> <p>“Keep her sou’ [---] by west,” cried the captain. “We must go on shore anywhere.”</p> <p>It happened that a draft of wind drove back the flames, which soon began to blaze up more furiously against the saloon; and the partition betwixt it and the hold was soon on fire. Then long wreaths of smoke began to find their way through the sky light; and the captain seeing this, ordered all the women forward. The engineer put on his utmost steam – the American flag was run up, and reversed, in token of distress; water was flung over the sails, to make them hold the wind. And still John Maynard stood by the wheel, though now he was cut off, by a sheet of smoke and flames, from the ship’s crew.</p> <p>Greater and greater grew the heat □ the engineers fled from the engine room – the passengers were clustering round the vessel’s bow – the sailors were sawing planks on which to lash the women – the boldest were throwing off their coats and waistcoats, and preparing for one long struggle for life. And still the coast grew plainer and plainer; the paddles, as yet, worked well – they could not be more than a mile from the shore; and boats were even now starting to their assistance.</p> <p>“John Maynard!” cried the captain.</p> <p>“Aye, aye, Sir!” said John.</p> <p>“<b>Can</b> you hold on five minutes longer?”</p> <p>[--- --- ---]</p> <p>And he did try; the flames came nearer and nearer; a sheet of smoke would sometimes almost suffocate him; <b>and</b> his hair was singed – his blood seemed on fire with the great heat – Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his left hand, till the flesh shrivelled, and the muscles <b>crackled</b> in the flame; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or a groan. It was enough for him that he heard the cheer of the sailors to the approaching boats; the cry of the captain, “The women first, and then every man for himself, and God for us all.” And they were the last sounds that he heard. How he perished was not known; whether, dizzied by the smoke, he lost his footing in endeavoring to come forward, and fell overboard, or whether he was suffocated by the dense smoke, his comrades could not tell. At the moment the vessel struck the boats were at her side; [--- ] passengers, sailors, and</p>
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160	captain leaped into them, or swam for their lives: all, save he to whom they owed everything, escaped.	captain leaped into them, or swam for their lives; all, save he to whom they owed everything, escaped.
165	He had died the death of a Christian hero – I had almost said, of a martyr; his spirit was commended into his Father’s hands, and his body sleeps in peace by the green side of Lake Erie.	He had died the death of a Christian hero – I had almost said, of a martyr; his spirit was commended into his Father’s hands, and his body sleeps in peace by the green side of Lake Erie.

**IV. THE ORIGINAL “HELMSMAN OF LAKE ERIE” SKETCH:  
NEWSPAPER DISTRIBUTION OF A-VERSIONS AS COMPARED WITH B-VERSIONS**

	<b>A-VERSION: DATE</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>B-VERSION: DATE</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>PLACE</b>
	<b>1845:</b>			<b>1845:</b>		
1	19 JULY 1845	POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL & EAGLE	POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK			
2	26 JULY 1845	MAINE CULTIVATOR & HALLOWELL WEEKLY GAZETTE	HALLOWELL, MAINE			
3	14 AUG. 1845	MOHAWK COURIER	LITTLE FALLS, NEW YORK			
4				30 AUG. 1845	BALTIMORE SUN	BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
5	02 SEPT. 1845	WISCONSIN ARGUS	MADISON, WISCONSIN TERRITORY			
6	04 SEPT. 1845	PITTSFIELD SUN	PITTSFIELD, MASS.			
7				08 SEPT. 1845	ADAMS SENTINEL	GETTYBURG, PENNSYLVANIA
8	09 SEPT. 1845	DAILY REPUBLICAN	SPRINGFIELD, MASS.			
9				10 SEPT. 1845	CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER	CLEVELAND, OHIO
10	12 SEPT. 1845	BUFFALO COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER	BUFFALO, NY			
11	20 SEPT. 1845	NEWPORT MERCURY	NEWPORT, RI			
12	24 SEPT 1845	AUBURN JOURNAL & ADVERTISER	AUBURN, NY			
13	30 SEPT 1845	REPUBLICAN ADVOCATE	BATAVIA, NY			
14	01 OCT. 1845	PEOPLE’S ADVOCATE & NEW-LONDON COUNTY REPUBLICAN	NEW-LONDON, CT			
15	02 OCT. 1845	FARMERS’ CABINET	AMHERST, NH			
16				04 OCT. 1845	WESTERN LITERARY MESSENGER	BUFFALO, NY
17				06 OCT. 1845	REPUBLICAN COMPILER	GETTYSBURG, PENN.
18/19	11 OCT. 1845	THE SUN WEEKLY	NEW YORK CITY, NY			
	11 OCT. 1845	VERMONT JOURNAL	WINDSOR, VERMONT			
20				01 NOV. 1845	SOUTH PORT AMERICAN	SOUTHPORT, WISCONSIN TERR.
21				01 NOV. 1845	SPIRIT OF THE TIMES	NEW YORK CITY, NY

