

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED DEC 16 1975

DATE ENTERED SEP 1 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

### 1 NAME

HISTORIC

**\*\*** Bourbon Iron Works (Slate Furnace)

AND/OR COMMON

Same

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

2.6 miles south of Owingsville on Ky. 36

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

07

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Bath

CODE

011

### 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Commonwealth of Kentucky

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bath County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

STATE

Kentucky

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky

DATE

1971

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Kentucky Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort,

STATE

Kentucky

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

---

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

On the east bank of Slate Creek in Bath County about one mile south of Interstate Route 64, off Kentucky Route 36, sits the last remnants of the first iron furnace west of the Alleghenies. The remaining structure of the Bourbon Iron Works is the blast furnace stack (see photo 1). In the form of a truncated pyramid approximately twenty feet square and twenty-five feet high, it is constructed of ashlar limestone, regular-coursed and dry-jointed (see photos 2, 3, 4). Two roughly pointed-arched hearth openings provided access to the molten iron. Iron slabs, about one inch thick, five inches wide and of varying lengths, are used throughout the lower course of the structure for reinforcement. A single solid iron lintel, 5" by 12" and over six feet long, provides support across the western hearth. Intense heat from the once raging fires has warped it upwards. As with most iron furnaces, glassy and sponge-like slag covers the ground in its vicinity.

The hill on the eastern side once used for charging the furnace has been cut out for the right-of-way of Kentucky Highway 36. Cracks are present in the structure and most of the interior shell has broken and fallen away. However, the structure is now stable. The State Department of Highways has developed a roadside park nearby with picnic tables, charcoal grills and recreation and parking areas. Except for the close proximity of Highway 36, the area surrounding this rural site retains much of its original integrity.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES    1791

BUILDER/ARCHITECT    Jacob Myers

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

On the banks of Slate Creek in Bath County, approximately three miles south of Owingsville on Kentucky Highway 36, stands a stone stack, the surviving remnant of the first charcoal iron furnace built west of the Alleghenies. Within the next fifty years after the construction of the Bourbon or Slate Furnace in 1791, five other furnaces were constructed in Bath County for the smelting of iron ore and the manufacture of iron and its products, although the Bourbon Furnace remained the most famous and the most lucrative. During this period the area provided most of the iron west of the Blue Ridge Mountains for the settlers' own use, and for export and military distribution as well. It was from this source that all of Kentucky, for many years, received its iron and iron products, much of it transported along the famous Iron Works Pike that still extends westward from Bath and Fleming Counties into the Blue-grass region of central Kentucky (Richards, p. 89).

The Bourbon Furnace was the first of six early blast furnaces in this area for the smelting of ore and the manufacture of iron and its products. Along with the ore itself, there were available an abundance of heavily timbered lands or forests, sufficient water power, and a supply of limestone, as well as convenient access to market for the finished products over roads to either the Licking or Kentucky rivers to the Ohio.

The construction of the Bourbon Furnace conformed to those described by John A. Richards in his history of Bath County (1961) in which he denotes the typical early Kentucky furnace as: a big truncated pyramid of stone, varying in size, usually about twenty feet square at the base and from twenty-five to forty feet high, entirely open at the top where it reached its smallest size. There was no effort made to smooth the outside surface. It resembled, and was, a huge pile of sand-stone blocks, consisting of three parts, the hearth, the bosch, and the stack, beginning at the base. These stone furnaces were erected against the side of a small hill so that the charge, the iron ore, the limestone flux and the charcoal could be carried or wheeled in barrows over a small bridge from the stockpile on the bank and dumped into the stack at the top. As the furnace was tapped at the bottom of the stack (that is, the molten iron was drawn out from the bottom) the reasons for the two levels becomes apparent.

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Coleman, J. Winston, Jr. "Old Kentucky Iron Furnaces." The Filson Club History Quarterly, Volume XXXI (July 1957), pp. 227-241.

Lancaster, Clay. "The Early Ironworks of Central Kentucky." The Antiques Magazine (May 1948), pp. 354-358.

(continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 7	25, 90, 8, 0	4, 22, 18, 6, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

John Johnson and Gloria Mills

WEL/hv

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

October 15, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

401 Wapping Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

SIGNATURE

*Eldred W. Mellon*

TITLE

*State Historic Preservation Officer*

DATE

*12/9/75*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

*9/1/76*

ATTEST  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*9/2/76*

*Adony*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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Bourbon Iron Works (Slate Furnace)

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

This furnace, as were all others, was built by hand out of huge blocks of rock hewn from the surrounding hills as there was no dynamite in those days. These rocks were then conveyed by ox cart to the chosen site where they were lifted by hand into place on the massive iron supports. This was all accomplished without the assistance of modern machinery and solely by the sweat of honest toil and at the risk of loss of life, as the workers were subjected to frequent Indian attacks which necessitated the building of a stockade and the constant vigilance of an armed guard. Whenever the workers went into the hills for material, they carried their loaded rifles as well as their tools(p. 91).

The Bourbon Iron Works was founded by German-born Jacob Myers, who, on October 3, 1782, left Richmond, Virginia, for Kentucky. In a letter to a friend written the day of his departure he stated: "I am this day starting from this place for Kentucky. . . . There is so many people going to that country that lands pay very high. I heard of one thousand acres being sold for six choice negroes and four hundred pounds cash. I shall write you by every opportunity. . . ." (The Kentucky Magazine, p. 377).

Myers found favorable lands in 1785, surveying and patenting 5,434 acres on Slate Creek, then in Fayette County. In March, 1791, he began the erection of a small furnace. Some two months later, on May 24, 1791, Myers sold interests in his lands on Slate Creek to John C. Owings of Maryland, Christopher Greenup, Walter Beall, and Willis Green of Kentucky. Myers retained 25 percent interest for himself. The formal agreement creating the joint-stock company, John Cockey Owings and Co., states that "The furnace now building on Slate Creek shall hereafter be styled, called, and known by the name of the Bourbon Furnace. . . ." (Coleman, 227).

In 1795, according to Richards, the company was again reorganized and Jacob Myers, for reasons unknown, withdrew from the company. What became of him records do not show. At this time John Owings' son, Colonel Thomas Deye Owings, a native of Cockeyville, Maryland, was requested by his father to come to Kentucky and assume management of the iron works company (for additional information on Colonel Owings, see the National Register form on his house in Owingsville). Constituting the new ownership were a distinguished group of Kentuckians including John Breckinridge, author of the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, United States Senator (1801-05) and Attorney General of the United States (1805-06); previous stockholder Christopher Greenup, Revolutionary soldier, Representative in the United States Congress (1792-97), and Governor of the State from 1804-08 ; George Nicholas, Revolutionary soldier and Attorney General of Kentucky; George Thompson; the aforementioned Walter Beall, Willis Green and, of course, John Cockey Owings (Richards, p. 94).

(continued)

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Bourbon Iron Works (Slate Furnace)

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

"The Iron Works, which began operation in 1792, was originally built for the purpose of casting of ten-gallon kettles, to be used in boiling the sap of the maple trees, on which the pioneers were wholly dependent for their sugar. With the demand for other articles, however, there was begun the manufacture of nails, cooking utensils, axe blades and plowshares. The furnace soon was supplying these to the people all over Kentucky, and iron to the blacksmiths as far as Lexington" (Kentucky Magazine, pp. 378-379). In addition, staple architectural pieces, according to Clay Lancaster, found a steady market, and special types were made to order (Lancaster, p. 354).

With the conclusion of Pinckney's Treaty of 1795, came the opening of the Mississippi to shipping and the Bourbon Iron Works began flatboating castings down to New Orleans. Inter-state shipping, however, presented a special problem in that no convenient waterway or overland route existed between the northeastern Kentucky iron industry and the central Bluegrass. A new route, Iron Works Pike, was constructed, and is still known by that name today.

