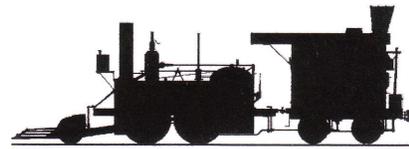
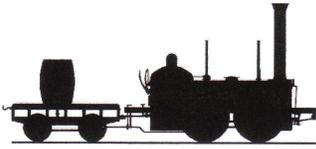


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# Introduction to “Early American Railroads”, and Franz Anton Ritter von Gerstner

By John Kilbride

## Background

I'd heard of a German-written survey of the Camden & Amboy Railroad several years ago, authored by an engineer commissioned by the Russians to (re)build their railroads. Later, it was reported it had been translated into English and published. A quick search yielded a purchase price well beyond my budget, especially for such a topic that had become an avocation (as opposed to full-time, tax-deductible possibilities!!) Most recently, I learned the volume was available for loan through my library, alas on terms more restrictive than their regular loaning's! A week later, the 916 page document became available.

The writings of Franz Anton Ritter von Gerstner center around a 1838-39 visit to the United States and



include ten pages on the Camden & Amboy Railroad in great detail. With the permission of the publisher, they follow on these pages! (The New Jersey Railroad and Philadelphia & Trenton Railroad are also included and will be published in a future *JOHN BULLETIN*.) A total of 178 rail lines were visited by Gerstner,

and 86 canals are also featured. If the listing included in the book is in chronological order (it's not labeled!), the C&A was visited early in his trip.

## An Introduction....

(Excerpt from the translated Introduction to “Early American Railroad”, by Frederick Gamst) – “As the pioneering period of American railroading came to an end in the late 1830's, and the Railway Age began to dawn in the 1840's, a student of railroads from the German-speaking lands came to the United States. This student was Franz Anton Ritter von Gerstner, who built what are often called the first railroad on the European continent and the first Russian railroad. His mission was to investigate extensively the railroads and other internal transportation of Martin Van Buren's America and to report on them in detail to the Russian government. Gerstner's industrial information gathering resulted in an encyclopaedic two volumes of source material, *Die innern Communicationen der Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika* (The internal communications of the United States of North America), on the development, finance, operations, and pioneering men of American railroads and canals. The two volumes (published here as one) cover 1838-39. Following Gerstner's untimely death in 1840, they were completed and published in German by his assistant, civil engineer Ludwig Klein.”

Born in Prague in 1796, Gerstner studied under his father's tutoring at that city's university and became a professor of geometry. He would later become involved in the design and construction of a horse-drawn street car rail system on the Danube. In the 1820's he had already visited England and studied the emerging steam powered work of George

(von Gerstner-Continued on page 7)