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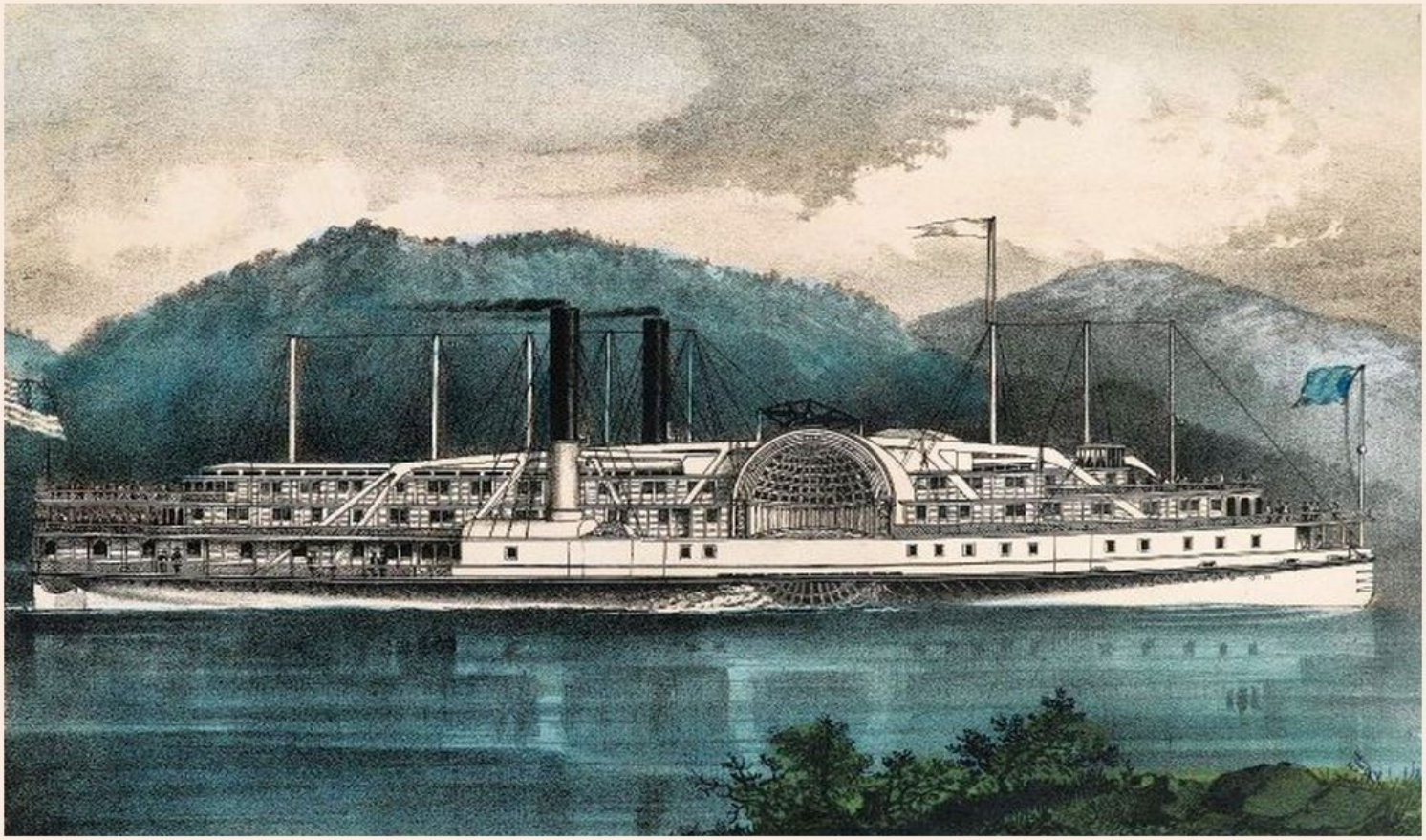

OLD STEAMBOAT DAYS ON THE HUDSON RIVER

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Old Steamboat Days on the Hudson River, D. Lear Buckman
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849652517

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FOREWORD

THE approaching dual celebration of the Tercentennial of Henry Hudson's discovery of the great river bearing his name, and the Centennial of Robert Fulton's successful application of steam to navigation on that same stream, would seem to warrant the appearance of this little volume. Aside from this fact, the subject is one that calls up many interesting reminiscences on topics that have not heretofore been grouped along the lines the author has endeavored to follow.

