

Ices Ferry Ironworks

In the 1790s, iron ore was discovered on Chestnut Ridge, and by 1798 the Davis furnace was in operation, producing a ton of iron daily. An iron community sprang up on the Cheat River at Ices Ferry, which at its peak in the 1840s had a population of 2,500. There were three other furnaces, the Woodgrove, Henry Clay, and Anna. Ices Ferry had a foundry, rolling mill, and nail factory.

Jackson's Ironworks at Ices Ferry was northern West Virginia's most significant pre-Civil-War ironworks and an important nail production center. Located on the east side of the Cheat River at Ices Ferry in Monongalia County, the ironworks was established by Samuel Jackson about 1809 for the manufacture of hand-wrought nails. The works used local ore, limestone, and fuel, and over the next 40 years the operation was expanded into an extensive ironworks complex. Local tradition holds that during the War of 1812 the ironworks supplied iron for shot used in the Battle of New Orleans and shipped nails and plates to Lake Erie for Admiral Perry's Lake Erie squadron.

By 1812, the first Western Virginia rolling mill was in operation at the ironworks, and in 1822 the region's first cut-nail machinery was installed there. About 1836, the Henry Clay Furnace (now part of Coopers Rock State Forest) was built to supply pig iron to the works; it was the first steam powered furnace in Western Virginia.

By 1868, the ironworks closed for the last time. The lack of adequate transportation and the depletion of iron ore and fuel resources forced its closure. The once extensive ironworks now lies beneath the waters of Cheat Lake.



Building the Building the Cheat Lake Dam, 1913