

# **The Paddle-Wheel Boat**

by James Baldwin

More than a hundred years ago, two boys were fishing in a small river. They sat in a heavy flat-bottomed boat, each holding a long, crooked rod in his hands and eagerly waiting for "a bite."

When they wanted to move the boat from one place to another they had to pole it; that is, they pushed against a long pole, the lower end of which reached the bottom of the stream.

"This is slow work, Robert," said the older of the boys as they were poling up the river to a new fishing place. "The old boat creeps over the water no faster than a snail."

"Yes, Christopher; and it is hard work, too," answered Robert. "I think there ought to be some better way of moving a boat."

"Yes, there is a better way, and that is by rowing," said Christopher.

"But we have no oars."

"Well, I can make some oars," said Robert; "but I think there ought to be still another and a better way. I am going to find such a way if I can." The next day Robert's aunt heard a great pounding and sawing in her woodshed. The two boys were there, busily working with hammer and saw. "What are you making, Robert?" she asked.

"Oh, I have a plan for making a boat move without poling it or rowing it," he answered.

His aunt laughed and said, "Well, I hope that you will succeed."

After a great deal of tinkering and trying, they did succeed in making two paddle wheels. They were very rough and crude, but strong and serviceable. They fastened each of these wheels to the end of an iron rod which they passed through the boat from side to side. The rod was bent in the middle so that it could be turned as with a crank. When the work was finished, the old fishing boat looked rather odd, with a paddle wheel on each side which dipped just a few inches into the water. The boys lost no time in trying it.

"She goes ahead all right," said Christopher, "but how shall we guide her?"

"Oh, I have thought of that," said Robert. He took something like an oarlock from his pocket and fastened it to the stern of the boat; then with a paddle which worked in this oarlock one of the boys could guide the boat while the other turned the paddle wheels.

"It is better than poling the boat," said Christopher.

"It is better than rowing, too," said Robert. "See how fast she goes!"

That night when Christopher went home he had a wonderful story to tell. "Bob Fulton planned the whole thing," he said, "and I helped him make the paddles and put them on the boat."

"I wonder why we didn't think of something like that long ago," said his father. "Almost anybody could rig up an old boat like that."

"Yes, I wonder, too," said Christopher. "It looks easy enough, now that Bob has shown how it is done."

When Robert Fulton became a man, he did not forget his experiment with the old fishing boat. He kept on, planning and thinking and working, until at last he succeeded in making a boat with paddle wheels that could be run by steam.

He is now remembered and honored as the inventor of the steamboat. He became famous because he was always thinking and studying and working.

Source:

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