

## **Pennsylvania Civil War Trails**

### ***Civil War Stories from Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site***

#### Citizen Defense of the Commonwealth

Berks County responded quickly to the beginning of the Civil War. In Reading, Hopewell's Henry Miner joined Captain James McKnight and his Ringgold Light Artillery, one of the first volunteer units to reach the front. Roughly a dozen other furnace workers followed Miner's lead in the months that followed. The number of Hopewell Furnace day laborers (wood cutters, colliers, etc.) who enlisted is hard to determine.

Other Hopewell villagers remained at the furnace. Although Berks County overwhelmingly supported the defense of the Union, individual opinions remain difficult to isolate. Perhaps the workers who remained at Hopewell were pacifists who objected to war, or perhaps they viewed themselves as performing a vital function by continuing to produce pig iron that was useful to the Union war effort.

The early summer of 1863 changed things for many at Hopewell, as the Army of Northern Virginia invaded the Keystone State. Pennsylvania's Governor Andrew G. Curtin called for volunteers to join the state's militia. Adam Bard and Samuel Williams left Hopewell for Reading and joined the 42<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Emergency Militia Regiment.

#### Commerce and Daily Life

Hopewell Furnace ran 24 hours a day producing pig iron needed for the manufacturing of Union weapons. The constant production brought increased prosperity to workers and their families. At the same time, the cost of manufactured goods rose with war demands, and transportation became difficult as the military monopolized the railroads. On the home front, Hopewell Village residents worried about friends and relatives on the battlefield. Furnace workers Henry Hauck, Fred Mosteller, Henry Care, Daniel Buckley, Henry Nanback, and Daniel Hunsberger all perished during the war. In a small community these losses must have laid heavily on everyone's hearts.

For some residents the Civil War illustrated the disparities in American Society. African-Americans like Isaac Cole desired to join their neighbors and fight for the Union. They may, in fact, have had a special yearning to take up arms as the abolition of slavery became the focus of the war. Ironically, federal law initially prevented Cole's enlistment. Finally, in 1863, the Union Army organized the United States Colored Troops and accepted African-American enrollees. In 1864, at the age of 40, Isaac Cole enlisted in Company H, 32 Regiment U.S. Colored Troops.

#### Women and Children Under Siege

Civil War combat never reached Berks County, thanks to the Union victories that stopped Confederate invasions at Antietam and Gettysburg. The civilian population of Hopewell Village never faced the horror of battle that terrorized the citizens of Gettysburg.

Nevertheless, the strain of a lengthy war must have been felt deeply in the village. Local men - husbands, brothers, and sons went off to face the dangers of the battlefields, while shortages of necessary or desirable goods and supplies, and an unknown future took a toll on the women and children left at home.

In the summer of 1863, the strain increased dramatically when General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia invaded Pennsylvania. Additional local men rushed to volunteer for military service with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Emergency Militia Regiment, and everyone undoubtedly waited frantically for news of the invasion. If Lee's Army had won at Gettysburg, and continued its march east toward Philadelphia, Hopewell and its rich war industry rested right in its path.

### African Americans and the Quest for Freedom

Of all the Civil War era stories at Hopewell Village, those of the African-American population, the Underground Railroad, and the struggle for freedom and equality remain the most compelling.

Before the Civil War and in the early days of the fighting, Hopewell provided a haven for those self liberating from slavery. Some like Dorothea and Quash appear to have rested at Hopewell on their journey north to New York or Canada. Others like Isaac Cole stayed in the vicinity, established a family and legacy, and left us descendants that continue to enrich the area to this day.

At Hopewell, life for African-Americans in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was startling different than that experienced by urban African-Americans. In matters of education, employment, housing, religion, and medical care, European Americans and African Americans at Hopewell enjoyed equal treatment. African Americans held every position at the furnace except that of Ironmaster and Founder.