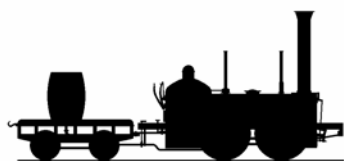


**The
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The Stevens Family – First Family of Inventors

By John Kilbride

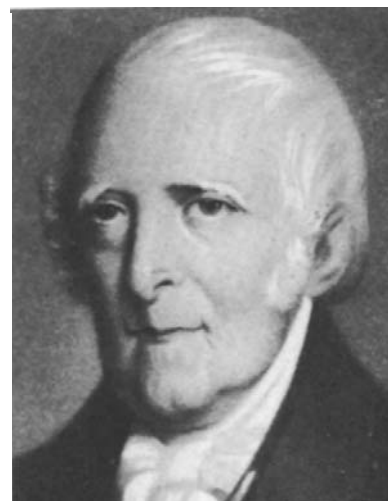
Much has been mentioned on introductory levels about the Camden & Amboy Railroad's founding family, with respective individual tales, and continued with a prevailing myth the death of Colonel John Stevens prompted the sale of the C&A to the PRR in 1871. Son Robert is known for inventing the "T" rail, the prototype whittled enroute to England to buy a locomotive. Together with another son, Edwin A., the trio is known for the building of New Jersey's first railroad and the nation's third. A review of their lives provides a much larger glimpse into their legacies and will provide portraits of their respective roles in both the state's, and a nation's, industrial development in many areas, including steamboats, railroads and naval warfare.

Colonel John Stevens (1749-1838)

Born to well-to-do landowners, John's grandfather had come over from England in 1699 at the age of seventeen, became a lawyer and purchased land in New Jersey. His father, a merchant and ship owner, extended the landholdings and became prominent in New Jersey politics. John trained as a lawyer and during the American Revolution served as treasurer of New Jersey, collecting monies for the colonial cause. He rose to the rank of colonel and for the rest of his life was known as Colonel Stevens. His early days were spent in New York City, and after marrying, bought for himself and his bride a sizeable tract of land seized from its pro-British owner on the New Jersey side, an estate that dominated a rise of land beside the Hudson River but otherwise surrounded by swamps. He worshipped weekly back in New York City, a slow and perilous river crossing that prompted him to seek a better transit. Sometime

around 1788, he chanced to see John Fitch's experimental steamboat churning along the Delaware River, and that experience would forever change his life.

In no time, he designed a steam engine of his own. Seeking to protect his ideas, he petitioned his friends in Washington and helped bring about the first U.S. patent laws, earning one of the initial patent for himself in 1791. Although nothing came of his initial design, he continued to improve on it; in the meantime, pursuing various business matters. Around 1797, he joined a foundry firm (headed by Nicholas Roosevelt, ancestor of the Oyster Bay Roosevelt's, and New York's Robert Livingston, a brother-in-law) to build a steamboat; Roosevelt supplying the mechanical expertise and Livingston the political muscle needed to secure an operational monopoly in New York state. Livingston's enthusiasm was unable to overcome his weak ideas; together with an assignment to France as minister, the craft that emerged was unworkable. Undaunted, Stevens continued and by 1804 a revolutionary craft; The "Little Juliana" emerged. It was driven by twin-



Col. John Stevens, about the time he wrote his 1812 "Documents Tending To Prove The Superior Advantages of Railways and Steam-carriages Over Canal Navigation".