

Wisconsin Argus
(Madison, Wisconsin Territory)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1845
[p. 1, c. 1-3]

[A]

Variations between the *Wisconsin Argus* [Madison, Wisconsin Territory] “A1” version, Sept. 2, 1845, the *Pittsfield Sun* [Pittsfield, Massachusetts] “A2” version, Sept. 4, 1845, and the *Baltimore Sun* [Baltimore, Maryland] “B” textual variation, August 30, 1845, are recorded in brackets.

Column 1:

Part I: Title plus lines 1-24: Title, America’s Great Lakes Described and Extolled, Bustling Harbor Scene before Departure

Title [A1 & A2: The; B: -] **Helmsman of Lake Erie.**

1 It was on a pleasant May morning that
2 a steam vessel was riding at anchor, oppo-
3 site [A1: - - - ; A2 & B: the town of] Buffalo, on Lake Erie. You know, I
4 dare say, that Erie is one of those sea-
5 lakes for which America is so famous; and,
6 as you stand on its shore, and see the green
7 waves dashing in one after another, you
8 might well think you were looking [A1 & A2: at; B: on]
9 the [A1 & A2:green; B: great] ocean itself. The Jersey — for
10 that was the name of the steamer — was
11 [A1 & A2: dressed out; B: dressed gaily] with many bright flags: the
12 Blue Peter, the signal [A1 & A2: for; B: of her] immediate sail-
13 ing, was at her main-mast head, porters
14 were hurrying along the narrow quay that
15 juts out into the lake; boatmen quarrelling
16 with each other for passengers; trav-
17 ellers hurrying backwards and forwards to
18 look for their luggage; — friends shaking
19 hands, and bidding each other farewell;
20 idlers lounging about, with their hands in
21 their pockets; cab-drivers jangling for a
22 larger fare; and all the various kinds of
23 bustle and confusion that attend the depart-
24 ure of a packet from a watering place.

**Part II: Lines 25-40: Time between Departure and Outbreak of the Fire:
Focus on Passengers' Activities and State of Mind**

25 But presently the anchor was [A1 & A2: hove; B: heaved], the
26 paddles began to turn, the sails were set,
27 and, leaving a broad track of foam behind
28 her, the Jersey stood westward , and held
29 on her course for the town of Erie. It was
30 a bright blue day; and, as hour after hour
31 went by, some mingled in the busy conver-
32 sation [A1 & A2: on; B: of] politics; some sat apart, and cal-
33 culated the gains of the shop or the counting-
34 house; some were wrapped up in the book
35 with which they were engaged; and one or
36 two, with whom time seemed to hang hea-
37 vily , composed themselves to sleep. In
38 short, one and all were like men who
39 thought that, let danger come to them when

End of Column 1. Top of Column 2:

40 it might, at least it would not be that day.

**Part III: Lines 41-61: John Maynard Introduced: Physical Features and
Character**

41 It drew towards four in the afternoon,
42 and the steamer, which had hitherto been
43 keeping the middle of the lake, stood south-
44 [A1 & A2: ward; B: wards] – Erie, the place to which it was bound,
45 lying on the southern side. Old John
46 Maynard was at the wheel; a bluff , weath-
47 er-beaten sailor, tanned by [A1 & A2: many a burn-
48 ing summer day, and by; B: - - - - -] many a [A1 & A2: winter; B: wintry]
49 tempest . He had truly learnt to be con-
50 [A1 & A2:tent; B: tented] with his situation: none could ever
51 say that they [A1 & A2: had heard; B: ever heard] him repine at
52 his hard labor and scanty pay. He had, in the
53 worst [A1 & A2: time; B: times], a cheerful word and a kind
54 look for those with whom he was thrown;
55 cast, often enough, into bad company, he
56 tried, at least, and generally succeeded, to
57 say [A1 & A2: or do; B: - -] something for its good. He was
58 known from one end of Lake Erie to the
59 other, by the name of honest John May-
60 nard; and the secret of his honesty to his

61	neighbors, was his love of God .
	<p>Part IV: Lines 62-92: Fire Discovered; Cause of Fire; Vain Attempts to Extinguish Fire</p>
62 63 64 65 66	<p>The land was about ten miles off, when the captain, coming up from his cabin, cried to a sailor, “Dick Fletcher, what’s all that smoke I see coming [A: out of; A2 & B: out from] the hold!”</p>
67 68	<p>It’s from the engine room, sir, I guess,” said the man.</p>
69	<p>“Down with you, then, and let me know.”</p>
70 71 72 73	<p>The sailor began descending the ladder by which you go to the hold; but scarcely had he disappeared beneath the deck, when he came up with much greater speed.</p>
74 75 76	<p>“The hold’s on fire, sir,” [A: said he; A2 & B: he said] to the captain, who by this time was standing close to him.</p>
77 78 79 80 81 82	<p>The captain rushed down, and found the account too true. Some sparks had fallen on a bundle of tow , no one had seen the accident; and now not only much of the luggage, but the sides of the vessel were in [A1 & A2: a; B: -] smouldering flame.</p>
83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92	<p>All hands, passengers as well as sailors, were called together; and two lines being made, one on each side of the hold, buckets of water were passed and re-passed; they were filled from the lake; they flew along a line of ready hands, were dashed hissing on the burning mass, and then passed on to the other side to be re-filled. For some few moments, it seemed as if the flames were subdued .</p>