In 1807 Colonel Owings contracted with the American government to supply cannon balls to the navy, orders which were substantially increased with the outbreak of the War of 1812. The balls were hauled in wagons from the furnace to Iles Mill, on the Licking River into which Slate Creek flows, loaded into barges and floated down the Ohio, into the Mississippi and on to New Orleans. On January 8, 1815, with the aid of these munitions, General Andrew Jackson checked and routed the British veterans under Sir Edward Pakenham. For a time the furnace operation was known as "Old Thunder's Mill" for the role it played in Jackson's victory.

Owings owned other related buildings at the site in addition to the iron furnace. In the early years forts were established on the slopes to protect the vital industry from Indian attack. Nearby were a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, and a general store. With the furnace, store, and grist mill as a nucleus, quite a settlement grew up about the Iron Works. Richards describes such a community:

Each furnace was a bustling self-contained community known as an "iron plantation" under the direction of the owner or "Iron Master." Below the mansion of the iron master was the furnace, cottages for the laborers, tool and storage sheds, shops for the carpenters and blacksmiths, a store for general merchandise, stables for the mules and oxen, and schools for the employees' children. A "furnace house" or home for the manager completed the complement of buildings. While the furnace itself required a relatively small crew to operate it, there were dozens of men working in the woods, felling the timber, burning the charcoal, working the ore diggings, mining the limestone, hauling the ore, charcoal and limestone, and caring for the mules and oxen (Richards, p. 92).

(continued)

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Bourbon Iron Works (Slate Furnace)

CONTINUATION SHEET

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PAGE 4

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The Bourbon Furnace also became a meeting place of visitors passing through the area on their way West. Louis Philippe, later King of France from 1830-1848, supposedly spent several months here hunting, moving on to Owingsville where he stayed at the residence of his friend Colonel Owings.

Owings operated the Bourbon Furnace until 1822 when he went bankrupt, whereupon it was operated for several years by his trustees in bankruptcy. Robert Wickliffe, the celebrated Lexington attorney, eventually acquired the furnace, leasing it to Major John C. Mason and Samuel Herndon, who were the proprietors until August, 1838, the date of the last blast. The discovery of other deposits in Wisconsin and Minnesota, plus cheaper transportation by water, put Kentucky's ore out of the market, although some furnaces had abortive activity just after the Civil War in both eastern and western Kentucky (see National Register form for the Red River Furnace in Estill County, just southeast of Bath County, and the Center (Hillman) Furnace in Trigg County, in the Land Between the Lakes in the western part of the State).

Today the Bourbon Iron Works, representative of an engineering type and a reminder of Kentucky's era as a leading iron-producing state, is contained within a state highway road-side park, opened August 25, 1970.

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Bourbon-~~Iron~~ Works

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Kilpatrick, Lewis H. "Louis Philippe in Owingsville." The Kentucky Magazine,  
Volume I (September, 1917), pp. 375-384.

Richards, John A. A History of Bath County, Kentucky. Yuma, Arizona: Southwest  
Printers, 1961.

Swank, James M. History of the Manufacture of Iron in All Ages. Philadelphia:  
1892, p.233.

Young, V. B. "An Outline History of Bath County." (An address delivered by  
Young July 4, 1876). Owingsville: Pintcraft, 1946.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Bourbon Furnace." Tri Weekly Kentucky Yeoman (Frankfort),  
June 19, 1884.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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### 1 NAME

HISTORIC

**\*\*** Bourbon Iron Works (Slate Furnace)

AND/OR COMMON

Same

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

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\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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Kentucky

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Bath

CODE

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CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
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<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Commonwealth of Kentucky

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bath County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

STATE

Kentucky

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

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DATE

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FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
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CITY, TOWN

Frankfort,

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## CONDITION

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DETERIORATED  
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UNALTERED  
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ORIGINAL SITE  
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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

On the east bank of Slate Creek in Bath County about one mile south of Interstate Route 64, off Kentucky Route 36, sits the last remnants of the first iron furnace west of the Alleghenies. The remaining structure of the Bourbon Iron Works is the blast furnace stack (see photo 1). In the form of a truncated pyramid approximately twenty feet square and twenty-five feet high, it is constructed of ashlar limestone, regular-coursed and dry-jointed (see photos 2, 3, 4). Two roughly pointed-arched hearth openings provided access to the molten iron. Iron slabs, about one inch thick, five inches wide and of varying lengths, are used throughout the lower course of the structure for reinforcement. A single solid iron lintel, 5" by 12" and over six feet long, provides support across the western hearth. Intense heat from the once raging fires has warped it upwards. As with most iron furnaces, glassy and sponge-like slag covers the ground in its vicinity.

