Samuel Morey Biography

Samuel Morey

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Biography

Samuel Morey was born in Hebron, Connecticut, and grew up in Orford, New Hampshire. As a youth he experimented with steam power and in 1790 harnessed the steam from a kettle to turn the spit in his fireplace. Three years later he applied the principle behind this contraption to his next creation, the first steamboat with paddle wheels. Capable of carrying two people to the speed of 4 miles per hour (6.4 kph), his steamboat plied nearby rivers for the following three summers as Morey demonstrated its practicality. He also modified his design, placing the paddle wheel at stern for increased efficiency.

The steamboat was of great interest at the time when traveling consisted of either rough-riding stagecoaches or ships dependent upon unreliable winds. Robert Livingston (1746-1813), who was to play a large role in the life of Robert Fulton and the development of his steamboat, offered to back Morey and his boat in a joint business venture, but Morey refused, apparently hoping to develop it himself. He later designed a crank-motion engine and built a steamship with side paddles in 1797. For the next few years he patented improved designs, getting ready for large-scale commercial boats.

However, his hopes for commercial success dimmed. His backers suffered financial losses, and he became discouraged when Robert Fulton succeeded with his steamboats. Morey finally sank his boat on a small lake. Its interesting to note that Fulton, often credited with the invention of the steamboat, actually owed much to Morey. It was Fulton who visited Morey to see his steamboat demonstrations before launching his own vessel.

In addition to his steamboats, Morey took on other challenges. He patented wind, water, and tide mills, made improvements in steam engines and boilers and in 1826 patented an internal combustion engine. He also devised a series of locks to aid navigation on the Connecticut River and helped construct chutes to carry logs from inaccessible heights down to ponds. Morey was so capable in so many areas of science and invention that he has been called "the Edison of his day."

Samuel Morey is one of the highest achieving yet least-known American inventors in history. Although he secured at least 20 patents from 1793 to 1833 and was a true pioneer of steam propulsion, he never attempted to bring suit to win a claim for any of his inventions.