

**THE AUTHOR'S SIGNATURE:
THE GOOD SHIP *JERSEY* IN "THE HELMSMAN OF LAKE ERIE,"
AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF NEW JERSEY
IN THE WORKS OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER**

BY

NORMAN BARRY

I. THE *JERSEY* ON LAKE ERIE

One of the most baffling mysteries confronting any researcher of the genesis of "*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*," as originally distributed in British, American and North Irish newspapers and periodicals beginning on June 7, 1845, is the name of the steamer, the *Jersey*. The ship's name crops up twice in the tale. Yet there was never a steamboat by that name plying the waters of Lake Erie. The fascinating question as to what a ship by the name of the *Jersey* should be doing on Lake Erie deserves an answer. The anonymous author of the moving and well-written sketch describing the heroic death of the fictional wheelsman John Maynard had something in mind when the ship's name was chosen. He was willing to leave a striking clue as to his identity, the multi-layered symbolism behind the ship's name adding to the richness of the tale and ultimately becoming the hallmark of the writer, the "signature" we find in so many of his works. The writer's name: James Fenimore Cooper.

II. COOPER'S LIFELONG ATTACHMENT TO BURLINGTON AND NEW JERSEY

The first aspect that invariably attracts attention is Cooper's place of birth, Burlington, New Jersey, located on the Delaware River on the border to Pennsylvania, with little Bristol on the opposite bank. Although it is often argued that Cooper could not have felt a strong attachment to New Jersey inasmuch as he was extracted from this environment while still an infant and then transplanted in the frontier settlement of Cooperstown, New York, named after his father William Cooper, James Fenimore Cooper's novels, letters and nonfictional works of a lifetime tell a different tale.

i. Miles Wallingford Explaining the Meaning of New Jersey

In Part 1 of *Afloat and Ashore or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, published in 1844, there is an amusing passage about three young would-be mariners from the Wallingford estate of Clawbonny in the state of New York, who have set out down the Hudson in their small vessel. As in "*The Helmsman*," the action begins on a very pleasant day:

"Everything was new, and everything seemed delightful. The day was pleasant, the wind continued fair, and nothing occurred to mar our joys. I [=Miles Wallingford] had a little map, one neither particularly accurate, nor very well engraved, and I remember the importance with which, after having ascertained the fact myself, I pointed out to my two companions, the rocky precipices on the western bank, as New Jersey! Even Rupert was struck with this important circumstance. As for Neb, he was actually in ecstasies, rolling his large black eyes, and showing his white teeth, until he suddenly closed his truly coral and plump lips, to demand what New Jersey meant? Of course, I gratified this laudable desire to obtain knowledge, and Neb seemed still more pleased

than ever, now he had ascertained that New Jersey was a state. Travelling was not as much of an everyday occupation, in that day, as it is now, and it was, in truth, something for three American lads, all under nineteen, to be able to say they had seen a state, other than their own.”

Afloat and Ashore or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford, Pt. I, Ch. III, p. 38:
Cooper Edition (New York, AMS Press, 2004)

The letter to Issac Mickle, who was preparing a history of Gloucester County, New Jersey, and who was inquiring as to Cooper’s origins, clearly establishes the strong attachment Cooper felt towards New Jersey, Burlington and Gloucester county. It is particularly fortunate that Cooper’s comments, both here and in the excerpt from *Afloat and Ashore*, are provided roughly one year before publication of “*The Helmsman*.” It should be noted that Cooper’s sense of “roots” and “family” extended far beyond the state boundaries of New York. First of all, there was his mother, who, as Cooper states:

“My mother was a Jersey-woman, and strongly attached to her native State.”

The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper [=LJ], 6 vols. Edited by James Franklin Beard (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 1960-1968), vol. IV., p. 498 (Letter 786. To Isaac Mickle, From Hall, Cooperstown, **December 6th, 1844**)

Then, only two paragraphs further on, Cooper adds:

“I am a New Yorker by education, interests, property, marriage, and fifty-four years of residence; but New Jersey has, and ever will have, a near hold upon my feelings. My ancestors, in various directions, were among her first settlers, and, though William Cooper, the root of us all, first settled in Burlington in 1679, he went so soon to Gloucester that I have always regarded that county as the real nest of the whole brood. If I ever spoke of Gloucester as my place of origin, it must have been in reference to the facts here mentioned.”

LJ, vol. IV, p. 499

It should perhaps be pointed out that James Fenimore Cooper’s mother, Elizabeth Fenimore Cooper, had been extracted from New Jersey soil (and her hometown of Burlington) against her will and had never been able to accept the frontier community of Cooperstown as a true home. Her dislike of the name “Cooper” even went so far as to attempt to bribe her youngest son James into changing his *surname* to Fenimore. After his mother’s death, James Cooper attempted to, at least in part, fulfill his mother’s wish by lodging a petition for a *middle surname* “Fenimore,” a request which, in 1826, was not quite fulfilled as the result was a *middle name* and not a *middle surname*.

ii. “A Jersey-man Born”

In a letter to his nephew and later son-in-law, Cooper, at the age of 41, makes the following statement:

“It is odd enough that I had a visit, when in Tuscany, from an officer of one of our frigates who told me he was born in Cooperstown. This is probably the first male native who ever found his way into Italy, for you will remember that I am a Jersey-man born, and both William and Paul are New Yorkers.”

LJ, vol. II, p. 90, Letter 207. To Richard Cooper. From Paris, **May 25th, 1831**.

iii. Roots in Pennsylvania and New Jersey

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, both New Jersey and Pennsylvania are singled out as exemplary in their treatment of the Native American. An interesting question is the extent to which the tradition of racial tolerance and fair play in those two states influenced both Cooper's thinking and writing.

"The American is justly proud of the origin of his nation, which is perhaps unequaled in the history of the world; but the Pennsylvanian and Jerseyman have more reason to value themselves in their ancestors than the natives of any other state, since no wrong was done the original owners of the soil."

The Last of the Mohicans – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. 29, p. 304, footnote added in 1831.

In 1848, Cooper responded to a former classmate at Yale, who had inquired concerning the lineage of the Huguenot De Lancey family. Cooper's wife's maiden name was Susan Augusta De Lancey. In his response, Cooper's attachment to his roots and, consequently, to Pennsylvania and New Jersey is unmistakable:

"My family is from New Jersey, having been at the same place, opposite to Philadelphia, where it still owns a handsome estate, ever since 1687. We came from Buckinghamshire in 1679, went to Burlington, and my great-grand-father crossed the river into Bucks, Pennsylvania, about the year 1700. My grandfather and father were born in Bucks—My father came to this place [Cooperstown, New York] in 1786, and we have been here ever since."

LJ, vol. V, pp. 303-304, Letter 930, To *Benjamin Franklin Thompson*, From Hall, Cooperstown, **March 15, 1848**

iv. The Religious Background and Quakerism

Cooper's pride in New Jersey's long tradition of religious tolerance is reflected in the following remark:

"In New-Jersey *no protestant can be denied any civil right on account of religion.*"
[Cooper's italics]

The Travelling Bachelor; or, Notions of the Americans [1828] – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter XXXI To the Abbate Giromachi &c. &c., p. 455.

In Cooper's first letter to George Bancroft, eminent historian, diplomat, and – in 1845, Secretary of the Navy – Cooper observed:

". . . I have been exceedingly gratified with the allusions you have made to the Quakers in New Jersey, for though we have long since returned to the church of England (in a spiritual sense at least) my family was among the original emigrants to West Jersey, and we still feel an interest in their characters. William Cooper, my lineal ancestor, sat at that assembly of 1681, which you have termed the first Quaker Legislature, and it is still a matter of boasting among us that the tract of land (about 1000 acres) that he took up in 1687, opposite to Philadelphia, after Penn had commenced his town, has never been out of the name, from that hour to this. It has indeed, been much increased in extent, and not a little in value. Certainly, I am no advocate for the theoretical theology of my progenitors, but their practice was such as no man need be ashamed of, and I am glad to see the sect honorably mentioned."

LJ, vol. III., p. 384, Letter 530, To *George Bancroft*, From Hall, Cooperstown, **June 4th, 1839**

Fourteen years earlier, Cooper applied for enrollment in the Pennsylvania Historical Society. At the time, he already enjoyed close links to the New York Historical Society inasmuch as the information given to Cooper on the “intended [Pennsylvania] association” was provided by Dr. David Hosack, the incumbent President of the New York Historical Society. In the passage that follows, it is clear that Cooper’s sense of “home” was intimately linked with his sense of “roots,” yet all of this was “*completely within the influence of the mild tenets of Penn:*”

“My direct male ancestor, was a friend and co-religionist of William Penn, though he was amongst those who originally settled in West-Jersey – Many of his descendants subsequently crossed the Delaware, and both my father and grandfather were natives of Pennsylvania – I was born myself on the banks of the river, on the Jersey side, but completely within the influence of the mild tenets of Penn, and in fact, in the Territory which he once (had) materially controlled – I am the fifth in descent of my family, in America, (and) every individual of which, down to my own generation was born either in Pennsylvania, or on the opposite shores of the Delaware.”

L&J, vol. VI, p. 288, Letter 72a. *To an Unidentified Philadelphian* [November 1824 – January 1825?]

v. Burlington, New Jersey

Even Burlington, New Jersey, the town in which Cooper was born, is explicitly referred to twice in *The Crater*, published in August 1847:

a) In the year 1793, when Mark Woolston was just sixteen, a full-rigged ship actually came up, and lay at the end of the wharf in Burlington, the little town nearly opposite to Bristol, where she attracted a great deal of the attention of all the youths of the vicinity.

The Crater; or Vulcan’s Peak. A Tale of the Pacific. Ch. I, p. 6, published in Aug. 1847, Reprinted in One Volume, 1863.

and

b) “Great was the commotion in the little town of Bristol at the return of all the Woolstons, who had gone off, no one knew exactly whither; some saying to New Holland; others to China; and a few even to Japan. The excitement extended across the river to the little city of Burlington, and there was danger of the whole history of the colony’s getting into the newspapers.”

Ibid., , Ch. XXX, p. 231

Young Cooper spent nearly two years in Burlington with his mother and brother Samuel, where, according to his sister Hannah, he had already begun to receive instruction in Latin in 1798.^[1] His mother was deeply dissatisfied with the winters at Cooperstown and longed to return to her more civilized hometown of Burlington, which, of course, was much closer to Philadelphia ^[2] and her husband, who, at the time, was serving as a Congressman. Cooper’s “*earliest schoolboy days*,” in Burlington, are referred to in the following letter [*LJ*, vol. V, p.168], which leaves no doubt as to his attachment to his native State:

875. *To William Adeë Whitehead*

Hall, Cooperstown, Sept. 18, 1846

Sir,

Your letter apprising me of my election as a Corresponding Member of the New Jersey Historical Society, has been recieved [*sic*].

I accept this compliment with peculiar satisfaction, as I happen to be a native of your state, and have some claims, on account of my predecessors, to feel more than a common interest in her annals. Although I was taken from New Jersey an infant, some of my earliest schoolboy days were passed within her limits, and I have never lost the impression then made in her favour.

