

Iron Works labor held fast for nearly 25 years

The first iron works and blast furnace in colonial Connecticut was established on the town line between Branford and East Haven in 1655 and continued for about 25 years.

It was located where the East Haven River emerges from Lake Saltonstall. East Haven was originally called Iron Works Village. The lake between our two towns was called Great Pond, later Iron Works Pond or Furnace Pond, and finally Lake Saltonstall - named for the Connecticut governor who owned property on

the lake.

Stephen Goodyear of New Haven was granted the right to start an iron works at the lake in 1655, but died soon after. Other interested parties were John Davenport and Theophilus Eaton of New Haven, who were represented by their agent John Cooper.

John Winthrop Jr., a metallurgist, physician and later governor of Connecticut, also shared an interest in the operation. Jasper Crane was Branford's agent for the iron works, sometimes known as

the bloomery.

Iron products until that time could only be obtained from England so there was a great need for a more convenient source. The furnace at the bloomery was supplied with bog ore from North Haven, probably brought down the river by boat. Branford provided 3/8 of the wood, the lime and water to power the operation and New Haven had to supply the rest. The work was very hazardous and at least one worker was killed.

In 1657, two Boston residents, Capt. Clarke and William Payne, took over the Winthrop portion of the business and controversies arose. In 1665, Mr. Jones, the chief magistrate of New Haven, wrote to Capt. Clarke "about the disorderly persons that were at the iron works; and upon consideration of so much trouble that arises to the town by means of disorderly persons coming thither, the Town did see cause to order Mr. Clarke not to admit any persons about the said works before a certificate from some persons of known reputation be first presented to the authority of this plantation."

Operation of the Iron Works ended in 1679 when, during a period of great illness, many of the workmen died. It is also possible that the supply of bog ore had been exhausted.

The following year Clarke sold to John Potter, who established a bloomery on a different site. A small plaque marks the site of the Iron Works.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is historian for the town of Branford.



PICTURES OF THE PAST

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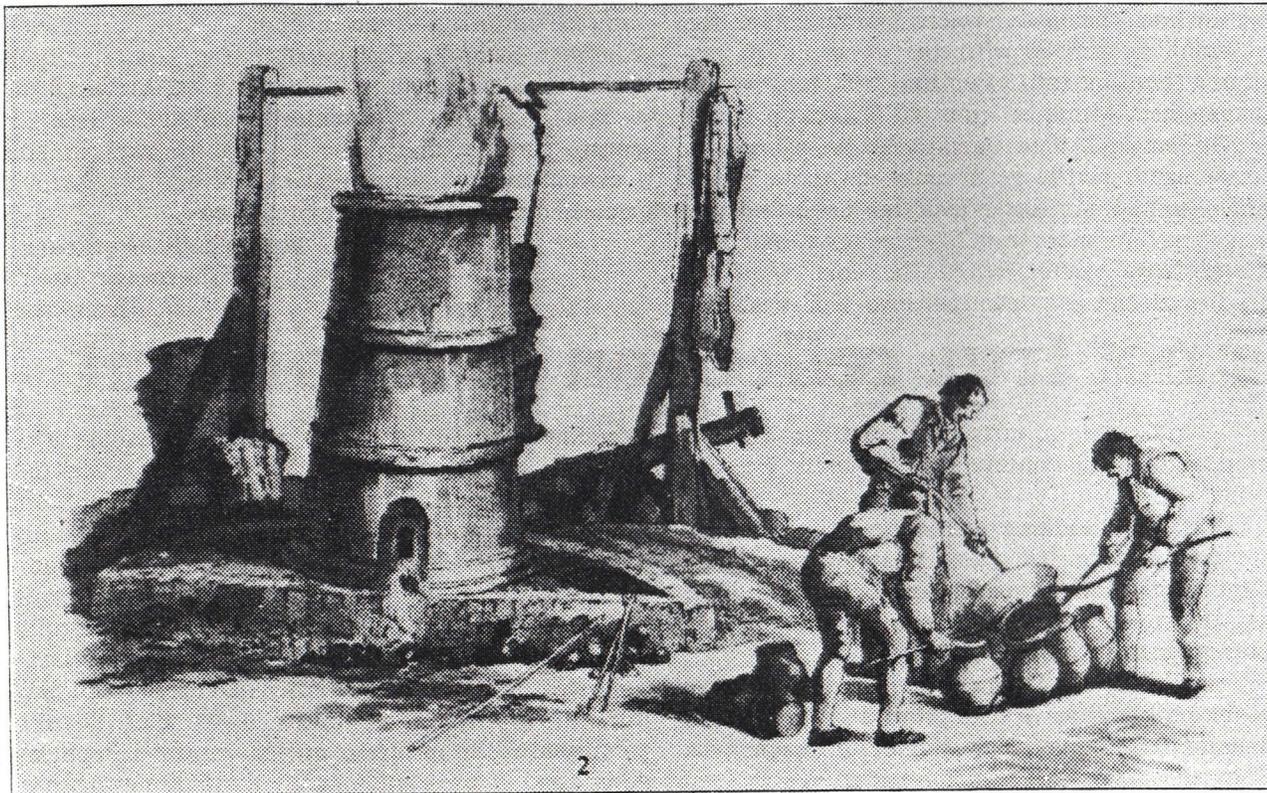


Photo courtesy Branford Historical Society

An illustration from Rural Occupations in Early 19th-Century England by Pyre depicts an English blast furnace.