

Name _____

Date _____

Robert Fulton and the Steamboat

Reading and Discussion

Robert Fulton was an American inventor and engineer. He was born in Little Britain Township in Pennsylvania on November 14, 1765. He is credited with creating the first commercially successful **steamboat**. He also experimented with submarine torpedoes and torpedo boats. His continued study led to several advancements with boats.

Fulton was first interested in steamboats when he visited **William Henry** in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1777. Henry had learned of **James Watt's** steam engine while visiting England and became interested in steam engines. In fact, Henry had made his own engine. When he tried putting his engine in a boat in 1767, the boat sank. In spite of this, Henry's interest continued. Fulton began to share this interest after visiting Henry.

In 1786, Fulton went to Paris. While there, he studied painting and met a man named **James Rumsey**, an inventor from Virginia. Rumsey had already run a steamboat in 1786. By 1793, Fulton was proposing his own plan for steam-powered ships to both the United States and the British governments. He eventually designed the first working submarine, which was called the **Nautilus**. He designed the submarine between 1793 and 1797 when he was in France. He wanted the government to help him with the cost of construction, but he was turned down twice. He finally approached the Minister of the Marine and was given permission to build in 1800.

Robert R. Livingston was appointed the US Ambassador to France in 1801, and he met Fulton while in France. The two decided to build a steamboat and attempt to run it down the **Seine River** in France. Fulton experimented with all kinds of shapes for the boat and made many models and drawings. The steamboat was then built. It ran perfectly during the first trial, but Fulton still strengthened and rebuilt the hull of the boat.

Fulton married Robert Livingston's niece, **Harriet**, in 1806. They had four children: Robert, Julia, Mary, and Cornelia. In 1807, Livingston and Fulton built the first commercial steamboat. It was called the **North River Steamboat**, but later became known as the **Clermont**. This ship carried passengers from New York City and Albany to New York.

Fulton became a member of the **Erie Canal Commission** in 1811. He remained a member until his death on February 24, 1815. He is buried at the Trinity Church Cemetery in New York City. Several other famous Americans are buried in this same cemetery, including Alexander Hamilton.

After his death, Pennsylvania donated a marble statue of Fulton to the **National Statuary Hall Collection**, which is located in the US Capitol Building. There are many places named in honor of Robert Fulton, including many counties in several states. In 1909, there was a celebration in New York City called the **Hudson-Fulton Celebration**. This celebration honored Fulton's development of steamship technology. In fact, a replica of the **Clermont** was even built for the event.

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Activities

Activity A: Multiple Choice:

1. Robert Fulton was born in:
 - a. Great Britain
 - b. Pennsylvania
 - c. New York
 - d. France

2. Robert Fulton designed the submarine named:
 - a. Nautilus
 - b. Titanic
 - c. Clermont
 - d. Hudson

3. Robert Fulton and his wife, Harriet, had _____ children:
 - a. 3
 - b. 8
 - c. 7
 - d. 4

Activity B: Fill in the Blanks:

1. Livingston and Fulton built the first commercial _____.
2. Fulton and Henry shared interest in building _____.
3. James Rumsey had run a steamboat in the year _____.
4. The *Clermont* carried passengers from New York City to _____.

Activity C: True or False:

- ____ 1. Fulton was a member of the Erie Cannon Commission.
- ____ 2. Fulton studied in Paris.
- ____ 3. Fulton is buried in Philadelphia.

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Answer Key

Activity A

1. Robert Fulton was born in:

- a. Great Britain
- b. **Pennsylvania**
- c. New York
- d. France

2. Fulton designed the submarine named:

- a. **Nautilus**
- b. Titanic
- c. Clermont
- d. Hudson

3. Robert Fulton and his wife, Harriet, had _____ children:

- a. 3
- b. 8
- c. 7
- d. **4**

Activity B

1. Livingston and Fulton built the first commercial _____ steamboat _____.

2. Fulton and Henry shared interest in building _____ steamboats _____.

3. James Rumsey had run a steamboat in the year _____ 1786 _____.

4. The *Clermont* carried passengers from New York City to _____ Albany _____.

Activity C

 E 1. Fulton was a member of the Erie Cannon Commission.

 T 2. Fulton studied in Paris.

 E 3. Fulton is buried in Philadelphia.