Most of the old river men best calculated to furnish both information and advice in the preparation of a book such as this, have gone on their last long trip, white those who remain are comparatively few and widely, scattered. There are possibly still many old steamboat men who have, stored away in ancient scrapbooks and records, highly interesting data that should be brought together in some permanent form — and which the writer would be pleased to incorporate in some future edition — for the benefit of those who may seek to learn something more of the unfolding of one of the most glorious and important periods in the country's development. To those who have helped the author in any way — and there have been many — grateful acknowledgment is hereby given. Many books have aided in furnishing the data that will be found in the following pages, among the number being "Reigart's Biography," J. H. Morrison's "History of American Steam Navigation " and " Munsell's Annals." Special thanks are due Mr. Samuel Ward Stanton, editor of the " Nautical Gazette," for his permission to use the interesting table of old boats, prepared by him, and several illustrations that have appeared in that publication. The fact that the author's father followed the river for many years, handling the

wheel of the old North America on her sprints to cut down the time, and his great-uncle commanded the good sloop Robert Burns long before that, carrying both freight and passengers, has added no small degree of interest to the labor involved in the preparation of "Old Steamboat Days on the Hudson."

To the memory of his father in particular, the author would inscribe whatever of interest and value may be found in this tribute to the men of the early days, who made possible the important chapter of the country's history that deals with steam navigation on the Hudson River.

D. L. B.

September 30, 1907.

CHAPTER I. ROBERT FULTON

ROBERT FULTON will always be known as the inventor of the steamboat. It was a great day in the world's work, when, after years of study, experiment and disappointment, he traveled from New York to Albany on his little steamboat the Clermont. That was in August, 1807, just one hundred years ago.

A new distinction was added to the noble Hudson, that of being the first river on which a successful demonstration of steam navigation had been made. There had been previous efforts made both in this country and abroad to apply the steam engine, yet in the infancy of its development, to the navigation of boats, but without practical results.

Fulton himself had made a trial on the Seine, France, in 1803, and failed. The boat was too frail to stand the weight of the engine and boilers and they had broken through the bottom of the craft during an overnight storm and sunk in the river. Others had tried before him. James Rumsey in 1784 on the Potomac sought to propel a boat by forcing a jet of water from the stern with pumps worked by steam. Some of his experiments with the boat were witnessed by General Washington and other officers of the Army, but they were failures. John Fitch had tried his boats on the Delaware at Philadelphia (1790), and on the Collect Pond, N. Y. (1796), and failed. Elijah Ormsbee, with his "goosefoot" paddles, had attempted the same thing at Pawtucket, R. I. (1792), and John Stevens crossed the river from Hoboken to New York (1804) in a boat fitted with a steam engine of his own construction, but all of these efforts were barren of practical results.

It remained for Fulton to inaugurate on the Hudson the system of navigation that was to revolutionize the carrying trade of the world.

Robert Fulton was born on a farm in Little Britain, Pa., November 14th, 1765. His father was an Irishman, of Scotch ancestry, however, named Robert Fulton, who settled in Philadelphia and there married Mary Smith, a native of that city. Most of his early education was received in a school at Lancaster, Pa., where the family had removed, presided over by a dignified Quaker. Fulton was not an apt pupil. When not busy with his books, for he was not a lazy scholar, he haunted the shops of the town, as he early manifested an interest in all mechanical matters. A gunsmith's shop in the village seemed to possess an especial attraction for him and some of his suggestions were even adopted by the workmen. While a boy Fulton made sky rockets for his own amusement, and experiments with mercury and bullets gave him the name of " Quicksilver Bob " among his companions.

