

## Furnace Road

Furnaces - impressive brick structures fired by charcoal, coal or wood - once refined the iron ore from Union County's mountains, and forges and foundries once wrought and cast this iron into the tools and implements necessary for farms, homes and factories.

In the 1830's iron ore was discovered in Shamokin Ridge (New Berlin Mountain). The ridge extends west from the Susquehanna River West Branch past New Berlin. Iron ore was dug from mines the entire length of the mountain. Napoleon Hughes, an ore prospector from Franklin County, recorded rich iron ore in the ridge in 1841 and opened mines near Yankee Springs (now Winfield) and Miner's Hollow.

Ore was hauled in horse- or mule-drawn wagons along the road, now called Furnace Road, from Mifflinburg to Turtle Creek and then to Winfield.

Early on, the iron ore was transported across the river to Northumberland by ferry or by sleighs when the river froze in winter, and by barges on the canal to the Danville furnaces.

When the Union Furnace was built 1853-54 by the Beaver, Geddes, Marsh Company, ore could be refined at Winfield. Foundry operators Samuel Geddes, James S. Marsh, Elisha C. Marsh and Joseph Shriner bought land below Turtle Creek for the furnace. Thomas and Peter Beaver, Charles E. Morris, and Levi Rooke joined the company and provided financial and technical assistance. Rooke would eventually become superintendent of the furnace, until it closed in 1891.

The Union Furnace stacks were over 100 feet high. There were 4 large boilers, a stock house, casting room and blowing rooms. There was also a company store, where workers and their families could buy an assortment of everyday goods. Employees were charged rent or room-and-board for company-owned housing.

The furnace employed 25-30 people. Ledgers from the furnace, which are in the Union County Historical Society collection, list employees, their wages and charges. In 1870's workers included L. Tierney, Conrad Hoover, Wm and John Driver, John Connery, John Trutt, Thomas Shannon, John Parker, Lewis Dieter, Charles Williams, Wm. Renninger and Jacob Campbell. In the late 1800's, James Jones, Wesley and James Dunlap, Levi Leader, Edward Hines, Charles S. Bell, and James Gill were among the iron workers.

Invoices from Union County foundries show the range of their goods: waffle irons and skillets, water kettles - heavy before water was put in them, butchering kettles, farm implements of all varieties, hand tools, kitchen utensils, fireplace equipment, and more.

Farm tools and cooking items from 19th century foundries are in the collection of the Union County Historical Society and can be seen at the Dale/Engle/Walker House, Strawbridge Road, Lewisburg. The house is open on Sunday afternoons from 2 to 4:00, until October 31. The site re-opens for tours and exhibits in June.



**Union Iron Works circa 1912**