**Part V: Lines 93-110: Maynard Questioned by Anxious Women Passengers
– His Response**

93 In the meantime the women on board
94 were clustering round John Maynard, the
95 only man unemployed who was capable of
96 answering their questions. “How far is
97 it to land?” “How long shall we be get-
98 ting in?” “Is it very deep?” [A1 & A2: “Is there
99 no boat?” ; B: - - - -] “Can they see us from [A1 & A2: the ; B: -]
100 shore?” The hel[m]sman answered as well
101 as he could. There was no boat, it had
102 been left at Buffalo to be mended; they
103 might be seven miles from [A1 & A2: the ; B: -] shore; they
104 would probably be in in forty minutes, he
105 could not tell how far the fire had reached.
106 “ [A1 & A2: But; B: And], to speak the truth,” he added, “we
107 are all in great danger; and I think if there
108 was a little less *talking* and a little more
109 [A1 & A2: *praying*; B: *praying*] it would be the better for us, and
110 none the worse for the boat.”

**Part VI: Lines 111-148: Dialogue with Captain and
Emergency Measures**

111 “How’s her head?” shouted the cap-
112 tain.

113 “West-sou’-west, sir,” answered May-
114 nard.

115 “Keep her [A1 & A2: sou’ and; B: south] by west,” cried
116 captain. “We must go ashore any where.”

117 It happened that a draft of wind drove
118 back the flames, which soon began to blaze
119 up more furiously against the saloon; and
120 the partition betwixt it and the hold was
121 soon on fire. Then [A1: - ; A2 & B: long] wreaths of smoke be-
122 gan to find [A1 & A2: their; B: -] way through the [A1 & A2: skylight; B: sky light];
123 and the captain seeing this, ordered [A: - ; A2 & B: all] the
124 women forward. The engineer put on
125 his utmost steam; the American flag
126 was run up, and reversed, in token of distress;
127 water was flung over the sails, to make

128 them hold the wind. And still John May-
129 nard stood by the wheel, though now he
130 was cut off, by a sheet of smoke and [A1 & A2: flame; B: flames],
131 from the ship's crew.

132 Greater and greater grew the heat; the
133 engineers fled from the engine room; the
134 passengers were clustering round the ves-
135 sel's bow; the sailors were sawing planks
136 on which to lash the women ; the boldest
137 were throwing off their coats and waist-
138 coats , and preparing for one long struggle
139 for life . And still the coast grew plainer [A:- - ; A2 & B: and plainer];
140 the paddles, as yet, worked well; they
141 could not be more than a mile from the
142 shore; and boats were even now starting
143 to their assistance.

144 "John Maynard!" cried the captain.

145 "Aye, aye, [A1 & A2: sir; B: Sir]!" said John.

146 "[A1 & A2: Could; B: Can] you hold on five minutes lon-
147 ger?"

148 [A1 & A2: "I'll try, sir." ; B: - - -]

Part VII: Lines 149-173:

Maynard's Agonizing Sacrifice and the Rescue of Crew and Passengers

149 And he did try; the flames came nearer
150 and nearer; a sheet of smoke would some-
151 times almost suffocate him ; his hair was
152 singed; his blood seemed on fire with the
153 great heat . Crouching as far back as he
154 could, he held the wheel firmly with his
155 [A: - ; A2 & B: left] hand, till the flesh shrivelled , and the mus-
156 cles [A1: cracked; A2: creaked ; B: crackled] in the [A:flames ; A2&B: flame]; and then he
157 stretched forth his right, and bore the agony
158 without a scream or a groan. It was en-
159 ough for him that he heard the cheer of the
160 sailors to the approaching boat [A: boat; A2 & B: boats]; the cry of
161 the captain, "The women first , and then
162 every man for himself, and God for us all."
163 And they were the last sounds [A: - ; A2 & B: that] he heard.
164 How he perished was not known; whether,
165 dizzied by the smoke, he lost his footing
166 in endeavoring to come forward, and fell

167 overboard, or whether he was suffocated
168 by dense smoke, his comrades could
169 not tell. At the moment the vessel struck,
170 the boats were at her side; [A1 & A2: the; B: -] passengers,
171 sailors, and captain leaped into them, or
172 swam for their lives: all, save he to whom
173 they owed every thing, escaped.

Part VIII: Lines 174-178: Aftermath

174 He had died the death of a [A1 & A2: christian; B: Christian] he-
175 ro – I had almost said, of a martyr; his

End of Column 2. Top of Column 3:

176 spirit was commended into his Father's
177 hands , and his body sleeps in peace
178 by the green side of [A: lake; A2 & B: Lake] Erie.

- Norman Barry, January 2010