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### *The Margaret C. Buckingham Collection and Other Business Records*

**A**MONG the collections of industrial and business records at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, those pertaining to the early charcoal iron industry of Pennsylvania are significant. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the southeastern part of the State was the chief center of American iron production. As the industry spread westward, it reached its peak about the period of the Civil War. In time it was surpassed by iron manufacture based on new techniques which included the use of coke, instead of charcoal, as a furnace fuel. An age of iron also gave way to a new era of steel.

The many ponderous volumes of the old ironworks, together with the correspondence of ironmasters and merchants, which have been acquired by the Society from time to time reveal the rise, progress and decline of the charcoal iron industry of southeastern Pennsylvania. Iron manufacture in all parts of the country during this period was similar. The forms of organization, the types of ironworks, the methods of production, the application of improved procedures and processes, the means of transportation, and the problems concerning markets were practically the same. Only in details were there differences. The story of the Pennsylvania charcoal iron industry, therefore, is typical of the industry all over the country where it existed.

The older collections of industrial records at The Historical Society include the Forges and Furnaces Account Books, 1726-1832, which relate largely, but not entirely, to the iron enterprises and interests of the Potts family in the Schuylkill Valley and other sections of Pennsylvania. They number approximately two hundred and fifty volumes. Some of these books were presented by members of the Potts family and by other individuals. Most of them were obtained from the estate of Samuel W. Pennypacker, a former Governor of the State. These records relate to the following ironworks and

periods: Coventry Iron Works (1726-1769); Colebrookdale Furnace (1729-1767); Warwick Furnace (1742-1772); Pine Forge (1720-1790); Pool Forge, Berks County (1749-1759); Popadickon Furnace (1744-1755); Sarum Forge (1767-1771); Mount Pleasant Furnace (1737-1796); Pottsgrove Ironworks (1755-1825); Dale Furnace (1799-1801); Hopewell Furnace (1784-1808); Tulpehocken (later Charming) Forge (1763-1791); Elizabeth Furnace (1762-1779); Mary Ann Furnace (1771-1776); Berkshire Furnace (1767-1789); New Pine Forge (1760-1778); Valley Forge (1757-1772). In addition to the interests of various members of the Potts family, the records of works owned by Thomas Rutter, George Ross, Henry William Stiegel, William Bird, Thomas Maybury, Robert May, and others are included in this collection.

Another important group of industrial records is that known as the Grubb Furnace and Forge Account Books, 1765-1880. These books were presented to the Society by Daisy E. R. Grubb, M. Lilly Beall, Mrs. William M. Thornton, Jr., Mrs. William T. Morris and Mrs. I. Wistar Morris. They are chiefly the business accounts of the early ironmasters, Peter and Henry Bates Grubb. The eighty-nine volumes cover the following: Hopewell Forge, Lancaster County (1765-1805); Mount Vernon Furnace (1800-1812); Mount Hope Furnace (1784-1819); Codorus Forge (1802-1812); Codorus Ore Books (1866-1868); Manada Furnace (1836-1859); Columbia and St. Charles Furnaces (1853-1880); Miscellaneous (1804-1875).

The correspondence of merchants contains a wealth of material that throws further light on early iron manufacture. Some examples are the Henry Drinker Letter Books (1773-1800); the Pemberton Papers (1641-1880); and the Isaac P. and Levi Morris Papers (1836-1845). Other manuscripts invaluable to a study of the early iron industry may be found in such collections as the Penn Manuscripts (1629-1834); the Thomas Stewardson Papers (1716-1900); and the Gilbert Cope Historical and Genealogical Collection.

The recent, generous gift of Mrs. Margaret C. Buckingham to the Society of about four hundred and fifty volumes adds greatly to the materials on the early iron industry. This impressive collection of ledgers, journals, daybooks, cashbooks, and miscellaneous books represents many iron works over varied periods of time. They include the following: Berkshire Furnace, 1777-1793 (four volumes); Castle

Fin Works, 1826-1864 (forty-three volumes); Charming Forge, 1784-1819 (twelve volumes); Colebrook Furnace, 1791-1887 (one hundred volumes); Cornwall Furnace, 1764-1881 (eighty-three volumes); Elizabeth Furnace, 1766-1832 (fourteen volumes); Hopewell Forge, 1803-1817 (ten volumes); Martic Iron Works, 1818-1832 (eleven volumes); Mary Ann Furnace, 1764-1778 (ten volumes); Pequa Iron Works, 1829-1852 (six volumes); Reading Furnace, 1793-1857 (twenty-nine volumes); Schuylkill Forge, 1819-1826 (eighteen volumes); Speedwell Forge, 1784-1882 (fifty-one volumes); Spring Forge, 1765-1852 (forty-one volumes); Union Forge, 1783-1795 (fifteen volumes); Miscellaneous, 1814-1895 (six volumes).

