

STORIES of New Jersey

Historians say that the first iron produced in New Jersey (other than bog iron from the southern swamps) was probably forged in the Rockaway region. From the Indians the colonists learned of the prized "black stone" from which the red men had made long-wearing hatchets. The first discovery by scouts from the Newark colony of the source of this iron ore, near Sucassunna in Morris County, was almost equal to finding money, for every piece of land bought from the Indians was paid partly in iron tools, hatchets, knives and hoes. These had to be imported from England at high prices.

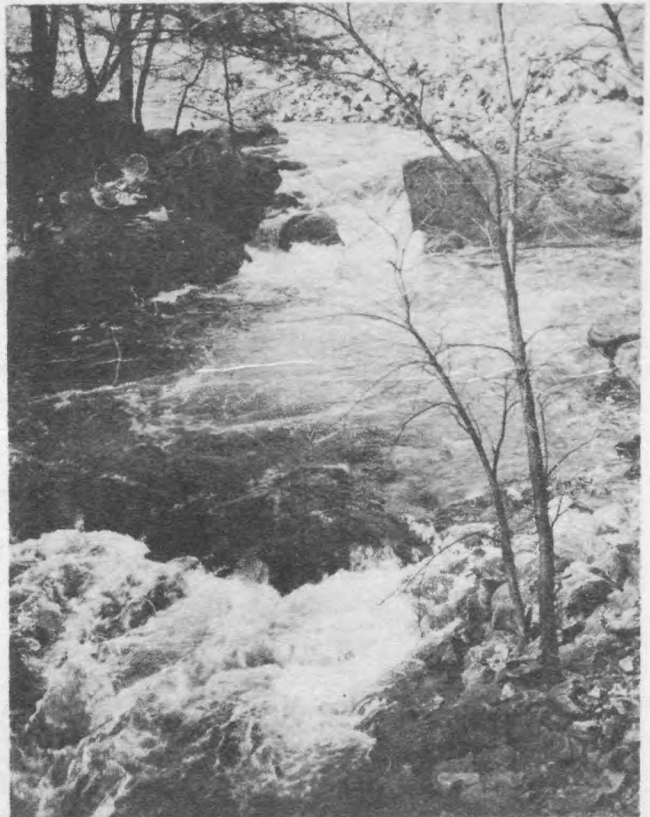
As early as 1685 or 1700 a party of Newark and Elizabeth pioneers set out for the Passaic River frontier. There were skilled ironworkers among them. They cleared some land on the west side of the Passaic near the mouth of the Rockaway, extending to the Whippany River. On the latter they built a forge close to the present village of Whippany. The place was known for many years as Old Forges.

Taking pack horses, these men followed the streams back into the hills to find the "black stone" which they brought in leather saddle bags to the forge. Today there are scores of old mine shafts on the range of hills in Mine Hill township, running about two and one-half miles southwest from Wharton and the Rockaway River. One of these, the Dickerson Mine, was bought by Mahlon Dickerson, Governor of New Jersey. Its ore contained 82 percent of iron. Today, thousands of bats find homes in the old shafts.

The prospectors covered the whole basin of the river and its branches and reached beyond to Ringwood and Charlotteburg. As the veins of ore were discovered more and more forges and furnaces were built. Despite the opposition of English ironmasters who tried to crush the infant enterprise, the colonists developed an industry that enabled them to achieve independence of Europe. At one time northern New Jersey had 80 forges and furnaces.

Denmark, site of the present United States Naval Ammunition Depot, had the Burnt Meadow Forge in 1750. It was owned by Col. Jacob Ford, commander of the militia who kept the enemy away from the numerous forges scattered through the Morris County hills, all of which were furnishing munitions to the Revolutionary Army.

Most prolific of the Morris County mines was the Hibernia group which continued to operate long after the Civil War, close to the village of Hibernia, about five miles north of Rockaway Borough. These mines and Hibernia Furnace, built 1763, were bought in the Revolution by Lord Stirling, one of Washington's generals, who soon had skilled men at work molding small cannon for the Continental



White Water Below the Boonton Falls