I shall not probably prove a very profitable correspondent, though I beg you will not hesitate to employ me in any inquiry, or other business, in which it may be thought I might be useful. I shall not consider labour expended on behalf of New Jersey as time thrown away, but as a single exhibition of natural filial piety. May I ask of you to make my acceptance known in the proper quarters, with my acknowledgements for the honour done me.

I am, | Sir | Very Respectfully | Your Obli. Ser
J. Fenimore Cooper

Sometimes a shared place of birth can serve to bring people together. During Cooper's short stint in the navy as a young man, William S. Dudley hints at this in the following passage in his "Historical Introduction" to *Ned Myers; or, a Life before the Mast*:

"Cooper's last duty assignment was on board the sloop-of-war (corvette) USS *Wasp*, to which her commanding officer, Lieutenant James Lawrence, sent him on recruiting duty in New York City. Despite their differences in age and rank, Cooper and Lawrence became good friends, perhaps because they shared a mutual birthplace, Burlington, New Jersey." [3]

Cooper visited Burlington on Independence Day, 1836. The following is an excerpt from the letter written to his wife:

"I was at Burlington yesterday, where I passed three hours delightfully. I went over the whole place, which is neat, quiet, genteel, and as free from Yankee strut as one could wish, besides having many excellent houses. In my wanderings I asked an old man, who was blind, eighty years old, and who was seated on the stoop of an old-fashioned brick house, if he had ever known William Cooper? "Intimately. He lived next door there." It was the last house he inhabited in Burlington. The tavern below was the first, the house where Ridgway lived the second, and this was the last. Of course, the last was the house where I was born. The house that is now a tavern is not large but was a pretty good house sixty years ago. The Ridgway house you may have heard me speak of, for Mrs. Thomas, Capt. Elton's aunt, lived in it, and *my* house is a very decent abode. It is beautifully roughcast, has a large back-building, and a single front. The room looked quite respectable, though evidently falling off.

The old man was a Mr. How, and the son of a man of some importance formerly. He appears to be decayed now. He told me Cooperstown here is only three miles from Burlington. [4] It has a meeting-house, tavern, two stores and twelve dwellings, not having increased much since my father left it, which he did about fifty-eight years since.

The high sheriff is a Fenimore, and my third cousin. I know his father, who was received by my mother as her second cousin. He has one or two brothers.

While looking for the house in which I once lived, I questioned a respectable-looking old Quaker. By way of apology, I explained that I had been born in

Burlington. “Thy name?” he asked, looking hard at me. “Cooper.” “Of what branch of the Coopers? thy family is numerous.” “My father was named William.” “Not of the Otsego?” “The same.” “Why, we are related—thy mother was a Fenimore—the sister or daughter of Richard Fenimore.” “The daughter.” “Then thy great-aunt, the sister of Richard, married my father’s brother.” etc., etc. in a short time, I could have mustered all the men of Burlington as cousins, I believe.

It is a delightful place—far handsomer and better built than I had fancied. It is about thrice as large as Cooperstown.”

LJ, vol. III, pp. 225-226, Letter 437. *To Mrs. Cooper*, From Head’s – Philadelphia – July 5th, 1836.

Roughly three years later, on March 30, 1839, in a letter to his son Paul, Cooper wrote the following:

“The trees are beginning to open their leaves here [=in Philadelphia] , and I trust next month your mother and sisters will have an opportunity to run about the country a little. We intend to visit Burlington, Bristol, Wilmington, and New Castle, etc., etc. As yet, they have seen nothing.”

LJ, vol. III, p. 373, Letter 524. *To Paul Fenimore Cooper*, From Philadelphia, March 30th, 1839

vi. Cooper’s Views on the State of New York in 1845

In 1845, Cooper was not in a good mood with regard to the State of New York. The whole question of property rights was a powder keg which, Cooper feared, could blow up in his face. In the preface to *Satanstoe*, the first novel in *The Littlepage Manuscripts*, a trilogy aimed at showing how anti-rentism in the State of New York flouted the law and the rights of the owners of large estates, his frustration and anger at the wanton disrespect for property owners in the State of New York were evident. Squatters, or “advocates of anti-rentism” (to use the polite term), would argue that “mere possession (squatting)” amounted to rightful ownership (by making “betterments”) and, consequently, freedom from rent, even if the property was lawfully deeded and owned by an absentee landlord. That such squatting was indeed “tolerated” by New York law may be gathered from the following:

“In our view, New York is, at this moment, much the most disgraced state in the Union, notwithstanding she has never failed to pay the interest on her public debt; and her disgrace arises from the fact that her laws are trampled under foot, without any efforts at all commensurate with the object being made to enforce them.”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Preface, p. 4

In *The Chainbearer*, the second volume of the trilogy, also published in 1845, Cooper, with reference to New York, does not mince words: “*Good laws, badly administered, are no better than an absence of all law,...*” [5].

III. “THE THRESHOLD OF THE COUNTRY” & VISIONS OF NAVESINK [6]

New Jersey has exerted a long and profound influence on America’s maritime history. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, a ship sailing from Plymouth, England, would find her way to the New World and North America by means of the Jersey Highlands, named after an

Indian tribe called the Navesink, later corrupted to read Neversink. These were the mountains that welcomed the mariner to America, who, on arrival, would find safe anchorage upon entering New Jersey's Sandy Hook. [7] Thus the Highlands of New Jersey, already alluded to in *Afloat and Ashore*, serve in Cooper's writings as a nautical guide of where America begins, and Sandy Hook represents the safe harbor and haven America offers. These singular aspects of New Jersey's Atlantic coastline are employed by Cooper time and again—not for mere embellishment, but even to determine the flow of the plot.

Cooper's *Homeward Bound*, published in 1838, offers a title which cannot be misunderstood. In his preface, Cooper explicitly states:

“By the original plan, the work was to open at the threshold of the country, or with the arrival of the travelers at Sandy Hook, from which point the tale was to have been carried regularly forward to its conclusion.”

Homeward Bound; or, The Chase. A Tale of the Sea, “Preface”, first paragraph, p. 2 (New York, Published by Hurd and Houghton; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1871)

The sense of expectation as a ship approaches North America can be seen in the following quotation:

“Has no one sung out ‘land,’ yet, from aloft, Mr. Leach? The sands of New Jersey [= Sandy Hook] ought to be visible before this.”

“We have seen the haze of the land [= Navesink] since daylight, but not land itself.”

“Then, like old Columbus, the flowered doublet is mine—land, ho!”

The mates and the people laughed, and looking ahead, they nodded to each other, and the word “land” passed from mouth to mouth, with the indifference with which mariners first see it in short passages. Not so with the rest. They crowded together and endeavored to catch a glimpse of the coveted shore, though, with the exception of Paul, neither could perceive it.

Ibid., Ch. XXXII, p. 236

“The haze of the land” cannot receive a more moving description than that which follows:

“Have the kindness to look over the stock of that anchor,” said Paul, glad of an excuse to place himself nearer to Eve; and you will discover an object on the water.”

“I do,” said Eve, “but is it a vessel?”

“It is, but a little to the right of that vessel, do you not perceive a hazy object at some elevation above the sea?”

“The cloud, you mean — a dim, ill-defined, dark body of vapor?”

“So it may seem to you, but to me it appears to be land. That is the bluff-like termination of the celebrated high lands of Navesink. By watching it for half an hour you will perceive its form and surface grow gradually more distinct.”

Eve eagerly pointed out the place to Mademoiselle Vielville and her father, and from that moment, for near an hour, most of the passengers kept it steadily in view. As Paul had said, the blue of this hazy object deepened; then its base became connected with water, and it ceased to resemble a cloud at all. In twenty more minutes, the faces and angles of the hills became visible, and trees started out of their sides. In the end a pair of twin lights were seen perched on the summit.

Ibid., p. 237

The motif of the “hovering cloud,” which serves as a harbinger to the New World, can also be seen in a different context in *Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*, which was a chronology

of the Cooper family's first tour of Switzerland from July 14 to September 15, 1828. (Their second Swiss tour was from August to October 1832). Publication was delayed, however, until 1836:

The day was lovely, and I had persuaded [Mrs. Cooper] to share my seat on the carriage box. As we rounded the little height on which the ruin [=“a castle of Roland”] is seated, she exclaimed, “What a beautiful white cloud!” Taking the direction from her finger, I saw an accurately defined mass, that resembled the highest wreath of a cloud whose volume was concealed behind the mountains of the Jura, which, by this time, were so near as to be quite distinct. There was something that was not cloudy, too, in its appearance. Its outline was like that of chiseled rock, and its whiteness greatly surpassed the brilliancy of vapour. I called to the postilion and pointed out this extraordinary object. “*Mont Blanc, monsieur.*” We were, according to the maps, at least seventy miles from it, in an air line!

I shall never forget the thrill of that moment. There is a feeling allied to the universal love of the mysterious, that causes us all to look with pleasure at any distant object which insensibly leads the mind to the contemplation of things that are invisible.

– Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter II, p. 13.

Sandy Hook's premier role in the honor code of mariners becomes evident in *The Pathfinder*:

“..no man induces me to commit such a sin against my own bringing up. I should never dare show my face inside of Sandy Hook again, had I committed so know-nothing an exploit. Why, Pathfinder, here, has more seamanship in him than that comes to. You can go below again, Master Eau-Douce.”

The Pathfinder, or The Inland Sea – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. XVI, pp. 247-248, originally published Feb. / March 1840, London and Philadelphia

From *Homeward Bound* in 1838 to *The Redskins* in 1846, Navesink (now Neversink) provides the coordinates that lead the writer home:

“The packet has a reasonably short passage, as we were twenty-nine days from land to land. It was a pleasant afternoon in May when the hummock-like heights of Neversink were seen from the deck; and an hour later we came in sight of the tower-resembling sails of the coasters which were congregating in the neighborhood of the low point of land that is very appropriately called Sandy Hook. The light-houses rose out of the water soon after, and objects on the shore of New Jersey next came gradually out of the misty background, until we got near enough to be boarded, first by the pilot, and next by the news-boat; the first preceding the last, for a wonder, news usually being far more active, in this good republic, than watchfulness to prevent evil.”

The Redskins, p. 53, published in July 1846. Cf. N. Barry, “*The Legend of John Maynard, ‘The Helmsman of Lake Erie,’ in the Backdrop of the Year 1845: The Jackson – Elliott – Cooper Connection,*” p. 27

Yet Cooper's use of Navesink and Sandy Hook far exceeds a span of eight years in only two of his works. The *Water-Witch*, for example, was published in 1830. Here Cooper also emphasizes the role of Sandy Hook in his novel:

The seaman will at once understand, that the tide of flood must necessarily flow into these vast estuaries from different directions. The current which enters by Sandy-Hook (the scene of so much of this tale) flows westward into the Jersey rivers, northward into the Hudson, and eastward along the arm of the sea that lies between

Nassau and Main.

