Mining and quarrying.—Pennsylvania has long held supremacy over all the other states of the Union in its mineral wealth. It has often been stated that the development of coal and iron ore laid the foundation for the industrial development of Pennsylvania. In Northampton County the presence of iron ore, cement rock and slate have been of the greatest importance.

Iron and steel.—The earliest mining and smelting of iron ore in the region took place at Durham Furnace, Bucks Co., near Riegelsville, a few miles from the Northampton County line, in 1727, the date at which the first blast furnace was erected. A bloomery may have been operated there even earlier. The iron ore, magnetite, was obtained from Rattlesnake and Mine hills nearby; the limestone for flux was quarried at several places within a quarter of a mile; and the charcoal for fuel was obtained from numerous residents who cut and burned the wood growing on the hillside. The products were mostly pig iron, pots, kettles, and fire backs. Three forges for the manufacture of wrought iron were located in the same vicinity. Durham Furnace was operated about two-thirds of the time from 1727 to 1908, a period of 181 years.

Iron mining did not extend to Northampton County until the beginning of the 19th century. One of the earliest operations was a forge built on the Bushkill Creek about 2 miles northeast of Nazareth in 1808 by William Henry. The iron ore presumably was mined near Nazareth. The iron was used in the manufacture of rifles and shotguns.

For the next few years the iron ores apparently received little attention. Beginning about 1825 the prospecting and opening of iron mines became active and was carried on over much of the county until about 1910, a period of 85 years. The mines are widely scattered throughout the limestones of the Valley and in the sandstones on the slopes of South Mountain. The exact number of deposits worked is not known but 89 places are marked on the county map. Some of them furnished only small quantities but others yielded as much as 100,000 tons. The ore was of variable quality and a constant supply could not be depended on as many deposits were worked only when farm labor was slack.

Furnaces were erected at numerous points; a string of them followed the Lehigh River in Carbon, Lehigh and Northampton counties—Parryville, Hekendauqua, Cataqua, Allentown, South Allentown, Bethlehem, Freemansburg, Redington, Glendon and South Easton. Others were at Hellertown, Bingen, Em (m) aus and Alburtis.