

Split Rock Furnace
Split Rock
Morris County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-553

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Split Rock Furnace
Split Rock
Morris County, New Jersey

Owners: The Mayor and Aldermen of Jersey City

Dates of Erection: Furnace No. 1 in 1862, to replace
previous forges built in or before 1803 and
rebuilt 1837

Architect:
Unknown

Builders: Ebenezer Farrand before 1803; Andrew Bell
Cobb 1837 and 1862

Present Condition:
Structures now abandoned and in ruins; site
forms part of water shed for Jersey City

Materials of Construction:
Stone laid up without mortar, iron tie-rods,
brick lined core in furnaces

Historical Data:

A recent author^(a) states that (quote) The
Split Rock Bloomery^(b) located on Beaver Lake about
four miles northwest of Boonton, was built according
to Bishop, about 1790 by Ebenezer Ferrand¹. The land
on which this plant was situated was part of a tract
located by James Parker and Andrew Bell, and originally

(a) Charles S. Royer, Early Forges & Furnaces in New
Jersey, 1931, p. 211. 1. J.L. Bishop, Hist. of Amer.
Manufactures I, 543. 2. The name Split Rock is sup.
to have orig. from character of rocks in bed of Beaver
Brook passing betw. rocks greatly split by the stream.
3. J.B. Pearse, Iron Manufacture, p. 71, prob. confused
with Old Boonton Works. 4. N.J. Geolog. Survey, 1910,
p. 3.

(b) on page 2

the survey also included the Durham Forge lands. Pearse says a slitting mill at Split Rock² was owned by David Ogden in 1770, and was the first one to be built in the Province³. This property was bought by Colonel Lemuel Cobb and formed part of a 3000 acre tract at Split Rock which was eventually devised to his three heirs, Andrew B. Cobb, Mrs. W.C.H. Waddell and Mrs. Benjamin Howell. In the division of the estate, the forge fell to

(b) The author states, page 5, that in the "bloomery" forge the charcoal fuel on the open hearth was pushed up against the air-blast inlet, and that upon this inclined bed of hot coals was placed the iron ore, flux and charcoal. In our survey of the several ruined remains at the site, no evidences of the open fire described as essential to the "bloomery" forge was found. Accordingly, and from the following discoveries there, we must describe this Split Rock plant as a furnace, not a "bloomery". The remains of a large stack (no. 1 on our drawings) on the east side of Beaver Brook certainly are those of a furnace. This was probably the charcoal blast furnace mentioned in the quotation above as having been erected in 1862. Well-defined portions of a stone wall some 64 feet directly behind this furnace and level with its top (see drawing 2) probably are foundations of a large storage house from which iron ore, charcoal and lime were wheeled across a bridge (now missing) to the top of the furnace. A smaller stack (no. 2 on our drawings) bearing no marks of melted metal on its interior, was probably used as a lime kiln to produce that necessity for the flux used in the blast furnace (no. 1). Westward across Beaver Brook are the foundations of a crushing mill. Remains of Ebenezer Farrand's "Forge, Saw Mill, coal house and other outhouses" mentioned in his conveyance of 2 Sept. 1803, have not been identified among their successors, the stacks and foundations now found on the site.

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Andrew B. Cobb, who greatly enlarged and improved it. The next definite information which we have of the works at this place is found in "Dover History", where it is stated that in 1816 Lemuel Cobb was operating a forge of two fires. In the tax list of Pequannock township for 1822, John Dixon^(c) is assessed for two fires at Split Rock, at which time it was known as Dixon's Forge. A.B. Cobb was running an ironworks at this place in 1850, which is probably the one Professor Cook refers to as having been built in 1837.⁴ The last charcoal blast furnace built in the State was erected at Split Rock about 1862, but was soon abandoned.⁵ (End of quotation)

Verification of the above account and supplement thereof with additional dates and facts of the successive ownership of the property from 1793 to the present time has been possible as the result of search of title as recorded in the County archives.

The Surveyor General, according to the records of his office still preserved in Perth Amboy, made a return (or report) dated 16 April 1793 of his survey of a certain 825.5 acre tract in Pequannock Township, Morris County, for the owners, James Parker and Andrew Bell, "at the request of Ebenezer Farrand." In the southwest part of this large tract was Split Rock Lake or Pond, from the southwest end of which ran Beaver Brook. The ruins of the furnace, forge and crushing mill here surveyed are found at that outlet of the pond. This tract was purchased by Ebenezer Farrand "at different periods of Hartshorne Fitz Randolph, Benjamin Howell, Abraham Ogden, James Parker and Andrew Bell," before 2 September 1803.

(c) By deed of 13 Jan. 1834, Andrew Bell Cobb and Benjamin Howell, executors of the estate of Lemuel Cobb deed. (c. v. supra) conveyed to one James Dixon a 208 acre tract on "Back Mountain" east of the headwaters of Middlebrook, in Pequannock Twp., Morris Co. Query if John Dixon supra is error for James. The County records show that the Split Rock furnace was never owned by one John or James Dixon. He may have leased it, but the deed here cited indicates a forge elsewhere than at Split Rock for Dixon.

Likewise, a return of survey of a 32.5 acre tract adjacent to the southwest corner of the large one abovesaid, and bounded west by the famous Hibernia Forge tract, was made to the executors of the estate of Peter Van Brugh Livingston on 1st May in the same year 1793, who conveyed the tract to Lemuel Cobb and he in turn to Ebenezer Farrand abovesaid.