The Water-Witch – The Michigan Historical Reprint Series, Ch. XXVIII, p. 362 (New York: George P. Putnam & Co., 1852)

References to Navesink (or Neversink) and/or Sandy Hook can be made out in a number of Cooper's works extending over a period of more than two decades [8]:

- 1) *The Travelling Bachelor; or, Notions of the Americans*, 1828: Neversink and Sandy Hook
- 2) *The Water-Witch*, published in May 1830: Navesink and Sandy Hook.

→*LJ*, vol. II, p. 410, Letter 328 from London to Caroline De Lancey, dated Sept. 16, 1833: Sandy Hook (simply referred to as "the Hook").

- 3) *Homeward Bound*, published in 1838: Navesink and Sandy Hook.

→*History of the Navy of the United States of America*, published in 1839. Sandy Hook is mentioned in connection with events in the years 1806, 1811, 1812, 1814, and 1815.

- 4) *The Pathfinder*, published in March 1840: Sandy Hook.

Sandy Hook:

→*LJ*, vol. IV, p. 92, Letter 598, while on board the U. S. ship *Macedonian*, at Sandy Hook, to his wife, dated Oct. 17th, 1840.

→*LJ*, p. 94, Letter 599, from Head's to Mrs. Cooper in Cooperstown, dated Oct. 28, 1840.

→*LJ*, p. 104, Letter 604, from Cooperstown to his son, Paul Fenimore Cooper, Geneva, N.Y., dated Nov. 29, 1840.

- 5) *Ned Myers*, published in November 1843, Sandy Hook.
- 6) *Afloat and Ashore, or, the Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, Pt. 1 published in June 1844, Pt. 2 in October 1844: Navesink and Sandy Hook.
- 7) *The Redskins*, published in July 1846: Neversink and Sandy Hook.
- 8) *Jack Tier*, serialized between November 1846 and March 1848: Sandy Hook.
- 9) *The Sea Lions*, published in April 1849: Sandy Hook.
→*LJ*, Vol. VI, p. 136, Letter 1043, from Globe, N. York, to Mrs. Cooper (Cooperstown), dated Feb. 17, 1850: Sandy Hook.

In January 1850, Herman Melville's *White Jacket* was published in London. In the chapter "The Pitch of the Cape," Melville makes a direct allusion to Cooper's Navesink [=Neversink] in his novel *Homeward Bound* by *creating* the fictional ship *Neversink* and *transforming* the title of Cooper's novel into dialogue! The element of patriotism in the quote is understandable.

"What ship's that?"

"The *Sultan, Indiaman*, from New York; and bound to Callao and Canton, sixty days out, all well. What frigate's that?"

“The United States ship *Neversink*, homeward bound.”
“Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!” yelled our enthusiastic countryman, transported with patriotism.

Just as Melville could take a literary treatment of Navesink by Cooper in his novel *Homeward Bound* and invent a ship by the name of *Neversink*, so Cooper himself could just as readily have “signed” his sketch of “*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*” with the name of a ship laden with associations dear to his heart, a pre-Melvillian ship, if you will, which – as a leitmotif – has “sailed” through so many of Cooper’s works.

IV. THAT “NECK OF LAND”: A QUESTION OF LOCATION AND ORAL TRADITION

The Littlepages on the estate of Satanstoe are not located in Cooperstown, New York, where Cooper grew up. They are also not in Albany, New York, where young Cooper attended a boarding school before going to Yale. Instead, the ‘Toe is located elsewhere:

“I (=Cornelius Littlepage) was born on the 3^d May, 1737, on a neck of land, called Satanstoe, in the county of West-Chester [9], and in the colony of New York; ...”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. I, p. 8

“The Neck lies in the vicinity of a well-known pass that is to be found in the narrow arm of the sea that separates the island of Manhattan from its neighbour, Long Island; and which is called Hell Gate.”

Ibid., Ch. I, p. 9

The “neck of land” refers to a peninsula:

“It [=Satanstoe] has two miles of beach and collects a proportionate quantity of sea-weed for manure, besides enjoying near a hundred acres of salt-meadow and sedges, that are not included in the solid ground of the neck proper.”

Ibid., Ch. I, *ibid*)

Westchester County is bordered by the Bronx and Long Island Sound to the south, and the Hudson River to the west. The “neck of land” termed Satanstoe may be placed along the northern banks of the East River, northeast of, and appropriately close to Hellgate.[10] This means that the shortest way to Newark, New Jersey, and Corny’s college of choice (later referred to as Princeton after it had relocated), was via the Island of Manhattan and, at that time, by ferry to Powles Hook (also termed Paulus Hook, the beginnings of what is now Jersey City).

A description having nothing to do with measurements but with “oral tradition,” runs as follows:

“Some fancied resemblance to an inverted toe (the devil being supposed to turn everything with which he meddles, upside-down), has been imagined to exist in the shape and swells of our paternal acres; a fact that has probably had its influence in perpetuating the name.”

Ibid., Ch. I, pp. 9-10

“Turning things upside-down” is a gift not merely reserved for the devil. A writer can also play with events – in some cases to make them more rarified and “purer” than they otherwise might have been.

In Cooper’s lengthiest novel, *Afloat and Ashore or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, written from December 1843 to August 1844, and just preceding *Satanstoe*, put out in June 1845, the “old *Jersey*,” the infamous prisoner-of-war ship during the Revolutionary War is mentioned in connection with Moses Marble’s unsavory experience in that precursor of a concentration camp [11]. In *Satanstoe*, as we shall see, a completely different ship, built by American genius, will supplant the living hell of the old *Jersey*, and be associated with the dawning of a new age. But first, to follow up on the notion of “playing the devil” and turning “everything with which he meddles upside-down,” let us consider Cooper’s comments as he targets Corny’s college education.

V. A MOTHER’S RESERVATIONS: POWLES HOOK AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

The case against Yale is presented effectively by Corny’s grandfather in the following quote:

“I should have sent Evans [=Corny’s father, Major Evans Littlepage] to Yale, had it not been for the miserable manner of speaking English they have in New England,” resumed my grandfather, “and I had no wish to have a son who might pass for a Cornish man. We shall have to send this boy [=young Corny] to Newark, in New Jersey. The distance is not so great, and we shall be certain he will not get any of your round-head notions of religion, too, Col. ‘Brom, you Dutch are not altogether free from these dissenting [distressing] follies.”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. II, p. 26

Whereas Cooper’s mother, following her final return to Cooperstown from Burlington, New Jersey, with the two boys James and Samuel, progressively retreated from the outside world and had virtually ceased to shoulder her duties as a mother, in *Satanstoe*, Corny’s mother is portrayed as a vibrant woman with her son’s safety in mind. Cooper’s proxy, Cornelius Littlepage, becomes an object of a loving mother’s concern:

“I should think less of sending Corny to Newark,” added my mother, “was it not for crossing the water.”

“Crossing the water!” repeated Mr. Worden—“The Newark we mean, Madam Littlepage, is not at home. The Jersey of which we speak, is the adjoining colony of that name.”

“I am aware of that, Mr. Worden, but it is not possible to get to Newark, without making that terrible voyage between New-York and Powles Hook. No, sir, it is impossible, and every time the child comes home, that risk will have to be run. It would cause me many a sleepless night!”

“He can go by Tobb’s Ferry [12], Matam Littlepage,” quietly observed the Colonel.

“Dobb’s Ferry can be very little better than that by Powles Hook,” rejoined the tender mother. “A ferry is a ferry, and the Hudson will be the Hudson, from Albany to New York. So water is water.”

Ibid., Ch. II, pp. 26-27

A mother's "apprehensions", the only strong argument for *not* sending Corny to Newark, are amazingly disregarded in *Satanstoe*:

"My mother saw that her apprehensions were laughed at, and she had the good sense to be silent."

Ibid.

Just how valid were those objections? And what was Powles Hook, otherwise known as Paulus Hook? This cryptic passage in *Satanstoe* becomes of central importance, for, as it turns out, Corny's mother had every right to feel uneasy about her son taking the Powles Hook Ferry. A newspaper article from 1812 gives some insight into both the danger of the crossing and a new invention that made the crossing safe:

Fulton's Paulus-Hook Steam Ferry Boat. — This is the 7th day since she commenced her regular passages, in which time she has surpassed the utmost extent of public expectation. The Paulus Hook Ferry has ever been one of the most inconvenient and difficult in the U. States; in head winds and a strong tide, it has often required three hours to make the passage, and in a calm it has been next to impossible to get over such a boat as would be able to take in a horse and carriage. Even under the most favorable circumstances the risque and inconvenience of putting a carriage and horses into a sailboat, has been sensibly felt, and the passage of Hudson's River pressed like a load on the mind of every traveller who was under the necessity of passing it. It was a preventative to social intercourse between this city and Philadelphia; happily a work of art, has removed all those difficulties by means of a *floating bridge* [my emphasis] on each side of the river—Carriages and horses are driven on to the deck of the steam boat without the persons alighting, and with all the safety and facility which a bridge gives; she can take in at one time 6 carriages, with their horses, and 300 passengers; with such a load she can pass the river in a calm in 14 minutes; in a strong tide in 20. This has rendered this Ferry one of the best in the world. Of all the works of art, this approaches nearest to the convenience of a bridge; and in this place perhaps it is superior; for a bridge would impede the free navigation of the Hudson River—the steamboat is no interruption to navigation, yet it is a bridge as to convenience of transit and economy of time—it is the work of an American mind—a gift of Heaven as eternal as time—a proud example of the genius of our country—which every American will cite with pleasure.

Charleston Courier, (S. Carolina), Thursday Morning, August 6, 1812,
vol. X, no. 3038, p. 2, c. 1-2

Powles Hook was the gateway to New Jersey from New York. In *Gleanings in Europe: France*, Cooper compares Powles Hook with Calais: "I know no place that will give you a more accurate notion of this celebrated port [=Calais] than Powles Hook." [13] Robert Fulton's development of the steamboat made the heavy traffic across the Hudson safe.

VI. JERSEY CITY AND ROBERT FULTON

Glancing across the Hudson to Jersey City, what do we find in 1812? The following article is an eye opener:

From the *Columbian*.
The Mechanic Arts rapidly improving.

In the last twelve months, a large establishment of workshops have been erected by Mess. Livingston and Fulton, in the northern part of Jersey City, expressly for constructing steam-engines, and the machinery for steamboats. The first is a capacious building, two stories high, in which are the boring, turning, and drilling mills; also, the fitting, filling and model shops. The second building is a superb smiths' shop, containing nine fires, in which shafts of one ton weight are forged. The third is a *boiler* shop with its *ovens, moulds, punchers* and *cutters* complete, and of a capacity to construct within it at one time, two boilers, 22 feet long, and of 3 feet diameter. To these works are added a dry-dock, for building and repairing steam-boats, which is 200 feet long, 40 feet wide at bottom, and 60 feet at top, sunk three feet below low water mark, walled, floored, and well secured, with horse-pumps to discharge the water left by the ebb tide; yesterday its large folding gates were thrown open for the first time, to receive the flood of our magnificent and bountiful Hudson; and at one o'clock, the North-River Steam-boat entering, settled on the timbers prepared for her support. This, to the best of our knowledge, is the only dry-dock in the United States.

