Crane Iron Co., David Thomas proved that anthracite could be substituted for charcoal. Several decades later, improved railroad transportation permitted the shipping in of coke or bituminous coal from which coke could be made.

In most cases all the ore mined was hauled by wagon to the furnaces. This heavy traffic is said to have resulted in almost impassable roads during wet seasons. The construction of the Catasaquana and Fogelsville Railroad, which was opened in 1857 to Ruppsville (Rupps Station) and later extended to Rittenhouse Gap, was of the greatest importance in the transportation of ore to the furnaces at Catasaquana, Hokendauqua, and Alburtis. Similarly the East Penn Railroad from Reading to East Penn Junction, completed in 1859, served another group of mines near Macungie, Alburtis, and Emmans. The Ironton Railroad from Coplay to Ironton was completed in 1860. These three railroads and some short spurs reduced the transportation difficulties materially by shortening the wagon hauls. Later these railroads acquired much greater importance in the transportation of other commodities, especially cement.

EARLY FURNACES

So far as known the first iron furnace erected in Lehigh County was the Hampton or Sigmund Furnace, located at the place now known as Sigmund, on a branch of the Perkiomen Creek, in Upper Milford Township, close to the Berks County line. It is at the base of Furnace Hill, which, obviously, was named for the furnace. It was built in 1809 and was operated until 1868.

The first owners were David Heimbach and two other men, Wisserman and Coverly. Heimbach, however, soon bought the holdings of his partners and operated the furnace until August 13, 1832. It changed hands several times before February 7, 1850, when it was acquired at sheriff’s sale for $3,525 by Frederic Sigmund, who was in charge until his death in 1860. His sons operated it until 1867. At this time it became known as Sigmund’s Furnace, although originally given the name of Hampton Furnace. In 1867 it was acquired by Peter Faust, who closed the furnace and erected a powder mill on the site. The mill was wrecked by an explosion three years later.

Stove plates were made in the early years. Later the entire product was pig iron. The furnace had small capacity. In 1857 it produced 722 tons of “first-class car-wheel iron” in 28 weeks.

Some of the ore used in the furnace came from mines in Berks County, some was hauled from the iron mines at Ironton, and probably from mines in other parts of the county. The charcoal was made locally and the limestone for flux was obtained from some near-by quarries on both sides of the Berks-Lehigh County line.

In 1826 the Lehigh Furnace (pl. 25-A) was built near the base of Kittatinny (Blue) Mountain in Washington Township because of the proximity of charcoal supplies and water. The ore is said to have been hauled from iron mines in South Whitehall Township. This furnace, which was operated until about 1880, also was of small capacity. “In 1857, during 26 weeks, it produced 554\(\frac{3}{4}\) tons of pig-iron.”