

SEVIER COUNTY'S FORGOTTEN IRON WORKS

By J.A. Sharp

Early Sevier County, like the rest of the Tennessee frontier, suffered from a shortage of many needed supplies. Lack of roads across the Appalachian Mountain barrier prevented the importation of both manufactured products and many raw materials from the older and more developed states along the Atlantic seaboard.

Iron, because of its weight, was one of the most difficult commodities to obtain, and Sevier County pioneers were compelled to resort to their own ingenuity and industry, and to extract their own iron from such ore deposits as were available locally- often these deposits were of an inferior quality.

As early as 1820, and perhaps before, the Sevier County iron industry began on both forks of Little Pigeon. An act of the Tennessee legislature of that year named Robert Shields as the owner of a "forge dam" on the East Fork of Little Pigeon and Isaac Love as the owner of a similar dam on the West Fork. Love's "forge dam" was located at the present Pigeon Forge, which accounts for the name of this flourishing village of today.

In 1809, the Tennessee legislature, following North Carolina's earlier example in 1788, passed an act "to encourage the building of Iron Works" by permitting the free entry of 3000 acres of land previously declared "unfit for cultivation" by juries of view appointed by local county courts. Such lands were exempted from taxes if individuals making the entries established iron works thereon. Similar acts were passed in 1815, in 1823 and in 1824.

At least one Sevier Countian, Isaac Love, took advantage of these "Iron Works" bounty laws. In 1825, he entered 1620 acres, located generally between the "West fork of Pigeon and Middle Creek," which had been adjudged "unfit for cultivation" by a jury of twelve men appointed by the Sevier County court in 1815. The same Isaac Love, in the same year, made two more entries- one of 418 acres "between Middle Creek and East Fork of Little Pigeon River," and another of 313 acres "on the waters of Middle Creek."

Two years later, in 1827, Isaac Love also entered 100 acres in Wear's Cove which included an "Iron Ore Bank," and in 1831 he joined Jacob Peck and William Manson in making an entry for 1000 acres "on the waters of the Little East fork of Little Pigeon." It was doubtless of some significance that this last entry included "Love's Iron ore Bank above John Breedens."

Hence it appears that Isaac Love was engaged actively in the iron industry in 1820 and for several years thereafter. Also, three Love brothers, probably sons of Isaac, namely, William K. Love, James L. Love, and Preston A. Love, became connected with this iron industry. Because in 1834, 2000 acres were surveyed for them "on the waters of Little East Fork of Little Pigeon River for the use of Iron Works," and this entry joined the 1000 acre tract already entered by Love, Peck and Manson. Another tract of 561 acres "between the Little East fork of Little Pigeon and Jones Cove," was surveyed for the three Love brothers in 1835, and they obtained 100 acres on the West Fork in 1836.

Isaac Love's connection with the Sevier County iron works ended about 1835 and he migrated to Missouri soon after 1840. No recorded details

of his iron works operations in this County have been found. The Love brothers, however, remained in control of the "Short Mountain Furnace," as it was first called, on the Little East Fork as well as the forges on the West Fork at the present Pigeon Forge. Their firm was called "William K. Love and Brothers."

Over expansion and speculation in business and railroad building brought national depression and financial panic in 1837. Evidently the Love brothers were caught in this economic whirlpool. Because in 1836, after the erection of a "furnance of large dimensions" on Little East Fork, they found themselves indebted to Micajah C. Rogers, better known as "Cage" Rogers, prominent Sevierville merchant, to the amount of about \$5000.00 which they were unable to pay.

Although admitting that he was "totally ignorant of the Iron Business," "Cage" Rogers was nevertheless anxious to collect this debt, and on November 1, 1836, he bought the Loves' interests in the Short Mountain Furnance and their adjoining 3640 acres- the Loves, however, retained their forges at Pigeon Forge. Rogers agreed to pay them \$4665.00, or credit them for this amount, and signed a contract to "furnish the said Loves with what merchantable Pig Iron they may be able to manufacture into Bar Iron or Blooms at their Forge or Forges in Sevier County, not exceeding five hundred tons of Pig Iron per annum." In exchange Rogers was to receive from the Loves "one Ton of merchantable Bar Iron for every four Tons of pig Iron, payable quarterly at Pigeon Forges." It was also agreed that the contract was to continue for eight years and that the pig iron was "in part consideration" of the purchase price. This latter provision was later to cause trouble.

"Cage" Rogers had been prominent in Sevier County business and political affairs since about 1820. While "Cage" was never one to shrink from a business venture, he undoubtedly realized his inexperience in the iron industry, and consulted with David Shields, senior member of the firm of "D. & M. Shields & Company," operators of the Bright Hope Furnace in Greene County- he did this before closing the above deal with the Love brothers. Other members of this Greene County iron company were: Milton Shields, Samuel Shields, brothers of David, Andrew Smyth, John Guthrie, and John Rice and David Johnson.

On December 8, 1836, a partnership between Micajah C. Rogers and the above men were formed for the operation of the two furnances- Short Mountain in Sevier and Bright Hope in Greene. The new firm was called "Shields, Smyth & Company."

Rogers, apparently taking the word of the Loves, informed his partners that the Little East Fork ore banks were some "inexhaustable and convenient" that "one Ore-Digger, a boy and a Cart could keep the Furnance well supplied on a running blast." He also represented the ore as being equal to the best "Swedish Iron," so henceforth the Sevier County furnace was the "Sweden Furnace." "Cage," if alive today, would make Sevier County a wonderful Chamber of Commerce secretary.

