

JOHN MAYNARD RESEARCH IN 1956

A REVIEW OF “JOHN MAYNARD – LAKE ERIE HERO” BY MARVIN A. RAPP

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Some John Maynard articles are hard to find. One such article by the historian and folklorist, Dr. Marvin A. Rapp, written in 1956, and entitled “John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero” [*Inland Seas* (vol. XII, pp. 3-15)] has, thanks to Anne Huberman’s tenacity, finally been located.

Although Dr. Rapp’s article is exceptionally well-written and even brimming over with suspense, his presentation reads more like fiction than actual research. Sources are generally swept under the rug. Testimony is not completely quoted. In addition, the faulty dating of events and persons makes the article as a whole misleading at best, in spite of the flowing and often eloquent pen that Rapp deftly wields. The purpose of the review at hand is to point out some of the more glaring misconceptions prevalent in the 1950’s.

A quick look at the facts reveals that on August 9, 1841, the worst steamboat tragedy in the history of Lake Erie up to that time occurred about eight miles off Silver Creek. The steamer had left Buffalo and was on her way to Dunkirk, New York, when fire broke out. The total number of passengers and crew was initially estimated at between 160 and 200, although exact figures were never established. And, even more disappointing, the frightening number of casualties was never determined. Rapp claims that the “ship’s records listed 300 people aboard,” a statement of doubtful authenticity. He then opts for the round figure of 250 fatalities without stating his source.

What makes the *Erie* conflagration even “eerier” is that a similar tragedy had occurred only three years earlier at nearly the same location off Silver Creek: the steamboat *Washington* was lost, also by fire, with an estimated 50 fatalities.

I. RAPP’S BASIC TENET:

THE WHEELSMAN OF THE *ERIE* IS THE HELMSMAN OF THE *JERSEY*

The basic tenet Rapp’s paper hinges on is that the wheelsman of the ill-starred *Erie*, a young man named Luther Fuller, is identical with the helmsman named John Maynard, the old hero

of the anonymous sketch entitled “The Hero of Lake Erie,” which was not published until four years after the tragedy in 1845 [1] :

“What of the wheelsman whom Titus told to hold his course until they reached the shore? In the inquest following the tragedy, Captain Titus paid a hero’s tribute to Luther Fuller, the wheelsman. ‘He remained at the wheel and never left it until he was burned to death,’ and then Titus added, ‘He was always a resolute man.’

“It could have been just another day and just another trip and Fuller could have remained just another sailor.

“But this is the stuff folk heroes are made of. Among canallers and sailors, Fuller’s fame spread. In many a waterfront saloon and on the deck of many a laker his story was told over and over again. He became the symbol of courage and strength of all Lake Erie sailors.” Marvin A. Rapp, “John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero,” p. 10

A) CAPTAIN TITUS’S TESTIMONY

What Rapp does not immediately explain with regard to Captain T. J. Titus’s testimony before the Coroner’s Inquest at Buffalo on August 11, 1841, only two days following the loss of the *Erie*, was that the captain’s testimony was never confirmed. A glance at Captain Titus’s testimony reveals the following:

“[I, Captain Titus,] am of the opinion that I was the last person who left the *Erie*; when I left her I heard much confusion but saw no person; think Fuller *remained at the wheel and never left it until burned to death* [- this part of the testimony was italicized]; he was always a resolute man in obeying orders.”

From *The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Thursday evening, August 12th, 1841: http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/1841j.pdf (p. 5)

Captain Titus could not see his wheelsman in the blinding veil of smoke. The screams of men and women struggling to save their lives also made communication with the wheelsman impossible. Instead, Titus merely was “of the opinion” and “thought” that his wheelsman had remained at his post “*until burned to death.*”

B) ANDREW W. BLILA’S TESTIMONY

At the end of his article, Rapp then lets the cat out of the bag: Titus had erred! Fuller, Rapp reports, had, though badly burned, survived the conflagration! Yet the resurrection of the alleged hero received no mention in the press. To make matters even worse, Luther Fuller, according to Rapp, then took to strong drink and received a criminal record, apparently from counterfeiting. [2] Fuller had even changed his name to James Rafferty. Living to a ripe old

age of 87 in spite of his decadent life style, Fuller died "a convicted criminal and drunkard" in the Erie County Hospital in Erie, Pennsylvania on November 22, 1900 (Rapp, p. 15).