(UNCONFIRMED)						
22	20 Nov. 1845	ALBANY EVENING JOURNAL	ALBANY, NY			
23				27 Nov. 1845	GUERNSEY JEFFERSONIAN	WASHINGTON, OHIO
24	28 Nov. 1845	NORFOLK DEMOCRAT	DEDHAM, MASS.			
<u>1846:</u>				<u>1846:</u>		
25	02 JAN. 1846	BARRE GAZETTE	BARRE, MASS.			
<u>1847:</u>				<u>1847:</u>		
26				SEPT-NOV 1847	N.Y. ORGAN (NOT YET LOCATED)	
27				03 Nov. 1847	NORTH AMERICAN & UNITED STATES GAZETTE	PHILADELPHIA, PENN.
28				13 Nov. 1847	SOUTHERN PATRIOT	CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA
29				13 Nov. 1847	DAILY STAR	SYRACUSE, NY
30				20 Nov. 1847	STATE GAZETTE	TRENTON, NJ
31				01 DEC. 1847	CONSTITUTION	MIDDLETON, CONN.
<u>1848:</u>				<u>1848:</u>		
32				18 JAN. 1848	NEW-HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE & REPUBLICAN UNION	PORTSMOUTH, NH
33				JAN—FEB. 1848	PHILADELPHIA CITY ITEM (NOT YET LOCATED)	PHILADELPHIA, PENN.
34				12 FEB. 1848	NEW LONDON DEMOCRAT (FRAGMENT FROM PHILADELPHIA CITY ITEM)	NEW LONDON, CONN.
35	13 APR. 1848	ARKANSAS STATE GAZETTE ( FRAGMENT – PERHAPS “A”)	LITTLE ROCK, ARK.			
36				08 MAY 1848	SEMI-WEEKLY EAGLE	BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT
<u>1849:</u>				<u>1849:</u>		
<u>1850:</u>				<u>1850:</u>		
<u>1851:</u>				<u>1851:</u>		
<u>1852:</u>				<u>1852:</u>		
<u>1853:</u>				<u>1853:</u>		
37	17 MAY 1853	THE PENN-YAN DEMOCRAT	PENN-YAN, NY			
38	07 JUNE 1853	CAYUGA CHIEF	AUBURN, NY			
39	17 JUNE 1853	SKANEATELES DEMOCRAT	SKANEATELES NY			
<u>1854:</u>				<u>1854:</u>		
40				JUNE 1854	HARPER’S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE (ABRIDGED)	NEW YORK CITY, NY
41				01 DEC. 1854	LONG-ISLANDER	HUNTINGTON, LONG ISLAND, NY.
<u>1855:</u>				<u>1855:</u>		
42				13. JAN. 1855	M’KEAN CITIZEN	SMETHPORT, PENN.
43				28 SEPT. 1855	NEW-HAMPSHIRE SENTINEL	KEENE, NH
<u>1856:</u>				<u>1856:</u>		
<u>1857:</u>				<u>1857:</u>		

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	<u>1858:</u>		<u>1858:</u>
44	05 AUG. 1858	HORNEVILLE TRIBUNE (ABRIDGED)	HORNEVILLE, NY
	<u>1859:</u>		<u>1859:</u>
	<u>1860:</u>		<u>1860:</u>
45	JAN. – MAR. 1860	MICHIGAN FARMER (NOT YET LOCATED)	
46	15 MAR. 1860	WEEKLY HAMILTON TELEGRAPH	HAMILTON, OHIO
47	03 JULY 1860	WEEKLY BURLINGTON GAZETTE	BURLINGTON, WISCONSIN

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Checking distribution in the first three months of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” (19 issues have thus far been located), the reader will immediately notice fourteen entries under A-version in contrast to a mere five under B-version. That a B-version was snatched up by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in June 1854\* must be regarded as a major step in the later dissemination of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” at the national level. As of 1860, it would appear that the sharply abridged [version by John Bartholomew Gough](#) supplanted the 1845 version entirely.

