

STORIES of New Jersey

Ringwood Manor lies between the wooded slopes of a rugged little valley at the northern end of Wanaque Reservoir, only a mile from the New York State boundary, and about 10 miles southwest of Suffern, N. Y. The Manor House and about 100 acres of land has been given to the State by Erskine Hewitt, the last owner of an estate once occupied by early iron manufacturers.

The iron mined in the nearby hills was converted at the Ringwood forge into munitions and field equipment for Washington's army. Its position on the main road halfway between West Point and Morristown made it a convenient place for conferences between Washington and his generals. Here the Commander in Chief came to confer with Robert Erskine, the iron-master, who was also surveyor general for the Army. The forges were so important to the Colonial cause that extreme precautions were taken to protect them. The names Ringwood and Erskine were not mentioned in military dispatches, lest the messages fall into the hands of British spies. It is said that many of Washington's letters dated from "headquarters" were written from this secluded valley.

The mines of Ringwood continued in operation long after modern methods of smelting and forging had carried iron manufacture to other regions. Until 1931 Ringwood was the center of an active community. The pretentious house and gardens, the many relics and objects of art gathered from all parts of the world reflect the importance of the owners and the wealth they took from an estate that once covered 15,000 acres in the Ramapo hills.

On the path before the house are crushing stones and grindstones found in the vicinity. They indicate that the section was an Indian camp site. About 1739 Cornelius Board, a Welsh miner then living at Little Falls, learned from the Indians that there was iron ore in the Pompton mountains. They led him to the head of the Ringwood River, a branch of the Pequannock, and there he built a small furnace.

In May of the following year Board sold the furnace and 16 acres for £63 to a family by the name of Ogden, residents of Newark, who had been surveying the iron fields of northern New Jersey and had bought up several water-power sites along the Pequannock River.

It was the Ogdens who gave the northern New Jersey iron industry its start. They built a splendid house and several smaller dwellings and carried on active trade in forged iron. Forged iron was shipped by mules to points on the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers, where it could be transferred to boats.

Word of this promising enterprise came to the ears of Peter Hasenclever, a shrewd German promoter. He went to London and persuaded people influential in court circles to buy shares in a company that was to develop resources in the new world. It is said Queen Charlotte and some of her maids of honor subscribed. The new concern was called the American Iron Company and Hasenclever was sent to America as resident manager.

In the New York Mercury of March 5, 1764 appeared an advertisement offering for sale the Ogden properties on the Ringwood River. This, Hasenclever bought for £5,000, together with additional lands at Long Pond, in all 15,000 acres.