To justify his account of Fuller's survival and unfortunate transformation, Rapp calls forth the testimony of Andrew W. Blila, given twelve years after the stated death of James Rafferty, allegedly Luther Fuller, in 1900. Blila, at the time of his testimony, was serving as secretary of the Erie Historical Society:

"Credence was placed immediately in the secretary's story because he had been little Andy Blila, the call boy on the *Erie* the night it burned."

Marvin A. Rapp, "John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero," p. 15

Rapp's narrative has already prepared the reader for Blila's claim by allowing glimpses of little Andy's dreams of future greatness while intently observing Fuller's "every move:"

"Slowly the paddle wheels began to turn. They churned up the water. Luther Fuller headed her bow for the open lake. By his side stood Andy Blila, call boy, watching his every move. Some day he hoped to be a wheelsman like Fuller. Right now no job in the whole world seemed so important and to Andy no one did it so well as Fuller."

Marvin A. Rapp, "John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero," p. 6

The question of Blila's actual presence on board the *Erie* and the soundness of Blila's memory (71 years had, after all, elapsed!) were challenged in 1964 by George Salomon, [3] who believed that the man who died in the Erie County Alms Hospital was neither a Fuller nor a Rafferty but a Lafferty! Salomon correctly points out that the material Rapp makes use of to demonstrate Fuller's survival had already been presented by Frederick J. Shepard in 1927.

C) THE INCONGRUITY OF TESTIMONIES IN THE BACKDROP OF THE ANONYMOUS SKETCH

However one may wish to judge the objectivity of either Blila or Salomon, agreement exists that Fuller remained in the locality of Erie, quite close to his and Blila's "mutual home town of Harborcreek" [4] in Erie County, all of about six miles from Erie, Pennsylvania. Indeed, according to Blila, Fuller "often" frequented Blila's father's saloon where he would "borrow a dime for a drink." At this point the incongruity of the tale becomes apparent. If Fuller had felt a burning need to "go underground," one wonders why he did not move on to a locality where he would not have been recognized instead of complacently remaining on home ground. The incongruity with the anonymous sketch is even more glaring:

"He was known from one end of Lake Erie to the other, by the name of honest John Maynard; and the secret of his honesty to his neighbors, was his love of God.

(— "The Helmsman of Lake Erie," lines 57-61)

Assuming Fuller remained in Erie or Harborcreek, Pennsylvania, even with a new alias, it would seem next to impossible that he would not have been identified. Certainly the honest helmsman of the sketch would have been immediately recognized. Also, the very thought of a John Maynard turning to a life of dishonesty and crime while living to “a rum-soaked old age” (Salomon’s wording) simply does not jive with the legend.

Nowhere is there any report of Fuller’s deep religiosity and honesty. Also, the helmsman of the anonymous sketch is not a young whippersnapper but “old John Maynard.” Going one step further, the astute reader might question whether an individual lacking both honesty and moral integrity could, *at any time in his life*, have been capable of an act of civil courage even approximating that of a John Maynard.

What should be clear from the foregoing is that *if* there is indeed an “historical core” to the legend of John Maynard, a Luther Fuller, who allegedly died depraved, drunk and destitute in an Erie Alms House would make a grotesque parody of the legend.

II. RAPP’S SECOND TENET: AN ORAL TRADITION RENDERED INTO A SKETCH BY AN ENGLISH WRITER

Rapp continues with the following paragraph:

“By 1845 his [=Luther Fuller’s] story was common property. An English traveler and writer on tour through the Lakes apparently heard the story and wrote it down. In September of that year it appeared in the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* and the following month in the *Western Literary Messenger* under the title “Helmsman of Lake Erie.” One authority believes the author was Charles Dickens who toured the lakes in 1845.” Marvin A. Rapp, “John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero,” p. 10

Rapp’s first assumption in this paragraph is that the tale of Luther Fuller’s heroic death was “common property” in the Lake region, a result of telling and retelling. The John Maynard researcher of the 1960’s, George Salomon, could not find any indication of an oral tradition [5] upon which the sketch was based. And, if given some thought, an “oral tradition” of only four years (the time span was from 1841 to 1845) hardly qualifies as a “tradition.”

