

Hopewell Furnace

Hopewell Furnace
National Historic Site
Pennsylvania

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Molten iron was cast into stove plates and other products in the cast house, roofed with tiles to prevent fire



Bethesda Church: remote Hopewell needed all social amenities on site



The furnace, heart of Hopewell's iron making operation

PHOTOS EXCEPT CHURCH
NPS / GEORGE FISTROVITCH

As relations between England and its American colonies disintegrated, Mark Bird, already an important figure in the booming colonial iron industry, built Hopewell Furnace in eastern Pennsylvania in 1771. When the American Revolution erupted in 1775, England's ministers regretted not having reined in American ironmasters more successfully. They knew the iron industry would now be turned against the mother country. Ever since colonists carried blast furnace technology to America in the mid-1600s, England had been worried by the industry's rapid expansion and American ironmasters' increasing skill at turning out cast and wrought iron products. Abundant natural resources in the colonies also favored the creation and expansion of an iron industry. It took an acre of woodlands to make enough charcoal to run an iron furnace for just one day. Pennsylvania's ancient forests proved ideal for such high demand.

Crown officials wanted to limit the colonies' iron industry to producing raw pig iron (rough cast bars). The bars would then be shipped to England and processed into profitable goods—that could be sold back to America. But the colonies weren't about to

give up such a lucrative enterprise. When Parliament prohibited the building of more ironworks, Americans simply defied the law. They both cast iron and refined it into wrought iron, from which they made a broad range of competitive products. At the onset of the Revolutionary War, American furnaces, forges, and mills were turning out one-seventh of the world's iron goods.

With the advent of war, the Pennsylvania iron industry played a critical role in supplying the new nation's army. In fact, George Washington took his army to Valley Forge in part to protect the supply lines for the products from the iron furnaces along the Schuylkill River. At Hopewell, Mark Bird turned from casting stove plates to supplying cannon and shot to the Continental Army and Navy. Unfortunately, like many American patriots, he suffered economic setbacks because of his support for Independence.

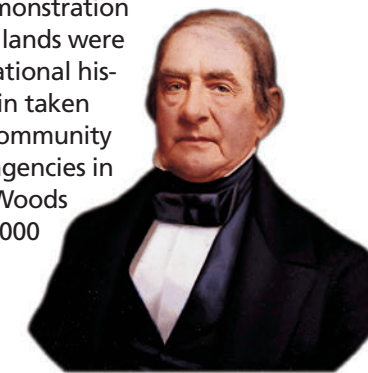
Both rural Pennsylvania community and iron plantation, Hopewell turned out products for a growing nation.

After the war, Bird had difficulty collecting debts from the nation, and he also suffered financial reverses with the general economic depression that followed the peace settlement. A 1786 flood further added to Bird's financial woes, and in 1788 Hopewell Plantation was sold at a sheriff's sale. New owners converted to peacetime production, but the operation remained unprofitable. Natural disasters, national recession, and litigation closed the furnace in 1808.

By 1816 protective tariffs and better transportation systems had brightened Hopewell's future. The imaginative leadership of Clement Brooke, the furnace's resident manager from 1816–1831, brought Hopewell's best years, supplying iron products up and down the East Coast. But the financial Panic of 1837 undermined its prosperity, and the iron operation never again matched its early success. The Civil War brought some relief in the 1860s, upping

demand for pig iron. But changing technologies—the Bessemer steel production process, particularly—and development of urban steel factories doomed Hopewell's operations. Hopewell Furnace went out of blast for the last time on June 15, 1883.

The property remained a summer home for descendants of the Brooke family, the last owners of the furnace, until 1935 when it was sold to the federal government. Originally made part of the French Creek Recreational Demonstration Area, 214 acres of historic furnace lands were set aside on August 3, 1938 as a national historic site. Today Hopewell has again taken its place as the center of a wider community as it joins state, county, and local agencies in the creation of the Hopewell Big Woods project. The goal is to preserve 72,000 acres of open land in southeast Pennsylvania. Mark Bird's 15,000 acres form the core of this ambitious project.



Clement Brooke
NPS

Touring the Park

- 1 The anthracite furnace was a failed attempt at hot-blast technology.
- 2 At hundreds of charcoal hearths colliers turned 5,000 to 6,000 cords of wood a year into charcoal.
- 3 Teamsters dumped charcoal in the cooling shed before moving it to the charcoal house.
- 4 Fillers carted charcoal, limestone, and iron ore via the connecting shed to the bridge house. At the base of the furnace the water wheel drove the blast machinery (not visible).
- 5 Workers' purchases at the office store were charged against credits for work.
- 6 In the cast house surrounding the furnace stack, moulders cast iron into stove plates and other products.
- 7 The blacksmith shop provided hardware and horse shoes and was an informal gathering place.
- 8 A schoolhouse (foundation visible) education was democratic but rudimentary.
- 9 Some workers with families rented company tenant houses. Single men boarded with them or in a boarding house across the road.
- 10 The barn sheltered up to 36 draft animals and held a year's worth of feed.
- 11 In the springhouse and smokehouse, maids stored and cured foods.
- 12 The ironmaster's mansion, built in three stages, starting ca. 1770–1800, was re-modeled as late as 1870.



