

THE NEW YORK HERALD.

WHOLE NO. 12,635.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 1871.—QUADRUPLÉ SHEET.

PRICE FIVE CENTS.

DEATH OF A LAKE ERIE HERO.—Captain McBride, whose death took place in Milwaukee last Sunday, was wheelsman on the Erie in 1841, when that steamboat was burned on Lake Erie, by which disaster—the first of any magnitude to occur on the lakes—300 immigrants, fifty cabin passengers and all the vessel's officers and crew but about twelve were burned or drowned. Only about fifty lives were saved, passengers and crew. McBride remained at the wheel till the flames enveloped the pilot house, and after cutting loose and throwing overboard many articles to float the passengers he saved his own life by the same means. During the ten years in which he commanded the steamer Detroit Captain McBride crossed Lake Michigan in her 2,732 times, without a single accident to passenger, crew or vessel.

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The Hartford Daily Courant (Hartford, Connecticut), March 30, 1871, p. 1, c. 9:

Capt. McBride, whose death took place in Milwaukee, Sunday, 12th inst., was wheelsman on the Erie, in 1841, when that steamboat was burned on Lake Erie, by which disaster—the first of any magnitude to occur on the lakes—300 immigrants, 50 cabin passengers, and all the vessel's officers and crew but about 12, were burned or drowned. Only about 50 lives were saved—passengers and crew. McBride remained at the wheel till the flames enveloped the pilot house, and after cutting loose and throwing overboard many articles to float the passengers, he saved his own life by the same means.

A FALLEN HERO.

**A Prototype of John Hays' "Jim Blud-
son" Sent up for Vagrancy at Erie,**

[From the Erie Dispatch, February 26.]

"Fifteen days in jail for vagrancy" was the sentence yesterday imposed on James Lafferty, a gray headed, wondering vagabond of the happy-go-lucky stripe, who is scarcely ever sober, but who, drunk or sober, is harmless to all except himself. He was a hero once; one of the type of men in reality that John Hays must have imagined when he wrote the graphic lines of the engineer of the Prairie Bell.

"I'll hold her nozzle agin the bank
Till the last galoot's ashore."

On the 3th of August 1841, the steam-boat Erie, then the finest on the lakes, and which had only made her trial trip previously—having then on board a large number of the citizens of Erie, with their families, and also the "Presque Isle band," which had stayed on from the time of the trial excursion—left Buffalo for this port. It was a bright, sunny day, and the lake was almost a dead calm. When nearing Dunkirk the boat was discovered to be on fire, and the flames spread rapidly. She was headed for shore, and the horror-stricken passengers crowded the forward part of the boat as she clove through the water. Two men were standing at the wheel, Almon Fuller, of Wesleyville, and James Lafferty—the drunken vagabond sent to jail yesterday—of Erie. It seemed almost certain that the boat could not reach the beach, and everything that would float a human being was made use of, as passengers and crew threw themselves overboard, but while there was life there was hope. Almon Fulmer dropped where he stood, dying at his post. James Lafferty stayed though his clothes were on fire, his hair burned off and hands and face crisped by the scorching heat, and only abandoned his post when the Erie was sinking. A number of persons were lost in that appalling disaster, but the great majority were saved. The wheelman who had barely escaped with life and the memory of the one who died where he worked, were honored then, but that is upwards of thirty years ago, and the surviving hero of that day is now only a drunken vagabond who must soon drop unnoticed into a pauper's grave.

"And are we so soon forgotten."

Refer to
comment in
the parallel
article from
the *New
Hampshire
Patriot*.

"Fulmer" is an
obvious misprint.

p. 7, c. 1

A FALLEN HERO. The Erie Dispatch, of February 26, says : "Fifteen days in jail for vagrancy" was the sentence imposed on James Lafferty, a gray-headed, wandering vagabond of the happy-go-lucky stripe, who is scarcely ever sober, but who, drunk or sober, is harmless to all except himself. He was a hero once : one of the men in reality that John Hay must have imagined when he wrote the graphic lines of the engineer of the *Prairie Belle* :

"I'll hold her nozzle against the bank,
Until the last galoot's ashore."