On the other hand, vagrant snatches of the tale may have been extant if the editor’s comment on the anonymous sketch in the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* of September 12, 1845 is extrapolated: although the name of the wheelsman was confused with that of a wheelsman off duty, a man named Jerome McBride, at least a vague memory of Fuller’s supposed heroic death back in 1841 was still flimmering in Buffalo. Rapp, however, leaves the reader in the dark without producing a single source to back up his claim of “common property.” Although immediately following the loss of the *Erie*, some newspaper reports did misstate Titus’s testimony, just as Rapp did, the praise of Fuller was considerably less than that of the young

unnamed “cadet” Rapp mentions, whose heroism definitely did receive national coverage. The boy’s name was Levi T. Beebe, who had been attending a military school at Cooperstown, N.Y., the hometown of the famous American author James Fenimore Cooper. Due to his stamina and staying-power, the 11- or possibly 12-year-old boy (not 17, as Rapp asserts), was able to survive the ordeal in spite of severe burns on his hands and head. Young Beebe’s eye-witness account of the conflagration was printed not only in American papers but even reached Leipzig, Germany. [6] Yet in both instances, that of Fuller and Beebe, coverage was short-lived without any follow-up.

While it is at least conceivable that a newspaper editor in Buffalo might recall some details of a Lake Erie tragedy that had occurred only four years previously, the anonymous prose sketch was not a Buffalo, New York creation as Shepard, Rapp, and even Salomon believed. The first publication of “Helmsman of Lake Erie” had occurred nearly two weeks prior to the September 12, 1845 publication in the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*. The location, newspaper, and date: The *Baltimore Sun*, August 30, 1845, nearly two weeks before the tale reached Buffalo! [7]

Secondly, “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” stands the 1841 conflagration of the *Erie* on its head by transforming one of Lake Erie’s greatest tragedies into a piece of literature in which only the heroic steersman dies. Further, the events pertaining to the *Jersey* of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” depart completely from the actual events on board the doomed *Erie*. [8] In other words, it is hard to imagine that an oral tradition could have existed that the anonymous writer of the sketch simply “wrote down,” as Rapp maintains. What the 1845 sketch reveals is that it was a work of the imagination, a romantic portrayal of one man’s steadfast courage and the rescue of passengers and crew, far removed from a detailed record of the loss of the *Erie* and the unconfirmed heroic death of her young steersman, Luther Fuller.

Rapp asserts that the writer “anglicized Lake terminology.” Unfortunately, he fails to provide one example. Admittedly, both Frederick J. Shepard and later George Salomon were struck by this argument. What escaped their notice, however, is that American English in 1845, particularly that used by writers, was much closer to British English than it was over a century later. The reason is easy to grasp. American literati waited impatiently for packets to arrive from England with the latest British novels. Writers still gazed enviously at their role-models in Britain and often, whether consciously or unconsciously, succumbed to the same set phrases, stylistic devices, and idioms. Perhaps the final and most glorious battle Americans fought against Britain was neither the Revolutionary War nor the War of 1812, but the long process of emancipation of American authors to attain cultural independence while freeing themselves from the shackles of the British monopoly on so-called “great literature.”

Rapp again gets his dates wrong when injecting Charles Dickens as a possible author. Dickens’s first visit to the United States was from January to June, 1842 (*not* in 1845, as Rapp asserts). Dickens’s critical observations of America and Americans during his first visit were published in *American Notes* later that year. The unnamed “authority” Rapp vaguely alludes to in connection with Charles Dickens is Frederick J. Shepard back in 1927. [9]

III. RAPP'S DEPICTION OF THE EMIGRANTS FROM EUROPE

Perhaps one of the more conspicuous omissions in the 1845 "Helmsman of Lake Erie" is that *no emigrants* from Europe are even alluded to. Indeed, the activities of the *Jersey's* passengers can only strike the reader as "American"—talking politics, counting profits, reading a book, or curling up for a nap even though it is still midday and the conflagration does not break out until about 4 p.m. in the afternoon:

"It was a bright blue day; and, as hour after hour went by, some mingled in the busy conversation on politics; some sat apart, and calculating the gains of the shop or the counting-house; some were wrapped up in the book with which they were engaged; and one or two, with whom time seemed to hang heavily, composed themselves to sleep."
"The Helmsman of Lake Erie," lines 29-37

Different ethnic groups do not exist on the *Jersey*. Foreigners are not even alluded to. The sketch is even mum about settlers in general moving west. Not once is the reader told that a child cried.

