

## **Interim Report, Robertsville Forge, Part IV**

*We are introducing the public to the archaeological investigation that is ongoing at the Richard Smith Forge in the Robertsville section of Colebrook. This report was written in April of this year, and we will update you on the results of this year's investigation when it is concluded later in the autumn.*

A well was also identified immediately north of the concentration of subsurface stones in the area where we believe at least two of the dwelling houses were located. While a well would be expected near the dwelling houses, it remains to be determined whether this well is related to these occupations or later farming activities. The well was almost entirely covered over with modern roofing materials. Enough of this debris was removed to determine that it was in fact a well and to measure its diameter, which was just over 3 feet. Future excavation at the well might reveal other materials that could help determine the age of this feature.

### **The Barn**

The stone foundation of what appears to have been a two-story barn is located just south of Robertsville Road near the northwestern corner of the project area. The entrance to the upper level was at the north side. The eastern wall contains many large stones. The interior is filled with many smaller cobbles. The Rutgers map does not depict a barn; however, one is shown near the store. (Over one hundred yards distant.) A land transaction from 1810 indicates a barn, which is quite likely the barn whose stonework is still present near the northwest corner of the field (Colebrook Land Records, Vol. 4, p. 421). Interestingly enough, this land record makes no mention of any dwelling houses or the coal house. The forge ceased operation in 1811. Materials recovered from test pits dug on the east and west sides of the barn and just outside the opening to the structure on the south side yielded primarily building materials, handmade and cut nails and window glass. If this is the barn referred to in the 1810 document, it was probably built after 1771. Evidence of what appears to be an old building was found between the field and Robertsville Road just west of the barn. The function of this structure has yet to be determined. Test pits near this structure yielded primarily animal bone and building materials. Domestic materials were noticeably absent.

### **Earlier Occupations within the project area**

A small quantity of stone flakes and chips recovered during testing indicates that Native Americans camped in the field. This is not surprising, as the Still River would have afforded excellent fishing opportunities. Expanded testing across the field, especially those portions bordering the Still River, may provide further evidence of these occupations.

### **Analysis and disposition of artifacts**

All materials recovered during the archaeological investigation of the Richard Smith Ironworks are presently in the possession of the principal investigator. Upon conclusion of the analysis, the disposition of the artifacts will be determined in consultation with the property owners and the State Historic Preservation Office.

### **Future research at the Colebrook Forge**

The 2007 archaeological testing was seen as the initial step in the study of the forge site. While a number of the goals were achieved during this investigation, it is clear that much more remains to be learned about this site. Given the importance of the forge during the Revolutionary War and to the histories of Colebrook and surrounding towns, the site warrants further study. Presently, efforts are being made to obtain funding and expand the archaeological investigation on to the adjoining Northeast Utilities property so that the study can include the following:

- locating stonework associated with dwelling houses of forge workers;
- expanding testing across the present grid to locate additional structures and features associated with the forge;
- determine the orientation and dimensions of the coal house;
- identifying the location of the steel operation;
- map layout of forge, raceway and other features;
- test near the store, blacksmith shop and iron house and record data on remnants of stone work;
- create a site map showing all identified structures within the project area;
- analyze the materials recovered and conserve unstable artifacts;
- document the history and archaeology of the Richard Smith Forge.

Beyond learning more about the Richard Smith Ironworks from the below ground archaeology, it is hoped that this research will help determine those areas within the property that should be protected and possibly considered for an archaeological preserve given the historical significance of the forge.

### **2008 addendum:**

At the time of this writing, mid-September 2008, the primary thrust of the 2008 investigation season was directed along the north side of the field adjacent to Robertsville Road. There were two principal reasons for this; we did not yet have written permission from the utility company, owners of the land on which the forge was built on to conduct our investigation on their property (we received it in early September), and we wanted to further pinpoint the locations of any dwellings for the forge workers that might have been located along Robertsville Road. Based upon the distribution of cultural items, we feel confident that we have reasonably located two of the worker's dwellings. The uncovering of a layer of broken rock in this same area that proved to consist of a high percentage of magnetite, an iron ore, has provided us with additional questions. There have been unsubstantiated reports that local iron ore had been used at this forge, but there was nothing concrete to back up these claims. While it is probable that this ore was used at the forge, we can't scientifically tie the two together at this point. It is hoped that this subject will be laid to rest by the time the investigation is concluded.

The remainder of this season will be spent in the area between Old Forge Road and Still River, where there are at least four building sites associated with the forge.