Works of such great general utility, prosecuted with such ardor, do honor to our national industry and enterprise, and place the native American genius high in the ranks of talent and public spirit. They also contribute eminently to our national independence, and strengthen our claims to the respect of the European states, and consideration of the world. Patriotism and interest equally combine to recommend their encouragement and patronage.

Oct. 16

CIVIS.

[*The Cabinet*, Schenectady, N.Y., Wednesday, vol. iv, no. 176, Nov. 3, 1813, p. 6, c. 2-3]

Jersey City was thus *the* center of production for American steamboats. It also had the first America dry dock. Within the context of the development of steamboat transportation throughout the United States in the early years of the 19th century, Jersey City is of first importance. Thus the journey by ferry from the Island of Manhattan to Powles Hook on the New Jersey bank of the Hudson is rich in symbolism.

VII. A NOVELIST AND HISTORIAN GRAPPLING WITH HIS NATION'S CHILDHOOD AND HIS OWN

In Greek antiquity, the spirits of the dead were banned to a netherworld called Hades, where they lived on in the form of shades, having been ferried across the Styx, the River of Forgetfulness, by the Ferryman named Charon. The Ferryman, or "Helmsman," immune to "forgetfulness," represents the nexus between the living and the dead. The Ferryman knew that the past was still alive. He also knew that the present, if completely cut off from the past, was blind. Who was this Ferryman, who could, with impunity, view both worlds and, through his own efforts, allow the present and the past to interconnect?

In *The Pioneers*, the protective young Mr. Edwards tells Elizabeth Temple:

"...pardon me, Miss Temple, that I do not permit those venerable Charons to take you to the shades, unattended by your genius." [14]

The "venerable Charons" were none lesser than the aged Leatherstocking himself and his faithful friend Chingachgook (also known as The Great Serpent, the Last of the Mohicans,

John Mohegan, and Indian John). They could look back upon the days of virgin forest and woods untrampled by settlers pushing westward, on the one hand, while gazing in consternation at the great scars created by advancing civilization, on the other.

Such efforts at reawakening the fading memory of the past is the task of the historian. He is not bound by one small and somehow unrelated occurrence but looks beyond and behind what has happened to find its origins, its ultimate cause, sometimes even in the twilight of mankind's recorded history. He can also *reconstruct* events, pointing out what might have happened differently, had only a few circumstances been changed. Just as Cooper in *Satanstoe* was able to *recreate his* college education (by slipping into the person of young Corny) such that a "happy ending" would be the result, so in "*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*," the historian is at work, *recreating history* while forging the contending legends of Lake Erie into a viable new ideal of man's ultimate worth.

James Fenimore Cooper was the historian *par excellence* of America's naval history in 1845. His reputation in this regard, has, in the course of years, remained undiminished. Concerning America's and Europe's waterways, Cooper was well informed. In his Introduction to his 1832 novel, *The Heidenmauer* (= *The Pagan Wall*), Cooper asserts that the Rhine is hardly able to match the "excellence" of the Hudson. The Rhine "*wants the variety, the noble beauty, and the broad grandeur of the American stream.*" He then provides a clear statement as to his own familiarity with the Hudson, which he so adroitly makes use of in *Satanstoe*:

I had been familiar with the Hudson since childhood. The great thoroughfare of all who journey from the interior of the state towards the sea, necessity had early made me acquainted with its windings, its promontories, its islands, its cities, and its villages. Even its hidden channels had been professionally examined, and time was when there did not stand an unknown seat on its banks, or a hamlet that had not been visited. [15]

His reference to the Powles Hook Ferry in *Satanstoe* as the *only hindrance* to young Corny attending Nassau Hall in Newark, New Jersey, cannot be ignored. What makes this passage so remarkable is that Cooper suddenly hedges as to the significance of Powles Hook. On the one hand, it evokes such anxiety that Corny's mother vetoes the ferry and thus Nassau Hall in Newark as the place where Corny should be allowed to attend college. Yet her reservations are strangely left dangling, unworthy of consideration. It is as if Cooper were pointing at something of crucial importance, but – just at the last moment –withholding comment. The affair of Powles Hook is hushed up. Even Corny's mother "*had the good sense to be silent.*" As the place and dates of publication of *Satanstoe* (London, June 10, 1845) and "*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*" (London, June 7, 1845) fall so close together [16], it is incumbent upon any researcher to leave no stone unturned, for what is *not* said can serve as the key to unlocking a mystery.

The ambivalence with which Cooper plays with the notion of Powles Hook in *Satanstoe* can only increase the reader's suspicions that it embodies more than meets the eye. First, Cooper tries to reduce the duration of a mother's suffering by asserting that Corny was not required to go to Newark *the whole four years* because the university was removed to Princeton:

"There was usually a little humour, in all Col. Follock said and did, though it must be owned it was humour after a very Dutch model: Dutch-built fun, as

Mr. Worden used to call it. Nevertheless, it was humour, and there was enough of Holland in all the junior generations of the Littlepages, to enjoy it. My father understood him, and my mother did not hear the last of the ‘terrible ferry,’ until not only I, but the college itself, had quitted Newark; for the institution made another remove to Princeton, the place where it is now to be found, some time before I got my degree.”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. II, p. 28

Nine pages later, however, the ploy to reduce her anxiety has already been forgotten, and she does not express her relief that he will no longer have to take the “terrible” ferry until he has actually received his degree:

“As for the Powles Hook Ferry, it was an unpleasant place I will allow; though by the time I was junior I thought nothing of it. My mother, however, was glad when it was passed for the last time. I remember the very first words that escaped her, after she had kissed me on my final return from college, were—
“Well, Heaven be praised, Corny! you will never again have an occasion to cross that frightful ferry, now college is completely done with!”

Ibid., Ch. III, p. 37

Then there is Corny’s tongue-in-cheek remark as to how uninformed his poor mother was—both as regards the dangers he (Corny) was to be subjected to, as well as the relative ease “*in later life*” with which Cornelius Littlepage (alias Cooper) was able to negotiate the passage from Manhattan Island to Powles Hook (which developed into Jersey City). This statement provides a strong hint that Cooper is alluding to the revolution in transportation sparked by Fulton’s American ingenuity and the introduction of Fulton’s new Paulus Hook Steamboat Ferry in 1812, which shortened traveling time from three hours to a mere fifteen to twenty minutes:

“My poor mother little knew how much greater dangers I was subsequently called on to encounter, in another direction. Nor was she minutely accurate in her anticipations, since I have crossed the ferry in question, several times in later life, the distances not appearing as great of late years, as they certainly seemed in my youth.”

Ibid.

When a second steamboat ferry was added in the first half of 1813, and the Powles Hook Ferry Company was renamed later in that year; the two steamboats then in operation were known as the *Jersey* and the *York*. Interestingly, the *Jersey* was the faster of the two. Fulton’s original Paulus Hook steamboat ferry, linking [New] York and [New] Jersey was logically christened the *Jersey*:

“In 1812, the engineer and steamboat developer Robert Fulton, also saw the advantageous location of Paulus Hook for commerce. He started a ferry service between New York and Paulus Hook. His steamboat the *Jersey* took approximately fifteen minutes across the Hudson River.”

[“*Jersey City, Past and Present*”]

(http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/Pages/Paulus_Hook.htm)

“*The Jersey City: Past and Present website is a digital project of New Jersey City University (NJCU) that was designed to inform its viewers in words and images about Jersey City.*” [17]

VIII. THE THRILLING TALE OF A “FLOATING BRIDGE” IN *SATANSTOE*

The hallmark of “*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*” is the masterful heightening of suspense by the anonymous writer. *Satanstoe* also offers a thrilling tale, which would seem at variance with the conflagration of a steamer on Lake Erie, yet which contains elements or motifs not at all foreign to the makeup of “*The Helmsman*.”

The creative imagination of Cooper, the storyteller – in *The Pathfinder, or The Inland Sea*, for instance – had no trouble in “*associating* [such disparate elements as] *seamen and savages, in incidents characteristic of the Great Lakes*” (Preface to *The Pathfinder*). A similar leap of fantasy can be seen in Cooper’s creation of two tales in *Satanstoe* set on the Hudson River, one relating to Corny’s use of the Powles Hook Ferry, created by the hand of man, and one relating to Anneke and Corny’s salvation by means of a “ferry” fashioned by Nature, i.e., by the hand of God.

The tale begins with the idea of an innocent outing by sleigh down the frozen Hudson River from Albany to Kinderhook, and back (a total of forty miles requiring four hours). At Kinderhook a relative would be visited, an excellent dinner enjoyed, friendly conversation and the latest news exchanged, before a moonlight return.

Just as “*The Helmsman*” offers a parenthetical observation on the grandeur of Lake Erie, Cooper injects a generalization regarding American propensities so as to ease the reader into the cliffhanger he is about to spin:

[“*The Helmsman*”] “You know, I dare say, that Erie is one of those sea-lakes for which America is so famous; and as you stand on its shore, and see the green waves dashing in one after another, you might well think you were looking at the green ocean itself.” [18]

[*Satanstoe*, Ch. XV, p. 215] “Every northern American is familiar with the effect that the motion of a sleigh produces on our spirits, under favourable circumstances.”

The rub is Cooper’s sly addition of “favourable circumstances.” Ignoring (or perhaps *due to*) the fact that spring was in the air, young Guert Ten Eyck had set his heart on an outing with Mary Wallace, the woman of his dreams. Corny (Cornelius Littlepage) and Anneke Mordaunt, another amorous couple, were to accompany Guert in his sleigh. After arriving safe and sound in Kinderhook, Corny commented:

“We were all in high spirits; us two young men, so much the more, because each of us fancied he had seen that day, evidence of a tender interest existing in the heart of his mistress towards himself.”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. XV, p. 218

The maxim “Love is blind” may serve, in part, to explain why the warning statement at the beginning of the chapter was not taken more seriously:

“We had reached the 21st of March, a period of the year, when a decided thaw was not only ominous to the sleighing, but when it actually predicted a permanent breaking up of the winter. The season had been late, and it was thought the change could not be distant.”

Ibid., Ch. XV, p. 211

The uneasy awareness of the reader stands in sharp contrast to the relative lack of concern exhibited by the participants of the outing, whose doubts, should they come to the foreground, are quickly dispelled by a confident and convincing Guert. The notion of a sleigh ride down the frozen, yet thawing, Hudson, when all the snow has already melted on the land *and* off the ice on the river, can only arouse suspicions that a tragedy is in the making. Similarly, in “*The Helmsman*,” dramatic irony is effectively employed:

[“*Helmsman*”] “In short, one and all were like men who thought that, let danger come to them when it might, at least it would not be that day.” - Lines 37-40

The outing down the Hudson begins rather late in the morning:

“The clock in the tower of the English church struck ten, as both sleighs drove from Herman Mordaunt’s door.”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. XV, p. 214

The two sleighs, those of Guert and of Herman Mordaunt, Anneke’s father, who had Corny’s friend Dirck Follock (a truncated surname from Van Valkenburgh) and a neighbor, Mrs. Bogart (“*an elderly female connection*”) on board, required only two hours to Kinderhook, where they enjoyed “*dining in a snug Dutch parlour.*” The hostess was “*worthy Mrs. Van der Heyden,*” a cousin of Anneke’s family. Since the hospitality resulting from their unannounced visit was, as to be expected in America, both spontaneous and “*from the heart,*” the guests stayed on longer than originally anticipated:

“As we left the house, I [Corny] remarked that a clock in the passage struck eight [p.m.]”