Rapp paints a completely different picture of the 1841 scene on the *Erie* without even bothering to consider just how different the depiction was in 1845:

"The 300 passengers and crew represented a cross section of society. Rich and poor, moral and immoral, banker and laborer, theist and atheist. All coming from different parts of the world, all filled with hopes and plans for the future."
Marvin A. Rapp, "John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero," p. 5

Rapp's vivid description of the emigrants marching down Commercial Street to board the *Erie* deserves a close reading. To his mind, they were "Dutch":

"Over a hundred Dutch emigrants walked down Commercial Street toward the *Erie*. Dressed in the traditional garb of their country, they made a colorful and picturesque parade as they boarded the vessel for what they hoped would be their promised land. Each clutched a carpet bag as if his life depended on it. In a sense it did. Most of them were carrying their life's earnings in specie in their bag as a grubstake in the new land. With wide-eyed wonder they jabbered among themselves. Occasionally an expletive *Mein Gott, Be Jabbers, Gott in Himmel*, would crackle out above normal harbor noises."
Marvin A. Rapp, "John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero," pp. 4-5

Although several of the survivors of the *Erie* themselves described the emigrants as "Dutch" [10], the mistake can easily be explained. Just as the Pennsylvania Dutch are anything but "Dutch," the misnomer could conceivably have arisen from a confusion of the German word *deutsch*, (meaning "German") with the English word *Dutch*. In any case, no newspaper stated that the foreign passengers on board the *Erie* were "Dutch." The emigrants were German-speaking with a large contingent from the German-speaking part of Switzerland:

“We have also gathered the following facts and additional names from Parsons & Co.— On examination of the eighty-seven names of Swiss immigrants given yesterday, they actually count one hundred and eight persons, to which must be added some ten or twelve infants, not before enumerated, of whom no charge was made. To this list must also be appended the following from the same house, omitted yesterday:

Strugler, Cleveland	2 persons
Mrs. M. Stemper, Zanesville	3 do
Mrs. Bargest, Portsmouth	3 do
J. F. Byer, Chicago	2 do

This swells the number of persons shipped by Messrs. PARSONS & Co. to one hundred and thirty. A mere fraction of whom were saved.”

The Jamestown Journal (Jamestown, Chautauque County, N.Y.),
Aug. 12, 1841, vol. XVI, No. 789, p.3

The “expletive” Rapp invents for his “Dutch” emigrants is, oddly, not Dutch but German. “Mein Gott!” is German for “My God!” “Gott in Himmel” is incorrect German for “Gott *im* Himmel” (literally, “God in heaven” or, freely translated, “Heavenly Father”). And the “Be Jabbers” (apparently referring to the incomprehensible “jabbering” of foreign tongues) would also be incomprehensible in Germany.

Rapp’s statement about the foreign arrivals’ carpet bags is at least in part correct. An emigrant from Europe was, in many cases, travelling with his or her life savings. And, due to the unreliability of paper money, heavy specie was carried. The coins, however, were often sewn into the women’s skirts as an extra precaution against theft. Unfortunately, this meant that if a woman were to spring overboard she would sink like a rock. This has been cited as one of the reasons why the bodies of the women emigrants were so difficult to recover:

THE STEAMBOAT *ERIE*.—The lake continues to give up the dead bodies of those who lost their lives by the destruction of the steamboat *Erie*. Every day additional bodies are found. A belief is expressed that very few of the German women will ever be found, as they had a considerable quantity of specie quilted in their clothing, which would tend to prevent the bodies from rising.

