

**JOHN FITCH: THE FIRST IN THE
WORLD'S HISTORY TO INVENT
AND APPLY STEAM PROPULSION
OF VESSELS THROUGH WATER**

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John Fitch: The First in the World's History to Invent and Apply Steam Propulsion of Vessels
Through water by Various

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VARIOUS

**JOHN FITCH: THE FIRST IN THE
WORLD'S HISTORY TO INVENT
AND APPLY STEAM PROPULSION
OF VESSELS THROUGH WATER**

JOHN FITCH

The first in the World's History to In-
vent and apply Steam Propulsion
of Vessels through water.

BORN,

January 21, 1743 in Windsor (now South Windsor) Connecticut.

DIED,

July 2, 1798 and was buried in Bardstown, Kentucky.

Compiled for the Admiral Bance Section, Hartford, Conn., No. 42, of the
National Navy League of the United States. -

Hartford
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F. B. Allen
Hartford.

To _____

With the compliments of the Admiral Bunce Section, No. 42,
Hartford, Conn., of the National Navy League of the United States.

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Chairman.

Admiral Bunce Section No. 42, Hartford, Conn.
of the
Navy League of the United States.

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HARTFORD, CONN.

FOREWORD.

The genius of John Fitch found expression in the field of mechanics. Singular as it may seem, living from boyhood in an inland agricultural town, he became obsessed and possessed with the idea of steam propulsion of vessels through water, and at a time in the world's history when the only known way was by sails or oars.

Fitch's finances seem to have been limited to his earnings. Nor did he have influence sufficient to enlist capital, at a time when the country had been nearly impoverished by the Revolutionary war, and doubtless his ideas were deemed chimerical, and he, a visionary; yet he struggled and triumphed over all obstacles, and successfully demonstrated the practicability of his wonderful invention, which dates back to April, 1785. Sole and exclusive rights in navigable waters were granted Fitch in 1786 by the state of New Jersey for his invention, and in 1787 the states of Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia granted Fitch similar rights.

After the adoption of the constitution of the United States in 1789, letters-patent were granted Fitch by the Federal Government, August 26, 1791, signed by President Washington, and by Thomas Jefferson, Henry Knox and John Randolph, Commissioners. The destruction of the U. S. Patent Office by fire in 1836 was unfortunate in this, that details of Fitch's invention cannot now be obtained.

Fitch's rights in navigable waters granted him by the state of New York in 1787 were, by reasons alleged of death, or non-use, repealed in 1798, and these rights conferred conditionally, upon Robert R. Livingston of New York. Up to April 5, 1803, Livingston's efforts towards steam propulsion of vessels, along the line of Fitch's invention, were fruitless. Robert Fulton had also been experimenting along the same line, but without success, and these conditional rights transferred to Livingston, were extended April 5, 1803, by Legislative enactment, to embrace Fulton. This period was

eighteen years after Fitch's invention and twelve years after letters-patent were granted Fitch by the Federal Government. Fulton's first steamboat, the "Clermont," was not launched until 1807. Fulton, himself, never claimed priority of invention for steam propulsion of vessels through water.

John Fitch was also a Revolutionary soldier, and served under Washington at Trenton and Valley Forge.

During the fall months of 1909, the Admiral Bunce Section, No. 42, Hartford, Conn., of the Navy League of the United States, moved to take special action towards the further honoring and perpetuating the memory of this distinguished inventor John Fitch, a native of Windsor (now South Windsor), this state—the first in the world's history to invent and apply steam propulsion of vessels through water—one of the world's greatest inventions. Messrs. Knapp and Welles were appointed a special committee to examine and report upon the rightful claims of Fitch to *priority of invention and application of steam propulsion of vessels through water*, and their report (D) which follows, was made December 6, 1909, to Mr. Francis B. Allen, chairman of the Admiral Bunce Section.

Since the report of this Committee was made to the chairman of the Admiral Bunce Section, the Hon. O. Vincent Coffin of Middletown, Judge John A. Stoughton of South Windsor and Mr. A. D. Risteen of Hartford, have been added to the membership of this Committee. Governor Coffin has since traversed a much wider field than was practicable for the first Committee, and by much labor and research secured authentic and valuable papers and records regarding Fitch and his invention. These researches are given in detail (F) and follow the report first made by the Committee.

FREDERIC KNAPP,

Chairman of Committee.

HARTFORD, CONN.,

December 6, 1909.

Francis B. Allen, Esq.,

Chairman, Admiral Bunce Section, Hartford, of National
Navy League, U. S.

Your Committee appointed to examine into the priority claim to the discovery, invention and application of steam power to the propulsion of vessels, beg leave to report that they have examined the records and papers on file in the Connecticut State Library, and are of the opinion that the honor of this discovery belongs of right to John Fitch, a native of Windsor, this state, who was born January 20, 1743.

The history of Fitch's marvelous invention, and of its practical application in the waters of the Delaware and Ohio rivers and elsewhere, has been narrated by William Wood of East Windsor Hill in his letter dated March 12, 1883, and published in the Hartford Times, April 19 of that year; also in a report of a special committee appointed by the general assembly convened in 1887, which report was signed by

O. VINCENT COFFIN, *Chairman of the Senate*;A. FOSTER HIGGINS, *Chairman of the House*

(by O. V. C., by request);

C. E. OSBORNE, }
LUKE E. WOOD, } *House Committee.*

This report was accepted by the Senate and House, and a tablet in bronze to the memory of John Fitch was ordered and placed on the east wall of the north entrance to the Capitol building in Hartford. This report and the accompanying monograph prepared by the late William Wood were recorded in the archives of this state, and copies of the same were sent to the secretary of state of the United States, with request from this state that they be recorded in the archives of the United States for the information of posterity.

With these papers in the archives of our own state and also in the archives of the United States, your committee at