

*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><b>Part IV: Lines 62-92: Fire Discovered; Cause of Fire; Vain Attempts to Extinguish Fire</b></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 &amp; 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 &amp; 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 &amp; 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