Satanstoe – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. XV, p. 218

Mrs. Van der Heyden tells Anneke’s father: “*There will be a moon, cousin Herman, and the night will be both light and pleasant.*” As the reader shortly discovers, nothing could be further from the truth.

The first half of the return trip is uneventful: “*An hour went swiftly by, and we had passed Coejeman’s...*” (- an oblique reference to *The Chainbearer*’s Andries Coejeman, whom Cooper would be developing). The focus is now upon Guert’s sleigh, whose bells jingled merrily (but, as will become clear, exhibited a near-fatal flaw in jingling so loud):

“Away we went, Guert’s complicated chimes of bells jingling their merry notes, in a manner to be heard half a mile.”

Ibid., Ch. XV, p. 219

Then a series of warnings occur. A sleigh coming “*quite swiftly*” down the river from the opposite direction, passes the two sleighs driven by Guert and Herman Mordaunt. Indistinct words are shouted in Dutch, which only Guert could be expected to understand. Unfortunately, Guert’s sleigh “*bells made so much noise that it was not easy to understand him*” (i.e., the sleigh-driver’s indistinct message). Herman Mordaunt then has Guert stop and inquires if Guert has understood what was said. To alleviate suspicions that the ice might indeed be breaking up, Guert measures it at eighteen inches. Then two more warnings take place in quick succession: in each instance, a sleigh dashes past our homeward-bound party in the opposite direction; each time, words resembling “*Albany*” and the “*river*” are called out in Dutch, yet the context remains veiled; each time Herman Mordaunt brings the group to a halt and inquires of Guert for an explanation. And then, to confirm the reader’s worst suspicions,

“a sound which resembled that which one might suppose the simultaneous explosion of a thousand rifles would produce, was heard, and caused both drivers to pull up” [Ch. XV, p. 223].

The danger they were in was now undeniable:

“The bank on the west side of the Hudson, was high, at the point where we were, and looking intently at it, I saw by the manner in which the trees disappeared, the more distant behind those that were nearer, that we were actually in motion! An involuntary exclamation caused the whole party to comprehend this startling fact, at the same instant. We were certainly in motion, though very slowly, on the ice of that swollen river, in the quiet and solitude of a night, in which the moon rather aided in making danger apparent, than in assisting us to avoid it!”

Ibid., Ch. XV, p. 224

To complicate matters, the river could throw up ice cakes, one on top of the other, “until walls of twenty, or thirty feet high are formed,” which, in effect, would block further passage by sleigh either up the river, or hinder retreat further down. The islands were too low to offer secure refuge. And, as for the shoreline:

“The banks of the Hudson are generally high and precipitous, and, in some places they are mountainous. No flats worthy of being mentioned occur, until Albany is approached...”

Ibid., Ch. XVI, p. 226

The immediate feeling is that avenues of escape have been blocked off, and our heroes and heroines stand in imminent danger of being trapped. The two sleighs become separated. The element of time, as in “*The Helmsman*,” now becomes crucial. Somehow, the saving shore must be reached:

We heard the bells of Herman Mordaunt’s sleigh, on the other side of the barrier, **but could see nothing** [my emphasis]. The broken cakes, pressed upon by millions of tons’ weight above, had risen fully ten feet, into an inclination that was nearly perpendicular, rendering crossing it next to impossible even to one afoot. Then came Herman Mordaunt’s voice, filled with paternal agony, and human grief, to increase the awe of that dreadful moment!

“Shore! – Shore! –” he shouted, or rather yelled – “In the name of righteous providence, to the shore, Guert!”

Ibid., Ch. XVI, p. 229

In “*The Helmsman*,” the “dense smoke” cuts Maynard off from the crew and passengers. There is only the short dialogue with the captain, who is also unable to see his helmsman due to the smoke, and the reference to “*the last sounds he [Maynard] heard.*” As Corny puts it, “*We felt as if we were cut off from the rest of our species*” (Ch. XVI, p. 229).

In “*The Helmsman*,” the captain tells John Maynard, “*We must go ashore anywhere*” [line 116]. Herman Mordaunt gives Guert Ten Eyck the same order.

After Guert and Corny survey the “lay of the land,” (and the movement of the river), they return to the island where the young ladies were left on “terra firma,” only to discover that cakes of ice have moved in and the girls are gone! Mary Wallace is found hiding behind a tree. She and Guert set out to reach the shore on foot. Corny, in sheer desperation, seeks

Anneke in the sleigh, which she was fearful of abandoning. He finds her in the sleigh (doing what John Maynard had told the women passengers on the *Jersey* to do) — *praying*:

“She [=Anneke] was on her knees: the precious creature was asking succour from God!” *Ibid.*, Ch. XVI, p. 236

Thereupon, the two of them set out together to reach “*the saving shore*.”

In “*The Helmsman*,” the third-person narrator is far from omniscient. When considering how John Maynard died, he can only speculate that Maynard *may have* “lost his footing in endeavoring to come forward and fell overboard.” The first-person narrator of *Satanstoe*, Corny Littlepage, relates how Anneke and he himself were able to make it over the slippery cakes of ice:

“Fortunately, I wore buckskin moccasins, over my boots, and their rough leather aided me greatly in maintaining my footing. Anneke, too, had socks of cloth, without which I do not think she could have possibly moved.”

Ibid., Ch. XVII, p. 241

In “*The Helmsman*,” the captain asks Maynard [lines 146-147], “*Could you hold on five minutes longer?*” Five minutes was the time required to reach the shore. In *Satanstoe*, Corny notes in retrospect,

“Five minutes longer on the ice of the main channel, and we should have been swept away.” *Ibid.*, Ch. XVII, p. 240

The race against time, here measured in segments of *five minutes*, spells out life or death. But the ultimate question was *how* Corny and Anneke were able to save themselves:

“I tremble, even at this distance of time, as I write the particulars. A small cake of ice was floating in between us and that which lay firmly fastened to the shore. Its size was such as to allow it to pass between the two, though not without coming nearly, if not absolutely in contact with one, if not with both. I observed all this, and saying one word of encouragement to Anneke, I passed an arm around her waist, waited the proper moment, and sprang forward. It was necessary to make a short leap, with my precious burthen on my arm, in order to gain *this floating bridge* [my emphasis]; but it was done and successfully. Scarcely permitting Anneke’s foot to touch this frail support, which was already sinking under our joint weight, I crossed it at two or three steps, and threw all my power into a last and desperate effort. I succeeded, here also, and fell upon the firmer cake, with a heart filled with gratitude to God.”

Ibid., Ch. XVII, p. 244

As it turns out, *everyone is saved*. At the end of the novel, young Guert, the “helmsman” taking orders from the “captain,” Herman Mordaunt, will die the death of Andries, the Chainbearer, and John Maynard: a slow death, in agony, but with Mary Wallace providing Guert Christian support and her own love during his final hours. [19]

But what, exactly, saves Corny and Anneke? Cooper terms it “*this floating bridge*.” This was the precise formulation used in 1812 newspapers to describe Fulton’s Paulus-Hook Steam Ferry Boat [20]:

The “*floating bridge*,” the sobriquet of the *Jersey*, transformed by Cooper’s poetic imagination into a ferry made of ice, which enables Corny to cross the Hudson with Anneke, thus saving the life of the woman he will later wed! [21]

Although Cooper’s “Thrilling Tale on the Frozen Hudson” may, at first glance, hardly seem to reveal features in common with the conflagration of the *Jersey* on the Erie, yet an amazing number of elements are present – “ingredients,” if you will – which could well have been used in creating John Maynard. In brief, the uncanny parallels included the following: a disaster while travelling, though not on a lake, but a river; not fire, but ice, is the life-threatening element; the need to reach the “*saving shore*”; the sense of being “*cut off*” from one’s fellow man; the suspense created by dramatic irony intensified by repeated unheeded warnings and, finally, by a race against time; the happy fact that everyone was saved, though Guert, the “*helmsman*,” [22] or guide, during the outing, later dies an untimely death; the importance of prayer and of gratitude to God, and – finally – the “*floating bridge*,” the accolade of newspapers applied to the *Jersey*.

IX. “A MULTITUDE OF ASSOCIATIONS” [23]

What better name than the *Jersey* for Cooper, looking back upon his youth from the perspective of *Satanstoe*! – A steamer named the *Jersey*, a boat made possible by Fulton’s American genius; a boat that, from the perspective of *Satanstoe*, would have spared Corny’s mother sleepless nights and young Cooper, when viewed within the fictional time frame of a writer playing the devil’s advocate, the taint of college expulsion; and, just for good measure, a “*floating bridge*” that would serve to rescue Anneke and ensure Corny’s future happiness. Moreover, for the historian of maritime progress, the *Jersey* opened the gateway to Jersey City and the very beginnings of American steamboat construction leading to the Age of the Steamboat. But even Burlington, Cooper’s birthplace, could hold her head up high. To quote from *The Encyclopedia of New Jersey*:

“John Fitch launched the first successful steamboat from Burlington in 1788, nineteen years before Robert Fulton.” - *ENJ*, “Burlington City:” p. 105, c. 2

Thus have we come full circle. [24] The geography of New Jersey was always in the back of Cooper’s mind and flashed into his novels with a symbolism of striking diversity and intensity. That geography was, to Cooper, *native soil* and, consequently, an abiding source of pride.

The geography of New Jersey runs like a silver thread throughout Cooper’s works. That the celebrated *Jersey* [25] of 1812 should be the steamer of the legendary John Maynard on Lake Erie tells us in advance that *this vessel*, even when ablaze – or, as the playful devil with the “*inverted toe*” will have it in *Satanstoe*, turned “*upside-down*” in Cooper’s creative imagination into a floating cake of ice – *will always touch an American shore*.

For Jersey, in the mind of Cooper, the author, social critic, and naval historian, was always *where America began*. The “*saving shore and safe anchorage*” were always a part of Jersey, a haven of American values and traditions Cooper held sacred.[26] What did the *Jersey* mean? Surely it meant *HOMEWARD BOUND*.

COOPER EDITIONS & ABBREVIATIONS:

Cooper Editions Consulted in This Article:

The Pathfinder or The Inland Sea. Edited with an Historical introduction by **Richard Dilworth Rust.** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

The Pioneers or the Sources of the Susquehanna; A Descriptive Tale. Edited with an Historical Introduction and Explanatory Notes by James Franklin Beard. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980).

