

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”
BY
NORMAN BARRY

The shocking tragedy which beset the *Erie* on August 9th, 1841, did not go unnoticed in Germany. Hardly two months had elapsed since the disaster when the *Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen** (possibly translated as the *Saxon Commercial Advertiser*), a newspaper put out by Nob[ert] Binder, whose publishing house was located in Leipzig and Chemnitz, issued a thrilling account purporting to provide “detailed coverage” of the event.

The reports presented in Binder’s newspaper, which have, in this article, been pieced together from various reprints of the original correspondence published in the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, were received from a single source in Buffalo, New York, and contributed only two days following the conflagration. Apart from the short transitional piece dealing with the 2nd Mate, William Hughes, [*Gewerbe-Blatt*, p. 480, lower half of the 1st column), seven-eighths of the source material, upon which the article in the *Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen* is based, has been located. In this research paper, the German article has been split up into five sections or parts, four of which are set against the original American newspaper articles for easy sentence-by-sentence textual comparison. In these sections, the translation was from English into German by the 1841 German newspaper. Only Part IV, referring to the 2nd Mate, which has not been found, is a translation from the German article into English.

* For scans of the original 1841 article in the *Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen*, kindly provided by Lutz Weide, cf.

http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/GBSachsen1.pdf (p. 479) & http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/GBSachsen2.pdf (p. 480)

<p><i>Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen</i>, Nr. 79, 8. Okt. 1841, Leipzig, S. 479-480.</p> <p>Passages in red are either incorrect or not in the American text. For a transcription of the antiquated German Gothic script by Lutz Weide, cf. http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/GBSachsenT.pdf</p> <p><i>Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen</i>, Teil I:</p>	<p><i>The Liberator</i> (Boston, Massachusetts), Friday, September 3, 1841, Vol. XI, No. 36, Whole no. 557, p. 144, c. 3.</p> <p>Passages in blue were not translated.</p> <p>Part I of the Complete German Article:</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Der Untergang des Dampfbootes Erie. [= Loss of the Steamboat Erie]</i></p> <p>S. 479, 1. Spalte:</p> <p>Der Untergang des Dampfbootes Erie auf dem Eriesee und die Umstände unter denen dieser gräßlicher Vorfall stattfand, sind von solchem Interesse, daß wir unsere Leser nicht zu ermüden fürchten, wenn wir Ausführliche darüber nach den Angaben der nordamerikanischen Zeitungen mittheilen:</p> <p>„Es ist nun mit Gewißheit erhoben, daß der Erie 230 Reisende an Bord hatte, darunter 130 Deutsche und Schweizer und zwölf Frauen, sodann eine Bemannung von 25 Mann und 10 Musikanten, in allem 265 Personen.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Correspondence of <i>N. Y. Commercial Advertiser</i>. BUFFALO, 11th August 1841</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[No Heading]</p> <p>[<i>Translation of introduction in the Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen hinting at a newspaper source in the United States:</i></p> <p><i>The loss of the steamboat Erie on Lake Erie together with the circumstances, under which this dreadful incident occurred, are of such immediate interest that we are not fearful of tiring our readers by rendering detailed coverage based upon reports drawn from North American newspapers:]</i></p> <p>The <i>Erie</i> had—as near as can now be ascertained—one hundred and eighty deck passengers, (of which about one hundred and thirty were Germans,) fifty cabin passengers, (about twelve of them ladies,) twenty-five crew, and ten musicians—in all, two hundred and sixty-five persons.</p>

The reader is at the very beginning of the article impressed by the frightening and apparently quite exhaustive figures of the number of casualties and the total number of people on board the ill-starred *Erie*. Yet, given the reports provided to the American press on the loss of the *Erie*, the reader

must approach the statistics in the German paper with caution. The actual number of casualties and the actual number of passengers were never ascertained with certainty, contrary to the statement in the Leipzig paper, which was based upon initial estimates at best. But even without any prior knowledge of North American press coverage, several anomalies are apparent. Not one child, for instance, is mentioned in the statistics. Yet, we are told, first engineer Edgar Clemens heard a child scream (“Kindergeschrei”) “shortly before 8 o’clock.” Also, young Levi Beebe’s eyewitness account is related towards the end of the article. Levi was “not yet twelve years of age.”

That only “twelve women,” according to the *Saxon Commercial Advertiser* should have been on board is due to an unfortunate deletion in the German. Amazingly, the womenfolk in the German and Swiss immigrants’ families receive no consideration in the German translation. Instead, only the ladies who were “cabin passengers” were counted! Interestingly, the American text lumps the German-speaking Swiss together with the Germans without even mentioning the Swiss in the statistics. This oversight is corrected in the *Saxon Commercial Advertiser*.

The Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser* reported on Tuesday evening, August 10th, exactly one day after the tragedy:

“Of cabin passengers, Capt. Titus thinks there were between 30 and 40, of whom 10 or 12 were ladies. In the steerage were about 140 passengers, nearly all of whom were Swiss and German immigrants. They were mostly in families with the usual proportion of men, women and children. The heart bleeds at the thought.”

As should be clear, the flawed statistics in the *Saxon Commercial Advertiser* fail to jibe with general reports of the tragedy in American newspapers, particularly as the inventory of those lost and saved was a haphazard affair. One explanation for the failure to provide final statistics was that passengers’ lists had been destroyed in the blaze and not every passenger had been recorded before the ship disembarked. Also, there was the problem of identification of bodies as well as those missing and unaccounted for. Children often counted as only one-half of a passenger, leading to further difficulties in establishing the total number of casualties. And finally, there was never a complete inventory of those fortunate enough to be saved. The Coroner’s Commission, though urged to make a thorough investigation of those saved, was too busy retrieving corpses from the bowels of the lake and attempting identification and restoration of personal possessions to next of kin. A major revision of the second listing of losses put out only two days after the tragedy [cf. *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser and Journal*, Aug. 11, 1841] has yet to be discovered and was, in all likelihood, never undertaken. Instead, only piecemeal reports continued to drift in.

