

## Interim Report, Robertsville Forge, Part II

In 1770, Smith hired Jacob Ogden to manage, and perhaps oversee, the construction of the new ironworks. Experts in construction, workers, and materials were assembled at the site. This was not an easy task given the lack of an established road to connect the site to the Old North Road. This was, at best, a poorly maintained road over very steep terrain. Before the end of 1771, the new ironworks were functional and a November 11, 1773 advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant* describes the ironworks as follows: A forge with four fires (forges with extensive stonework and chimneys), two hammers (which likely had 500 lb. heads), waterworks, canals to handle surplus water, a two-floor dwelling house with four rooms per floor, a store, “compting” house (which was the business office) with a deep basement for provisions, four worker houses, a coal house, an iron house, a blacksmith shop and a barn. Fifty acres of the 289 acres were under improvement in 1771 and there was also a sawmill and sawyer’s house nearby.

A special feature of the ironwork was water privileges to Long Pond (Highland Lake) granted by the Winchester proprietors. At a June 1771 meeting, Smith was given the right to draw down, or lower, Long Pond by one and a half feet for the benefit of his ironworks “during the pleasure of the Proprietors...” The four waterwheels were enclosed and heated with large woodstoves to allow winter use. Between 600 and 1,000 cords of wood had to be cut and converted into charcoal to run the forge. Oxen and teamsters moved over 100 tons of pig iron from Salisbury to Colebrook during 1771.

Also in 1771, Smith requested that the General Assembly build a second county road through Colebrook, Barkhamsted and New Hartford. The new road branched off the Old North Road as Deer Hill Road in Colebrook, passed by the forge and then the east side of the Farmington River through Barkhamsted to rejoin the Old North Road just past Satan’s Kingdom. This road provided a more direct route with fewer elevation changes for transporting iron from Salisbury to the port at Hartford. The road was completed in 1774 and named the Wolcott Road. Later, portions of this road would become part of the Farmington River Turnpike. Before, during and after the War of Independence, hundreds of tons of iron moved over this road, past the future site of the Squire’s Tavern. Imported and manufactured goods then made the return trip along the road.

In an April 6, 1775 advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant*, Jacob Ogden offered for sale at the forge refined and bloomed iron suitable for guns, scythes, cart tires and shear molds for which he offered to take pork, wheat, rye or Indian corn in payment. The production of bloomed iron at the forge indicates they were reducing some raw iron ore into wrought iron. A *Connecticut Courant* advertisement on July 1, 1778 “seeks teamster to move fifty tons of iron ore from Salisbury to the forge in Colebrook.” There are several unconfirmed reports that some local ore was also used at the forge.

In the spring of 1775, Smith purchased nine ships in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and filled them with New England goods, which were to be traded in the Caribbean for rum, sugar and molasses and then sailed to England. Smith traveled to England in 1775 to meet the ships and sell many of them along with their cargo. He remained in Europe for most of the War of Independence, leaving Jacob Ogden to manage the ironworks. Our investigations put to rest the rumor that Smith had fled America because of his Tory leanings. Much of his time was spent in Russia, where he convinced Tsarina Katherine that iron works should be erected near St. Petersburg as well as extensive areas for raising

hemp, to be used in the rope industry. He felt that there would be an economic downturn following the war, regardless of the outcome; this proved to be an accurate assessment.

On April 4, 1777, Jacob Ogden placed an advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant* announcing that he had produced steel at Colebrook “in the German way” and had steel to sell, after meeting the war needs of the colonies. This steel was a top quality tool edge product and was one of the few sources available to Americans during the war. The importance of the ironworks to the war effort was shown by the fact that Ogden and his workers were exempted from serving in the war. (*Records of the State of Connecticut 1778-1780, Vol. 2, p. 387*).

The forge burned on August 31, 1781 and was rebuilt with State financial help in three months. The rebuilt forge had five fires, two of which were dedicated to anchor production, two large hammers, and a rebuilt steel works. To give an idea of the importance of the anchor production, here are two entries that were found at Rutgers: May 12, 1784, 27,840 lbs. of anchors; Oct. 19, 1785, 14,702 lbs. of anchors.

The steel works, which were rebuilt in the fall of 1781, are not mentioned in the May 12, 1784 deed by Richard Smith to Elijah and Joseph Buell, nor are they listed in the *Connecticut Courant* July 16, 1787 advertisement offering the ironworks for sale.

It was basically this forge, without the steel works, that David Squires bought in 1802. A possible explanation for the disappearance of the steel works could be that the Rockwells bought them from Ogden and moved the steel works to Colebrook Center. Jacob Ogden was the son-in-law of Joseph Rockwell of Colebrook.

#### **1771 Map of the Richard Smith Ironworks**

Among the goals of the 2007 archaeological investigation of the Richard Smith Forge was the verification of the 1771 map found in the archives at Rutgers University. The map depicts the original road (Kellogg Road) to the forge and the layout of buildings associated with the northern portion of the project area. The structures included a coalhouse and four dwelling houses. A store, blacksmith shop and iron house that were part of the forge complex are shown just north of the Forge.

The cellar hole for the store and stonework related to the other buildings are still visible within a small triangle of land that lies between Old Forge Road and Old Creamery Road, just outside the 2007 study area. It is assumed that other buildings were built during the years the forge was in operation. The steel operation has yet to be located. Economically it would have made sense to incorporate this operation with the forge; however, steel products may have been stored in another building possibly located in the pasture that is the focus of this investigation. Locating this structure would be very important, as early steel works were very rare in North America. The identification of these structures and the recovery of materials associated with them can provide a greater insight into the operation of the forge, the lives of forge workers and the role of the forger and the Still River during the early history of Colebrook.

Testing also attempted to determine the age and function of the barn whose foundation is located at the northern edge of the property and any other below ground features related to the Richard Smith Ironworks.

To be continued.

**Historic Bytes**  
Bob Grigg