

Using iron as wages, firm enjoyed success until it ran out of trees

15,000-acre plantation, called Aera Furnace, left the land barren

In 1776, the year the American colonies declared their independence from England, was also the year that Aera Furnace went into operation.

The S.C. legislature decided to encourage the production of iron by offering a 1,000-pound bounty. York County's Nanny Mountain had iron ore in abundance. Col. William Hill secured a partner, Col. Isaac Hayne of Charleston, and managed to get title to 15,000 acres of land and 100 slaves. He was able to hire skilled artisans who had worked at North Carolina's Troublesome Creek Iron works.

Aera Furnace was built in eight months. A 2.5-mile tramway was constructed that ran from Nanny's Mountain to Allison Creek. With lime from Kings Creek and

NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



his property. They also confiscated the slaves and all the livestock.

After the war, South Carolina confiscated 50 slaves from Tory estates and awarded them to Hill. Aera Furnace was rebuilt and AETNA Furnace was built using a waterwheel for power.

In 1795, Hill was sued by the heirs of Isaac Hayne, who were joined by other creditors. The York County sheriff announced that the iron works and 15,000 acres of land would go on the auction block.

A Boston newspaper, The Columbian Centinel Extra, advertised the auction on October 14, 1795. Besides AETNA and Aera furnaces and the 15,000 acres, the ad listed a "good two-story brick house, 4 grist and 2 saw mills, 90

the rice mills of the Lowcountry.

There were specifics such as the statement that three tons of ore was equal to 2,900 pounds of metal. Aera's furnace wheel was 26 feet high and 4 feet wide, while AETNA's furnace wheel was 28 feet high and 4 1/2 feet wide. The forge wheel was 16 feet high; the hammer wheels were 11 feet high and 5 feet wide. The water in Allison Creek was high enough to run the two forges for nine months of the year with a head of water 19 feet high.

The ad further informed prospective buyers that the workers were all paid their wages in iron. Wages of ordinary workers ranged from 100 to 130 pounds of iron per month. A founder was rewarded for his skill with 1,250 pounds of iron per month. As to the value of the iron, the only example given was that four pounds of iron equaled one bushel of corn. It sounds like a bookkeeper's nightmare.

The highest bidder at the auction was William Edward Hayne

of Charleston, who went into partnership with Hill. Five thousand acres of the original 15,000 were sold to other parties.

The Hill/Hayne partnership lasted until 1809 when they were no longer making a profit. A major reason for the shutdown of Hill's Iron Works was that they had exhausted the trees that furnished the charcoal that fueled the furnaces.

An 1855 traveler, after seeing the wasted land around the Kings Mountain Iron Works, said that it "presented as far as the eye can reach, the most desolate and gloomy appearance. The lands having all been bought up by the Company for the sake of fuel."

The same could have been said about the Hill's Iron Works and Nanny's Mountain area. Pennsylvania's anthracite coal proved to be both cheaper and superior to York County's charcoal.

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor. Her column appears Sundays.

2 Sell

TY, LLC



*Full
Service
With Big
Savings*

online **www.wesellyork.com**

ROCK HILL



333 NORTH CONFEDERATE

6 BD, 2 BA Brick Classic Beauty, Fresh Paint On
Exterior Porch And Windows

\$115,000 / Reduced!

ROCK HILL

REDUCED PRICE



3524 HOWELL RD.

3 BD, 2 BA, Home w/Vinyl Siding, Rear Deck,
10x10 Storage Bldg, 24' Above Ground Pool

\$114,000 / Reduced!

ROCK HILL



TURNKEY LANE

54 Wooded Acres On Unrestricted Land. Could Be
Sold In Smaller Tracts.

\$339,900 / Reduced!

ROCK HILL



1023 SLOAN DRIVE

3 Or 4 Bedroom Main w/Built In Entertainment
Center. 16x30 Inground Pool & Pool House Fenced
Bkyard On 1.17 Acres.

\$187,500

ROCK HILL



143B GLENWOOD DRIVE

2 Bd, One Bath Condo On First Floor, 813 Square
Feet Of Living

\$61,500

ROCK HILL



613 CAUTHEN STREET

2 Bedroom 1 Bath With Fenced Rear Yard, 900 Square
Feet Of Living

\$59,900

ROCK HILL



304 LONG STREET

Newer Vinyl Siding, New Shingles On This 1500
Square Feet Home, Seller To Give \$4,000 Allowance
For Air Conditioning And Repairs

\$71,900

ROCK HILL



1117 PARKMONT

5 Bedrooms w/Main On 1st Level, 3 Baths And A Half
Bath, Main Bath Has A Whirlpool Tub And A Sep.
Shower

\$105,000