

Pennsylvania's colonial ironmasters forged iron and a revolution that had both industrial and political implications.

The colonists in North America wanted the right to the profits gained from their manufacturing.

However, England wanted all of the colonies' rich ores and raw materials to feed its own factories, and also wanted the colonies to be a market for its finished goods.

England passed legislation in 1750 to prohibit colonists from making finished iron products, but by 1771, when entrepreneur Mark Bird established the Hopewell blast furnace in Pennsylvania, iron making had become the backbone of American industry.

It also had become one of the major issues that fomented the revolutionary break between England and the British colonies.

By the time the War of Independence broke out in 1776, Bird, angered and determined, was manufacturing cannons and shot at Hopewell to be used by the Continental Army.

After the war, Hopewell, along with hundreds of other "iron plantations," continued to form the new nation's industrial foundation well into the nineteenth century.

The rural landscape became dotted with tall stone pyramids that breathed flames and smoke, charcoal-fueled iron furnaces that produced the versatile metal so crucial to the nation's growth.

Generations of ironmasters, craftspeople, and workers produced goods during war and peace-ranging from cannons and shot to domestic items such as cast-iron stoves, pots, and sash weights for windows.

The region around Hopewell had everything needed for iron production: a wealth of iron ore near the surface, limestone for removing impurities from the iron, hardwood forests to supply the charcoal used for fuel, rushing water to power the bellows that pumped blasts of air into the furnace fires, and workers to supply the labor.

By the 1830's, Hopewell had developed a reputation for producing high quality cast-iron stoves, for which there was a steady market.

As Pennsylvania added more links to its transportation system of roads, canals, and railroads, it became easier to ship parts made by Hopewell workers to sites all over the east coast.

There they were assembled into stoves and sold from Rhode Island to Maryland as the "Hopewell stove".

By the time the last fires burned out at Hopewell ironworks in 1883, the community had produced some 80,000 cast-iron stoves.