

Steam: The Untold Story of America's First Great Invention. By ANDREA SUTCLIFFE. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. xiv, 272p. Illustrations, notes, chronology, bibliography, index. \$24.95.)

The invention of the steamboat in America was a more complex and muddled affair than you might think, especially if you are ready to name Robert Fulton as the steamboat's originator. Contenders for that honor include a number of inventors who worked on related projects before Fulton. These pioneers fought for patronage and funds to build their version of a workable mechanical boat able to move upstream against the current.

The situation was further confused by the fact that the American patent system was not in effect when the battle for priority rights to the invention of the steamboat began. In the period before the establishment of the patent system in 1790, inventors scrambled to press legislatures and Congress with their rival claims, requests for funds, and calls for exclusive right to use routes on America's rivers.

Well-known figures in American history appear in the steamboat story: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. Washington was anxious to find a way to unite a country divided by its geographical features. Roads were expensive to build and maintain and carts carrying trade goods moved over them slowly. Far better to use America's rivers. In 1784 when Washington met James Rumsey, who showed him a model of a boat that could move upstream, he was impressed. Within a year another steamboat inventor, John Fitch, approached Washington, and the steamboat was begun. Fitch and Rumsey, too proud to cooperate, wasted time, energy, and money on legal battles and attempts to sway legislative bodies and commissions.

Benjamin Franklin and his scientific colleague David Rittenhouse were skeptical that steam-powered boats would ever be practical, especially if they used paddle wheels to propel them. Franklin opted for propulsion by a powerful jet of air or water. Rumsey experimented with steam-jet propulsion while his rival Fitch arranged ungainly ranks of joined oars that moved in unison to paddle his boat against downstream currents. Both men were hampered by the lack of light efficient steam engines. James Watt's new engines could not be exported in America.

The Patent Act was passed in 1790 and Thomas Jefferson, the secretary of state, named to head the patent commission. Jefferson never patented his own inventions and was not keen on awarding patents to others. When the veterans of the steamboat wars descended on Jefferson, he responded by awarding Fitch and Rumsey patents simultaneously. Rumsey died shortly thereafter and Fitch began limited steamboat passenger service between Trenton and Philadelphia.

The turning point came in 1806 when Robert Fulton returned to America from Europe, where he had been experimenting with steamboat designs. Within

a year he was running what Sutcliffe calls the world's first commercially successful steamboat.

Sutcliffe's story of America's early steamboat inventors is well documented. She has diligently searched and used the relevant archival material in writing her history. That said, this is not a book for the historian of technology who seeks to place the steamboat in its technical, cultural, and social setting. Rather, this work is intended for the serious general reader who is interested in the many political and legal entanglements of early steamboat history.

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Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675–1815. Written and edited by KERBY A. MILLER, ARNOLD SCHRIER, BRUCE D. BOLING, and DAVID DOYLE. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. xxvii, 788p. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendix, sources, index. Cloth, \$99; paper, \$49.95.)

At first glance, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan* appears to be a rather standard, albeit lengthy, primary-source collection of mostly personal letters, along with journal excerpts and a handful of public documents, that have been gathered together to reveal the tremendous variation in the life experiences of sixty-eight Irish immigrants to early America. Indeed, as the authors' choice of subjects reveals, early Irish immigrants were a diverse lot, consisting of Presbyterians, Anglicans, Quakers, as well as a substantial minority of Catholics. These immigrants came from a variety of social classes (from the wealthy to the humble), occupations (they included merchants, clergymen, craftsmen, and laborers), and regions in Ireland (many were urban dwellers from Ulster, or Dublin, but many others were rural dwellers from the north and south). In short, unlike later waves of mostly poor, uneducated, and rural dwelling Irish Catholic immigrants, there was no one "type" of early Irish immigrant.

While this information is significant, as one reads more deeply in this collection, it is evident that the authors intend this book to be much more than a standard documentary reader. Rather, this work sets out to convey a more comprehensive history of early Irish immigrants' social, economic, religious, and political experiences in Ireland and America before 1815. And it is this more ambitious goal that distinguishes this work from so many other documentary collections. Each document, for example, is prefaced with a lengthy introduction that meticulously details each immigrant's life in Ireland and America. Such documentation offers powerful testimony to continuities and changes that marked the transition between Old and New Worlds. The authors also choose to present the documents as they were written, using extensive notations to explain