Partly surrounding the northward projection of the large tract was one of 130 acres as described in a return of survey thereof made on 8 January 1798 to the devisees of Mary Ashfield. These heirs conveyed this tract within 18 months to Lemuel Cobb and he by deed of 24 June 1799 to Ebenezer Farrand abovenamed.

By deed of 2 September 1803, this Ebenezer Farrand of Hanover Township, Morris County, conveyed all three of the tracts, above mentioned, to Lemuel Cobb of same place, for \$2562.50, describing them as "lying at Splitrock Forge. The first tract is situated on both sides of Beaver Brook about four miles southerly from old Charlottburgh Furnace in the Township of Pequannock," beginning near the water-wheel of grantor's saw mill on Beaver Brook, including in this conveyance "the Splitrock Forge, Saw Mill, Coal House and other out-houses," and reciting the facts of previous ownership of the three adjacent tracts as outlined above in this text.

By his will dated 15 October 1827 and proved 18 May 1831, the grantee Lemuel Cobb being aged 65 years and 5 months, devised to his son Andrew B. Cobb the 100 acre "farm or plantation whereon I now live" situate in Hanover, Morris County, bounded east and north by the Parsippany Parsonage farm, and the residue of his real and personal estate to his daughter Elizabeth's husband Benjamin Howell of Troy, to his daughter Maria C. Kirkpatrick's only son Eugene, to his daughter Julia Ann, (wife of Wm. C. H. Waddell), and to his son Andrew B. Cobb, equally.

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In deeds of 27 December 1838, dividing this real estate, Howell and Waddell, each with his wife, abovesaid co-devisers of the will of Lemuel Cobb as abovesaid, quit-claimed to a third heir, the son Andrew B. Cobb, 38 tracts of land in Morris and in Passaic Counties, comprising a total of 3655 acres. The first of these was described as being part of "the great Split Rock tract situated on both sides of Beaver Brook" in Pequannock Township, containing .643 of the original 825.5 acres. Of the other tracts conveyed, no. 2 comprised some 452 acres adjacent on the north of the first, no. 3 some 118 acres on the south, no. 4 some 52 adjacent to the 3rd., no. 5 some 86 adjacent to the south side of no. 1, no. 6 some 92 adjacent on the north, and no. 7 some 128 also adjacent, these 7 tracts alone forming a great tract of some 1577 acres around Split Rock Pond, and evidently the chief site of the mining operations pertinent to the iron manufacture in the plant thereon whose ruins are here surveyed. (d)

(d) Split Rock or Cobb Mine, Rockaway Twp., Morris Co., on southeast side of Split Rock Pond. The principal vein of ore here has been traced by the compass for a mile and has been opened and worked for half that distance. The workings are at two points: the largest near the foot of the hill and on its slope and the other near its summit. The vein at the foot of the hill is about two and a half feet thick, and had been worked in just above the water level for nearly a quarter of a mile, and until there is one hundred feet of material overhead. The dip of the vein is 70 degrees southeast in solid gneiss rock. On the hill the vein has been opened more recently, and the work is much less extensive. The vein is about five feet thick, with a narrow streak of rock in the middle of it. Its dip is southeast 78 degrees. The ore is apparently free from sulphur. When worked in the forge without separating, it makes a hot short iron. In the furnace it works well producing a hard and strong iron which has been much approved for car wheels. The furnace at Split Rock has been run by Judge Cobb on this ore, using it after it has been crushed and separated and melting it with charcoal. (Geo. H. Cook, Geology of N.J., 1868, p. 556).

Andrew B. Cobb thus came into possession of what must have been the major portion of his father's real estate, including the homestead, and the forge. Boyer states that he "greatly enlarged and improved it". By his will dated 20 November 1869 and proved 12 February 1873, he as Andrew B. Cobb of Parsippany, Morris County, devised to his executors in trust for 20 years all my lands and premises situate in Rockaway Township^(e), Morris County, embracing what is generally known as my Splitrock tract upon which is the water power, Blast furnace, Forge, Saw Mill, Storehouse, dwelling house and other buildings, containing 3500 acres of land", to be leased for the benefit of his estate, "being convinced that the minerals which are known to be upon them, and which will be discovered, are of great value and will produce a large income to my estate if rented for the purpose of mining," and granted them power to sell the property at the end of that period. In a codicil of 27 July 1871, the testator Andrew B. Cobb directed his son Andrew L. Cobb to have the use of the seven tracts forming the original Splitrock tract of 878 acres until he came of age.

The son Andrew L. Cobb of Parsippany, leased a tract of 500 acres including a surrounding Split Rock Pond to the Montclair Water Company for 5 years on 11 April 1889, with option to purchase it, and renewed the same on 7 March 1894.

By deed of 11 April 1896, the said corporation exercised their option and purchased the tract.

By deed of 4 April 1922, they conveyed the same to the Montclair Service Corporation of New York City, with some 257 acres "part of the great

(e) Created 1844 from Hanover and Pequannock Twps.

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Split Rock Tract situate on both sides of Beaver Brook", "equannoek Township, "which was returned to James Parker and Andrew Bell at the request of Ebenezer Farrand" 16 April 1793 as 825.5 acres. Included in this conveyance were 9 other tracts adjacent, comprising some 986 acres additional. Finally, by deed of 19 December in the same year, this corporation conveyed the same property to the Mayor and Aldermen of Jersey City, who remain as owners at the time of our survey of the ruined forge and furnace on the site.

Reference:

Search of title in land and probate records of Morris County by Thomas J. Riley, reported September 13, 1940

Lewis D. Cook

Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer

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