On the 9th of August, 1841, the steam-boat Erie, then the finest on the lakes, and which had only made her trial trip previously—having then on board a large number of the citizens of Erie, with their families, and also the "Presque Island Band," which had stayed on from the time of the trial excursion—left Buffalo for this port. It was a bright, sunny day, and the lake was almost a dead calm. When nearing Dunkirk the boat was discovered to be on fire, and the flames spread rapidly. She was headed for shore, and the horror-stricken passengers crowded the forward part of the boat as she clove through the water. Two men were standing at the wheel. Almon Fuller of Wesleyville, and James Lafferty—the drunken vagabond sent to jail—of Erie. It seemed almost certain that the boat could not reach the beach, and everything that would float a human being was made use of as passengers and crew threw themselves overboard, but while there was life there was hope. Almon Fuller dropped where he stood, dying at his post. James Lafferty stayed, though his clothes were on fire, his hair burned off, and hands and face crisped by the scorching heat, and only abandoned his post when the Erie was sinking. A number of persons were lost in that appalling disaster, but the great majority were saved. The wheelman who had barely escaped with his life and the memory of one who died where he worked, were honored then, but that is upward of thirty years ago, and the surviving hero of that day is now only a drunken vagabond, who must soon drop unnoticed into a pauper's grave.

This is the only article thus far discovered which purports that "two men" were "standing at the wheel" of the *Erie*. The body of the wheelsman Augustus Fuller (mistakenly reported as "Luther Fuller" by the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* in 1841) was identified. "Almond" (not „Almon“) Fuller of Wesleyville was Augustus Fuller's father.



A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

A Reminiscence of the Lakes.

The following reminiscence of the steamboat *Erie*, off Silver Creek, which event occurred thirty years ago, furnished the *Toledo Blade* by a contributor, will be read with interest by many of our citizens:

Editors Blade—I noticed an article in the *Blade* of March 30, referring to the death of Captain McBride. You state that he was a wheelman on the steamboat *Erie*, when she burned on the night of August 9, 1841. This, I think, is a mistake. Captain McBride had a brother on board the *Erie* who was a wheelman; he was badly burned, and died at *Erie* two or three days afterwards; his name was Jerome. Captain or Dennis McBride was first mate of the ill-fated *Erie*.

Now, as I was on board the *Erie*, and one of the saved, permit me to say a few words concerning Captain McBride, myself and others. I was sitting on the boiler deck conversing with some of the passengers, when I heard a heavy, dead sound at the boiler below—something like a blast underground. I sprang to my feet and ran as fast I could. My impression was that the boiler was about to burst. As I passed over the shaft, I looked back and saw the boat was in flames. I passed on, and when near the stern, got over the railing and stood on the outer edge of the guard, ready to take anything that might present itself that would buoy me up, and at this moment a scene presented itself that beggars description. Some were crying out, "we are lost;" others were calling upon God to have mercy upon them; others almost frantic cried out, "Where is my wife?" "Where are my children?" The fire and smoke were becoming

almost suffocating, still I stood on the edge of the guard. Soon I heard the voice of McBride giving the command: "Over with this boat!" The boat was soon thrown over, and as it passed the guard the first mate (Captain McBride) sprang into it, and as soon as it reached the water I sprang for it and landed safely into it. The *Erie* at this time was in full motion, going up the lake. There was a large rope attached to the small boat, called the painter (I think), which was either fastened to the steamer, or got foul, and when it straightened up swamped us in a moment. I got away from it altogether, and when I arose to the surface I saw the small boat between me and the burning steamer. I swam for it with all my strength. By this time this large rope I spoke of had broken loose from the steamer and floated directly toward me, and in swimming I got hold of it and drew myself to the boat. When I got to her she was right side up, but filled with water. Many by this time had swam to her, as many as could get hold of her, and as soon as possible I got into her. A very short time after she rolled over, and I got away from her again; however, I swam to her again, or as near as I could get, for by this time there were about as many around her as could cling to her. I did the next best thing, laid hold of the first man I came to, who happened to be a German. But now came the tug of war; he, to save his own life, made every effort in his power to kick me off, while my own life depended on my grasp on him. He soon found he could not kick me off, so he elbowed those at his side and made room for me. He then reached and got me by the collar and drew me to his side, threw his arm around my neck and gave me a kiss. If he is yet alive, my soul says God bless that German! The boat was bot-