- *The Baltimore Sun*, August 25, 1841, p. 2

IV. A “SLIGHTLY” ROUGH SEA

Rapp begins his article with the following statement:

“A LITTLE AFTER EIGHT O’CLOCK the evening of August 9, 1841, the steamer *Erie*, four hours out of Buffalo and eight miles off shore about opposite Silver Creek, pushed ahead through the night toward Dunkirk in a slightly rough sea that had started

to abate with a falling wind. The ship's records listed 300 people on board."

Marvin A. Rapp, "John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero," p. 3

Captain Titus's testimony seems to collaborate Rapp's initial data:

"The *Erie* left port at ten minutes past 4. P.M., on Monday last; wind was fresh from south and west; the lake was rough; laid our course for Dunkirk; at ten minutes past 8 o'clock the same evening, heard a cry of fire; we were about ~~three~~ [the number "8" was apparently misread as a "3"] miles from Silver creek landing at this time; was standing on the forward part of the promenade deck, some ten yards from the wheelsman. First saw fire coming out back of the escape pipe; saw fire before I saw smoke, the hold of the *Erie* was 11 feet deep; the fire was 14 feet below me; we were seven or eight miles from shore; the wind was abating, but the sea was rough."

The question that concerns us here is the question, "What is meant by a 'slightly rough sea?'" Theodore Sears, a painter by trade and a resident of Buffalo, who survived the ordeal, added this testimony before the Coroner's Inquest on August 11:

"My opinion is that *many Swiss children who were seasick on the forward part of the boat, were burned to death.*" [The italics are not my own.]

John H. St. John sworn, a resident in Mississippi, made the following report before the Coroner's Inquest::

"In the cabin, when the alarm was given; first saw fire at the cabin door; heard a report first; the report sounded like a pistol; heard fire called immediately following; the fire came from the forward part of the vessel; no particular odor or smoke. Two minutes after the report I ascended the companion way; ran toward the stern of the boat; not many persons in the cabin when I left it; only two or three; many were sea-sick. . . ."

A report of Levi Beebe's description is even more graphic:

"That the lake was very rough, so much so, that the waves dashed into the gentlemen's cabin at the stern of the boat, and the dead lights were consequently shut. After tea he ran about the boat and looked at the race horse; the waves would wash entirely over the horse, and even wet some passengers who stood upon the upper deck; that about 8 o'clock he went into the cabin, and saw but two passengers there, it was so warm, having the stern windows closed, and by reason of sea-sickness, the other passengers were on deck." - "Burning of the *Erie*," *Salem Gazette* (Salem, Mass.), Friday, August 26, 1841, p. 3, c.2 (From the *Cleveland Herald*, Aug. 24)

What should be clear is that the number of passengers who were incapacitated due to sea-sickness not only led to an increased number of fatalities but also made it impossible to provide a complete record of the number of passengers on board. Even if the wind was "abating," as Captain Titus testified, the number of passengers already incapacitated was such as to unreservedly term the sea "rough," or even "very rough," and not "slightly rough" according to Rapp. [11]

“From the fact that the disaster to the *Erie*, occurred shortly after leaving port, when many were suffering from sea-sickness, and before a record of passengers could be made, it is impossible to make out a perfect list.”

The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser, Aug. 11, 1841:

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/1841c.pdf (p. 6)

V. THOSE UNAVOIDABLE EMBELLISHMENTS

When describing the way legends are born, Rapp states:

“Most of the stories have their foundation in truth, but in the telling and retelling, writing and rewriting, the original facts are often embellished beyond recognition.”

Marvin A. Rapp, “John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero,” p. 4

This would seem to apply to the way Rapp himself presents facts. To get some idea of Rapp’s method of writing history, consider the following anecdote:

“Standing apart from this group of ladies was Maria Jones. Her dress and manner also told a story. Her lineage was strictly Canal Street. To the initiated, that meant only one thing. Having served her apprenticeship there, she was now on her way to open her own establishment at a western Lake port.”