The Last of the Mohicans; A Narrative of 1757. Edited with an Historical Introduction and Explanatory Notes by **James Franklin Beard.** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

Gleanings in Europe: France. Edited, with an Historical Introduction and Explanatory Notes by **Thomas Philbrick.** (Albany: State University of New York Press [=SUNY], 1983)

Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts: A Tale of a Colony. Historical Introduction by **Kay Seymour House;** text established by **Kay Seymour House and Constance Ayers Denne.** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

Afloat and Ashore, or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford. Edited, with an Historical Introduction by **Thomas Philbrick and Marianne Philbrick** (New York, AMS Studies in the Nineteenth Century, No. 31, Parts I & II, 2004.)

Ned Myers; or, a Life before the Mast. Historical Introduction by **William S. Dudley and Hugh Egan.** Text edited by **Karen Lentz Madison and R. D. Madison.** (New York: AMS Studies in the Nineteenth Century, No. 37, 2009).

The Chainbearer. Or, The Littlepage Manuscripts. (Kindle digital version), Lance Schachterle and James P. Elliott, Editors (SUNY Press, Albany, N.Y., 2020).

Responsible for the “Historical Introduction:” Lance Schachterle (“the novel’s inception and printing”), Wesley T. Mott (“reviews for *Chainbearer*”), and John P. McWilliams (“anti-rent controversies”) — Cf. “Acknowledgements,” p. 8, Position 73. “Explanatory Notes” by Lance Schachterle.

ENJ *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*, edited by Maxine N. Lurie and Marc Mappen (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004, Third Printing 2005).

LJ *Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. **James Franklin Beard**, 6 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960-1968).

Mich **University of Michigan Historical Reprint Series**

ANNOTATIONS:

- 1) **Wayne Franklin**, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), note 13, pp. 524-525.
- 2) Only in 1800 did Congress relocate from Philadelphia to the new national capital in Washington, D.C.
- 3) **James Fenimore Cooper**, *Ned Myers; or, a Life before the Mast*. Historical Introduction by **William S. Dudley and Hugh Egan**. Text edited by **Karen Lentz Madison and R. D. Madison**. (New York: AMS Studies in the Nineteenth Century, No. 37, 2009), “*Historical Introduction*” by **William S. Dudley**, Pt. I., p. xiv.

Capt. James Lawrence is often remembered for his exhortation in the War of 1812: “*Don’t give up the ship.*” Even Cooper, an impartial historian, may have been galled that Oliver Hazard Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie (1813) had failed to heed Lawrence’s command and even rubbed salt in the wound by abandoning the very flagship that bore his old commander’s name: the *Lawrence*.

- 4) There is indeed, as the “decaying” Mr. How pointed out, a Cooperstown, New Jersey, only a short distance from Burlington. In Cooper’s letter to Isaac Mickle of **Dec. 6th, 1844**, **LJ**, vol. IV, p. 499, we find that the name “Cooperstown” (New Jersey!) was definitely not restricted to New York:

“There are two hamlets that are called Cooperstown at no great distance from you, I believe—one the property of Isaac Cooper, who inherited his father Marmaduke Cooper’s large fortune; and the other once belonged to my father, whence its name. I certainly was not born in it, however, nor do I remember ever to have seen it, though I may have passed through it when a boy. I cannot be mistaken as to the place of my birth, as my mother often pointed it out to me when a school-boy in Burlington, and it was often mentioned in family discussions.”

Cf. **Alan Taylor**, *William Cooper’s Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* ((New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 18:

“About 1778 the Coopers moved to Willingboro and began to draw upon the Fenimore estate. Apparently mollified, Richard Fenimore seems to have given William Cooper at least 168 acres at a crossroads three miles southwest of Burlington City. Rather than farm the land or set up there as a wheelwright, William Cooper established a store and probably a tavern and developed a small commercial hamlet of a dozen buildings that he dubbed Coopertown [*sic*] – a little forerunner of his New York venture.”

- 5) The **CE, K, M, and P Editions** of *The Chainbearer*:

- i) [**CE**]: **Cooper Edition / Kindle digital version**, Lance Schachterle and James P. Elliott, Editors (SUNY Press, Albany, N.Y., 2020). Responsible for the “Historical Introduction.” Lance Schachterle (“the novel’s inception and

printing”), Wesley T. Mott (“reviews for *Chainbearer*”), and John P. McWilliams (“anti-rent controversies”) — Cf. CE: “Acknowledgements,” p. 8, Position 73. “Explanatory Notes” by Lance Schachterle.

ii) [K] : **Kessinger Publishing’s Rare Reprints**, vol. 1 & 2: No data on which edition was used. Vol. I: pp. 1-189 [Preface + Ch. I – XV]; Vol. II: pp. 1-203 [Ch. I- XV]. Cf. vol. 2, Ch. XII, p. 155.

iii) [M] : **The Michigan Historical Reprint Series Edition**: Reprint of (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1872), *preface* pp. iii-vi, *text* pp. 7 – 438 [Ch. I-XXX] . Cf. Ch. XXVII, p. 384

iv) [P] : **President Edition** in *The Complete Works of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: President Publishing Company, no date of publication), *preface* pp. iii-vi, *text* pp. 1 – 469 [Ch. I-XXX]. Cf. Ch. XXVII, p. 411.

- 6) “The Threshold of the Country” is from Cooper’s Preface to *Homeward Bound*, p. 2. The reference is to Sandy Hook. “Visions of Navesink” is my own variation of Walt Whitman’s “Fancies at Navesink,” the title he selected for a group of poems in *Leaves of Grass*. Interestingly, Whitman, in his poems “Fancies at Navesink,” made no allusion of the fact that Navesink was also of importance to seamen seeking the North American coast.
- 7) In a letter written to his wife in 1840, Cooper recalled their return from Europe in 1833, when their ship anchored at Sandy Hook:

U.S. Ship: Macedonian, Sandy Hook, Oct. 17th ‘40
My dearest wife,

Here we are, at last, at anchor about a cable’s length from the spot where we anchored in ’33. The wind is light at the Eastward and it is questionable if we get to sea even to-night. We shall try, nevertheless, and I still hope to be in Philadelphia by the twentyeth. - LJ, vol. IV, p. 92 (Letter 598. *To Mrs. Cooper*).

- 8) The list of sources should only serve the purpose of providing an inkling as to the *extent* of Cooper’s use of “*Jersey*” in his writings. It by no means claims to be complete.

If the New Jersey Palisades were included in this list, it would begin with Cooper’s first great success, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (cf. The Michigan Historical Reprint Series, Ch. XXXII, pp. 507-508), published in December 1821:

“Emerging from these confused piles, the river [=the Hudson], as if rejoicing at its release from the struggle, expanded into a wide bay, which was ornamented by a few fertile and low points that jutted humbly into its broad basin. On the opposite or western shore, the rocks of Jersey were gathered into an array that has obtained for them the name of the “*palisadoes*,” elevating themselves for many hundred feet, as if to protect the rich country in their rear from the inroads of the conqueror....”

For individual quotations dealing with Jersey, cf. Norman Barry, “A Language Comparison of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper and ‘*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*,’” Entry #12, “Jersey”, pp. 69-94:

<http://johnmaynard.net/COOPER.pdf>

9) That Cooper was well-acquainted with Westchester County can be seen in the following passage:

“He [=William Jay, the youngest son of the Governor] was at Yale with me, and he now lives in West-Chester, in which County my wife has some property, and where I have frequently resided.” *LJ*, vol. II, p. 155

[Cooper’s letter to William Buell Sprague, written from Paris, Nov. 15th, 1831].

10) Cf. *Satanstoe* – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Illustrations, Plate II, p. 122, “Matlack’s map of Westchester county and the setting of the early chapters,” from a manuscript entitled “*The Cooper Maps*,” Drawn by T. Chalkley Matlack (1911-1913).

11) Cf. *Afloat and Ashore or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford* – Cooper Edition/AMS, Pt. I, Ch. XIX, p. 290. Also, Explanatory Notes, 290.16, p. 524:

“the old *Jersey*: Commissioned as a fourth-rate line-of-battle-ship in 1736, the *Jersey* in 1778, by then a rotting hulk, was towed into Wallabout Bay on the later site of the Brooklyn Navy Yard to house American prisoners of war during the Revolution. She was abandoned by the British at the evacuation of New York after thousands of prisoners had perished on board her from disease, exposure, and malnutrition!”

12) “Tobb’s Ferry” is not a misprint but the Dutch-American vernacular of Colonel Follock, whose actual name was Abraham Van Valkenburgh (*Satanstoe* – Cooper Edition/SUNY, p. 23). In Explanatory Notes (*ibid.*, p. 444, note 27.3), we are told: “Tobb’s Ferry: dialect for Dobbs’ Ferry, the first ferry service on the Hudson River, initiated by Jeremiah Dobbs in 1698.” What is not mentioned is that Cooper’s “Dobb’s” should read “Dobbs’.” Just as Mark Twain delighted in reproducing American vernacular along the Mississippi, Cooper, decades earlier, had already integrated into his works the American vernacular of those of the Dutch-speaking population in New York, a vernacular that has since disappeared.

13) James Fenimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: France* – Cooper Edition. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), Letter XXIII, p. 274.

14) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (originally published in 1823) in *Leatherstocking Tales*, vol. I (New York: Library of America, 1985), Chapter XXIV, p. 270; Cooper Edition/SUNY: p. 268.

In *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* - Cooper Edition, Letter XV, p. 130, there is the following reference:

“The path conducted us to the Sibyl’s Cave, a long narrow cavern cut in the rocks, beneath the palaces and villas, and which leads to nothing. These cuttings are curious as connected with the religious rites of antiquity, and Virgil probably had an eye to them in his descent to the nether world. We found a Styx within them, and seeing no Charon, but one who offered to carry us on his shoulders, we returned to try another route.”

The notion of connecting Charon with Cooper was also aided by the following passage from Washington's Irving's delightful *A History of New York*. Here again, the devil is still up to mischief – as can be seen in Antony's progeny!

It was a dark and stormy night when the good Antony arrived at the famous creek (sagely denominated *Haerlem River*) which separates the island of Manna-hata from the mainland. The wind was high, the elements were in an uproar, and no Charon could be found to ferry the adventurous sounder of brass across the water. For a short time, he vaped like an impatient ghost upon the brink, and then bethinking himself of the urgency of his errand, took a hearty embrace of his stone bottle, swore most valorously that he would swim across en spijt den Duyvel and daringly plunged into the stream. – Luckless Antony! scarce had he buffeted halfway over when he was observed to struggle violently, as if battling with the spirit of the waters – instinctively he put his trumpet to his mouth and giving a vehement blast – sunk forever to the bottom!

