

Henry Clay Iron Furnace

Henry Clay Furnace, located on Quarry Run, was built between 1834 and 1836. Leonard Lamb erected the cut-stone furnace for Tasse, Morrison, and Company to supply pig iron to the nearby Jackson ironworks. The ore, limestone, and charcoal needed to operate the cold-blast furnace were all available on the western flanks of the Allegheny Mountains, where several similar furnaces operated.

Jackson's Ironworks at Ices Ferry was northern West Virginia's most significant antebellum ironworks and an important nail production center in the Monongahela Valley Region in northern West Virginia and southern Pennsylvania. Located on the east side of the Cheat River at Ices Ferry, the ironworks was established by Samuel Jackson around 1809.

Built of stone blocks, this cold-blast furnace sits on a 30-foot square and rises almost 34 feet in a truncated pyramidal shape.

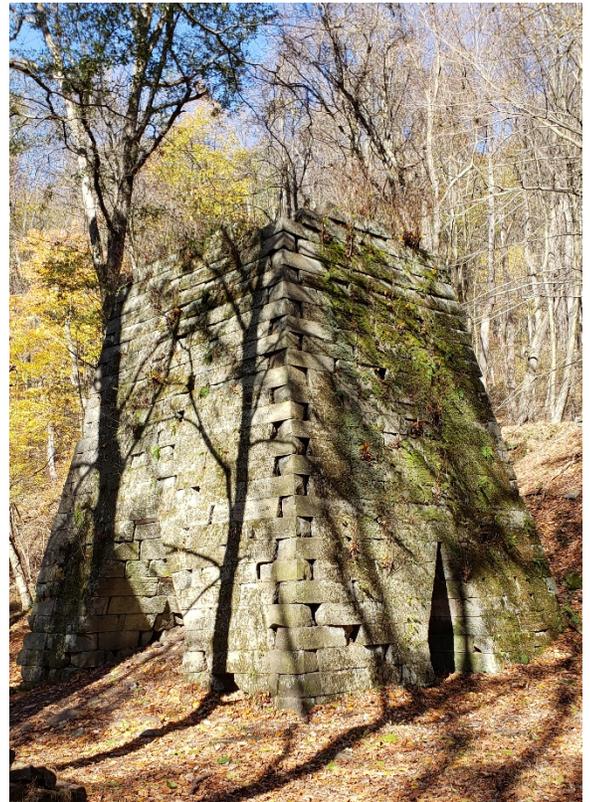
In operation, the furnace was "charged" or filled with alternating layers of charcoal, iron ore, and limestone until entirely full. At this point it was fired and brought up to temperature slowly. After about eight hours the furnace was ready to be tapped. First the slag, which was lighter and floated on top of the molten iron, was released, then the molten iron was cast. The molten iron was run into a series of voids made in a bed of sand in front of the furnace. The voids, where the actual ingots were cast, were all connected by channels, through which the molten iron flowed from the furnace. The resulting pattern of iron ingots in the sand resembled piglets suckling at a mother sow, hence the name. The furnace produced 4 tons of pig iron every day.

The Ellicott brothers--John, Andrew, and Joseph--Maryland ironmasters (If you're familiar with the Baltimore area, they founded Ellicott City), purchased the Jackson ironworks and the Henry Clay Furnace property in 1839. They made extensive improvements to the ironworks, building a tram road that connected the furnace with the ironworks, which was located at Ices Ferry on the Cheat River.

The wagons on the wooden tramways were hauled by oxen. Pig iron and finished goods were transported to Jackson's Iron Works near Ice's Ferry on the Cheat River where a sawmill made barrels and flat boats that floated the goods to market on the Monongahela and some as far as the Ohio and Mississippi. The boats were sold for lumber at the destination and the crew walked back to Ice's Ferry.

Until 1845 all of the iron produced was floated down the Cheat River. The brothers operated the furnace until their business failed around 1848.

About 200 people were employed at the furnace. It was the center of a community of over one hundred dwellings with a store, church, and schoolhouse.



The lack of adequate transportation and the depletion of iron ore and fuel resources forced its closure. The once extensive ironworks now lies beneath the waters of Cheat Lake. The last iron was made at Ice's Ferry in 1868.



Horse drawn tramroad that hauled ore from the furnace. (Iron Furnace Trail)

Those holes you see in some parts of the forest? “These are iron ore mines, where iron ore for the Henry Clay Furnace was mined”

<https://news.lib.wvu.edu/2020/06/29/henry-clay-furnace-at-coopers-rock/>

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/henry-clay-iron-furnace>

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