These ironworks represent the enterprises, interests and connections of the Coleman family whose members have contributed much to the industrial development of Pennsylvania and the nation. The first ironmaster in this family was Robert Coleman who was born near Castle Fin, not far from Londonderry, Ireland, in 1748. He came to America at the age of sixteen. In 1773, while working at Reading Furnace, he married the daughter of the ironmaster, James Old. Venturing into iron manufacturing himself, his rise was phenomenal. He leased and bought interests in many ironworks and built others. After his death in 1825 his children and descendants carried on his enterprises.

While none of the records of the Margaret C. Buckingham Collection covers the entire life of a furnace or forge, they are remarkably complete for the periods represented. For example, the records of Colebrook Furnace, built by Robert Coleman in 1791, extend from the origin of the furnace to the time of the Civil War. The collection does not include the later life of the furnace. Among other records relatively complete for long periods of time are those for the Castle Fin Works, Cornwall Furnace and Speedwell Forge.

It should be noted also that some of the volumes of this collection fill gaps in other collections in the possession of The Historical Society. A number of the books of Elizabeth Furnace, built by the ostentatious but unfortunate Henry William Stiegel, came into the possession of Robert Coleman when he first leased the furnace and later bought it. Gaps are also filled in the records of Berkshire Furnace, Mary Ann Furnace and Charming (formerly Tulpehocken) Forge.

As in the case of similar records, the Margaret C. Buckingham Collection contains a rich mine of information on the charcoal iron industry and its development. The volumes show prices of pig iron, bar iron, and castings over long periods of time. They record the cost of materials that were necessary in the manufacture of iron. Since iron and agriculture were closely allied in this industry—being organized on plantations where wood for making charcoal was abundant—prices of produce and various kinds of supplies are given. The wages of miners, woodcutters, charcoal burners, ironworkers, agricultural hands and other workers are included in the records. On many a fly leaf or on the last pages of an occasional book may be found agreements and contracts between ironmasters and workers.

Information of a social nature, likewise, can be obtained from these volumes. The daybooks, especially, abound in notes of local importance. References to the planting and reaping of grain; remarks concerning the weather; accounts of heavy rains and high water which caused considerable damage; notations of repairs to the furnace, as well as the time when it was started or blown out; references to births, marriages and deaths; and occasional gossip items about the ironmaster's employees are set forth. In the books for the earlier period, there are references to Negro slaves with such names as Nero, Bacchus, and Caesar, who performed work of different sorts on the plantations and even at the ironworks. Cures for the diseases of horses included the use of sulphur, antimony and asa-fetida, while those for human beings were concoctions worthy of the witches' brew in *Macbeth*. The superstition prevalent in early America is clearly reflected in many places in the records.

The Historical Society is fortunate in a most recent acquisition of manuscripts which relate to the last period of the charcoal iron industry. Through the gift of Lieutenant William Wikoff Smith of the Army Air Corps, a member of the Potts family, the records of Isabella Furnace in Chester County have been acquired. They round out the collections pertaining to this bygone industry. The furnace was in operation from 1880 to the beginning of the twentieth century and a complete record of its activities are presented in the correspondence, ledgers, letter books, vouchers, pay rolls, checkbooks and pamphlets. For those interested in the technical aspects of iron

manufacture, there are many volumes that deal with the structure and technology of Isabella Furnace.

The Margaret C. Buckingham Collection and the Isabella Furnace Collection add materially to the older collections of industrial materials at The Historical Society. The story of an almost forgotten industry which played so important a part in the history of the country when it was young and lusty is recorded in these rich sources. They present an opportunity to economic and social historians, and they should be extensively used.

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