

Franconia Blast Furnace Retrospective



*Franconia, NH, blast furnace.
Photo by Emil Koller.*

On July 16, 2005, the Northern New England Chapter celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Franconia, New Hampshire, iron industry. The celebration included a program of speakers who presented a retrospective of the research of the surviving blast furnace that was led by Victor Rolando in 1994-1996, a history of early iron making in America, a tour of the furnace site and demonstrations of iron working by skilled blacksmiths.

Sponsors of the event and participants involved in the planning and implementation included the Franconia Area Heritage Council; Jewell Friedman, Curator at the Iron Furnace Interpretive Center; Roger Aldrich; Don Eastman; Bob Hall; the New England Blacksmiths Association and the Northern New England Chapter.

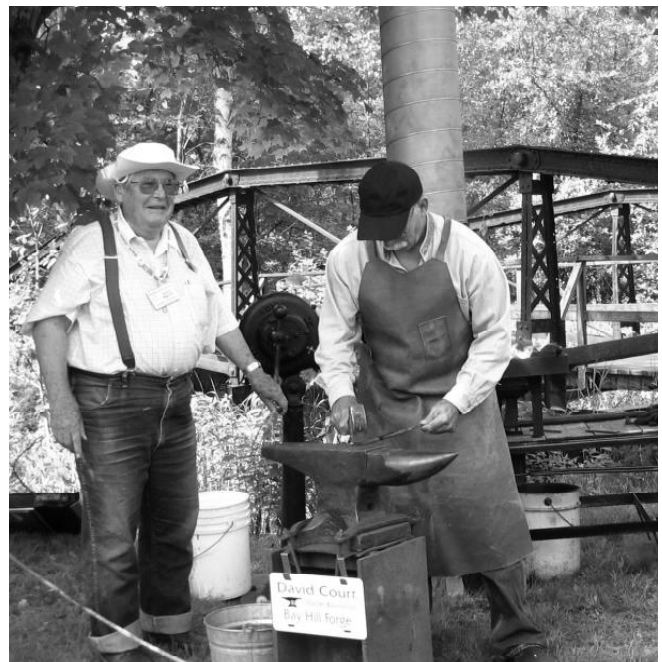
About fifty people attended the event. James Johnston (SNEC-SIA) described for them his research in 17th century iron making and the distinctions between bloomery forges and blast furnaces. Dennis Howe (NNEC-SIA) related his experiences with the 1994-1996 recording project

at the blast furnace and the importance of IA. Blacksmiths David Court, Courtney Mead and Jennifer Stackpole demonstrated how iron was formed into tools, hardware and other useful forms with heat, hammer and anvil.

The blast furnace represented by the remains seen today on the west bank of the Gale River was constructed in 1859 with split granite, lined with refractory brick and bound together with horizontal iron bars. The furnace was one surrounded by wooden buildings where the molten iron was formed into pigs. The wooden structures burned in 1884 and the works were abandoned. The first iron making began in Franconia c. 1805 and the first blast furnace was erected about 1811. At succession of stacks were constructed and/or rebuilt by the iron company prior to the extant 1859 furnace.

A copy of Rolando's research report is on file at the New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources or the New Hampshire Historical Society Library. Both are located in Concord, NH.

Dennis Howe



James Johnston, metallurgist, and David Court, Blacksmith. Photo by Emil Koller.