What becomes apparent in the German article, is that two thrilling eyewitness accounts are knitted together. The anonymous correspondent to the *N.Y. Commercial Advertiser* presents eyewitness accounts by both Edgar Clemens and Levi Beebe. It is he who also adds the moving lines on a certain Thomas Fuller, obviously referring to Luther Fuller, the steersman. The atmosphere surrounding the tragedy is highly charged and emotive.

A factual presentation is often brushed aside: There is no attempt made to ascertain what caused the fire. There is no consideration of liability. Captain Titus's testimony is not quoted. Strangely, there is a seemingly heartless disinterest in the identity of the Germans and Swiss who were either saved or lost. Instead, the reader is confronted with the tragedy as it unfolds before the eyes of basically two individuals, one is the first engineer, and the other, a boy.

Let us now turn to the first, the eyewitness account of Edgar Clemens, the first engineer on board the *Erie*.

In the Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser and Journal*, Wednesday, August 11, 1841, Edgar Clemens was one of the few singled out and praised for his heroic action:

“Notwithstanding the heroic and self-sacrificing act of PARMALEE, we fear there is no reason to hope that GELSTON was saved. In addition to what is stated respecting PARMALEE's gallant conduct, we learn from the *Republican* of this morning, that Mr. EDGAR CLEMENS, too, the engineer, abandoned a plank on which he was floating to three children, and after some search found a box or bale, which he also resigned to an old man, and after being some time in the water, at length reached the boat to which Capt. TITUS was clinging.”

The text of the *Saxon Commercial Advertiser* makes no mention of Clemens abandoning a plank to three children. An “elderly man” instead of “an old man” is alluded to, although he received Clemens' place on a plank rather than a “box or bale.” Also, Clemens did reach “the boat to which Captain Titus was clinging.”

The Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser and Journal* reported Edgar Clemens' testimony before the Coroner's Inquest on Saturday, August 14th, 1841. Clemens “aged 27; is 1st engineer of the steamboat Erie; acted in that capacity three years;....” His statement:

“...heard an explosion like the light blast of rock; instantly saw fire just aft of the smoke pipe, on boiler deck; he was looking in the direction of boiler deck at the time; attention called by the cry of children; explosion, fire and rolling paint kegs were all seen and heard at the same instant.”

As will be seen, the material reported in the *Saxon Commercial Advertiser* goes far beyond Clemens' testimony, placing the reader in the middle of the action, and painting a convincing, though subjective scene of the human drama as the doomed *Erie* went up in flames.

Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen, Fortsetzung, Teil II:

Kurz vor 8 Uhr zog ein Kindergeschrei die Aufmerksamkeit des Hrn. Clemens, welcher sich im Maschinenraum befand, auf sich. Er ging, darnach zu sehen und war Zeuge einer mütterlichen Exekution.

Im Augenblick, wo er sich an seinen Posten zurückbegeben wollte, ertönte ein Knall, nicht anders, als würde ein Fels gesprengt.

Hr. Clemens sah sich nach der Ursache um, und seine Augen begegneten einer Feuermasse, die sich längs des Kamins am Prominadendeck hinaufzog.

Nun eilte er nach dem Maschinenraum; hier aber kam ihm ein Qualm dichten, schwarzen, erstickenden Rauches entgegen, der ihm das Vorwärtsgen unmöglich machte.

Er zog sich auf die hintere Bootseite zurück, vom Rauch und Feuer verfolgt, welches letztere, von dem frischen durch die schnelle Fahrt noch mehr belebten Winde angefacht, mit der Geschwindigkeit einer Schießpulverlinie um sich griff.

Er stieg die Treppe hinauf auf das obere Verdeck und traf daselbst den Kapitän, welcher ihm befahl, die Maschine zu sperren.

Er erwiderte: „ich will es nochmals versuchen, Kapitän Titus, aber sicherlich ist es mein Tod.“

Nun rieth ihm der Kapitän, es gehen zu lassen, befahl aber dem Piloten, gegen das Ufer zu steuern.

Das geschah und Kapitän und Ingenieur suchten in den untern Raum zu

The Liberator (cont., Part II of the Complete German Article):

Mr. Clemens, 1st engineer, says that a few minutes before 8, his attention was drawn from the engine room by the cries of one of the children, whose mother was punishing it;

while looking at the child, he heard an explosion similar to that of the blasting of a rock;

he immediately turned round to ascertain the cause, when, to his astonishment, he saw fire running up to the promenade deck along the chimney;

he started for the engine room, but was met by volumes of dense, black and suffocating smoke, which prevented his reaching it;

he then retreated to the after part of the boat, followed by the smoke and flames, which seemed to spread with the rapidity of a train of gunpowder, urged on by the strong wind, to which the speed of the boat gave increased strength.

He then ascended the stairs leading to the upper deck, where he was met by the captain, who ordered him to stop the engine.

He replied: ‘I will attempt it again, Capt. Titus, but it will be certain death to me.’

The Capt. then told him not to try it, and he forthwith directed the helmsman to head the boat for the shore.

