

THE IRON TRADE BETWEEN THE COLONIES & ENGLAND IN THE 18TH & 19TH CENTURIES

David Blackburn, The Site Director at Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, gave a Zoom presentation in September. He received a special travel research grant and spent several months in Shropshire, England researching the ties between the US colonies and England which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



This is the Derby Furnace, the UNESCO World Heritage Site that also has a science museum.



Built in 1779, this bridge that crosses the Severn River in Shropshire, is the oldest cast iron bridge in the world.

There were connections across the Atlantic dating from the 1730's to the end of the 19th century. Processed Iron from the furnaces in northern Chester and Berks Counties was shipped to England. Other commodities that were exported from the mid-Atlantic colonies include textiles, tile, and coal. David noted in his presentation that this was truly the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.



The historic Joanna Furnace was established in 1791 on the border between Berks, Lancaster and Chester counties; in an area with a large quantity of iron ore, and verdant woodland for charcoal used for processing the iron. It was named for Joanna Potts, the wife of Samuel Potts, one of the furnace owners.



Hopewell Furnace was founded in 1771 by ironmaster Mark Bird and is located near Elverson in Berks County and operated until the mid-18th century. This "iron plantation" with its restored blast furnace, water wheel and other historic buildings was named a National Historic Site in 1938.

HISTORIC MILLS IN CHESTER & DELAWARE COUNTIES

Daniel Campbell, a multi-state registered architect, and President of the Society for the Preservation of Old Mills (SPOOM) gave a Zoom presentation in October about these many historic places in Chester and Delaware counties. SPOOM was established in the 1970's and there now over 900 preserved mills across the US. There are 90 in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland. Many mills processed wheat, flour, corn, and linseed oil. These products were an important part of the colonial trade exports.

The mills were established in the 18th century adjacent to waterways and the tributaries of the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers to create processing power by using the water wheels. The Mill at Anselma, in Chester Springs, processed wheat and corn. Snyder's Mill in Kimberton was first a gun powder works and later processed linseed oil and flour. The Cobbs Creek Mill also produced gun powder. The Rose Valley Mill, adjacent to Ridley Creek in Media, later became part of the Hedgerow Theater in 1923.

Many mills that were saved have now become private residences. In Phoenixville, James Starr built a home and a grist mill along French Creek. His grist mill was sold and later became the Nail Works, which fostered the creation of the Phoenix Iron Company.



Pictured here is the 18th century Snyder's Mill that was once a gun powder works and then a grist mill. Restoration was completed in 2018. It is located in East Pike-land near the French Creek Trail.



Locksley Mill is located along Chester Creek, near Thornbury, in Delaware County. This water-powered mill was built in 1724, and was the first place in the PA colony to refine iron.

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