The potent clangor of his trumpet, like the ivory horn of the renowned Paladin Orlando when expiring in the glorious field of Roncesvalles, rung far and wide through the country, alarming the neighbors round, who hurried in amazement to the spot – Here an old Dutch burgher, famed for his veracity, and who had been a witness of the fact, related to them the melancholy affair; with the fearful addition (to which I am slow of giving belief) that he saw the duyvel, in the shape of a huge mossbunker, seize the sturdy Antony by the leg and drag him beneath the waves. Certain it is, the place, with the adjoining promontory which projects into the Hudson, has been called Spijt den duyvel, —or Spiking Devil, ever since – the restless ghost of the unfortunate Antony still haunts the surrounding solitudes, and his trumpet has often been heard by the neighbors, of a stormy night, mingling with the howling of the blast. Nobody ever attempts to swim over the creek after dark; on the contrary, a bridge has been built to guard against such melancholy accidents in future – and as to mossbunkers, they are held in such abhorrence that no true Dutchman will admit them to his table who loves good fish and hates the devil.

Such was the end of Antony Van Corlear – a man deserving of a better fate. He lived roundly and soundly, like a true and jolly bachelor, until the day of his death; but though he was never married, yet did he leave behind some two or three dozen children in different parts of the country – fine chubby, brawling, flatulent little urchins, from whom, if legends speak true (and they are not apt to lie), did descend the innumerable race of editors who people and defend this country and who are bountifully paid by the people for keeping up a constant alarm – and making them miserable. Would that they inherited the worth, as they do the wind, of their renowned progenitor!

Washington Irving [1783-1859], *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* [publ. 1809], Bk. 7, Ch. 7, pp. 332-333;

Library of America (N.Y.: 1983): *Washington Irving: History, Tales and Sketches*, pp. 708-709.

15) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Heidenmauer; or, The Benedictines. A Legend of the Rhine* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868 reprint), "Introduction," p. viii; reprinted in the Michigan Historical Reprint Series.

16) Cf. a) Norman Barry, "Sensational Discovery: 'The Helmsman of Lake Erie' First Printed in Britain." Online: <https://johnmaynard.net/CofEDiscovery.pdf>

b) Cf. b) Norman Barry, “Two Transatlantic Passages: The Convoluted Path of ‘The Helmsman of Lake Erie’ to Poughkeepsie; Or, How to Hide (and Smuggle) a Manuscript.” Online: https://johnmaynard.net/COOPER_HELMSMAN.pdf under “Norman’s Cooper Corner.”

Due to Cooper’s lengthy contact with his London publisher Richard Bentley (beginning in the early 1830’s), publication in England hardly constituted a problem and ensured his anonymity. It will be noted that when the final part of *Satanstoe* was dispatched to Bentley by steamer to England on May 16, a “stowaway” manuscript of “*The Helmsman of Lake Erie*” could easily have been “smuggled” on board.

17) Cf. Arthur G. Adams, *The Hudson through the Years* (New York City: Fordham Univ. Press, 1996), p. 51:

“Also, in 1814, Robert Fulton, and his brother-in-law, William Cutting, established the New York & Brooklyn Steamboat Ferry Association to operate from Beekman’s Slip Manhattan (now the foot of Fulton Street) to Brooklyn. The first boat on this run was the *Nassau*. The *Jersey* had meanwhile been joined by the *York* on the Powles Hook line.”

Cf. *ENJ*, p. 776, c. 2, “steamboats:”

“By the end of 1812, there were six steam-powered vessels in service that enjoyed monopoly protection; *Claremont* and three others operating up and down the Hudson; *Jersey* was engaged in trans-Hudson ferry service; and a vessel called Raritan was operating on the Raritan River.”

Cf. *ENJ*, p. 270, c. 2, “ferryboats:”

“The needs of commerce dictate that people and goods must often get from one side of a river to the other. The first ferry leases in New Jersey date to colonial times, but until sailing vessels were replaced by mechanically powered ferries in the early years of the nineteenth century, crossing the Hudson River or the Delaware was, quite literally, at the whim of the wind. The first steam-powered ferry to cross the Hudson was John Stevens’s *Juliana* in 1804. A more robust Stevens vessel, the *Phoenix*, followed in 1808. Then, in 1812, a ferryboat by the name of the *Jersey* began operating between Manhattan and New Jersey. *Jersey* was built by Robert Fulton and, because of a monopoly that New York State had awarded to Fulton’s business associate, Robert Livingston, it prevented others, such as Stevens, from operating steam-powered ferries on the Hudson.”

18) A singular example that presages the parenthetical comment in “*The Helmsman*” [lines 3-9] is, as one might expect, to be found in *The Pathfinder, or The Inland Sea*, published in 1840. Here, the expression “*you must know*” has the same import as “*you know, I dare say*:”

“These great lakes, *you must know* [my emphasis], make a chain, the water passing out of one into the other, until it reaches Erie, which is a sheet off here to the westward, as large as Ontario itself. Well, out of Erie the water comes, until it reaches a low mountain like, over the edge of which it

passes.” *The Pathfinder*, Library of America, *Leatherstocking Tales*, vol. II: Ch. XII, p. 185; Cooper Edition/SUNY: p. 179.

19) Guert’s slow death later in the novel may be seen as a prelude to Andries Coejeman’s in *The Chainbearer*, published in November of the same year.

20) Cf. p. 15 of this article, *Charleston Courier*, August 6, 1812, and APPENDIX, 3rd entry, *Republican Star or Eastern Shore General Advertiser*, July 28, 1812.

21) As Corny himself related, as a man he could easily leap the distance of six or eight feet and save himself, but for Anneke such a leap would have been impossible. Anneke understood her situation and even begged Corny to save his own life, a request Corny could hardly entertain:

“You see how it is, Corny; I am not permitted to escape; but you can easily reach the shore. Go then, and leave me in the hands of Providence. Go; I never can forget what you have already done; but it is useless to perish together!” (*Satanstoe*, Ch. XVII, p. 243)

22) Guert and Mary Wallace arrived in Albany that very night. Guert’s “helmsman” role and the use of a “ferry” are alluded to in the following passage:

“About midnight they reached the ferry opposite to the town [=Albany], having walked quite six miles, filled with uneasiness on account of those who had been left behind. Guert was a man of decision, and he wisely determined it would be better to proceed, than to attempt waking up the inmates of any of the houses they passed. The river was now substantially free from ice, though running with great velocity. But Guert was an expert oarsman, and finding a skiff, he persuaded Mary Wallace to enter it, actually succeeding, by means of the eddies, in landing her within ten feet of the very spot where the hand sled had deposited him and myself, only a few days before. From this point, there was no difficulty in walking home, and Miss Wallace actually slept in her own bed, that eventful night; if, indeed, she *could* sleep.”
(*Satanstoe*, Ch. XVII, p. 249)

23) Even when in Paris, Cooper could reminisce on his youth and the places he loved. One of his favourite places was Albany, situated on the magnificent Hudson. Yet the “multitude of associations” which Albany invoked need not be limited to Albany. It is a hallmark of Cooper’s poetic genius that he was capable of reworking and weaving those fundamental events in his life which, viewed “geographically,” may properly be termed “landmark,” into his works:

“Still later, Albany was, to me, a town of excellent social feeling and friendly connexions. I could not visit my own County without passing it, and I always entered it with pleasure, and left it with regret. My father died in Albany, at the inn of Stewart Lewis, in 1809, and my eldest brother Richard Fenimore Cooper, in his own house. So you see, dear Sir, that Albany is a name I love for *a multitude of associations that are connected with my earliest years*” [my emphasis]. (LJ, Vol. II, p. 155, Letter #240. To William Buell Sprague, from Paris, Nov. 15th, 1831)

24) To round off the “full circle,” mention should be made of the comparison Cooper makes in *The Pathfinder: or, The Inland Sea* (Library of America, *The Leatherstocking Tales*, Vol. II, Ch. XII, p. 180; Cooper Edition/SUNY: p. 174):

“All d——d poetry! One may call a bubble a ripple, if he will, and washing decks a surf, but Lake Ontario is no more the Atlantic than a Powles Hook periagua is a first rate.”

The elderly and rather dogmatic mariner, Uncle Cap, cannot believe that there is even such a thing as an *inland* sea, and, to make matters even more ludicrous, the notion of a *fresh-water* sea is, to him, inconceivable. His fundamental rejection of fresh-water navigators of the Great Lakes as inferior to any who have plied the Atlantic Ocean runs like a silver thread through the novel. It may safely be assumed that Cooper sides with the Pathfinder and young Jasper in their positive regard for the “sea-lakes.” In this sense, a “steamboat ferry” from Powles Hook (obviously no longer a mere periagua*) might indeed contend with a “first rate” in a work of fiction:

“It may strike the novice as an anachronism, to place vessels on Ontario in the middle of the eighteenth century; but, in this particular, facts will fully bear out all the license of the fiction. Although the precise vessels mentioned in these pages may never have existed on water, or anywhere else, others so nearly resembling them as to form a sufficient authority for their introduction into a work of fiction, are known to have navigated that inland sea, even at a period much earlier than the one just mentioned.” (*Ibid.*, *The Pathfinder*, “Preface,” p. 3 & again on p. 7)

* The Notes at the end of The Library of America edition, vol. II, (pp. 1049-1050) provide the following interpretation of “periagua” and “first rate”: “A piragua (or, in the French adaptation from the Spanish, pirogue) was a dugout canoe used by the Caribs in British Guiana. A ‘first-rate’ is a warship deemed superior in size and armament.”

Although no doubt the original meaning of a periagua (also spelled piragua) is provided, this hardly fits the context of a Powles Hook ferry before the introduction of the steam engine.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s second entry is more appropriate: “An open flat-bottomed schooner-rigged vessel; a sort of two-masted sailing barge, used in America and the W. Indies.”

A quote from 1744 [F. MOORE, *Voy. Georgia* 49] provides a description that fits an 18th-century Powles Hook periagua ferry, which was obviously not a dugout canoe:

“These Periaguas are long flat-bottom’d Boats, carrying from 25 to 30 tons. They have a kind of a Forecastle and a Cabbin; but the rest is open, and no Deck. They have two Masts and Sails like Schooners. They row generally with two Oars only.”

25) That the *Jersey* was indeed *celebrated* as a triumph of American ingenuity can be seen in the APPENDIX, entries #1, #2, #3, #5, and #6.

26) As early as America’s first bestseller, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (published in 1821), Cooper can point out that the Jerseys were secure in the hands of American soldiers:

“It was at the close of a stormy day in the month of September, that a large assemblage of officers was collected near the door of a building, that was situated *in the heart* [my emphasis] of the American troops, who held the Jerseys.”
The Spy – Mich, Ch. XXXIV, p. 535

In this hallowed setting, General George Washington receives Harvey Birch, “the **SPY OF THE NEUTRAL GROUND**, who died as he had lived, devoted to his country, and a martyr to her liberties” [*The Spy – Mich*, the concluding sentence of the novel].

APPENDIX

(Punctuation and spelling have not been revised.)