He early developed an aptitude for making sketches, and at the age of seventeen, having determined to become an artist, left for Philadelphia to study. His father had been dead several years, but he had been an intimate friend of the father of Benjamin West, who had then become a celebrated painter. It is more than likely that this fact fired young Fulton's ambition to become an artist. Afterward Fulton met West, the artist, in England and they became fast friends.

In Philadelphia young Fulton painted portraits and landscapes, made drawings of houses and machinery and busied himself so industriously during the four years of his stay in the city, he not only supported himself, but was able to contribute something to his widowed mother at home. He must have made considerable money, for in 1785 he bought a farm at Hopewell, Washington County, Pa., paying

eighty pounds sterling for it, and in this homestead he installed his mother and the family.

Fulton, while in Philadelphia, met Benjamin Franklin and many who had become prominent during the Revolution, then just brought to a close. It is quite likely that some of these may have suggested the idea, which he put into effect as soon as he was twenty-one, of making a trip to Europe. This was a great undertaking in those days and especially for one so young. He carried several letters to Americans abroad from his friends in Philadelphia, and he had already made the acquaintance of Benjamin West by correspondence. West was so pleased with his young countryman, he took him into his own family, where he remained several years. This introduction to the English people by West, then at the height of his fame as an artist, did much for Fulton. He industriously painted portraits and landscapes, which gave him a means for support, but he was constantly making mechanical experiments.

He published a pamphlet on canals, patented a dredging machine and several other inventions, some of which were of great utility.

Fulton went to Paris in 1797, having acquired more fame as an inventor than a painter. There he secured accommodations in a hotel occupied by Joel Barlow, an American citizen, also somewhat of a projector and a man of considerable literary ability. Barlow produced among other works " The Columbiad," a national epic, which he dedicated "to his friend Robert Fulton." In Paris, Fulton studied French, German, mathematics and chemistry. The practical result of the application of the two latter studies was that his active mind turned to the production of torpedoes, and of submarine boats from which to fire them, at the hulls of an enemy's warships.

He achieved some success with both. He gave an exhibition of his plunging boat in the harbor of Brest before commissioners of the French Admiralty, in 1801, using air

stored in a copper globe, condensed to 200 atmospheres, from which he took supplies of fresh air as required. He stayed under water over four hours and was highly pleased with the result of his effort, but he failed to secure any aid from the French Government to develop the invention.

The English Government, always alert to what the French were doing in those days, invited Fulton to come to England with his torpedoes and diving boats. It was, of course, as it had to be, a very circuitous, roundabout sort of invitation, and there were many vexatious delays. When Fulton finally reached London in May, 1805, he found the men who had invited him there, retired from office. Finally, through Pitt's influence, which had been secured, he blew up an old brig, Dorothea, provided by the Government. The boat had been anchored in Walmer Roads near Deal. Walmer Castle, hard by, was the residence of Pitt, the Prime Minister, and he and a large number of officers in the navy witnessed the torpedo experiment, which was in a way a success, for the old brig was blown to splinters and sank.

A Royal Commission, after considering the matter for a long while, offered Fulton a reward for his trouble and expense if his torpedo system was suppressed, as it was deemed inhuman warfare. He declined promptly and said twenty thousand pounds sterling a year would not tempt him to do so, if the safety and independence of his country should have need of his torpedoes.

Failing to convince the English he resorted to America and induced the United States Government to place an old vessel at his disposal for an experiment. The torpedo machinery did not work right this time and the trial was a failure. Fulton knew why, but explanations did not avail and the Government did not adopt the device.

Modern torpedo warfare has developed along the lines Fulton projected and none of the great maritime nations