Shields, Smyth & Company took possession of Sweden Furnace in March, 1837, when John Guthrie, experienced "Iron Maker," started preparations for the first "Blast." Guthrie found the furnace built by the Loves unsatisfactory, and at considerable expense erected a new and large one. He was, however,

able to use such Love installations as the "Stack, Furnace House, Bridge House, the Race, a few Cabins, and a few imperfect Roads to the Ore-Banks and the Coleing Grounds." But a new dam was necessary to operate the bellows for the air blast.

Dreams of fortune from Sevier County iron received a rudge awakening soon after Guthrie started operations at Sweden Furnace in December of 1837. After two "Blasts" Guthrie became convinced that the bad quality of the ore would prevent the company from making any profits. He described the ore as "difficult to procure a Sufficient Quantity of it; and when procured it was of bad quality being mixed with rock, sulphur, Manganese and other substances injurious to its being made into Iron."

Andrew Smyth, another skillful "Iron Maker," differed with Guthrie about the ore's quality, and came down to Sweden Furnace from Bright Hope in Greene County. One "Blast" was enough for Smyth, and he, too, decided that the defective ore did not justify further operations.

The magnitude of these early Sevier County iron works may be surprising. One June 14, 1838, after about one year's operations, "Cage" Rogers reported that the Love brothers had received 179,800 pounds of pig iron from Shields, Smyth & Company, but 74,135 pounds of this had been hauled by wagons from Bright Hope Furnace in Greene County before Guthrie was ready for his first "Blast" at Sweden Furnace. The Loves, however, would not accept 26,255 pounds of this metal which they declared not to be "merchantable."

The Greene County pig iron was unloaded at George Fox's place near Fairgarden, and the Loves hauled it from there by way of Middle Creek to their Pigeon forges. And, one August 16, 1841, the various partners in the Shields, Smyth firm had made a total investment of \$63,690.09- a sizable sum during these depression years.

For a description of Love's forges at Pigeon Forge we must rely on a letter to David Shields, Marshall's Ferry, Grainger County, from "Cage" Rogers, Sevierville; the letter was dated, July 3, 1837, and stated: "Pigeon forge is now in better condition for making Iron than I have ever seen it- 3 fire places- Chimneys put up... 6 forge men- 2 of which are Idle for the want of a set of forge plates which they ordered together with a Hammer in April last." One of the hammers used in these old forges is still in existence; Henry Butler very appropriately has it on display in front of his Forge Hammer Grill at Pigeon Forge.

Due to the failure of Shields, Smyth & Company to carry out their pig iron contract with Rogers, the Love brothers were awarded a \$6000.00 judgement against the former by the Sevier County circuit court in August, 1840. This was the beginning of a series of lawsuits concerning the complicated affairs of "Cage" Rogers and his iron partners that reached the chancery courts of Sevier, Greene and Jefferson counties.

All of this litigation combined with the "Panic of 1837" and the poor quality of the Little East Fork ore brought an end to the operation of Sweden Furnace by the Shields, Smyth concern, and a rapid dissolution of the partnership. The death of David Shields in 1839 hastened the firm's

break-up, and the surviving partners, in 1840, asked the Greene County chancery court to sell their Sevier County iron property, but the Love brothers blocked this sale by an injunction from the Sevier County chancery court— this injunction was based on the Love's unpaid judgement against "Cage" Rogers and the fact that the iron company did not fulfill the pig iron contract. Indeed, it was shown that neither "Cage" nor his iron partners had a deed from the Loves for the Little East Fork property.

The Love brothers were not left untouched by financial reverses and the monetary shortages of the period. Because by 1841 their forges at Pigeon Forge were under new management, and in 1843 Sweden Furnace and lands were sold by the Sevier County chancery court to William C. Roadman, prominent Cocke County business man and political leader, for \$1100.00— the Loves were indebted to Roadman for almost this amount. Nothing is known of the subsequent operations of these old iron works, but it is said that irregular operations continued until the Civil War.

The fertile land of the unsettled West was the salvation for many unfortunate men of this era of American history. So it was apparently for the Love brothers. By 1841 Preston A. Love was a resident of Missouri, and it is believed that both William K. Love and James L. Love soon followed him.

The West likewise beckoned to Micajah C. Rogers, following his complete bankruptcy and the forced sale of all his extensive holdings, including his grandfather Spencer Clack's old homestead of 442 acres on East Fork opposite Sevierville. About 1842, "Cage" sought a new life by migrating to Huntsville, Texas, from whence, in 1849, he bared himself of his innermost thoughts in a letter to his brother-in-law, John Mullendore:

"My misfortunes were so great, and the fall I have undergone in the meandering vicissitudes of life felt with so much severity, that for a long time, I may say ever since I came to Texas, I seemed to my self as one cut adrift in a Storm, launched in a frail bark, upon a wide and unknown sea, in a tempestuous gale, far from land without rudder or compass. I felt the most poignant pangs for the great trouble I brought on as good friends as ever any man had, unintentionally on my part, for I had ~~deep~~ hope deep fixed in my bosom that I could weather the storm, but so it was, I was sadly mistaken and it yet seems to me that had I remained in good old Sevier I must have sunk deep in despair, or perhaps have committed Suicide."