

A letter to the *New York Tribune*, sent from Buffalo and dated August 10, the morning the survivors were brought back to Buffalo. The account is partially based on the eyewitness testimony provided by a survivor, Mr. Parmelee, the boat's bar-keeper! The timelines provided are of great interest. Also, the reference to the wheelman without mention of Capt. Titus deserves consideration. Mrs. Lynde's unintended plunge is also documented.

[ Blue, red and underscoring : only transcriber's emphasis! ]

*New-Hampshire Sentinel*  
(Keene, New Hampshire)

**Wednesday evening, August 18, 1841**

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*Domestic*

**Dreadful Steamboat Accident—Burning  
of the *Erie* on Lake Erie—Over Two  
Hundred Lives Lost!**

*Correspondence of the N. Y. Tribune.*

BUFFALO, August 10, 1841.

*Dear Sir*—Enclosed I send you a Buffalo paper of this morning, containing a brief notice of the loss by fire, last night, of the steamboat *Erie*, together with nearly two hundred persons. I also send a few incidents which I gathered in a brief conversation with one of the survivors, Mr. Parmelee, the bar-keeper of the boat. The *Erie* left her berth at Buffalo, for Chicago, between 5 and 6 P. M. on Monday, with a large number of passengers, nearly a hundred of whom were Swiss emigrants. The list of passengers, as taken by the Captain, numbered 205; but in addition to those, there were several young children whose names were not taken, and some also, it is supposed, who had not paid their fare when the disaster occurred. So that it is probable that the passengers, together with those attached to the boat, numbered not less than 230 or 240.—The fire was discovered about ten minutes before 8 o'clock [Titus' testimony: "at ten minutes past 8 o'clock"], off Silver Creek, a distance of 25 or 30 miles from Buffalo. The flames first appeared running rapidly across the boiler deck, (a permanent platform of a foot or two in height [sic], to protect the boiler where it projects above the main deck.) From its vicinity to the boiler, it had become highly inflammable, and its ignition was facilitated by a recent coat of paint which it had received. The boat's head was immediately directed toward the land, which was five or six miles off.

The flames spread with great rapidity. Perfect confusion succeeded, in the midst of which the small boat, hanging astern, was lowered by the hands and brought to the side. After a few

ladies had been handed down, the frenzy of those behind became uncontrollable [sic], and numbers leaped in beyond the capacity of the boat to sustain them, and it swamped. Several of those who fell from the boat were drawn under the wheel, and there were drowned, while a few clung to the boat's sides and were finally saved. A second and third boat were rendered useless by the same infatuation. **Some five minutes after the appearance of the fire, the machinery became deranged and stopped.** So rapidly did the flames spread that, although there were a quantity of life-preservers in the ladies' cabin, they could not be reached, as the cabin was almost instantly a light flame. **Twenty minutes only had elapsed from the beginning of the fire,** but after the intenseness of the heat had forced overboard every other person, when Capt. Titus threw himself into the water and abandoned the boat to its fate. The few who then remained alive were tossing in the midst of a heavy swell, dependent upon the precarious support, one of an oar, another of a plank or box, and liable every moment to lose their hold through exhaustion and the benumbing effects of fright. The steamers *De Witt Clinton* and the *Lady* perceived the light about quarter past 8 o'clock from Dunkirk, where they lay, and put out immediately to her relief. But a distance of 10 or 12 miles intervening, they arrived in time to save only 29 out of the large number who a few hours before had left Buffalo, with perfect confidence of a pleasant trip.

The *Clinton*, with 27 of the saved on board, took the hull of the *Erie* in tow for Buffalo; after having been drawn, however, fifteen or twenty miles, the remnants of the wreck suddenly sunk. The passengers were taken to the American House, where they now are. The *Lady* returned with the two she had picked up to Dunkirk; one of them was my informant. He had thrown himself overboard on a plank, when he saw further efforts to be useless, but relinquished it to a friend who could not swim, and took for his own support the "fender," which just then fell by his side. He states that those who survived the swamping of the boats clung with desperation to the burning wreck, except as a few found other supports. One man he saw standing for some minutes on the gallows-beam, the flames encircling him, with his coat-skirts thrown over his head, till he dropped dead into the body of flames. **One of the wheelmen is said to have been burnt up doing his duty at the helm. [Aug. 10 !]** Young Beebe [sic] (a lad of 14 [12], one of those saved) is reported to have behaved with great courage. As he descended the guys to the water, the chain was so hot that he left masses of flesh upon the rod at every clasp of his hands. Reaching the rudder he stood upon that, and soaking his jacket in the water, he applied it to assuage the pain of his hands, and then used it to extinguish the fire from his dress and parts of the wreck near him. Though badly burnt he is likely to recover. The only lady who was saved (Mrs Lynde, wife of C. J. Lynde, Esq., of Milwaukie,) was standing at the stern of the boat with her husband, arranging her life-preserver about her person, when the boat gave a lurch and precipitated her into the water. she saw nothing more of her husband, but was herself buoyed up till the *Clinton* arrived.

There is a common agreement in the belief that three demijohns of varnish, &c., exploded, and the liquid came in contact with the fire.

In great haste.

E. A. M. J.