This was done, when the Capt. and engineer endeavored to go below to

<p>gelangen, um einige der Passagiere zu retten; aber das war eine unmögliche Sache.</p> <p>Denn obwohl seit der Explosion kaum eine Minute vergangen, so war die ganze Frauenkajüte und das untere Verdeck zusammt dem vordern Theil des Promenadendeck ein einziger Feuerballen, und die Hitze war so groß, daß ihre Kleider davon in Flammen geriethen.</p> <p>Nun schlug Hr. Clemens dem Kapitän vor, für ihre Sicherheit zu sorgen, womit dieser übereinstimmte und augenblicklich über Bord sprang.</p> <p>Clemens ergriff eine brennende Bank und warf sie über Bord, allein augenblicklich hatten sie zwei Schweizer gefaßt,</p> <p>und als er ihr eine zweite nachsendete, war auch die im nu von einigen Passagieren im Wasser in Beschlag [S. 479, 2. Spalte:] genommen.</p> <p>So auf seine Schwimmkunst als letztes Mittel verwiesen, sprang Clemens über Bord und schwamm dem Ufer zu.</p> <p>Nachdem er etwa zehn Ruthen zurückgelegt haben möchte, schien es ihm gerathener, in der Nähe des Schiffs zu bleiben, um, wenn dasselbe bis auf den Wasserspiegel herabgebrannt wäre, sich auf das Wrack zu setzen.</p> <p>Mit diesem Entschluß kehrte er sich gegen das Dampfboot um, aber welches Schauspiel bot sich seinen Augen!</p> <p>„Ich kann,“ sind seine eigenen Worte, „keine Sprache finden, es zu beschreiben, keine Zeit, kein Orts-, kein Glückswechsel wird die schreckliche Erinnerung je aus meinem Gedächtnis verwischen.“</p>	<p>save some of the passengers; but their retreat was cut off;</p> <p>for, although hardly one minute had elapsed, the whole of the ladies' cabin, and the lower deck, together with the forward part of the promenade deck, were one sheet of flames; and such was the heat that their own clothes were on fire.</p> <p>Mr. Clemens then proposed to the Capt. that they should look to their own safety, which was agreed upon, and the latter immediately leaped into the water;</p> <p>The former seized a bench, which was on fire, and threw it overboard; but it was immediately grasped by two of the Swiss emigrants;</p> <p>A like attempt was made with a second bench, but this also was taken possession of by some of the passengers in the water.</p> <p>Mr. C. then concluded that his only hope was in swimming; jumped into the water, and made for the shore;</p> <p>After swimming about ten rods [ca. 165 ft.], it occurred to him that it would be better to wait until the vessel burned to the water's edge, and if the wreck then floated, to remain by it;</p> <p>With this view, he turned his face again toward the boat, but the sight which then met his eyes,</p> <p>was one (to use his own words,) 'which, though I cannot find words to describe it, neither time, nor change of scene or circumstances, can ever obliterate from my memory.'</p>
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Whether Captain Titus, thirty-three years of age, was truly the last person to leave the ship, as Titus *seemed* to indicate (“am of the opinion”) under oath during the Coroner’s Inquest, may, on the basis of Clemens’ statement, be subjected to scrutiny. As the Inquest was initiated on the second day following the disaster, its aim was “to investigate the causes which led to the destruction of the Steamboat *Erie*.” As such, the question of liability and possible negligence on the part of the Captain and crew were of central importance. It will be recalled that Luther Fuller’s name was provided *voluntarily* by Titus in this connection (perhaps a “harmless” ploy to divert attention from his vague response as to when, exactly, he had abandoned the *Erie*?). The awkward question as to whether Titus had prematurely abandoned his own ship when survivors were still on board and begging for help was never asked. Yet Edgar Clemens’ statement clashes head on with the Captain’s testimony:

“...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*; he was always a resolute man in obeying orders.”

T. J. Titus, *Before the Coroner’s Inquest, August 11, 3 P.M.* From *The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Thursday evening, August 12, 1841.

<p><i>Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen</i>, Nr. 79, 8. Okt. 1841, Leipzig, S. 479, 2. Spalte (p. 479, c. 2), Fortsetzung, Teil III:</p>	<p><i>New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette</i> (Concord, N. H.), August 26, 1841 (every Thursday), Vol. XXXII, No. 1681; New Series Vol. VIII, No. 351, p. 3, c. 4.</p> <p>The reprint which follows, apart from the introductory four lines, is identical, with very few exceptions, to that in <i>The Liberator</i>.</p> <p>Cont., Part III of the Complete German Article:</p>
<p>Das ganze Schiff mit Ausnahme eines kleinen Theils des vordern untern Verdecks bildete eine einzige zum Himmel emporlodernde Feuermasse.</p> <p>Beim Hin- und Herwehen der Flamme konnte er die Körper einiger Passagiere in ihrer Todesagonie sich windend erblicken , andere suchten über Bord zu springen, besaßen aber augenscheinlich nicht genug Kraft,</p>	<p>[<i>The Erie</i>.—A correspondent of the <i>N. Y. Commercial Advertiser</i>, in a letter from Buffalo, gives the following account of Mr. Clemens’ [sic: Clemens’] description of the conflagration as it appeared to him while he was floating on the water. Mr. C. was the first engineer of the Erie:]</p> <p>“The whole of the vessel, with the exception of a small part of the forward lower deck, was one mass of fire, lighting up the whole heavens;</p> <p>as the flames would wave to and fro, he could see the bodies of some of the passengers writhing as it were in their agony, and endeavoring to throw themselves overboard, but apparently not possessing strength to</p>