## V. WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS IN STORE

As the latest discoveries make all too clear, we may expect the next decade to yield further information of historical newspaper printings of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie.” The minor variations in the *Mohawk Courier* [deletion of “left” before “hand” plus “flames” instead of the singular] coincide with the *Wisconsin Argus*, suggesting that Little Falls, NY, may be the “stepping-stone” between the July and September “A”-variation. The *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle* exhibits several items that fit into a “B”-version: e.g., “heaved” and “car.” Yet the difference between the two remains marked (“dressed out” vs. “dressed gaily;” “cracked” vs. “crackled;” “if there were less *talking*” vs. “if there was a little less *talking*”). What is now apparent from the discovery of the *Poughkeepsie Journal and Eagle* and the *Mohawk Courier* is that there were indeed printings published before August 30, and those printings were all “A”-variation, thus serving to explain why the A-version took off in the first two months, while the B-version did not gain momentum until much later.

As for the B-version, it is completely distinct in its own right and cannot have been derived from early “A”-versions as it is not only plagued with major deletions but also contains several inexplicable alterations of vocabulary. This, in itself, suggests that the B-version sketch was submitted directly to the *Baltimore Sun* and is in no way an offshoot of the A-version. Two further reasons suggest the autonomy of the B-version. Firstly, the *Baltimore Sun* was not a provincial paper in the 1840’s. It seems rather difficult to picture one of America’s most technically advanced newspapers making careless deletions while altering vocabulary, particularly when the alterations were unnecessary. It will also be noted that later

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\* Cf. Norman Barry, “[Two Missing Links: Harpers 1854 & The Living Age 1860. An Evaluation of Two Newly Discovered John Maynard Texts](#)”

B-versions, even those in the “sticks,” remained quite faithful to the text found in the *Baltimore Sun*. Secondly, if the *Sun* had taken the sketch from another newspaper, one would expect an acknowledgment of its source. Instead, we read the following as a preface to Major Benjamin Brown French’s ballad “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” which appeared in the *Sun* on Sept. 5, 1845, only six days after the anonymous prose sketch “Helmsman of Lake Erie” was published:

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

[For the *Baltimore Sun*.]

As Baltimore was the second largest city in the United States in 1845, the notion of *targeting* Baltimore cannot be ruled out. As such, Baltimore may well remain the ultimate source of the “B”-version texts. Yet the riddle remains as to why the “B”-version should be the corrupt version while the “A”-version shines by comparison. On the other hand, the flaws in the “B”-version should perhaps be viewed as marginal when one considers that it was the *Baltimore Sun*, and not the *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle* or the *Maine Cultivator*, that was able to inspire Major Benjamin Brown French to compose his ballad.

As for Hallowell, Maine, it should be pointed out that a native son was Jacob Abbott (1803-1879), who – although no longer well known – was, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, quite famous for his prolific children’s literature. Chapter X, “The Steersman,” in Abbott’s *Marco Paul’s Travels on the Erie Canal* (1852) has been checked for language, style, and content but found unrelated to the anonymous 1845 sketch.

Neither Poughkeepsie, Hallowell, nor Little Falls sounds like a favorite locale for the publication of a “British” sketch from across the waters. Viewed simply on the basis of places of publication, this researcher would say that all rumors of a sketch of British extraction require no further comment.

Poughkeepsie, located on the Hudson River halfway between Albany and Manhattan, figured in several works by James Fenimore Cooper.\*

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\*For an investigation of linkage with Cooper, cf. [“The Poughkeepsie Factor: The Link to James Fenimore Cooper?”](#)