Marvin A. Rapp, “John Maynard –Lake Erie Hero”, p. 5

The only record of a Maria Jones, who lost her life in the *Erie* conflagration, was that she was an “abandoned female” (- From the *Buffalo Commercial Journal*, August 12). The term “abandoned female” was interpreted by Rapp to designate a prostitute. The following news clipping substantially supports Rapp’s assumption:

“**INTEMPERANCE**—Eliza Baker, an abandoned female, died at Buffalo on the 18th from excessive intoxication; being the tenth individual that has died, in the ‘infected district’ in that city from the same cause, during the season of navigation.”

Milwaukee Sentinel, December 4, 1841, p. 2

Yet even here there is room for interpretation. James Fenimore Cooper’s maritime novel *Jack Tier*, for instance, describes the tormented conscience of a dying man who is confronted with the wife he deserted twenty years before:

“He fancied, with a vivid and rapid glance at the probabilities, all that *a woman abandoned* [my emphasis] would be likely to endure in the course of so many long and suffering years.”

James Fenimore Cooper, *Jack Tier* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing Classic Texts, April 2010), vol. 31, Ch. XVI, pp. 331-332, first published in installments from 1846-1848

In Cooper's novel, the woman in question did not turn to prostitution for a living, but disguised herself as a sailor so that she could be close to the captain-husband who had rejected her. Her assumed name: Jack Tier!

Apart from the open question whether Maria Jones was really from the "infected district" of a town, it is far from clear whether Maria Jones was ostracized and "standing apart," whether her dress indicated her profession, whether she acted in such a way on board as to reveal her low "lineage" (which, of course, need not have been low), whether, assuming that Rapp was right about her profession, she was truly intent upon running her own "establishment," and whether indeed she even had the money to do so - all of these unknown factors are swept aside with Rapp's "embellishments" to produce an exciting tale.

That Rapp even attempts to invent "expletives" for the would-be "Dutch" on board, even if the expressions are not Dutch, strongly suggests a writer who is attempting to reconstruct events using the sparse facts at his disposal as a springboard for the entertainment of his readers. The departure of the *Erie* from the harbor was not necessarily accompanied by "Canal Street urchins who were tapping out dance rhythms on the dock boards" (p.5). The notion of the youths being showered with coins thrown by generous ladies in fine clothes is a nice touch and adds atmosphere, but it is nowhere recorded in any of the records of August 9, 1841. Whether the painters were really telling "bawdy jokes" and the ladies talking about "latest fashions" (p. 6) is anybody's guess. But, of course, it makes for an interesting read.

VI. THE GENESIS OF A LEGEND BUNGLED

Perhaps the lines Rapp penned on the historical development of the legend of John Maynard represent the straw that broke the camel's back:

"In 1901, John Gough, temperance leader, turned the poem into a prose oration entitled "The Pilot," and used it as a part of his vast repertoire on cross country tours. It had real punch. It eventually appeared in many school elocution books. School children memorized it. It soon reached overseas. Theodore Fontane, German poet, translated the story and poem into German. Eventually it was set to music."

Marvin A. Rapp, "John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero," p. 14

The year 1901 is terribly mistaken and, as will be seen, incomprehensible.

John Bartholomew Gough, it is true, was a powerful speaker and one of the greatest orators not only of 19th-century America but also of 19th-century Britain. It is a pity that great orators and actors are often forgotten much faster than great writers. The following clipping is from 1845, the year "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" appeared:

Mr. Gough.—This celebrated Temperance Lecturer was at Norwich all last week. — People of all sorts, old and young, flocked to see and hear him. He probably has

no superior in the great art of speaking. Mr. G., we learn, has agreed to visit Bridgeport as soon as he shall have fulfilled his previous engagements.

Republican Farmer, (Bridgeport, Connecticut), Tuesday, June 24th, 1845, p. 3

Gough was British-born but forced to leave his parental home in his youth for an apprenticeship in the United States. Perhaps because he was so uprooted, he fell under the sway of spirits as a young man, and only through the saving grace of the American temperance movement was he able to swear off the bottle. Gifted with both acting and speaking skills, he then dedicated his life to helping others to free themselves from a weakness that was wrecking their lives. Gough collected sketches depicting individuals who could literally “go through fire.” When he discovered an abridged “Helmsman of Lake Erie” sketch, he apparently shortened it even further while adapting it for his own delivery before crowded assembly halls. How, exactly, Gough found the shortened 1845 sketch he reworked has never been revealed and probably never will. [12] American newspapers suggest, however, that the first delivery was not in the United States but apparently during Gough’s lengthy speaking tour in his native country of England in the year 1860, *forty-one years* before the year Rapp cites. The following lines, for example, are taken from the *Albany Evening Journal*, September 28, 1860. They introduce Gough’s reworked sketch of “The Helmsman”:

