

STORIES of New Jersey

operate boats on the Hudson, and Stevens was ordered to take his boat out of service.

Nothing daunted, the Phoenix steamed jauntily down the bay to the open sea and headed for the Delaware River, thus making a record as the first ocean-going steam vessel.

But 20 years before the sensational voyage of the Clermont, another boat on another river had dazzled the imagination of a group of prominent American citizens, members of the convention gathered in Philadelphia to frame a Federal Constitution. This was the first boat in America to be propelled by steam for any distance, the invention of John Fitch, an obscure clockmaker and silversmith, born in Connecticut in 1743.

At the outbreak of the Revolution Fitch had been made a lieutenant in the Colonial Army. It soon became apparent that he would be of more service to the cause as a gunsmith and armorer, and Washington ordered him to Trenton. He worked long hours on weekdays and even Sundays in his gunshop, making arms for the fighting men. His few spare moments were devoted to study. Books were rare in those days, but Fitch read every one he could find. When the British entered Trenton in 1776, Fitch fled with what belongings he could gather to Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where he buried part of his little hoard of savings. The English had heard of his activities as a gunsmith and destroyed his little shop on King Street.

At the close of the Revolution he sought an appointment as a surveyor in the western country soon to be opened up to settlers. He had traveled as far west as Kentucky. There he had invested some of his savings in land.

Soon after this fresh start he had been captured by savages while on a voyage down the Ohio and had been marched by them through the wilderness as far west as Detroit. From his experience with the Indians he retained a vision of the vast opportunities that were offered in the unexplored country: great rivers, and miles of woodland ready for the hand of the enterprising white man. So far the only means of reaching this new treasure-land was by horse or mule-drawn wagons, or hand-propelled boats.

One day after his return to Pennsylvania, Fitch was walking along the street in Neshaminy. His progress somewhat slowed by rheumatism contracted during his wilderness journeys, he looked rather enviously at a dashing horse-drawn carriage that sped by him. Speed - that was what was wanted in this new country - and power that would draw heavy