<p>über das Geländer zu kommen.</p> <p>Auf dem vordern Theil des Verdecks stand eine Gruppe von zwölf oder mehr, wild mit den Armen um sich schlagend, und die Luft mit herzergreifenden Jammertönen erfüllend.</p> <p>„Wirklich, sagt Hr. Clemens, „der Anblick war so graßlich, daß ich einen Augenblick im Begriff war, mich untersinken zu lassen, nur um der schrecklichen Szene los zu werden.“</p> <p>Er wendete sich nun wieder vom Boot ab, und gewahrte eine Planke, auf welcher zwei von der Mannschaft saßen.</p> <p>Sie luden ihn zu sich ein, er folgte, aber die Planke war kaum im Stande, sie alle zu tragen.</p> <p>Glücklicherweise schwamm eine Schublade von einem Schreibtisch in der Nähe, diese erreichte er und fügte sie, die Höhlung nach oben gekehrt, unter die Planke, die nun leichter auf dem Wasser trieb.</p> <p>Er saß aber nicht lange darauf, als er eien ältlichen Mann, fast erschöpft, herbeischwimmen sah;</p> <p>Diesem rief er zu, trat ihm seinen Platz ab und vertraute sich nun wieder seiner Schwimmfertigkeit an.</p> <p>Bald darauf kam ihm ein Schutzbret in die Hände, da aber zugleich zwei Passagiere darnach fahndeten, so überließ er es diesen.</p> <p>Nachdem er wieder eine Weile geschwommen, hörte er die Stimme des Kapitäns, der ihm zurief; er wendete sich um und sah jenen mit Vieren</p>	<p>get over the rail—</p> <p>while on the fore part of the deck were seen some dozen or more wildly throwing about their arms and filling the air with cries and shrieks which seemed to pierce his very heart.</p> <p>In fact, said Mr. C., “so horrible and dreadful was the sight that I at one time almost felt ready to suffer myself to sink beneath the water, without an effort to save myself, that the scene might be hidden from my view.”</p> <p>He again turned from the boat and saw a plank floating about, on which were two of the crew.</p> <p>They called to him to get on [<i>The Liberator: it</i>]. He did so, but it barely supported them all;</p> <p>fortunately he perceived the drawer of a bureau near by, which he reached, and placing it bottom upward under the plank, it floated with more ease.</p> <p>He had not been on the plank many minutes before he perceived an elderly man swimming by, nearly exhausted;</p> <p>he called to him, and relinquished his place on the plank to the old man, while he again trusted to his swimming.</p> <p>It was not long, however, before he met one of the “fenders,” and as he was securing it, he saw two more of the passengers; this he also gave up to them.</p> <p>After swimming about alone for some minutes, he was hailed by the Capt., and turning round saw him and four of the crew on the yawl,</p>
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<p>von der Mannschaft auf dem umgeschlagenen kleinen Boot sitzen.</p> <p>Auch er setze sich darauf, und nun sagte der Kapitän, eine Frau treibe in der Nähe umher, und bald hatte er sie entdeckt: es war Mißtreß Lynde.</p> <p>Um ihren Nacken [Seite 480, 1. Spalte:] hing ein Schwimmapparat, der aber kaum zur Hälfte [<i>mehr als ein Viertel</i>] gefüllt war, mit der Hand hielt sie ein Ruder krampfhaft gefaßt, in jeder anderen Beziehung schien sie todt.</p> <p>Clemens dachte, würde der Schwimmapparat gefüllt, so müßte sie noch länger über dem Wasser treiben und möchte vielleicht, mit Bekannten zusammentreffend, aufgefangen werden. [<i>falls gerettet, von ihren Freunden erkannt werden</i>]</p> <p>In dieser Absicht setzte er den Mund an die Röhre und bließ hinein.</p> <p>Darüber bewegte sich Mistres Lynde's Lippen, und sie sagte mit schwacher Stimme: Sie sind sehr gütig, Sir.“</p> <p>Auf diese Weise gewiß, daß sie noch lebte, fuhr er im Füllen des Apparats fort, allein er war so erschöpft, daß er nur unvollkommen damit zu Stande kam.</p> <p>Er zog sie nun nach der Barke, worüber sie zu sich kam und sagte: „Retten Sie mich, wenn es ihnen möglich, aber sparen sie Ihre Kräfte für sich und lassen Sie mich sterben, falls meine Rettung nur durch Aufopferung anderer gelingen könnte.“</p> <p>„Eine solche Sprache aus dem Munde einer Frau,“ sagte Hr. Clemens, „brachte mich zu dem festen Entschluß, falls ich mich rettete, sollte sie es auch seyn,“ und so gab er seine Bemühungen um sie nicht auf, und</p>	<p>which was bottom upward.</p> <p>He also got on it, when the Capt. informed him that there was a lady floating by. He soon discovered her. This was Mrs. Lynde;</p> <p>a life preserver was about her neck, but not one quarter filled with air; her hand grasped an oar, and she was to all appearance dead.</p> <p>Mr. C. thought that by filling the life preserver she must continue to float, and if picked up be recognized by her friends.</p> <p>With this intention he applied his mouth to the tube and commenced filling it.</p> <p>While so doing, Mrs. L. faintly spoke and said, “you are very kind, sir.”</p> <p>Finding she was alive he continued to fill the life preserver, but so exhausted was he, that he could do it but imperfectly.</p> <p>He then drew her toward the yawl, when she revived a little, and said, “save me if you can, but rather use all your efforts for yourself, and let me die, if I cannot be saved without sacrificing others.”</p> <p>“Such language from a female,” said Mr. C., “made me resolve, that if I were saved she should be also;”— and his efforts were constantly directed to her, and successfully.</p>
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<p>war darin glücklich.</p> <p>Zwei Stunden trieben sie noch auf der Barke herum, bis der „Clinton“ sie aufnahm.</p> <p><i>Nicht im Originaltext:</i> So lautet die Erzählung des Herrn Clemens, deren Ablegung ihn dergestalt angriff, daß er wie in Konvulsionen zitterte. Obgleich ein großer kräftiger Mann, konnte er sie nur mit schwacher Stimme abgeben.</p>	<p>They continued on the yawl for about two hours, when the De Witt Clinton rescued them.”</p> <p><i>Translation of concluding lines of Edgar Clemens’s story in the Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen, which were possibly invented:</i> Thus ran the story of Mr. Clemens, whose telling of it so moved him that he trembled from convulsions. Although a tall and powerfully built man, he was only able to relate the ordeal in a weak voice.</p> <p><i>Not in the German text nor in The Liberator, but in the New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette:</i> <i>The pilot of the Erie, the captain in his examination says, he believes remained at the wheel till he was burned to death.”</i></p>
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The transition between Edgar Clemens’ story and that of Levi Beebe is a short depiction of the 2nd Mate on board the *Erie* (translated as “Unterschiffer”). An exact passage corresponding to the German has not been found, but the testimony provided during the Coroner’s Inquest provides sufficient hints as to the man’s identity. Nowhere in the Coroner’s Inquest were “keys” referred to. If the fire buckets were indeed kept under “lock and key,” silence on this sensitive point would be understandable.