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# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
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		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1791

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Jacob Myers

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

On the banks of Slate Creek in Bath County, approximately three miles south of Owingsville on Kentucky Highway 36, stands a stone stack, the surviving remnant of the first charcoal iron furnace built west of the Alleghenies. Within the next fifty years after the construction of the Bourbon or Slate Furnace in 1791, five other furnaces were constructed in Bath County for the smelting of iron ore and the manufacture of iron and its products, although the Bourbon Furnace remained the most famous and the most lucrative. During this period the area provided most of the iron west of the Blue Ridge Mountains for the settlers' own use, and for export and military distribution as well. It was from this source that all of Kentucky, for many years, received its iron and iron products, much of it transported along the famous Iron Works Pike that still extends westward from Bath and Fleming Counties into the Blue-grass region of central Kentucky (Richards, p. 89).

The Bourbon Furnace was the first of six early blast furnaces in this area for the smelting of ore and the manufacture of iron and its products. Along with the ore itself, there were available an abundance of heavily timbered lands or forests, sufficient water power, and a supply of limestone, as well as convenient access to market for the finished products over roads to either the Licking or Kentucky rivers to the Ohio.

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UTM REFERENCES

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C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

John Johnson and Gloria Mills

WEL/hv

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

October 15, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

401 Wapping Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

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LOCAL

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SIGNATURE

*Eldred W. Mellon*

TITLE

*State Historic Preservation Officer*

DATE

*12/9/75*

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DATE

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ATTEST  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

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*Adony*

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ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

This furnace, as were all others, was built by hand out of huge blocks of rock hewn from the surrounding hills as there was no dynamite in those days. These rocks were then conveyed by ox cart to the chosen site where they were lifted by hand into place on the massive iron supports. This was all accomplished without the assistance of modern machinery and solely by the sweat of honest toil and at the risk of loss of life, as the workers were subjected to frequent Indian attacks which necessitated the building of a stockade and the constant vigilance of an armed guard. Whenever the workers went into the hills for material, they carried their loaded rifles as well as their tools(p. 91).

The Bourbon Iron Works was founded by German-born Jacob Myers, who, on October 3, 1782, left Richmond, Virginia, for Kentucky. In a letter to a friend written the day of his departure he stated: "I am this day starting from this place for Kentucky. . . . There is so many people going to that country that lands pay very high. I heard of one thousand acres being sold for six choice negroes and four hundred pounds cash. I shall write you by every opportunity. . . ." (The Kentucky Magazine, p. 377).

Myers found favorable lands in 1785, surveying and patenting 5,434 acres on Slate Creek, then in Fayette County. In March, 1791, he began the erection of a small furnace. Some two months later, on May 24, 1791, Myers sold interests in his lands on Slate Creek to John C. Owings of Maryland, Christopher Greenup, Walter Beall, and Willis Green of Kentucky. Myers retained 25 percent interest for himself. The formal agreement creating the joint-stock company, John Cockey Owings and Co., states that "The furnace now building on Slate Creek shall hereafter be styled, called, and known by the name of the Bourbon Furnace. . . ." (Coleman, 227).

