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### EARLY AMERICAN PATENTS.

The recent celebration held to commemorate the founding of the Federal Patent Office, has called forth many retrospective articles in the press dealing with that branch of the national government service, many of which are incomplete in particulars while in general interesting. Since the subject admits of fresh treatment, the symposium of facts given may be found instructive and suggestive, because the advancement of the race and civilization is exemplified incidentally in the history of inventions in America.

It is generally admitted that the first American patent issued was that of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to Samuel Winslow, in 1641, for a method for manufacturing salt. The record reads, *ex parte*: "None are to make this article for ten years except in a manner different from his, provided he (Winslow) sets up his works within a year." In 1656, Governor Winthrop refused to re-issue Winslow's patent. He, however, made out a document which reads as follows: "John Winthrop son of the Governor granted the sole privilege of making salt for twenty years in Massachusetts." Governor Winthrop was clearly a modern type of political official.

In 1642, John Clark, of Massachusetts, was granted a patent which compelled every family using Clark's "method of saving wood and warming houses at little cost," to pay 10 shillings per annum.

John Prout, Jr., Moses Mansfield, mariner, and Jeremiah Brasier, of Connecticut, were, in 1710, granted, by the State, the sole right and privilege to make linseed oil "within the colony" for the term of twenty years.

Edward Himan of Stratford, Conn., applied to the State, in 1717, "praying liberty to make molasses of Indian corn stalks." The assembly in response granted Himan a sole patent right to manufacture molasses for ten years, adding a qualification which reads: "Provided the said Himan makes as good molasses, and makes it as cheap, as that which comes from the West Indies."

Alexander Phelps, Amassa Jones and John Coleman, of Hartford, Conn., sent in a claim to the Government, that, had it been granted, might have changed the whole aspect of the revolutionary war, and deprived the Bostonians of the privileges of throwing the king's tea into the bay. In this claim, presented in 1765, Messrs. Phelps and company pro-

ceed to say that they had, "with great pains and expensive pursuits, made discovery of a plant in a distant part of this continent, bearing such resemblance and taste to the genuine foreign Bohea tea, that we are assured 'tis the same kind." After dilating upon the advantages likely to accrue to society from the discovery, they pathetically remark, "We pray your honors would grant us a patent for manufacturing, and also for vending said plant or tea within this colony, exclusive of all others for twenty years." "Their honors" rejected the application.

Up to the adoption of the Constitution in 1789 patents continued to be issued in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and elsewhere. In 1784, Col. William Pitkin, of the revolutionary army, was granted a patent for the State of Connecticut, entitling him to manufacture snuff, to the exclusion of all others for fourteen years. A man named Donovan and a resident of Norwich named Lathrop, wished to go into the business of manufacturing snuff in 1785; incidentally, Donovan wished to introduce blue dyeing and cloth manufacturing, in both of which he was skilled. They applied to the legislature for permission to pursue their business, which was rejected. Lathrop's counsel worked with Donovan, and a fresh memorial was sent in by these two, which had an undoubted republican flavor. The paper says, after passing over preliminaries: "Now, your memorialists beg leave to suggest that the Hon. William Pitkin, not being the original inventor of the art of snuff-making, nor skilled in that business, had no claim to that grant to the exclusion of those who were, and who had a good right to exercise their skill in said art for the support of themselves and families by a lawful calling; nor was it known that any legislative body has a right to grant away the trade and professions of the subjects of the State to any individual for his private emolument," etc. The paper then proceeds to discuss the question in a manner that must have astonished "their honors." Subsequently they sent in a memorial to the legislature, signed by 243 prominent residents of Norwich, which says among other points, "snuff is an article of trade, and should be free," but without any result.

By far the most remarkable patent issued before the establishment of the national Patent Office service, was that granted in 1783 to John Fitch for the application of steam to navigation, in the States of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, etc. Fitch had