<p>Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen, Nr. 79, 8. Okt. 1841, Leipzig, S. 480, 1. Spalte (p. 480, c. 1), Fortsetzung, Teil IV:</p> <p>Der Unterschiffer gab an, er sey gerade auf dem vordern Promenadendeck in der Nähe des Kapitäns gestanden, als die Explosion vor sich ging.</p> <p>Augenblicklich habe er sich umgesehen, die Flamme und den Rauch erblickt, und die Beschaffung der Feuereimer befohlen.</p>	<p>N. Barry’s translation, the original text not having been located. Cont., Part IV of the Complete German Article:</p> <p>The 2nd Mate stated that he had been standing close to the Captain on the front portion of the promenade deck when the explosion occurred.</p> <p>Immediately, he looked to see what was happening, saw the flames and the smoke, and gave orders to fetch the fire buckets.</p>
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<p>Zu diesem Ende gab er einem der Leute die Schlüssel, von dem Manne aber ward nichts mehr gesehen, wahrscheinlich starb er in den Flammen.</p> <p>Nun sorgte er für Aussetzung des einen Boots, es schwamm aber noch nicht ganz auf dem Wasser, als es bereits mit Passagieren überfüllt war und umschlug;</p> <p>derselbe Fall war es mit dem andern Boot.</p> <p>Nun sprang er über Bord und erreichte mit neun anderen das umgeschlagene Boot, aber vier davon würden weggespült und ertranken.</p> <p>Die beiden geretteten sind der Ansicht, daß nahe an zwei Drittel der Umgekommenen verbrannten, und daß mit Ausnahme Mistreß Lynde's kein einziges Frauenzimmer der Kajüte entrann.</p>	<p>For this purpose he gave one of the crew the keys. This person, however, did not return and probably died in the flames.</p> <p>Then he saw to it that a lifeboat was lowered such that it was partially in the water. As it was already filled with too many passengers, it capsized.</p> <p>The same thing happened to the second lifeboat.</p> <p>Then he jumped overboard and reached the overturned boat with nine other men, four of whom were washed away and drowned.</p> <p>The two who were saved are of the opinion that nearly two thirds of the lost were burnt to death and that, with the exception of Mrs. Lynde, no other woman in the women's cabin was saved.</p>
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William Hughes, the 2nd Mate, was both responsible for the fire buckets and the fire engine. He was also active in lowering the lifeboats. He was also in the vicinity of the Captain when the fire broke out and immediately went to investigate the situation and inform the Captain.

***The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Saturday Evening, August 14, 1841, p. 2, c. 2: Coroner's Inquest**

Wm. Hughes sworn. —My age is 25; I am a seaman; having followed that business seven years, the last three on the lakes; entered as 2nd Mate on board the *Erie* this season.

... was forward when the fire broke out; saw Capt. T. conversing with a stout gentleman: heard a hissing sound, he jumped aft and saw the skylight windows illuminated from the flames below. The flames came up in a large body through the scuttle instantaneously; jumped forward and informed the captain of the fire; then ran to the passage way and called for the men below to get the buckets and rig the engine immediately; ran to the fire engine and found flames coming fiercely from below, high as the walking-beam; ran forward to clear away the small boats; there I saw Mr.

Clemens; saw several others at the bows, many Swiss were in the boats before they were clear of the decks. I ordered them out, but they did not obey, so I jumped in and threw them out; the boat was then lowered, and as she was on her way to the water many persons jumped in, and soon she was filled. Heard Capt. T. calling out to “stop her,” but could not see him for the smoke; jumped over among the others, and was afterwards picked up by the Clinton; is of the opinion that there were 300 persons on board at the time of the accident.

The thrilling story of Levi Beebe and the concluding lines on Thomas Fuller are also taken verbatim from the *New York Commercial Advertiser*. Apart from only a few translation errors and, in one case, a very free translation of “crowning incident,” the translation into German of both eyewitness accounts is quite good and does not distort the original English text. All in all, it may safely be said that the German translator, while allowing himself some stylistic freedom, provided a close reading of the original eyewitness accounts and made very few mistakes.

<p>Gewerbe-Blatt für Sachsen, Nr. 79, 8. Okt. 1841, Leipzig, S. 480, 1.-2. Spalte (p. 480, c. 1-2), Fortsetzung, Teil V:</p>	<p>New-Bedford Mercury (New-Bedford, Mass.), Fri. Aug. 27, 1841, p. 1, c. 4, vol. XXXV, no. 8. Passages in blue were not translated by the <i>Gewerbe-Blatt</i>.</p> <p>Cont., Part V of the Complete German Article:</p>
<p>...Daß dergleichen Unglücksfälle alle im Menschen schlum- [S. 480, 2. Spalte:] mernde Kräfte zu Tage fördern, gab sich auch bei dieser Gelegenheit kund;</p> <p>ein Beweis davon ist die bewundernswürdige Kaltblütigkeit und Geistesgegenwart des jungen Levi Beebe, eines noch nicht ganz zwölfjährigen Knaben. [„coolness“ = <i>Verstärkung von</i></p>	<p>A HEROIC BOY is here described in a letter from Buffalo concerning the burning of the <i>Erie Steamer</i>, which we find in the <i>N. York Commercial Advertiser</i>. It is a thrilling incident:</p> <p>The burning of the Erie and the loss of above 200 lives have cast a gloom over the whole community. There are stricken hearts and vacant places in social circles around us.</p> <p>Such disasters bring out heroic qualities.</p> <p>For example, the astonishing coolness and self possession of young Levi Beebe – not 12 years of age. [“Coolness” was incorrectly translated as “cold-bloodedness.”]</p>

„Geistesgegenwart.“ Hier: eher im Sinne von „Mut“ anstatt „Kaltblütigkeit“]

Er war von der Militärschule zu Cooperstown auf der Heimreise begriffen, mit dem Oberrichter Nelson, welcher ihn in Buffalo der Aufsicht des Unterschiffers übergab.

