

# STORIES of New Jersey

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## OLD OXFORD FURNACE

New Jersey has fallen heir to Oxford Furnace, once a thriving iron smelter, its stack pouring forth smoke and its belly gushing streams of white hot molten iron. It was built in 1742 by Jonathan Robeson, in the wilds of Morris (now Warren) County, and for 140 years it served New Jersey well.

Oxford made cannon balls to fight Indians, French, British and Hessians in turn. Its iron provided shoes for ox teams and horses to clear the land and haul the crops; spiked together the wooden ships, houses and carts; ballasted ships leaving our ports; and took part in building the railroads a century ago.

The old furnace is on the slope of Scott's Mountain, in the village of Oxford, about a block from State Highway No. 30. High on a hill overlooking the furnace is the three-story house that was built in 1754 by the Shippen brothers, Joseph and William, who owned the controlling interest in the furnace. Joseph was known as "Gentleman Joe," because of the many guests of distinction from New York and Philadelphia he entertained in the little village. Though the house has been remodeled from time to time, the original walls of native stone remain intact. Its broad front is partly hidden by glass-enclosed porches. This house went with the furnace, and the many owners and lessees used it in turn.

Near the house is the three-story gristmill that ground flour for the workers and feed for the animals that hauled ore and fuel. For the past 25 years the gristmill has been a Methodist Church, and at the peak where once hung a pulley to hoist grain, now hangs the church bell, without cover, like those of the Spanish Missions of California.

Of the furnace itself, only 25 feet remain of what was once a 38-foot, pyramid-shaped stack. It stands close to the foot of the hill, largely concealed by the engine and boiler house, later additions to the furnace. The lower half of the engine house was originally the stamping mill where the ore was crushed before being smelted. It stands beside a raceway that carried water from Furnace Creek to turn the water wheel, the wheel that ran the stamping mill as well as the big leather bellows that blew air into the furnace.

Iron is rarely found in the earth in a pure state. It is scattered in veins and fragments throughout rocks. Rock containing iron is called iron ore. The method of extracting the iron from the rock has not changed since the early days of the Oxford Furnace. Modern machinery, however, with large furnaces and electric power, has made it possible to extract or smelt hundreds of

The rest of the article can be read at the library on Saturday's from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.