

## Sensational Discovery: “The Helmsman of Lake Erie“ First Printed in Britain!

by Norman Barry

As of October, 2018, Poughkeepsie remains America’s first place of publication, but two prior publications have finally been located in Britain.

	DATE	NAME OF PUBLICATION & LOCATION	Frequency
1)	07 June 1845 (Sa)	<i>The Church of England Magazine</i> (London, England)	Weekly
2)	14 June 1845 (Sa)	<i>The Lancaster Gazette, and General Advertiser for Lancaster, Westmoreland, &amp;c.</i> (Lancaster, England).	Weekly
3)	19 July 1845 (Sa)	<i>Poughkeepsie Journal &amp; Eagle</i> (Poughkeepsie, New York)	Weekly

The anonymous sketch did not appear until 1845 due to an apparent literary fusion of two American steamer tragedies: the *Swallow* on the Hudson River (April 7, 1845) and the *Erie* on Lake Erie (August 9, 1841). The date of publication in *The Church of England Magazine* on June 7, 1845 lends further confirmation of the reason for a delayed printing of nearly four years.



Reports of the *Swallow* tragedy in the British press did not surface before May 2, and more complete coverage was only available the middle of May. This would allow roughly a two-week window for a hypothetical author in England to craft “The Helmsman,” submit it to *The*

*Church of England Magazine* in time for publication, after which it would require at least two weeks for the Episcopal publication to reach the shores of America and, of all places, Poughkeepsie – not New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, or Baltimore.

As is evident from the paucity of publications of the 1845 “Helmsman of Lake Erie” in the British Isles, the sketch quickly obtained far greater popularity in the United States, which was most probably its target audience.

Two fascinating questions remain to hound us: If the author was a Briton, who in Britain would have had the knowledge of America’s waterways and tragedies to react so quickly with a moving maritime sketch? Or, if the writer was an American, why would he choose to place it in the bosom of the Anglican Church while apparently banishing it from his own country? To be sure that “the Helmsman” was buried “deep”, it was placed under “Juvenile Reading” in *The Church of England Magazine*.

*The Lancaster Gazette* gave credit to *The Church of England Magazine* for “The Helmsman.”

A comparison of the three publications reveals very few alterations in text apart from some aberrations in punctuation.

Bad Schussenried, Germany, October 4, 2018