Beim Ausbruch des Feuers wollte er Zuflucht suchen im Frauengemach; da aber das Feuer ihm auch von dieser Richtung entgegen kam, so ließ er sich an den Ketten am Steuer hinab, ergriff das Ruder oder etwas dazu Gehöriges und ließ sich so zwei Stunden lang durch das Wasser ziehen, obwohl das Boot schwer und tief durch die hohen Wellen ging.

Das Feuer kam ihm dabei so nahe, daß seine Hände übel zugerichtet wurden, und er mußte sich beständig den Kopf naß machen, damit nicht Gesicht und Haar Feuer fingen.

Einmal ward er am Knöchel gefaßt von einem vorbeitreibenden Mann, der aber war so erschöpft, das es dem Knaben gelang, ihn von sich abzuschütteln.

Ein andermal faßte ihn ein starker Mann, der gerade im Begriff war, unterzusinken.

Der Knabe stellte ihm die Thorheit vor, ihn in sein Verderben hineinzuziehen und ward endlich mit großer Schwierigkeit auch seiner

He had been at the military school at Cooperstown, and came to Buffalo on his way home (to Cleveland) with Chief Justice Nelson who placed him in charge of the master of the *Erie*.

[“The misleading word “master,” referring to the captain, may have been a corruption of “paymaster.” “Mate,” instead of “master,” is used in **The Connecticut Courant** (Hartford, Conn.), Sat., Aug. 28, 1841, vol. LXXVII, no. 3997, p. 1, c.5. The man referred to is Glieson, the Clerk. For further details, see the excerpt following Levi’s story taken from the **New-York Log Cabin**.]

On the bursting out of the fire, he ran round the ladies’ cabin for safety, but the fire sweeping round, in both directions, he laid hold of the tiller chains and slipped down the stern; there he grasped the rudder, or some appendage of it, and was towed thro’ the water nearly two hours, heavily as the boat plunged in the violent sea.

The fire came so near him that his hands were badly burned – and he was obliged to wet his head constantly to prevent his hair from taking fire.

At one time his ankle [sic] was grasped by a man who swept past, but he was so exhausted that he succeeded in shaking him off.

At another a large man, “a strong swimmer in his agony,” caught hold of him;

The lad reasoned with him on the folly of pulling him off when both would be drowned in consequence, and eventually, with great

los, indem der Unglückliche sank.

Herzzerreißende Töne ließen sich inmitten der braußenden Wogen und der prasselnden Flamen vernehmen, über zweihundert Personen ertranken oder verbrannten in der Nähe des Knaben, und doch unter all diesen Gefahren und Schrecken hielt er mit unermüdlicher Ausdauer an seinen Rudern fest, und behielt seine volle Besinnung in dem Grade, daß er die ganze jammervolle Szene bezeugen konnte.

Der Brand löste endlich das Fahrzeug in zwei Theile auf, und nun half ihm ein Mann auf die Ueberreste der hintern Abtheilung hinauf, wo sie endlich von dem „Clinton“ gerettet wurden.

Der Knabe befindet sich außer Gefahr.

Aber **die Krone** des Märtyrerthums **erwarb sich** der Pilot, indem er sich seiner Pflicht zum Opfer brachte.

[Der mit „indem“ eingeleitete Nebensatz steht nicht im englischen Text. „Krönendes Ereignis“ wird mit der „erworbenen Krone“ übersetzt.]

Beim Ausbruch des Feuers steuerte er dem etwa vier Meilen entfernten Ufer zu;

Er blieb auf seinem Posten und ließ das Steuer, die einzige Hoffnung der Unglücklichen, nicht eher aus den Händen, bis das Feuer sie verzehrte.

Eine solche heroische Selbstaufopferung verdient dauerndes Andenken.

Möge Thomas Fullers Name eine bleibende Stätte in den Herzen der Menschen finden!

difficulty, got clear of him and saw him sink.

Heart rending shrieks rose above the roar of the waves and the crackling of the flames – more than two hundred persons were drowning or burning around him – yet amid all these difficulties and horrors he kept his hold with unabated resolution, and with a clear understanding and observation of the whole fearful scene.

The boat he says, burned in two and a man helped him up on the stern portion, from which they were taken by the *DeWitt Clinton*.

The next morning he was brought back to the American, where he is doing well. Was not the cool, self-possession of young Beebe above his years and rare for any years!

But the **crowning incident of the occasion** was the *martyrdom* of the pilot.

[Translated as “But the pilot earned the crown of martyrdom in that he laid down his life in the course of his duty.”]

On the fire breaking out he put the vessel’s head to the shore, distant about 4 miles, **and actually burned up at the wheel**;

Yes, he never took his hands from that only hope for the safety of the passengers until they were consumed –

such heroic sacrifice deserves an enduring record.

The name of Thomas Fuller should dwell in the hearts of men.

Who was the mysterious “master” or “mate” (translated into German as “Unterschiffer”) in charge of the boy? The following excerpt tells the tale:

The Log Cabin (New-York), Saturday, August 21, 1841, published by H. Greeley. Vol. I, New Series No. 38, p. 4, c. 2.

Excerpt from “**The Burning of the Erie**”

Young Beebe, whose courage and self-possession has been particularly noticed in many public prints, was attending a Military School at Cooperstown, and was on his way to visit his friends in Cleveland. At Buffalo he was placed under the particular charge of the unfortunate Glieson, the Clerk. When the fire broke out, his friend G. took him by the hand, and after in vain endeavoring to find some mode of escape for him, he advised him to slide down the tiller-chains. This he did, and G. accompanied him. While thus hanging, the fire often poured over them in livid sheets; but they hung on, changing hands, and dashing water in their faces with the hand at liberty. The little fellow succeeded in holding on until rescued; but poor Glieson sunk a few moments too soon to be saved. The boy’s face was a good deal burned, and his leg somewhat bruised by a burning timber which fell upon it. He describes, as the most fearful part of the dreadful scene through which he passed, the shrieks of those who were vainly struggling to press themselves through the windows of the cabin, which was filled with fire and smoke.