“**A HERO.**[— John B. Gough, the celebrated temperance lecturer, who has returned to the United States, from a visit to his native England, and who is announced to speak at Cooper Institute on next Monday evening, related in one of his recent speeches, the following anecdote:]

What were Gough’s dates? 1817-1886. In other words, by 1901, Gough had already been lying in his grave for fifteen years!

Rapp’s paragraph cited above contains the following:

“Theodore Fontane, German poet, translated the story and poem into German.”

To avoid confusion, it should be explicitly stated that Gough’s sketch or “anecdote” was prose. The “poem” Rapp pulls out of his hat is obviously the ballad by Horatio Alger, Jr. Alger was deeply impressed by a reading of Gough’s sketch at a church service in the summer of 1866. [13] He immediately set to work composing “A Ballad of Lake Erie” entitled “John Maynard.” Alger’s ballad enjoyed widespread acclaim in the remainder of the 19th century and was often recited at various social functions. George Salomon, after comparing texts, came to the conclusion that Theodor Fontane’s American source was not the 1845 sketch nor Horatio Alger’s ballad, but the shortened prose text by Gough. Fontane, of course, never “translated” either a Lake Erie story or poem. In 1886, Fontane’s Lake Erie ballad was published in Munich and Vienna. The abridged prose of the Gough rendering was transformed into one of Germany’s most popular and beloved ballads, “John Maynard,” which has endured the ravages of time much more successfully than Alger’s well-liked ballad of 1866.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rapp's paragraph, as quoted above, sadly reveals that Rapp knew next to nothing about Gough, Alger, or Fontane. Apparently, Rapp did not even bother to do his basic homework, like checking to see when the writers in question actually lived. Theodor Fontane, who is counted as one of Germany's giants of 19th-century literature – whether as a novelist, an essayist, or as a poet – could not, for instance, have “translated” a Lake Erie text in 1901, because he, like Gough, was already moldering in the grave. Fontane's dates: 1819-1898! Indeed, the very use of the word “translate” by Rapp indicates that he had never even cast a wayward glance at Fontane's ballad. Given Rapp's own seemingly half-hearted research which is supplemented with far too much literary license based upon Rapp's own considerable skills as a story-teller, the article unfortunately not only misleads but also misinforms the reader with regard to aspects of both the 1841 loss of the *Erie* as well as the literary development of the legend of John Maynard.

Summing up, the 1956 article, if viewed as an index of John Maynard scholarship in the 1950's, represents not the slightest advance in knowledge of the literary development of the legend of John Maynard. On the other hand, it is possible that the objective in 1956 was not “dry” scholarly research, which might be seen as dealing solely with “antiquarian issues,” but an attempt to awaken the nation to one of America's most moving legends. Nonetheless, as Rapp's article fails to match Shepard's research back in 1927, further advances in John Maynard research must be seen in the work of George Salomon, which did not begin until the 1960's.

NOVEMBER 22, 2010,
BAD SCHUSSENRIED, GERMANY

ANNOTATIONS:

1) Two distinct versions of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” were in circulation, which are referred to as the “B” and “A” versions in the distribution chart. (“B” is taken from “Baltimore,” i.e., the *Baltimore Sun*, and “A” is taken from “Argus” in the *Wisconsin Argus*). Interestingly, the “A” version exhibits fewer deletions and seems to have suffered less from editorial editing or blundering. For distribution between 1845 and 1860, cf. http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/Pre-Gough.pdf

For the differences between “A” and “B” versions, cf. http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/Numbered.pdf

2) Frederick J. Shepard, as early as 1927, alleged that Luther Fuller was “a former convicted counterfeiter.” Cf. Frederick J. Shepard, “A Wandering Legend of Lake Erie: John Maynard,” *Buffalo Evening News*, Saturday Magazine, July 16, 1927, p. 9:

