



The Wayne National Forest Claims Another Iron Furnace Site

*Trails project leads to the find of a possible National Register of
Historic Places eligible site.*



A photo of the Center Furnace before it was dismantled,
courtesy of the Lawrence County Historical Society.

Wayne National Forest Archaeologists Ann Cramer and Chris Euler recently identified yet another Iron Furnace site on the Ironton District. The Center Furnace/Superior Site was identified while conducting surveys of the Kosmos Trails area around the old cement factory.

Because the Center Furnace/Superior is especially important to local history, Forest archaeologists believe that it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and they plan to continue work on the formal nomination. The most notable aspects of Center Furnace is its association with a

prominent historical person and with the Iron Railroad.

The Center Furnace was built by William Carpenter and associates in 1836. Later, in 1862 William Dollerhide Kelly, a founding father of Ironton, bought a five-year lease on the Center Furnace properties and Lindsey Kelly, William's son, became manager in 1863. Nannie Kelly Wright (wife of the late Lindsey Kelly) bought Center Furnace in 1898, and assumed managerial duties in 1903.

She became very involved in the daily operation of the furnace and gained a reputation as a successful businesswoman. It is believed that Nannie Kelly Wright was one of the wealthiest women of her day and is noted as having been the only woman Iron Furnace Master in America.

At its heyday around 1885, the Center Furnace company town had grown to approximately 40 homes with as many as 300 to 400 residents and included a school, store, and hotel. Center Furnace was also at the northern terminus of the Iron Railroad, a legacy of John Campbell (a known abolitionist and founding father of Ironton).

As the iron furnace industry began to decline, the surrounding area that provided raw materials for Center Furnace became increasingly utilized for its limestone. Eventually the demand for cement was greater than that of iron. The town that once revolved around iron grew larger prospering from the cement industry; thus evolving into the

village of Superior.

The Superior Portland Cement plant began operation on September 1, 1907. For 46 years the cement plant changed hands from the Superior Portland Cement Company to the Wellston Iron Furnace Company in 1918, to the New York Coal Sales Company in 1932, and finally to the Marquette Cement Manufacturing Company in 1953.

Upon acquisition of the cement plant the Marquette Company announced that all housing in the Superior area would be vacated and within two years most of the homes and buildings were either dismantled and moved or demolished. The Marquette Company operated the cement plant until the 1970's, and the plant structures that still remain are attributed to them.

Ongoing investigations are expected to provide a greater amount of detail about Center Furnace and the village of Superior, which in turn will mean greater opportunities for interpretation. The site is situated along a proposed trailhead for the Kosmos Trails system, making this site a highly visible area which is certain to help educate people about the area's heritage and past, as well as creating urban connections.

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