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Book Review: Saugus Iron Works: The Roland W. Robbins Excavations, 1948-1953

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skewed lessons from the past toward individual achievement and away from community and collective action. I suspect Du Bois would wholeheartedly approve of the question and of the trajectory that Battle-Baptiste intends for the increasing relevance of this site.

In her final chapter, *Moving Mountains and Liberating Dialogues*, Battle-Baptiste highlights the need to allow different kinds of questions. She asks how archaeology can overcome the distrust of descendant communities and become trustworthy. *Black Feminist Archaeology* is part of an answer to that question as in Battle-Baptiste's own words, she "begin[s] to tell a story that is not just about archaeology or artifacts, but about people and places, women and men, leisure and labor, with details that can be relevant to contemporary struggles for social justice and liberation" (p. 31).

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SAUGUS IRON WORKS: THE ROLAND W. ROBBINS EXCAVATIONS, 1948–1953, edited by William A. Griswold and Donald W. Linebaugh, 2011, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 440 pages, 182 black-and-white illustrations, index, appendices, no price given.

Reviewed by Richard Veit

Wow! This beautiful, large-format volume on the Saugus Iron Works by William Griswold, Donald Linebaugh, and other contributors is a tour de force of industrial archaeology. From 1948 to 1953, Roland W. Robbins, an individual who even today tends to elicit mixed responses from historical archaeologists, carried out pioneering excavations at the site of the Hammersmith Iron Works in Saugus, Massachusetts. Robbins, who had already garnered some fame for his excavations at the site of Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond, began his work at Saugus nearly two decades before the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, at a time when there were no college courses in historical archaeology, and most North American archaeologists were focused on Native American sites. In every sense, Robbins was a pioneer. In this volume he shines through as gifted, witty, and driven; however, he could also be combative and headstrong. Although he was one of the first historical archaeologists, and a vocal advocate for what we today call public archaeology, the self-trained Robbins would ultimately become a victim of the ongoing professionalization of the discipline he helped found and popularize. This book describes and illustrates Robbins' work at a truly significant site. Moreover, it serves, in part as a palliative, restoring Robbins reputation as an exceptional fieldworker and pioneering public archaeologist. Indeed, Griswold and Linebaugh's book would not have been possible if Robbins had not been a careful excavator who took considerable pains to document his work.

The book project began when Griswold, the senior author, was charged with managing some structural improvements associated with the Americans with Disabilities Act at the reconstructed Saugus Ironworks. Griswold

soon discovered that Robbins, like so many archaeologists past and present, had never finished a report on his fieldwork. Griswold and Linebaugh have done the discipline a great service in pulling together Robbins' materials and presenting the results in what can only be described as a lavish format. The book is oversized, measuring 9.5 inches tall by 11.5 inches wide, and features 182 black and white illustrations, almost all of which are large format. These photographs, taken during the original excavations, are the work of Richard Merrill. Quite simply, they are stunning. The volume is also exceptionally well-referenced and clearly written.

Saugus Iron Works begins with an overview of the practice of iron manufacture in the 17th century. Particular attention is paid to the state of the iron industry in Great Britain and the attractions of North America, with its extensive forests and rich deposits of ore, to English ironworkers. Next, the volume examines the historical record relating to the Hammersmith ironworks at Saugus. This chapter was authored by Janet Regan and Curtis White. Saugus was unusual in that it was an early example of an integrated ironworks. It contained a blast furnace, a forge, a rolling and slitting mill, two blacksmith shops, a coal house, and a large number of ancillary buildings. Saugus operated from 1646 to 1670 when it closed, an unfortunate victim of mismanagement. The result was an exodus of ironworkers across North America. Indeed, it was from these sparks cast off by Saugus that many later ironworks sprang up in New England and the Middle Atlantic regions.

Donald Linebaugh authored the book's third chapter, which deals with the excavations at the site. Linebaugh begins with an interesting discussion of early preservation efforts at Saugus. I was intrigued to see William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England), make a guest appearance in 1911 when the Iron Works House, the sole standing original structure from the ironworks, went on the market. Appleton apparently acted as a historic property broker and helped find a sympathetic purchaser, the photographer and antiquarian Wallace Nutting, for the building. Later, Henry Ford attempted to acquire the

house and move it to Dearborn, Michigan, a plan which happily fell through. Ultimately, the First Iron Works Association (FIWA), with help from Quincy Bent, a Vice President of Bethlehem Steel, purchased the site, though Bent's interest was in the remains of the ironworks rather than the historic house. Hoping to find tangible evidence that remains of the ironworks were present, the FIWA hired Robbins, and the rest, as they say, is history, or in this case historical archaeology. Robbins' fieldwork, carried out between 1948 and 1953, certainly exceeded the expectations of his employers, as he identified the remains of a blast furnace, slitting mill, forge, and numerous other structures.

The fourth chapter, contributed by William Griswold, looks at Robbins in context. As he notes in his introduction, "Robbins managed to do what few academic archaeologists are ever able to do: successfully investigate an early industrial site buried by huge amounts of fill, gather archaeological information that supplemented and informed a privately-funded reconstruction, create a large amount of public interest in the project, and launch a career in archaeology that lasted throughout his lifetime" (p. 101). This accomplishment is even more impressive given that Robbins was a high school dropout, who had previously supported himself as a house painter and handyman. Nevertheless, through his intelligence, *savoir faire*, and persistence he became the go-to archaeologist for individuals interested in early American ironworks.

Chapter Five, also by Griswold, deals with the excavation of the blast furnace. It is followed by chapters on the forge and slitting mill, the Jenks area, and tailrace all contributed by Curtis White. Joseph Jenks is an intriguing fellow who was a blacksmith, millwright, swordsmith, and manufacturer of wire and pins. Chapters Eight and Nine, both by Griswold, discuss the waterpower system and other miscellaneous features.

Janet Regan and Curtis White wrote Chapter 10 which provides an overview of the artifact collection. In addition to an exceptionally interesting collection of finds relating to iron manufacture, prehistoric Native American artifacts were also present in abundance. It is clear from reading this chapter that there is still much more work that could be done with

the collection. The next two chapters deal with efforts to conserve the collection and with Robbins' efforts at public outreach. They are both strong contributions. Robbins' had the good fortune to recover large quantities of intact woodwork, including fragmentary waterwheels and anvil bases, and faced considerable challenges addressing their conservation. He was also a pioneering public archaeologist, constantly on the road lecturing about his finds.

The thirteenth chapter, *Evaluating the Reconstruction*, by Griswold examines the reconstruction and its costs, while Chapter 14, by Griswold and Linebaugh examine the post-1954 period. During this period, the FIWA lost the support of the steel industry and ultimately transferred the property to the National Park Service (NPS). Although this move led to the long-term preservation and interpretation of the site, we also see Robbins marginalized and frustrated as he attempted to work with the NPS park management.

This is a fascinating and beautiful book that is of value to historians interested in early American industries, industrial archaeologists—particularly folks who love ironworks, and individuals studying the history of historical archaeology. There are some aspects of the book that are a bit puzzling. The format employed by the editors makes for some pages that are entirely or almost entirely blank. There is no index, and there is no figure list. Because the authors are dealing with similar topics, there is occasionally a bit of repetition. I could not find a date of publication in the volume, though presumably it is 2011. The book was published by the Parks Service in a limited edition, distributed for free to individuals and libraries, and is not available for sale. These quibbles aside, this is an important book and a must-read for anyone interested in early American iron. The authors are to be commended for introducing Robbins and his extraordinary Saugus excavations to a new generation of archaeologists.

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