The Wolf’s Hollow Ironmaking Community on the Octorara Creek in West Fallowfield Township, Chester County

by Fred Kelso, copyright 2021

Hiking along the Charcoal Trail in Wolf’s Hollow Park — located in Chester County’s West Fallowfield Township—, one can now see dozens of charcoal pit sites which have been uncovered by the Park staff. These are large, purposely-leveled, now blackened circular areas in the woods. They were created as platforms for a scientific process that was once used to convert local hardwood forests into dense, carbon-rich charcoal for fueling iron forges.

The newest of these scars is no less than 150 years old (anthracite coal began to replace charcoal by the middle of the 19th century), and the oldest could be 220 years old, when the first of three local forges was built. Very little has been written about the community that once made iron here, so this work aims to tell its story. We will also explore the relationship of this enterprise to the other iron and steel works in the region, including the mighty Lukens Rolling Mills in Coatesville.

The first thing to understand is that the local iron works which exploited the water power of the Octorara Creek were forges, industrial complexes that reheated cast iron supplied in the form of pigs obtained from nearby iron furnaces. Pigs are large ingots that were cast into parallel rows on the floor of the furnace, resembling nursing piglets.

The photo to the right of various-sized pigs was taken at the Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park near McCalla, Alabama.
The forges had two types of hearths – finery hearths and chafery hearths, both of which were fueled by the hardwood charcoal and could be intensified using air blasts from mechanically driven bellows. The first step was to hold a pig in the finery fire with tongs to heat/soften one side. Once the forgeman visually determined by the color of the iron that the proper heat had been reached, the workpiece was taken to an anvil and beat upon by tilt hammers powered by a water wheel. This process of heating and hammering was repeated multiple times on each side of the workpiece until the forgeman determined he had a quality product, called a “bloom” or “anchony”. The hammering removed excess carbon, and turned the pig from brittle cast iron into strong wrought iron. If the forge had a rolling mill for a customer, the blooms would be sent to them as is. If the forge had blacksmiths or wheelwrights or cooperers for customers, the blooms would be taken over to the chafery hearth. There the bloom would be further heated, hammered, and drawn to create bar stock, which smiths and wrights would purchase as raw material for such end products as hinges, iron tires, and barrel hoops.

"The Development of American Industries Since Columbus",
*The Popular Science Monthly*, December 1890.

The forges were specifically built near Wolf’s Hollow because this section of the Octorara presented an excellent source of water power which could be harnessed through the use of dams and ponds. Many mill owners had exploited this resource long before the ironmasters arrived.

The second thing to note is that the local forges were not within the Park boundaries, but rather sat on the opposite side of the Octorara, in Sadsbury Township, Lancaster County. As hinted at above, the making of forged iron products required a great deal of hardwood charcoal.

The photo to the right shows a close-up of charcoal remnants from an old pit at Wolf’s Hollow, along the *Charcoal Trail.*
Wolf’s Hollow was home to a small army of lumberjacks (each forge could consume hundreds of acres of hardwood forest per year), woodchoppers (the timber had to be cut into very specific sizes to create the ideal charcoal pit), charcoalburners (aka colliers) and carters (the men who hauled the charcoal in carts to the coalhouses at the forges).

Charcoal pits were actually very large, carefully stacked mounds of cordwood, built on large flat circular clearings in the woods, and then covered with sod and poked with vents. Once ignited, the wood did not burn, but the structure became its own kiln, slowing baking the wood to leave dense, energy-rich lumps of charcoal. The sod covering was close to airtight, and colliers needed very special skills to monitor the escaping smoke and control the draft by poking and then resealing strategically-placed vents in the sod to maintain the proper interior temperature. Wispy blue smoke was the sign of proper carbonization while thick gray smoke meant “undercooking.” Walking on the surface of the heated mound was the most hazardous part of the operation.

Once the charcoal was ready for use, it had to be transported from the pit sites to the forges through the use of a fleet of carts. A stone-paved cart road, such as the one to the right found as part of the Charcoal Trail at Wolf’s Hollow, would have allowed the charcoal to be easily transported to the forge sites. Even though it was made to be strong and dense, if the charcoal piled into the cart saw too much transportation shock and vibration it could turn to dust, and even worse, it could spontaneously ignite.)
The maps below show the locations of the forges and their relationship to Wolf’s Hollow County Park. We see two distinct properties adjacent to Wolf’s Hollow, Sadsbury Forge (which actually encompassed two forges) and Ringwood Forge.