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/Wandering.html

3) Cf. George Salomon, “John Maynard of Lake Erie: The Genesis of a Legend,” *Niagara Frontier*, Autumn 1964, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 74-75:

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/LegendGenesis.pdf (pp. 2-3)

4) *Ibid.*, p. 75: http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/LegendGenesis.pdf (p. 3)

5) *Ibid.*, p. 78: http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/LegendGenesis.pdf (p. 8)

6) For Levi T. Beebe’s eye-witness account, cf.

a) Cf. “Levi T. Beebe's account:” *Salem Gazette*, Salem, Massachusetts, Friday, August 26, 1841: http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/Eyew1.pdf and

b) Norman Barry, “An Investigation of American Source Material Used by the *Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen* in Leipzig, Germany on October 8th, 1841, under the Heading ‘Loss of the Steamboat *Erie*,” http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/SCAEssay.pdf (pp. 12-15)

The *Salem Gazette* article, a reprint from the *Cleveland Herald*, states that Beebe was “only twelve years old.” The *New-Bedford Mercury* (New-Bedford, Mass.), Fri., Aug. 27, 1841, p.1, states that Beebe was “not 12 years of age.” At the very least, Beebe was *five years younger* than the age Rapp provides.

7) Cf. **Annotation 1** for distribution.

8) For an analysis of events on the *Erie* vs. events on the *Jersey*, the steamboat in the anonymous sketch, cf. Norman Barry, “The Legend of John Maynard, ‘The Helmsman of Lake Erie,’ in the Backdrop of the Year 1845: The Jackson – Elliott – Cooper Connection,” pp. 2-7: http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/MaynardJackson.pdf

9) Frederick J. Shepard’s 1927 article provides much more cogent argumentation than Rapp and is less error-prone. For a review of Shepard’s 1927 article with particular reference to Charles Dickens, cf. Norman Barry, “Who Wrote ‘The Helmsman of Lake Erie?’ An Examination of Two Candidates: Charles Dickens and James Fenimore Cooper.” http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/DICKENSvsCOOPER.pdf

10) Both Edgar Clemens, 1st engineer of the *Erie*, and Giles Williams, a merchant residing in Buffalo, referred to the immigrants as “Dutch” during the Coroner’s Inquest at Buffalo.

11) Rapp later waffles on the question of just how “rough” the sea was. On p. 7, he seems to correct himself when he writes, “While the wind had begun to abate slightly, the sea was still rough,” which, of course, is not what he wrote in his introductory paragraph on p. 3: “...a

slightly rough sea that had started to abate with a falling wind.” The question of sea-sickness as a result of weather conditions is surprisingly not considered although Rapp clearly had access to at least part of the testimony from the Coroner’s Inquest. Rapp’s background information on Captain Titus and facts concerning the *Erie* are taken directly from Captain Titus’s testimony on August 11.

12) Cf. Norman Barry, “Two Missing Links: *Harpers* 1854 & *The Living Age* 1860: an Evaluation of two newly Discovered John Maynard Texts” for one possibility as to how Gough may have had access to a shortened 1845 text:

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/TwoMissingLinks.pdf

13) Cf. Horatio Alger, Jr., “How I Came to Write ‘John Maynard,’” *The Writer* (Boston, Mass.), Volume 8, 1895, pp. 182-183:

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/Alger.pdf

Rapp’s own date for Alger’s ballad is mistaken. Apparently Rapp was not aware of Alger’s 1895 article in *The Writer*:

“In 1875 the story was turned into poetry. Authorship has been attributed to Horatio Alger, Jr., who made his fortune as a writer of dime novels, and to Kate Weaver.”

Marvin A. Rapp, “John Maynard – Lake Erie Hero,” p. 12

Who exactly was behind the name “Kate Weaver” has never been established with complete certainty, but it may be safely asserted that she (or he?) did not have anything to do with Alger’s 1866 Lake Erie ballad. For a consideration of one possible candidate, cf. Norman Barry, “Who Is Kate Weaver? (A Storm in a Teacup?)” —

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/Weaver.pdf