If he is yet alive, my soul says God bless that German. The boat was bottom side up at this time; so in order to ride the waves, McBride, and William Hughes, second mate, got on her bottom, and slid from side to side, to keep her in that position, as we could ride the waves in no other way. The lake was very rough at this time, and we lay in the troughs of a heavy sea. Up to this time I had been under water nearly one-third of the time; my strength began to fail, and I remembered I had a wife and child out in the then far west whom I loved as I did my own life. I then and there made a vow before McBride and Hughes and others to God that if he would spare me for the sake of my wife and child, I would serve him faithfully, all my days. Now let me here say that I expect to bless God while I live, and praise him to all eternity, that I made that vow. Shortly after this I began to cramp in my right leg and hip. McBride drew up on the boat and gave me such a slapping as I never had before; this put the blood in circulation and cramp left me.

About this time the steamer Dewitt Clinton came to our relief. Every eye was upon her, and shout after shout rent the air. I begged the men to keep the curve of our boat, for if she should roll over now in our weak condition the most of us would perish. McBride told them the same thing. A short time after she rolled over. She came toward me and I hung to her keel thinking I would come out on the other side, but I found I was under her bottom. I held my breath about as long as I could. I felt above me and got hold of some one's foot. I soon found it was McBride. He took me by the hair and drew me safely to her keel again. My prediction was true; all but four were

lost. Shortly after this happened we were picked up by a boat sent from the Clinton, and taken on board the steamer and all our wants attended to. Here we found Jerome McBride, whose back was almost burned to a crisp. He was saved by hanging on to one of the anchor chains. It so happened that the land was lying directly above him, and when it melted it ran down his back. Poor man, he suffered terribly. After picking up all that could be found, we were taken back to Buffalo. We remained in Buffalo some three days, when I parted with McBride. I loved the dear man; he had been an instrument in the hand of God to save me from a watery grave. When he departed for his home, which was Erie, Pa., I walked with him to the steamer and handed him a paper, on the edge of which I had written the following words:

"Dear Friend—If misfortune should ever overtake you, look me up; and as long as I have one crust of bread I will divide with you. I live in Joe Daviess county, Illinois."

I have never seen that noble, kind-hearted sailor from that day to this. Peace to his ashes. I trust we shall meet again when the conflict is over and the victory won.

HIRAM DEGRAFF.
Apple River, Ill., April 8, 1871.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer, November 26, 1900, p. 4, c. 3:

LAST SURVIVOR OF ILL-FATED ERIE IS DEAD

James Lafferty Succumbs to Heart Disease

Special to The Inquirer.

ERIE, Pa., Nov. 25.—James Lafferty, the last survivor of the ill-fated steamer Erie, burned August, 1841, died here suddenly of heart disease.

POLICE COURT.

Room 1—Judge Fiedler.

Intoxication—Orin G. Hunt, city hospital; John Smith, Adolph Peterson, Patrick Rush, John Jones, Mary Casey, James Lafferty, John Howard, Maggie Brooks, James Austin, Frank Flickenger, Ed Connors, Patrick Mengan, Leo McCue, Patrick Lindsay, James Gillespie, Michael Sullivan, Michael Burke, Martin Patton, Michael Barrett, Herbert Torrance, Joseph Masek, James Drake, Frank Crooker, William Richards, John Trycak, John Heckman, Patrick Pickett, Charles Glynn, Aaron Rausch, Robert McCann. Harry Rabeck, John Terak, discharged; Michael Thornton, James McDonald, probation, October 30; John O'Rourke, costs and ten days; Lucy Frank, \$25, costs, and thirty days; Thomas Campbell, \$1 and costs.

Yet
another
intoxicated
James
Lafferty?