L to R: 1864 map of Sadsbury Twp., Lancaster Co.; 1873 map of West Fallowfield Twp., Chester Co.; modern-day map of Wolf’s Hollow County Park

There is a short piece of road at the southern end of the Park property, along the creek, called “Old Forge Road” – this road crossed the creek on a bridge at Ringwood Forge. It would have originally extended northward along the creek, connecting all of the charcoal pits and the homes of the local workforce. We’ll look at older maps to corroborate this fact a bit later…

2020 photo of Old Forge Rd.

In this article, we will focus on the West Fallowfield community that served the iron forges, but first we want to understand when these ironmaking enterprises appeared, and who built them.
By the time George Washington became the first US president, the Withers family had made a small fortune through shrewd purchases of prime farmland and a mill along the Pequea Creek, as well as military sales of Michael Withers’ muskets, and they sought to parlay their equity by looking for new investments.

On December 15, 1789, partners John Withers, Sr. (1729 – 1813) and Benjamin Irwin purchased a property that was mostly in Sadsbury Township, but which crossed the Octorara Creek and included a small piece on the other side in West Fallowfield Township. Because this property included rights to roads and water power, it would have been valued as a seat for a mill or forge.

The ledgers of Michael Withers & Co. show that they built the first Sadsbury Forge in 1800, and a second one about one-half mile downstream in 1802. [Ref. “Early Charcoal Iron Forges and Furnaces on the Octorara Creek,” Daniel A. Graham, The Journal of Lancaster County’s Historical Society, Summer/Fall 2010].

The first forge must have been quite lucrative, and more family members began to buy in to build that second forge. On April 9, 1801, Irwin, a Sadsbury Township farmer, sold his ½ interest in the property to the son of his partner, John Withers Jr., a Strasburg Township millwright (1771 – 1857) [Ref. Lancaster County Deed Book 3L, p. 263]. Just four months later, on August 17, 1801, John Jr. turned around and sold his ½ interest in the property to his uncles Michael and George Withers, also Strasburg Township farmers. [Ref. Lancaster County Deed Book 3L, p. 265]. John Sr. evidently retained his half of the property. The Withers do not appear to have had any prior ironmaking experience, so “Michael Withers & Co.” likely financed the construction of the two forges and then either leased them out or hired experienced forgemen to run them.

The Withers’ first purchased their pig iron from the faraway Cornwall furnaces, but being good businessmen, they eventually turned to vertical supply chain integration. About 1807 or 1808 they built both the Mt. Eden Furnace in Bart (now Eden) Township and the Conowingo Furnace in Drumore Township. To supply their furnaces with raw material, they also opened the Conowingo ore banks. [Ref. Lancaster Intelligencer & Journal, October 27, 1886].

The earliest public reference I have found to the Sadsbury Forges is an 1810 ad for the sale of lands of James Nobel, which refers to a neighboring property as “Messrs John & George Withers’ forge”. [Ref. Lancaster Journal, October 20, 1810].
I also found contemporary documentation of the Mt. Eden Furnace and the Conowingo ore mines.

“Late Additions and Donations to [Charles Willson] PEALE’S MUSEUM…Iron ore from near Strasburgh village, Lancaster county, used by Withers at Mt. Etna [sic] furnace; this Ore was discovered last winter, and found to yield very fine Iron.”

_American Daily Advertiser_, Philadelphia, July 22, 1808

The two Sadsbury forges were well-established by October of 1814, when the Lancaster County Orphan’s Court ordered them to be auctioned off following the deaths of brothers George Withers (1747 - 1811) and John Withers Sr. (1729 - 1813). It appears that at this time a company headed by Thomas Clark was leasing the Sadsbury Forges. Judge Thomas Clark is said to have built the Black Rock Furnace in nearby Colerain Township in 1800 [Ref. Robert Bricker in *History of Southern Lancaster County, 1729-1991*, Elizabeth A. Logan (Coordinator), W.T. Cooke Pub., Devon, PA, 1991.]

The two furnaces noted in the advertisement to the right as being within six miles of the Sadsbury forges were likely Mt. Eden and Black Rock. [Ref. *Lancaster Intelligencer & Journal*, October 21, 1814].

The following ad and map show that Sadsbury Forges remained in the possession of the Withers family after this time, although they were leased out.

_Lancaster Intelligencer & Journal_, January 20, 1818.

The 1821 map of Lancaster County (the second earliest of the industrial property maps, the first having
been created in 1819) includes many details of interest to our story, including the existence of several bridges across the Octorara Creek that linked the Wolf’s Hollow charcoal works with the forges. Note again the existence of three forges in close proximity along the creek.

1821 William Wagner map of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.
Ringwood Forge and the Vanleer Family

The southernmost of the three forges on the 1821 map was called “Ringwood Forge,” as we saw earlier, but it did not belong to the Withers family. It was noted as new in late 1808 and appears to have been built by Isaac Vanleer (part of the oldest ironmaking family in the region) and operated by Joseph Heslep/Heslip & Co. The Vanleers were connected by marriage and were partners in the Hibernia ironworks in West Caln Township, Chester County a year or two later.

Evidently Vanleer did not sell the forge at this time, but actually had it seized and sold by the sheriff in 1817 to cover debts he had incurred. [Ref. Lancaster Journal, March 7, 1817]
I have not found the Sheriff’s deed, but ownership of Ringwood had been transferred to the ironmaking Buckley family by 1830, so it is possible they snapped it up at the 1817 Sheriff’s sale.

**Consolidation of the Sadsbury Forges and Ringwood Forge by James Sproul**

So, there were 3 partner-brothers in the Sadsbury Forges – John Withers Sr. owned ½, and his brothers Michael and George each owned ¼. As the partners died off and their shares became available on the open market, James Sproul began to buy them up. Sproul was an Irish immigrant who had strategically inserted himself into the world of ironmaking.

“James Sproul…came to this country a child from his birthplace in Armagh, Ireland, somewhere about 1789 or ‘90. He learned the trade of a millwright and afterward worked in the forge at Phoenixville.”

“James Sproul,” *Lancaster Intelligencer Journal*, July 15, 1895

Sproul’s brother Robert was also in the ironmaking business, and he was running Thomas Clark’s Black Rock Forges in Colerain Township in 1816 (see 1821 map above). [Ref. *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 14, 1816].
James Sproul purchased his first piece of the Sadsbury Forge property from the heirs of George Withers, ¼ of the property, on July 2, 1825 [Ref. Lancaster County Deed Book M5, p. 230]. He picked up the second ¼ from the executors of the estate of Michael Withers on April 18, 1827 [Ref. Lancaster County Deed Book O5, p. 278]. The final ½ piece was obtained from the administrators of the estate of John Withers, Sr. (he had died many years before but the estate was long tied up in family litigation) on May 23, 1828 [Ref. Lancaster County Deed Book L5, p. 92]. His own brother Robert may well have been involved in running the enterprise.

Some historians give a year of 1837 for when James Sproul added ownership of Ringwood Forge to his local empire, thereby becoming the lone employer of the Wolf’s Hollow workers. He may indeed have been operating Ringwood in 1837, but evidently, he did not actually secure ownership until an 1842 Sheriff’s sale [Ref. American Railroad Journal, Henry V. Poor, ed., J. H. Schultz & Co., NY, 1850].

Sproul died a very wealthy man in 1847, and was buried at the Bellevue Presbyterian Church cemetery in Gap, PA.

Fifty years after his death, a historian indicated that Sproul had owned a retail store and that he had also supplied raw material for the Lukens company in Coatesville.

“Mr. Sproul purchased property in the city of Lancaster, which he used as an iron store, and six-horse teams drove the twenty miles from Sadsbury to Lancaster, loaded with bar iron... Other teams transported blooms from Sproul’s forges to the Lukens’ rolling mill at Coatesville...”

“James Sproul,” Lancaster Intelligencer Journal, July 15, 1895

We know that Sproul bought the forges in 1825, and that in the same year Rebecca Lukens, America’s first female industrialist, took the reins of the Lukens Rolling Mills after her husband’s death, so the above information tells us that James Sproul was dealing with the great woman herself! [Ref. “Two Hundred Years of Rolling on the Brandywine,” by Richard P. Smith, Jr., ArcelorMittal, Coatesville, PA, 2010].

After Sproul’s death in 1847, the man who had been operating Ringwood Forge for him, John McGowan, is said to have moved to Pine Grove Forge (in Little Britain Township, Lancaster County). Evidently McGowan owned a lot of the forging equipment, and did not need it at Pine Grove, so he offered it all for public sale. Along with the equipment, he offered the following product of the local colliers: “about twelve thousand bushels of coal in the coal house (said coal has been made of the very best white oak and hickory wood, - the best coal that can be made, - I have seen the forge men make a bloom with less than three baskets of said coal, the baskets holding about two bushels each, and the said blooms to over run ten to the ton)...” [Ref. Lancaster Examiner, March 15, 1848].
In 1850 we get a glimpse into the operations of both the Sadsbury and Ringwood Forges, and it appears that their main business was supplying blooms to rolling mills – perhaps mostly to Lukens in Coatesville.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forge</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Lessee</th>
<th>Forge Fires</th>
<th>Hammers</th>
<th>1849 Product</th>
<th>Emp</th>
<th>Horses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ringwood</td>
<td>James Sproul's Heirs</td>
<td>Charles Cloud</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>346 tons blooms</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadsbury</td>
<td>James Sproul's Heirs</td>
<td>George Steel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>305 tons blooms</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Resplitting of the Sadsbury Forges from Ringwood Forge – Enter James Goodman**

On March 26, 1858, the Sadsbury Forge property was sold to James Goodman. The deed explains that on February 6, 1857, Charles N. Sproul, a son of James Sproul, had put the property in trust “in consequence of sundry losses and misfortunes and for other causes and considerations.” [Ref. Lancaster County Deed Book U8, p. 396]. Goodman was born in Ireland about 1807, arrived in New York on October 8, 1833 aboard the “Barque Sapphire,” [Ref. US Immigration records] and at the time of the 1850 US Census was a carpenter in Christiana Hundred, New Castle County Delaware. By 1860 he was listed as a wealthy farmer in Sadsbury Township, Lancaster County, and a few years later he was noted as the owner of the Sadsbury Forge [Ref. The Tribute Book, A Record of the Munificence, Self-Sacrifice and Patriotism of the American People During the War for the Union, by Frank B. Goodrich, Derby & Miller, New York, 1865 – he had contributed $50 and his employees $7 to the Union cause].

James Goodman died on April 5, 1873, and was buried at the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery in Delaware [Ref. www.findagrave.com]. At the time, the Sadsbury Forge was still “in full operation,” but the age of charcoal iron was rapidly drawing to a close.

*Lancaster Examiner & Herald, September 10, 1873.*
Less than ten years later, we can see the sad demise of one of the last forges in our region, as the remainder of the charcoal was offered for sale. When sizeable, sturdy chunks of the material can still be found lying in the woods in the many charcoal pit sites at Wolf’s Hollow today, it is easy to see why the remaining supply still held value for other purposes.

*Lancaster Intelligencer*, March 16, 1881.

The forge property was finally put up for sale a few years after James Goodman’s widow passed away in 1887.

*The Semi-Weekly New Era*, Lancaster, PA, December 3, 1892.

On March 28, 1860, William H. Sproul, another son of James Sproul (and father of future Pennsylvania Governor William Cameron Sproul) sold Ringwood Forge to Thomas J. Bailey of nearby Steelville. We find Bailey’s name associated with the forge on the 1864 and 1873 township maps that we looked at earlier, however, in the 1860 US Census for West Fallowfield he is listed as a 43-year-old storekeeper, so it is unlikely he decided to make iron himself, and must have had a partner or lessee.

**The Wolf’s Hollow Ironworkers**

Now we can turn to the lives of the actual ironworkers. Available records only tell us the names of the charcoal burners (aka colliers) and forgemen who lived on the West Fallowfield side of the Octorora Creek. We know that the broader community would have included woodchoppers, carters, and general laborers (as well as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and basketmakers).

The workers were evidently responsible for feeding their own families: “During Mr. Sproul’s life the wooded hillsides of the gorge…for three miles were studded with tenements in which resided his employees, each house having attached an acre or two of cleared land, on which was raised corn, potatoes, and other vegetables, for the use of the family resident.” [Ref. “James Sproul,” *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster Historical Society, Volume XI*, 1906-07].
As noted earlier, the Park staff has uncovered a number of the charcoal pit sites on the property and laid out a trail to showcase them. Over the generations of occupation, the ironmasters added many parcels of timberland to their holdings, obviously including many acres that now lie within the Park boundaries. The map below also shows the location of the ruins of a house and a well which would have been important to the community.

![Map of Wolf's Hollow County Park](image)

The colliers and others directly supporting the many charcoal pits would have lived in teepee-shaped “colliers huts” which could be disassembled and moved from pit to pit as the crews worked their way through the forest, consuming trees. Depending on the size of the pit, carbonization could take from one to several weeks, and the colliers had to stay close at hand 24/7. The design of this type of structure is very old, and was found hundreds of years ago in Great Britain and on the European mainland.

![Photo of an old collier’s hut](image)

To the right is a photo of an old collier’s hut which was being used by poor residents of Welsh Mountain in Salisbury Township, Lancaster County, about 1900. [Ref. “Among the Outlaws of Pennsylvania,” by E. Leslie Gilliams, *The World Wide Magazine*, December, 1899].

The carters and other laborers may have lived in log cabin tenements such as those shown below at the Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park near McCalla, Alabama. This would be similar to the series of “7 dwelling houses of log, 16’ x 16’,” which were part of the 1815 tax assessment of Thomas Clark at the Black Rock Ironworks in Colerain Township.
The ruins seen in the two photos below were found within the borders of Wolf’s Hollow Park, along the creek. It appears to be a house and a large rectangular wall that may have been used to pen in larger livestock. Perhaps this was a higher-paid forgeman’s home or a butcher shop / store.

Photos above and below taken in December, 2020
Charcoal Burners

The earliest named colliers that I have found in West Fallowfield appear in the 1814 Septennial Census. They were: Henry Conway, William McClane, and Joseph McConhey. None are found in the earlier 1793 and 1807 Censuses, so perhaps all of the earlier charcoal production was confined to the Lancaster County property on the other side of the creek. We later find John Watterson (b. 1806) as a “coalyer” in the 1850 US Census for West Fallowfield, he was perhaps the last man to hold this occupation in Wolf’s Hollow.

Let’s look at Henry Conway first. Various records indicate he was born about 1745, so in 1814 he was 69. We find him in the Chester County Tax Discount ledgers in several years. In 1805 his Sadsbury Township, Chester County tax was discounted because he was “gone” - presumably he had moved away. He was back in Sadsbury in 1808, but again his tax was discounted, this time because he was “poor,” and indeed we find that he was discharged from the County Poorhouse on January 5th of that year, but back in by May 20th. In 1814, the very year he had the important job of collier, he was also noted as “poor” in West Fallowfield. He returned to the Poorhouse many years later, “absconded” on January 5, 1820 but returned on September 16th of that year. He was in and out again before finally dying in the Poorhouse in 1824, at age 79.

Turning to William McClane/McClean, we find that he seems to have a similar hard life to Henry’s, having been born a generation later, in 1770. He was first noted in the Poorhouse records at age 51 in 1821, and stayed there for the next 15 years, perhaps passing away in 1836. Since coalburning was a very hazardous occupation, and because once injured, men often had no source of income, we can very easily surmise that these two men made unfortunate missteps on the coal pits, giving them no recourse but the poorhouse.

Next, Joseph McConhey/McConeghy. Although he doesn’t appear to have been supported by the Poorhouse, we do find him regularly in the Poor School Children records for various of his children, after he evidently left West Fallowfield. He was in East Fallowfield in 1819 (with children Joseph and Deborah), 1821 (with son Joseph) and 1823 (with son Edward). He then moved to West Caln, where he appears with son John in 1827 and daughter Hannah in 1828. In the 1828 Septennial Census he is again identified as a collier, this time in West Caln, where he was likely working for the Hibernia Iron Works.

Finally, we examine the scant evidence of the life of John Watterson, the last man listed as a West Fallowfield collier in the US Census records, in 1850. We find him earlier in East Fallowfield in 1840, but no occupations are listed in that Census, so we don’t know if he was a collier then. In 1870 and 1880 he appears as a West Fallowfield laborer, and his death is noted in the township in 1882. The end of the glory days of charcoal iron is told in this one man’s occupational story – he got there late in the game and the work quickly disappeared.
Forgemen

Another group of ironworkers can be found in West Fallowfield through the Septennial Census records:

1821 – Forgeman Charles Taylor
1828 – Forgemen Jacob Ayres and Jonathan Ayres
1835 – Forgemen David Ayres, Jonathan Ayres, and Samuel Bench and Ironkeeper Samuel Futhey
1856 – Forgeman Thomas Spence
1860 - Forgemen John Hahn (48), and his sons Lewis (22) and William (18)

Charles Taylor has been a very elusive target who will require further research.

David Ayres worked for many years as a forgeman throughout the region, from West Nantmeal (probably Springton Forge) in 1807 and 1814 to West Caln (Hibernia Forge) in 1821 and then to West Fallowfield. Jonathan and Jacob may have been sons of his.

Samuel Bench (b. 1812) can be found in the 1850 US Census for West Nantmeal, as a 38-year-old forgeman who was probably working at Springton Forge. He was also in that township at the time of the 1840 Census.

Samuel Futhey (b. 1794) is the one person associated with the Wolf’s Hollow side of the iron forge enterprise who came from a family with some wealth [Ref. History of Chester County, Pennsylvania, Futhey & Cope, L. H. Everts, 1881]. The occupation of “ironkeeper” is a bit unusual – perhaps he had a secure facility on his farm where valuable iron stock could be stored for various reasons?

Thomas Spence (b. 1815) can be found as a forgeman in the 1850 and 1860 US Census records for Sadsbury Township, Lancaster County, prior to moving by 1856 to the Wolf’s Hollow side of the creek to continue this occupation. Even though we are focusing on the West Fallowfield neighborhood of forge workers for this article, I will include Thomas’ 1850 and 1860 Sadsbury neighbors for the record, and their lives will be examined in a separate work.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>William BAUGH</td>
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<td>George WELLS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles CLOUD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas DEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis I CHRISTMAS (Black)</td>
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<tr>
<td>James MANLEY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel MOORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George MOORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie SPICOL &amp; children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebenezer AKINS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel PRESSBURY (Mallato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam LAMBERT</td>
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<tr>
<td>William MINER</td>
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<td>Michael NOGLE</td>
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<td>John TRAFFORD</td>
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<td>John FARRELL</td>
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<tr>
<td>David PICKER</td>
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In 1870 Thomas was still in Sadsbury Township with his wife Rachel. He is listed as “infirm,” at age 58. He died in 1873, and he and his wife are buried at Mount Pleasant United Methodist Cemetery in Christiana, Lancaster County.

We find John “Hon” as a forgeman in Robeson Township, Berks County in the 1850 US Census. Picking up on this clue, we are able to find son Lewis’ baptism in 1838 at St. John’s United Church of Christ near the Gibraltar Forge, which was operated in affiliation with Joanna Furnace. Many other Hahn families are included in the registers of this church.

As found in the US Census records, Lewis Hahn maintained the family connection to the industry throughout the years, first as an ironworker in Fair Hill, Cecil County in 1870 (son Amos was a forgeman, and both were possibly at one of the McCullough Iron Company facilities), and then as a forgeman in Wilmington, Delaware in 1880 and 1900.

By the time the 1883 Breou’s Farm Map for West Fallowfield appeared, both the Sadsbury and Ringwood Forge sites were defunct. They had provided a livelihood for many generations of workers in the woods of Wolf’s Hollow, and those workers left many traces for future historians to find, from charcoal-laced pit sites, to stone structure ruins and the remains of stone-paved cart roads.

We are truly fortunate that the Chester County government has preserved not only the environmental resources of Wolf’s Hollow, but also the industrial history that shares the hillsides and the creekside.

Many public parks throughout our region contain large swaths of forest that were kept intact because they were charcoal production lands for the many local iron works, and eventually made available for acquisition by the descendants of the ironmasters.

The story of Wolf’s Hollow is the story of sweaty, determined Americans with calloused hands and muscled arms, literally forging a new nation at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Almost nomadic in nature, the ironworkers were tied not to the land, but to the work. This project, by highlighting the movement of colliers and forgemen in and out of the neighborhood, shows that the iron works within Chester County’s Park System, including Springton Manor, Hibernia Park, and Wolf’s Hollow, all drew from the same pool of skilled workers. Other historical sites that were part of the local supply chain and which can still be visited range from the Cornwall Iron Furnace to the Lukens’ Rolling Mills. Enjoy!