

STORIES of New Jersey

was a matter of deep concern. The parts were uncrated and laid on the ground. Then it was discovered that Stephenson and Company had neglected to send the drawings by which it could be assembled. Here was a picture puzzle in iron that would have dismayed any mechanic, but it did not deter Isaac Dripps. He had never seen a locomotive but he set to work doggedly, fitting one part to the other, and by trial and error the "John Bull" finally came into being after several weeks of hard labor.



First American Locomotive on rails.

The locomotive was fitted on its wooden platform and this was attached to the tender, another wooden platform which carried pine wood for fuel and a whisky barrel filled with water. The barrel and the engine were connected by a leather pipe made by a local cobbler. Behind the tender were two carriages with flanged wheels to fit the tracks and with benches for the passengers. The engine had been tried out several times to see whether Dripps had managed to get all the parts just in the right places and now, on November 12, 1831, all was ready for the final test. Invitations had been sent to members of the Legislature at Trenton. All Bordentown and vicinity turned out for a gala day. In the gathering were many farmers who had found it profitable to supply horses and their feed to the railroad, and if this newfangled thing worked they would lose this business. They stood in the crowd, hoping for failure, little realizing that success would help every Jerseyman who had anything to sell to the great outside world.

When Ben Higgins, assistant to Dripps, stoked the boiler with pine wood and the great plumes of black smoke shot from the funnel, the people backed away. It must have been a fearsome sight. The visitors were reluctant to accept invitations to ride. But there was one in the crowd who was not afraid; Madam Murat, wife of Prince Murat, exiled French nobleman who was living in Bordentown at the time, accepted the invitation to step aboard, tucked her bonnet down tightly, drew her billowing skirts close to her legs, and was helped up to a seat in one of the carriages. Following her example, the rest of the company stepped gingerly on board; Robert Stevens gave the word to the faithful Dripps and the throttle was pulled open. The wheels spun ineffectually for a while but finally they gripped the tracks, and the Camden and Amboy Railroad was functioning. Later, their clothes strewn with ashes and their eyes filled with smoke, the group of dignitaries and their friends made their way triumphantly to Arnell's Hotel, where a gala luncheon was served.

Following the demonstration the "John Bull" waited patiently in a shed while the railroad was finished between Bordentown and South Amboy. In September of the following year it was placed in regular service.

In 1891 the Pennsylvania Railroad erected a monument at Bordentown in honor of the "John Bull." Sunk in a granite slab is a bronze tablet with this inscription: