



# Disaster on Lake Erie: The 1841 Wreck of the Steamship Erie

*Alvin F. Oickle*

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On August 9, 1841, the steamship Erie, one of the most elegant and fastest sailing between Buffalo and Chicago, departed carrying 340 passengers. Many were Swiss and German immigrants, planning to start new lives in America's heartland most never made it. The Erie erupted in flames during the night, and despite the heroic efforts of the crew of the Dewitt Clinton, 254 lives were lost. As news of this disaster spread, internationally renowned artists and writers, including Charles Dickens, were inspired to reflect on the lives lost. Historian Alvin F. Oickle's minute-by-minute account weaves together the tragic journey of the passengers, the legend that developed in the aftermath and the fury of a fire on an ocean-like lake.

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