ILLUSTRATION NPS/J. KENNETH TOWNSEND

Enjoying Hopewell Furnace

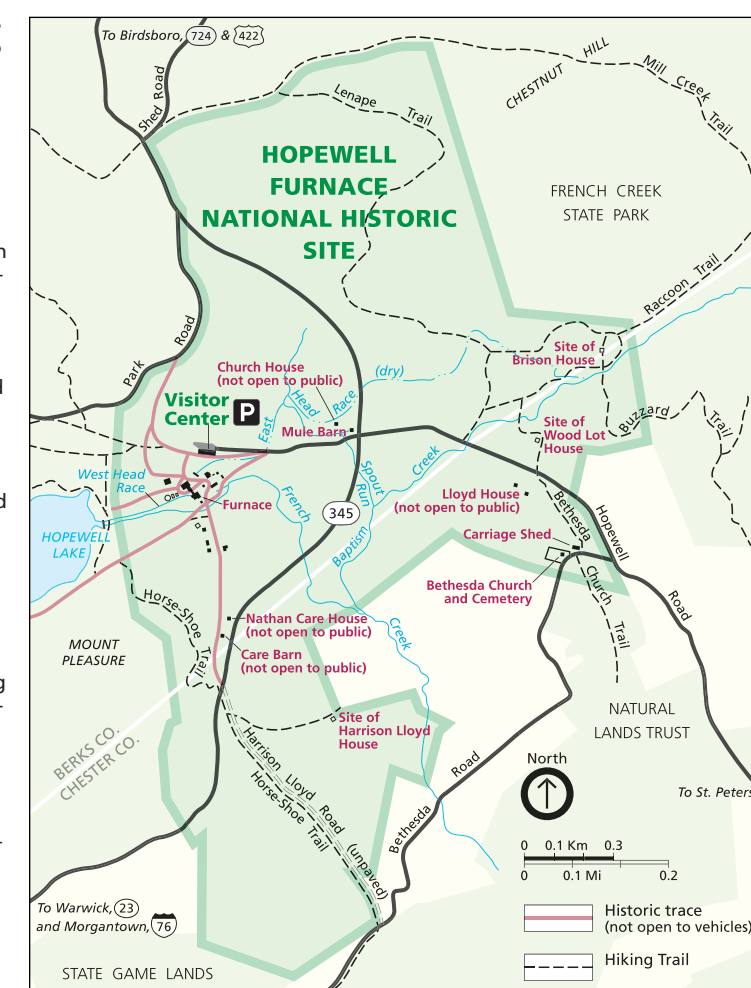
Hopewell Furnace is five miles south of Birdsboro on Pa. 345. It is 10 miles from the Pennsylvania Turnpike's Morgantown interchange, via Pa. 23 East and Pa. 345 North.

The park visitor center and historic buildings are open Wednesday through Sunday and Memorial, Independence, Labor, and Columbus days. Summer activities depict village occupations. (GPS coordinates: lat. 40.20864 N and long. 75.767660 W)

French Creek State Park (610-582-9680) offers picnicking, camping, and swimming (see map).

Hopewell Restored
By the 1930s Hopewell and surrounding lands had little market value. In 1935 Louis Clingan Brooke sold the decaying property to the U.S. Government to be included in the French Creek Recreational Demonstration Area (RDA).

RDA was a Depression-era program to provide poor urbanites with outdoor recreation. But a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) architect, Gustavus Mang, recognized the iron plantation's historic value. CCC Camp 2213 moved into the area and stabilized five structures. Thank to the CCC, Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site was established on August 3, 1938. Directed by the National Park Service, research and restoration continues today.



More information
Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site
2 Mark Bird Lane
Elverson, PA 19520
610-582-8773
TTY 610-582-2093
www.nps.gov/hofu
hofu_superintendent@nps.gov

For Your Safety
Beware of bees. Please stay off unstable furnace ruins, fences, and the other historic structures. Sharp slag can cut severely. Do not enter fenced areas or feed or handle livestock. Do not smoke in the historic area.

Hopewell Furnace is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and the National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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