

1974

Editor's Message

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Recommended Citation

Hanson, Lee (1974) "Editor's Message," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 3 3, Article 1.

Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol3/iss2/1>

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Too little attention has been paid to the iron industry in colonial America. Not only was it one of the earliest economically viable industries, in terms of producing an exportable commodity, but it led to improvements in the transportation network and stimulated corporate growth. Prior to the American Revolution, colonial furnaces produced about 14% of the world's supply of iron. Much of this was shipped to England to be made into finished products but the presence of a number of small forges throughout the colonies attests to the manufacture of salable goods within the colonies.

The outbreak of the American Revolution and the consequent upheaval saw a decline in the industry just when it was most needed by the colonists. A few furnaces, run by patriots, kept producing in spite of British harassment, labor shortages and the uncertainties of transportation and payment for goods delivered. Perhaps the most dramatic contribution the industry made was not the production of cannon balls and chains but the commandeering of large Durham boats, designed to haul ore, by George Washington. He used them to ferry his troops across the Delaware River in December, 1776, to attack Trenton, New Jersey.