A CHRONOLOGY OF ROBERT FULTON’S POWLES HOOK STEAMBOAT FERRY THE *JERSEY* BETWEEN 1812 AND 1818

1) We have the satisfaction to announce to the public, that on Thursday next, the large and commodious steamboat will be put in operation as a FERRY BOAT over the Hudson river, from the city of Jersey to the city of New-York. No expence has been spared to render her complete for the intended purpose. From the experiments made with her, there is no doubt she will answer the most sanguine expectations of the public, and do honour to the inventor Mr. Fulton. Carriages of all kinds may drive immediately in and out of her, as if on a bridge.— Those people who wish to attend the market may calculate to a minute at what hour they may be in the city, and may cross in the Steam-Boat with a two-horse waggon loaded, for fifty cents. The crossing the North River has been much an obstacle to the public, that it is really a matter of congratulation that these difficulties are removed—and that the most timid may cross the river without fear.

The Sentinel of Freedom (New Jersey), June 30, 1812, vol. XVI, no. 41, p. 3

2) We understand, and it is with pleasure we inform the public, that on the large and commodious Steam-boat, which has been for some time erecting in this city by Mr. Fulton as a Ferry Boat to ply between this city and the city of Jersey, will be in full operation on Thursday next; that from the experiments already made, she will answer the expectations of the public, and will not on an average be more than from fifteen to eighteen minutes in crossing. She is so large and convenient, that carriages of all descriptions may drive in and out of her as if on a bridge.

The crossing the North River has been such an obstacle to the communication with this city, that it is a matter of real congratulation to the public that their difficulties are removed. The most timid may now cross without fear. No expence in the erection of the boat has been spared to render her both safe and complete, and it is confidently hoped that she will not only give universal satisfaction to the public, but be an honour to Mr. Fulton, the inventor.

As the fare of a market waggon loaded, will be but fifty cents, there is no doubt but our markets will be better supplied than ever they have been.

We are informed that the road from Jersey to Newark is in excellent order, and that every gentleman who wishes to take a ride in the country on the 4th of July, will find that his pleasures are not abridged by either Ferry or Road.

It has also been said that capt. Bocatur of Newark, is on the 4th of July to leave that place with his Light Horse Company, with a field piece, cross the River in the Steam Boat, without dismounting, and after being reviewed by his Excellency Brigadier General Bloomfield, return in the same order.—*Mer. Adv.*

New-York Spectator, Wednesday, July 1, 1812, vol. 15, no. 1492, p. 3, c. 3

3) *Fulton’s Steam Ferry Boat*. This excellent machine consisting of a boat of two hulls, connected by a single platform, with a wheel in the space between them, and rudder at each end, built for the conveyance of passengers across the Hudson between this City and the City of Jersey, has got into successful operation, and promises extraordinary facilities for

travelling. Horses and waggons stand on each side of the machinery, driving in it at one end from a *floating bridge* [my emphasis] fitted to the boat, and out the other, without rising or descending six inches in accomplishing the passage from street to street on each side of the river. The boat is constructed with both ends alike, and never turns in sailing, but goes back and forth by changing the motion of the wheel. On Saturday the corps of Flying Artillery crossed in the boat from Paulus Hook to this City, on its way to Albany, at four trips, on the first of which it brought 4 pieces of artillery (6 pounders) and limber[?] 4 ammunition waggons, 27 horses, and 40 soldiers, besides other passengers. *New York Columbian Republican Star or Eastern Shore General Advertiser* (Easton, Maryland), Tuesday Morning, July 28, 1812, vol. X, no. 13, p. 3, c. 1

4) *New-York and Jersey Steam-Boat*
NOTICE is hereby given, that the Steam-Boat, plying between the cities of N. York and Jersey, will not ply on Tuesday next, it being then to be cleaned. O2
 [New-York Gazette & General Advertiser, October 2, 1812, p. 2]

5) FROM THE LONG ISLAND STAR.
STEAM BOATS.

MR. EDITOR;

Permit a correspondent who views with patriotic pride every advancement in the useful arts, and particularly such as shed a lustre on the American character, to give a short outline of the progress of *Steam-Boat navigation* in our country. It is to Messrs. Livingston and Fulton the public are indebted for this most certain, expeditious, and agreeable mode of travelling by water.

The Steam-Boats which go between New-York and Albany, are not less the admiration of the enlightened foreigner, than of our own countrymen. To see a magnificent vessel, replete with the most sumptuous accommodations, rapidly moving on an even keel, in opposition to wind and tide, may well excite our admiration. But the internal regulations—the system of police, and order, by which the whole of this establishment is governed, is also such as to command attention. There are three apartments, large and commodious—one for ladies—the second for gentlemen, and the third is a privileged apartment where gentlemen may smoke, play, &c. which is not permitted in the other apartments. There is a code of regulations, conspicuously posted, relating to order and cleanliness, and the non-observance is often a source of pleasant litigation.

Here is almost every necessary attendance, and every requisite refreshment usually found in a well regulated hotel. The officers and servants of the several boats appear to have been selected with a particular view to those qualifications in the disposition which are calculated to render all around them agreeable. The table abounds with the luxuries of our country, and the bar affords all which can be desired. There are generally about 80, and often 120 dining at one time in the gentlemen's apartment. The births [sic] are fitted in a style of convenience and elegance; and sliding curtains are so attached that a person may retire at any time, without being exposed to others in the room.

The manner of landing passengers, at, and receiving others from the different towns on the Hudson River, is deserving of notice.—The time of her passing the village may be known almost to exactness, and passengers assemble accordingly to go on board. If in the day time, she may be seen, and if in the night a horn is blown on board, and lights are also affixed to announce her approach. A boat then puts off from the shore, and another from the Steam-boat, and with admirable celerity.

Passage Boats of a similar description are multiplying fast in the United States. There are several from New York to New Jersey; and one which crosses the ferry at Paulus Hook, is well adapted for the purposes to which it is applied. It crosses in from 15 to 20 minutes—is so constructed as to go with either end foremost, and consequently carriages, are but little

more incommoded than in passing a bridge. It is understood that similar boats are to be built for Brooklyn ferry.

Whoever duly considers the origin and progress of Steam-Boats, cannot but consider them a proud advancement in American refinement. Already do they traverse Lake Champlain into Canada on the north, and between New Orleans and Natches on the south. And when in future years *canals* shall unite our great navigable waters, we may anticipate that Steam Boats will bear the luxurious products of distant lands into the interior of this vast continent.

TRAVELLER.

Long Island, Nov. 1812.

Poulson's American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia),
Nov. 20, 1812, vol. XLI, no. 11,230, p. 3, c. 3

6) *Paulus' Hook ferry Steam Boat.* — Yesterday upwards of twenty waggons loaded with produce, from Pennsylvania and New-Jersey, came across the Hudson to this city, in Mr. Fulton's Steam Boat, within 5 minutes as quick, just as conveniently, and quite as safely as they could have done on a bridge. These are not the first which have come in this way to our market. And thus we perceive in some measure a new avenue opened to the city, and another channel for business and prosperity added to this metropolis by the enterprize and genius of a mechanician, to whom the country is indebted for the most useful improvement the last century has produced.

N.Y. Paper.

The Enquirer (Richmond Virginia), Tuesday, **January 26, 1813**, vol. 9, no. 83, p. 3, c. 2.

7) NEW-YORK STEAM-BOATS.

Three ply to Albany,

One to Amboy,

One to Tappan,

Two ferry boats to Powles Hook, and

One to Hoboken,

And sometimes Gov. Ogden's from Elizabethtown, pays us a visit. Captain Bunker's boat for New-Haven is rapidly finishing, And one is built and intended for Brooklyn ferry. We are getting into the steam-boat age.

Columbian Register (New-Haven), Tuesday, **June 1, 1813**, vol. 1, no. 27, p. 4.

8) “**NOTICE**—The Steam Boat Ferry company who are the present proprietors of the ferry, usually known by the name of the Powles Hook Ferry, give notice, that they intend to apply to the legislature of New-York, at their next session, for an act to incorporate the company by the name of the *York and Jersey Steam Boat Ferry Company*. New York, 16th Nov. 1813.

By order of the board of Directors

ELISHA BOUDINOT, President.

Nov. 16 d6w

[*New-York Evening Post*, Wednesday, **November 17, 1813**, p. 2]

9) Yesterday forenoon a very severe storm of snow, hail and rain commenced, varying from N.E. to E. Its extreme severity being experienced even in this city, there is reason to fear that seamen on our coast have suffered to a serious degree, where the violence of the gale has probably been more to the eastward.

The Steam Ferry-boat *Jersey*, coming from Powles-Hook, loaded with numerous carriages, part of which were to be shipped on board the brig Eliza, for Savannah, was driven by the violence of the gale to leeward, and was last seen in the narrows, drifting at the mercy of the wind and waves, with injury, it was supposed to some part of her machinery. The reasonable

apprehension is, at least, she must, ere this, have gone ashore on the Jersey side, somewhere within Sandy Hook.

New-York Gazette, February 4.

[*City Gazette & Commercial Daily Advertiser*, February 14, 1818, vol. 38, no. 12,135, p. 2, c. 3]

10) Is it only coincidence that the *Erie* and the *Jersey* interacted in 1818 and 1845?

NEW YORK, Feb. 4

The pilot-boat *Erie* sailed yesterday morning, before the violence of the gale, for Sandy Hook; but by the time she reached the Tail of the West Bank, the strength of the gale induced her to return; and at half past one o'clock she fell in with the *Jersey*, about a mile this side of the Narrows, equidistant from each shore. At this time, to use the pilots' term, it was "young flood;" and such was the virulence of the wind, that the people on board the *Erie* could afford no assistance. Our fears for the safety of the *Jersey* and the passengers on board, are lessened, in some degree, from the wind shifting before dark to east, and the tide being flood.—These circumstances, presuming that she must have drifted through the Narrows, as the wind was then at N.E. leave a hope that the people have saved themselves upon the Jersey shore.

We learn from the *Erie*'s crew, that besides the carriages on board the *Jersey*, there were also several horses.

The *York*, we suppose, must have left Powles Hook about 11 o'clock.

The gale of yesterday has driven all the ice from our navigable waters, on flats and lee shores. —*Gazette*

[*Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, February 6, 1818, vol. XI, no. 30, p. 2]

11) BUSBY'S WATER WHEEL

"The public are respectfully informed that the Patent Water wheel invented by the subscriber is now fixed and is in action on board the steamboat **YORK**, The **YORK** has heretofore been a slower boat than the **JERSEY**, working on the same ferry. On Wednesday last the two boats started side by side from Powles Hook, having the committee of Directors on board, and crossed the Hudson together, when the York arrived first in the slip on this side. This wheel lifts no back water, and has been working several days among the ice, which is trundled beneath the ring, and mashed by the perpendicular paddles. The wheel is left open for the inspection of the public, who are requested to consider it as a *first experiment*, establishing a new principle, in the practical construction of which, like all other new inventions, improvements are contemplated.

Fe3 1w C. A. BUSBY, 2 Law Buildings.

[*The National Advocate*, New-York, February 15, 1818, vol. VI, no. 1589, p. 4.]

Norman Barry, Bad Schussenried, Germany
September 2008, Updated January 2021