Who was Chief Justice Nelson, the man who, on August 9th, 1841, placed young Levi Beebe in Glieson’s care? The following obituary provides clarification:

The Troy Weekly Times (Troy, N.Y.), Saturday, December 20, 1873, Vol. XVIII, No. 25, p.2, c. 4

OBITUARIES.

[From the Daily Times, Dec. 15]

EX-JUDGE SAMUEL NELSON.

Ex-Judge Samuel Nelson, late associate justice of the supreme court of the United States, died suddenly at 2 o’clock Saturday afternoon, at his residence in Cooperstown, N. Y. On Monday last he complained of having taken a slight cold, and was confined to his room up to Friday afternoon, when he went down stairs and spent the afternoon in the parlor. Saturday morning he went down to breakfast and appeared as well as usual. While sitting in his chair in the afternoon listening to the reading of a letter by Mrs. Nelson, he made an inquiry in regard to it, and then

without a word or sigh suddenly expired. So quiet was his death that it was supposed he had fainted, and not until the physicians pronounced him dead was the truth realized. We copy the following concise account of his life from the *New York Times* of yesterday:

The late judge had just completed his eighty-first year, having been born on Nov. 10, 1792, at Hebron, Washington county, N.Y. Both his father, John Rodgers Nelson, and his mother, Jane McCarter, were of Irish descent, their ancestors having emigrated from the north of Ireland to Salem, Washington county, about the middle of the eighteenth century. The deceased was sent to the district school at a very early age, and was prepared for college at a classical school in Salem, taught by Rev. Mr. Gross, and afterward at Granville Academy, the principal of which was Salem Towne of spelling-book fame. He entered Middlebury college, Vermont, in 1811, and graduated August 1813. He studied law in Salem under Messrs. Savage & Woods, both of whom were distinguished lawyers, Savage having been subsequently chief justice of this state, and Woods a judge in Madison county. In the year 1816 Mr. Woods removed to Madison county. Nelson accompanied him, and was admitted to the bar at the January term of the supreme court in 1817. He soon located himself in Cortland village, Cortland county, where he practiced his profession with great success. In 1820 he was appointed a presidential elector, and voted for the election of James Monroe for the second term. In 1821 he was appointed postmaster of Cortland village, and in the same year he was a delegate to the state convention for the revision of the constitution, where he advocated the abolition of the property qualification for voters. In April, 1823, he was appointed by Gov. Yates circuit judge under the new constitution he had helped to frame, and he held this office for a period of eight years. The circuit comprised the counties of Otsego, Delaware, Chenango, Broome, Cortland, Tompkins, Tioga and Sullivan. On Feb. 1, 1831, he was appointed by Gov. Throop to the supreme court, succeeding Judge William L. Marcy, who was elected United states senator. On August 31, 1837, Gov. Marcy appointed him chief justice of the state of New York, vice Judge Savage, (his former preceptor,) resigned. He held this position until 1845, when he was appointed by President Tyler associate justice of the United states supreme court, succeeding Judge Thompson. In 1846 he was elected a delegate to the state constitutional convention, but took no active part in its deliberations. He received the degree of LL.D. from Middlebury college, Columbia college and Geneva college. The soundness of his decision against the fugitive slave law in the celebrated Dred Scott case brought his name prominently and favorably before the public at that time. He was a member of the joint high commission that framed the Treaty of Washington, and was at all times the trusted and esteemed counselor of different administrations, and on several occasions during the civil war rendered valuable services to the Union by his firmness and patriotism. President Lincoln and Mr. Steward frequently expressed their appreciation of Judge Nelson's services. At one time during the war Mr. Seward, with nearly all the diplomatic corps, visited Judge Nelson at his residence at Cooperstown, ostensibly for recreation, but in reality it is known that certain important questions of international law and other public questions were submitted to him for his decision. He retired from the bench exactly a year ago, and was succeeded by Judge Ward Hunt. On his retirement, all the leading members of the bar passed resolutions in which high tribute was paid to the efficient services rendered by him during a long and honorable career in the administration of justice. Judge Nelson was married twice. First in 1819 to Miss Pamela Woods, oldest daughter of one of his preceptors, Judge Woods of Madison county. She died in 1822. In 1825 he married Miss Catherine A. Russell, daughter of Dr. Russell of Cooperstown, who with four children, two sons and two daughters, survive him. United states Commissioner Kenneth G. White is married to one of the daughters, and when in this city the late judge spent most of his time with Mr. White. The other daughter is the wife of Rev. Dr. Beech of the Episcopal church in

Twentieth street. One of the sons, Rensselaer Nelson, is judge of the United States district court of Minnesota.

It goes without saying that the geographical coordinates of both Levi Beebe and Judge Samuel Nelson point to Cooperstown, New York, the home of James Fenimore Cooper. How well did Cooper know Samuel Nelson? A letter dated October 9, 1841, written only one day after the publication of the Leipzig article on the *Erie*, provides concrete evidence that Cooper was in close contact with Chief Justice Nelson, even on October 9, with regard to the 1837 McLeod case, which was to be decided shortly afterwards with Chief Justice Nelson presiding (due to sudden illness, Nelson was obliged to give up the case). It is understandable that America's leading maritime historian would have taken a keen interest in the case, which was tied to the North Eastern Boundary Question* and was a powder keg that could have led to war between the United States and Britain. McLeod, who had murdered an American citizen on the *Caroline* and boasted that he had "killed a d—d Yankee," was found not guilty because he had been acting on orders from the British government to put down a Canadian republican insurgency close to Buffalo on Canadian territory. The *Caroline*, while anchored on American territory, was suspected of carrying weapons to the rebels. She was seized by force, an unarmed American on board killed in the process. Afterwards, she was set fire to and ultimately dashed to pieces when she crashed down the Niagara cataract. If McLeod, a British subject, had not been exonerated, war between Britain and the United States would have been imminent. The case was so paramount and American fighting sentiments had been running so high that President Tyler, on December 7, 1841, devoted a considerable portion of his State of the Union Address to this thorny case. [Cf. *Cyclopædia of Political Science, Political Economy, and the Political History of the United States, McLeod Case*: <http://www.econlib.org/library/YPDBooks/Lalor/llCy694.html> and John Tyler, "State of the Union Address," 7 December 1841: http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/P/jt10/speeches/jt_1841.htm]