In 1795, according to Richards, the company was again reorganized and Jacob Myers, for reasons unknown, withdrew from the company. What became of him records do not show. At this time John Owings' son, Colonel Thomas Deye Owings, a native of Cockeyville, Maryland, was requested by his father to come to Kentucky and assume management of the iron works company (for additional information on Colonel Owings, see the National Register form on his house in Owingsville). Constituting the new ownership were a distinguished group of Kentuckians including John Breckinridge, author of the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, United States Senator (1801-05) and Attorney General of the United States (1805-06); previous stockholder Christopher Greenup, Revolutionary soldier, Representative in the United States Congress (1792-97), and Governor of the State from 1804-08 ; George Nicholas, Revolutionary soldier and Attorney General of Kentucky; George Thompson; the aforementioned Walter Beall, Willis Green and, of course, John Cockey Owings (Richards, p. 94).

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"The Iron Works, which began operation in 1792, was originally built for the purpose of casting of ten-gallon kettles, to be used in boiling the sap of the maple trees, on which the pioneers were wholly dependent for their sugar. With the demand for other articles, however, there was begun the manufacture of nails, cooking utensils, axe blades and plowshares. The furnace soon was supplying these to the people all over Kentucky, and iron to the blacksmiths as far as Lexington" (Kentucky Magazine, pp. 378-379). In addition, staple architectural pieces, according to Clay Lancaster, found a steady market, and special types were made to order (Lancaster, p. 354).

With the conclusion of Pinckney's Treaty of 1795, came the opening of the Mississippi to shipping and the Bourbon Iron Works began flatboating castings down to New Orleans. Inter-state shipping, however, presented a special problem in that no convenient waterway or overland route existed between the northeastern Kentucky iron industry and the central Bluegrass. A new route, Iron Works Pike, was constructed, and is still known by that name today.

In 1807 Colonel Owings contracted with the American government to supply cannon balls to the navy, orders which were substantially increased with the outbreak of the War of 1812. The balls were hauled in wagons from the furnace to Iles Mill, on the Licking River into which Slate Creek flows, loaded into barges and floated down the Ohio, into the Mississippi and on to New Orleans. On January 8, 1815, with the aid of these munitions, General Andrew Jackson checked and routed the British veterans under Sir Edward Pakenham. For a time the furnace operation was known as "Old Thunder's Mill" for the role it played in Jackson's victory.

Owings owned other related buildings at the site in addition to the iron furnace. In the early years forts were established on the slopes to protect the vital industry from Indian attack. Nearby were a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, and a general store. With the furnace, store, and grist mill as a nucleus, quite a settlement grew up about the Iron Works. Richards describes such a community:

Each furnace was a bustling self-contained community known as an "iron plantation" under the direction of the owner or "Iron Master." Below the mansion of the iron master was the furnace, cottages for the laborers, tool and storage sheds, shops for the carpenters and blacksmiths, a store for general merchandise, stables for the mules and oxen, and schools for the employees' children. A "furnace house" or home for the manager completed the complement of buildings. While the furnace itself required a relatively small crew to operate it, there were dozens of men working in the woods, felling the timber, burning the charcoal, working the ore diggings, mining the limestone, hauling the ore, charcoal and limestone, and caring for the mules and oxen (Richards, p. 92).

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The Bourbon Furnace also became a meeting place of visitors passing through the area on their way West. Louis Philippe, later King of France from 1830-1848, supposedly spent several months here hunting, moving on to Owingsville where he stayed at the residence of his friend Colonel Owings.

Owings operated the Bourbon Furnace until 1822 when he went bankrupt, whereupon it was operated for several years by his trustees in bankruptcy. Robert Wickliffe, the celebrated Lexington attorney, eventually acquired the furnace, leasing it to Major John C. Mason and Samuel Herndon, who were the proprietors until August, 1838, the date of the last blast. The discovery of other deposits in Wisconsin and Minnesota, plus cheaper transportation by water, put Kentucky's ore out of the market, although some furnaces had abortive activity just after the Civil War in both eastern and western Kentucky (see National Register form for the Red River Furnace in Estill County, just southeast of Bath County, and the Center (Hillman) Furnace in Trigg County, in the Land Between the Lakes in the western part of the State).

Today the Bourbon Iron Works, representative of an engineering type and a reminder of Kentucky's era as a leading iron-producing state, is contained within a state highway road-side park, opened August 25, 1970.

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