

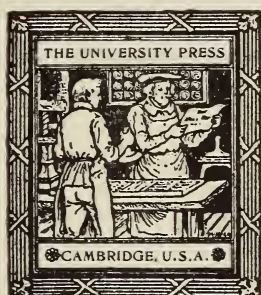
THE STORY OF COAL AND IRON IN ALABAMA

BY

ETHEL ARMES

AUTHOR OF "MIDSUMMER IN WHITTIER'S COUNTRY"

CLICK ANYWHERE on THIS PAGE to RETURN TO ANTIQUE TOILET
GUIDE at InspectApedia.com



BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
PUBLISHED UNDER AUSPICES OF
THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

1910

158 THE STORY OF COAL AND IRON IN ALABAMA

The Hale and Murdock Iron Works in Lamar County at once entered into contract with the Confederate Government. M. A. Hale of Georgia, says:

"In 1862 the erection of the new furnace began and the next year it was put in blast. The Confederate government took the larger part of its output, using the pig iron for making cannon, hollow ware, skillets, ovens, and pots for the soldiers' camp. These castings were made by dipping the molten iron direct from the furnace and pouring it into molds without remelting the pigs in a cupola. All products not sold to the Government were bartered or exchanged for country produce, antebellum prices governing the exchange. A large part of the labor used was slave labor. Many of the negroes were purchased by the owner at the time the furnace was built, and afterwards. The skilled labor, machinists, etc., were detailed for duty by the Confederate government. As it was much safer than being at the front, there were always many applications for the places."

According to Walter Nesmith of Vernon, Alabama, "This furnace contributed a good deal of material to the Confederate cause. It molded cannon balls, grape shot, and such like, which were used by the Confederate army. I might mention incidentally that the entire cavalry under General Forrest had their horses shot at this place when they made the tour through Mississippi to Corinth, during the year 1862-63. Now there is nothing left of the furnace except the slag and dross. An attempt was made to move the old boiler once. It was hauled about one half a mile, and lies along the public road as a monument of the old Hale and Murdock Company."

The furnace is occasionally mentioned as the Old Winston furnace, and in some records as the Weston furnace, having been built by a furnaceman named Joseph Weston, employed by Hale and Murdock.

According to Thomas P. Clinton, the Leach and Avery foundry, in Tuskaloosa County, near the town of Tuskaloosa, started business in the eighteen-forties, and during the Civil War cast a considerable amount of cannon for the Confederacy.

The old Tannehill furnace was bought in 1863 by William L. Saunders and Company, of Marion, Alabama. A steam engine was installed and another furnace added to the plant. On the same creek, precisely one mile south of Tannehill, a forge was put up by Thomas Hennington Owen, and Thomas Lightfoot Williams. "Over and again, so Rose Owen tells me, they had to get out their ore in the morning, and besides making the iron

for the government, they had to make the nails and horseshoes, shoe all their mules, and get the teams off to the railroad at Montevallo, before night.”¹ Mr. Williams also ran a big tan yard at Tannehill, and made saddles and harness for the Confederacy. The forge, being out of the way, escaped the enemy’s eye, but was destroyed in the June freshet of 1866. Mr. Owen was not an iron worker himself, but a planter and merchant of Jefferson County, and served in the latter eighteen-seventies as county commissioner. He employed an expert iron worker from Tennessee, Thomas C. Bratton, to build and operate the forge.

All during the war Tannehill furnace was operated, making cannon balls, gun barrels, ordnance, all the munitions of war, in addition to pots, pans, and skillets, for the use of the Confederate army. When Croxton’s detachment came through Roupes Valley they happened upon Tannehill at the very moment when the cupola was being tapped and they made short work of it. They demolished one furnace entirely, blew up the trestle, tore up the tramway, burned the foundry and cast houses, and passed on to the settlement beyond, which they razed to the ground.

This was the death blow. The Tannehill furnaces were put out of blast for good and all; the whole country round about was abandoned and the forest left to its own. And the forest took! It is wild almost as a virgin wilderness to-day down there. The old Mansion House, a short distance from the furnace, where Giles Edwards afterwards lived, is gone to rack and ruin. A few heaps of stone mark the site of the forsaken homes. The ruins of the furnace like some Welsh medieval tower stand forlorn, yet will they stand for centuries to come as a memorial to the early iron-masters of Alabama, as the mute historian of the first generation of the iron industry in this State. To-day there are but few men living who used to work about Tannehill. One is the old darkey, Bob Fuller, who sits around the Goethite commissary and tells how iron is made. There is no written record of any of the facts about Tannehill, and no mention whatever is made of this important group of furnaces in the standard authorities on iron making in Alabama. The Station Tannehill is the getting-off place for the Goethite miners now — nothing else. No hint or suggestion of the old furnaces, or of the early Tannehill settlement, can be seen from the railroad which cuts through the wild country there.

¹ James M. Gillespy of Birmingham.