*Cf. *Pennsylvania Inquirer & Daily-Courier* (Philadelphia), Sept. 30, 1841, No. 78, p.2, c. 2-3: "Our Relations with Great Britain. The McLeod Case & North Eastern Boundary Question"

638. To Charles Jared Ingersoll

Hall, Cooperstown, Oct. 9th '41

Dear Sir,

My recollections of the McLeod affair are as follows.

The Chief Justice [Samuel Nelson] told me that Mr. [Jonathan L.] Wood[s], the district Attorney of Niagara County, who was once his partner, had sent him an abstract of the testimony, as it stood last spring, when the Chief Justice was required to go and try the cause. According to this

abstract, several respectable Americans, who happened to be in Canada, swore that they saw McLeod get into, and come out of the boat &c, and heard him boast that he had killed a yankee &c. The alibi, it was also said, was attempted to be shown by means of a woman, or women of doubtful character. This, substantially, I repeat to you, with perhaps some further details to the same effect.

Since then, I understand the Chief Justice to say he has examined the testimony for the prosecution, and it struck him as insufficient to convict, unassailed. A general impression has got abroad that McLeod was not present.

All that the Chief Justice *first* said, appears to be proved, in terms, and by many witnesses; and every thing now depends on the characters of these witnesses. I have read the opening for the defence, and I confess I begin to think McLeod *was* present. At all events it is pretty clearly proved that he boasted of having been present, and that deprives him of all just grounds of complaint.

It is odd that Capt. Appleby [*master of the Caroline*] should think he saw McLeod on board the Carolina, *that very night*, on the American side of the river, and that others on the English side should swear they saw him embark. You will perceive Appleby tells a companion that McLeod was one of the party before the vessel was out of sight.

Capt. Drew [*the actual leader of the expedition against the Caroline*] also refused to testify, on very insufficient grounds, when a man's life is involved in the issue. The reporters evidently incline to *peace*, and their accounts are to be taken with grains of allowance.

I was right in thinking the Supreme Court must sentence. I mentioned the discrepancy to the Chief Justice to-day, and he laughed at his own forgetfulness in having advised the Circuit judge not to sentence.

The Letters and Journals of JAMES FENIMORE COOPER, Vol. IV (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 175-176.

As if Levi Beebe, Chief Justice Nelson, and the McLeod case were not sufficient to point to James Fenimore Cooper as an American writer and historian whose attention, due to personal contacts and his very place of residence, must have been directed *both in 1841 and earlier* to events on Lake Erie, on November 7, 1841, in a letter to David Conner, Cooper reported how shocked he was to discover that his recently published *Naval History* was not permitted to be placed in the District School Library “on the ground that *the book was controversial on the subject of the Battle of Lake Erie, and he* [John Canfield Spencer, Secretary of War from 12 October 1841 to 3 March 1843] *had uniformly declined admitting any controversial works*” [Italics represent Cooper's emphasis. Cf. *The Letters and Journals of JAMES FENIMORE COOPER*, Vol. IV, p. 187].

The concluding paragraph dealing with the steersman Thomas Fuller (whose correct name was Luther Fuller) is the best example yet found of the small number of news items representing an *incipient* Fuller legend, which *conceivably* could have flowered into the legend of John Maynard. It must not be forgotten that a legend may extend far beyond factual precedents and may even, in part, be counter-factual. Although there were no eyewitnesses of Fuller's sacrifice, the pilot's heroic deed is not questioned in this text. There is no mention of Captain Titus' shaky testimony in which he was only "of the opinion" or "believed" that Luther Fuller had "remained at the wheel and never left it until burned to death." The word "martyrdom" must ring a bell to those familiar with the anonymous 1845 John Maynard text. The "Krone des Märtyrerthums" ("Crown of Martyrdom") must also make many admirers of Theodor Fontane's "John Maynard" rejoice: "Er hat uns gerettet, er trägt die Kron', Er starb für uns, unsre Liebe sein Lohn. John Maynard." (*Roughly*: "He saved our lives, he wears the Crown; he died for us, our love, his reward and renown. John Maynard.") Whether, as may be speculated, Fontane ever saw this German translation from an anonymous correspondent in Buffalo, we shall never know. Needless to say, it is by itself insufficient to give birth to Fontane's famous ballad. A more likely scenario would be the possible influence of the Leipzig article on Emil Rittershaus's Lake Erie ballad, "A German Heart" (*Ein deutsches Herz*), published in 1871, the very first ballad of Lake Erie composed in the German language.* A mere coincidence, but it, too, was published in Leipzig.

*Cf. **Norman Barry**, "The Triangle: Three German Lake Erie Ballads. Is Emil Rittershaus the Catalyst behind Ada Linden's and Theodor Fontane's 'John Maynard' Ballads?" (English version): http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/TriangleEng.pdf

or *Das Dreiecksverhältnis: Drei deutsche Eriesee-Balladen. Ist Emil Rittershaus die treibende Kraft hinter Ada Lindens und Theodor Fontanes „John Maynard“-Balladen?* (German version): http://homepage.mac.com/joel_huberman/JohnMaynard/TriangleGer.pdf

BAD SCHUSSENRIED, GERMANY,

JANUARY 24TH, 2009