

previously experimented—as our readers know—believing that he had solved the problem which Fulton afterwards worked out to a historically satisfactory issue, and induced the legislatures of several States to grant him extraordinary powers to the exclusion of all other inventors. He had a rival in James Rumsey, who had worked upon the same abstract idea for several years, with a difference in the means used, and who is known to have tested it successfully as early as 1785 on the Potomac. Rumsey had previously called upon General Washington—to repeat an interesting incident—at Mount Vernon, and interested him in the scheme. He wrote to Gen. Washington, March 10, 1785, as follows: “I am not less sanguine in my boat projects than when you saw me at Richmond, and I have made such further discoveries as will render them more useful than was at first expected.” Washington, meanwhile wrote to Governor Johnson of Pennsylvania, remarking that he thought Rumsey’s theory of steam “an unmaturing idea.” Rumsey, later, wrote “to the father of his country,” after referring to the model the general “had seen in motion:” “I have taken the greatest pains to perfect another kind of boat upon the principles I mentioned to you at Richmond in November last (1784), and have the pleasure to inform you that I have brought it to great perfection; it is true that it will cost something more than the other way, but when in use, it will be more manageable, and can be worked with as few hands. The power is immense, and I have quite conceived myself that boats of passage may be made to go against the currents of the Mississippi or Ohio rivers, or on the Gulf Stream (from the Leeward to the Windward Islands), from sixty to one hundred miles a day. I know this will seem strange and improbable to many persons, yet I am certain it may be performed, besides it is so simple when (understood), and is also strictly philosophical.”

Fitch, like Major Bushwell, the inventor of the torpedo, was a native of Connecticut.

The first national patent ever granted as already published in this journal was issued to Samuel Hopkins, of Vermont, on July 31, 1790, for an “improved method of making pot and pearl ash.” The second was for an “improved method of making candles” granted to Joseph Stacy Sampson, on Aug. 6, while Oliver Evans got the third patent on December 18, for a “superior method of making flour and meal.” These three patents were the only ones granted during the first year of the United States Patent Office. In 1791, the following year, thirty-three were issued, the first being for punches for types, taken out by Francis Bailey on January 29. On March 10, John Stone took out a patent for a method of driving piles for bridges; and Rumsey, of steamboat fame in this year took out six distinct patents relating to the use of steam motive power, one of which concerns ships and boats. John Fitch was also granted a patent for his improved method of applying steam power to the same ends. Between this year and the appearance of Fulton’s steamboat, a great number of patents were issued to inventors for this purpose.

Folding beds, sewing machines, stoves, clocks and washing machines seem to have monopolized a goodly share of the inventive genius of those represented in the records of the United States Patent Office up to

the present time. In 1792 the first patent for a portable folding bed was granted to an inventor with a Teutonic cognomen, and since that year the evolution of that important article in the household economy has proceeded with prolific results and still they come. In the third year of the department only eleven patents were issued, of which may be named patents for an improved clock pendulum and a stove of cast iron. Among other miscellaneous issues, one for bilious pills comes to light. The era of nostrum manufacturing in America began thus early, we may observe.

The first patent relating to improvements in the piano-forte was taken out May, 1796, by James Sylvanus McLean, of New Jersey. In 1797 Moses McFarland was granted a patent for a federal balloon. In 1800 J. Grant Jr., took out a patent for a telegraph. In this year, J. I. Hawkins, of Philadelphia, took out two patents, one for improvements in musical instruments, the other in relation to pianos. Hawkins was the first in this country to export native manufactured pianos, and in this year we find that he made and exported several of his portable upright grand piano-fortes to Manchester, England. Andrew Law, one of the first native-born American musical theorists and publishers, appears in 1802 in connection with a new method of printing music by type.

Among the many curious records in Washington granted after 1800, are a mode of setting horses’ and dogs’ ears, granted to Seth James in 1804; an elixir of life patent; a method for beautifying the face and transforming the features; a perpetual motion machine; a sure cure for intemperance, and numerous such peculiar patents, besides nostrums in profusion.

Two years (about 1810) before the breaking out of hostilities between Great Britain and the United States, patents for improvements in firearms first appear, and during the war they appeared in large numbers. Toward 1816, public interest in war materials relaxed, but when the invasion of Mexico called for inventive genius in that direction, American inventors were not wanting. The same may be said of the late civil war, during which period the patent office issued a great number of papers for inventions in the class of firearms, and materials for war purposes.

Adding machines and type writers appeared in the patent office records forty years ago, while a vast number of things that we except as exclusively modern can be found anticipated in comparatively ancient patent records in Washington. The telephone may be found partially illustrated in a patent taken out by Samuel Sawyer, of Boston, in 1833. Sawyer’s patent was called an Acoustic Drum, and was intended to facilitate the holding of conversations at long distances. The drum or membrane, was the medium by which the sounds of the voice were intensified and reinforced after being carried from point to point through a cord or tube. During the past forty years more patents have been granted for methods of turning over music than for all other departments of invention in musical instruments combined.

The first record of historic value in the domain of photography, was Talbot’s patent for producing and fixing pictures upon paper, granted in 1847. Talbot is to a large extent the inventor of the present ac-