

SHIPPEN MANOR and OXFORD FURNACE

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY HISTORY
OF TWO
WARREN COUNTY LANDMARKS

by
SUSAN P. MORGAN

WRITTEN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
PAUL G. E. CLEMENS
and
KATHLEEN BROWN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE
WITH
DEPARTMENTAL HONORS IN HISTORY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

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“[T]he growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs.”

George Eliot
Middlemarch

I.

“hidden li[ves] . . . unvisited tombs”

Oxford's Pioneers

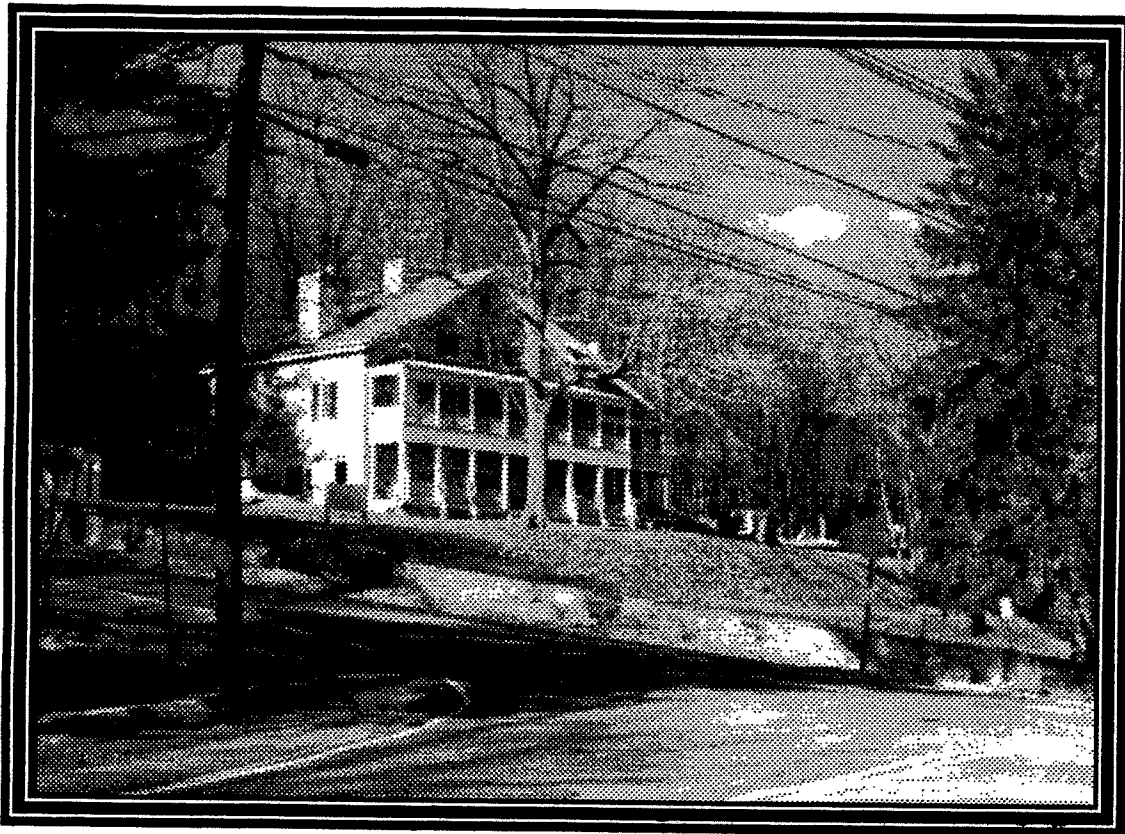
hippen Manor stands on the rising slope of a hill in the midst of the Warren County community of Oxford. The village is small, encompassing slightly more than six square miles, and lying but a few miles from the Delaware River. The Pequest River flows through Oxford on a southwesterly course toward the Delaware. The hills surrounding the village were once thickly forested and held vast deposits of limestone and iron ore. Because of these physical characteristics, the community, which maintains a tenuous foothold in today's economic climate, was one of colonial New Jersey's earliest industrial centers. The hub of activity was the Oxford Furnace, the second iron furnace in the colony.¹ Like the Manor, which served as the ironmaster's residence, the furnace stands today as a testament to the bustling, thriving village of yesteryears.

The nineteenth-century history of these two Oxford landmarks is well documented and generally familiar to local residents. During this time William Henry, and the Scranton brothers after him, occupied the Manor and operated the businesses associated with the furnace. The former earned recognition for technological advances in the iron industry.² The latter's fame derives from the advent of the railroad in Oxford during their tenure, as

¹ Charles S. Boyer, *Early Forges & Furnaces in New Jersey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 148, 196. Tinton Falls Furnace (Shrewsbury) was in operation by 1674. Although Oxford Furnace was New Jersey's second iron furnace, it remained in operation longer than any other furnace in America (1741-1884). Andrew Gilbert Yount, ed., *Bulletin of the Second Presbyterian Church, Oxford, New Jersey* 526 (25 August 1940).

² William Henry successfully employed the first "hot blast" system in America at Oxford Furnace on May 24, 1835. This innovation involved utilizing waste heat generated from the hearth to heat the cold air in the bellows. The result was the achievement of even higher temperatures than previously possible, thereby increasing output as well as the purity of the iron. In 1846 Henry took this a step further by using coal-heated boilers and steam engines for blowing air into the furnace.

well as their role in the founding of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Less is known, however, about the eighteenth-century history of Oxford. Historical markers near the two landmarks inform passersby that a man named Jonathan Robeson erected the furnace between 1741 and 1742, and that Joseph and William Shippen were responsible for the building of the Manor around 1754. The purpose of this essay, then, will be to flesh out a broader picture



Shippen Manor as it appears today. Built in 1754.

of life in Oxford during the eighteenth-century. It will investigate the circumstances involved in the founding and settling of Oxford, and will explore the relationship between the servants, laborers and managers of the village with the aristocratic owners of Shippen Manor. The Shippen family were not the first inhabitants of European descent in Oxford. Joseph Shippen I purchased land in the area sometime before his death in 1741.³ It was

³ This paper will use designations for members of the Shippen family set forth by Randolph Shipley Klein in *Portrait of an American Family: The Shippens of Pennsylvania Across Five Generations* (Philadelphia:

John Axford and George Green, however, who are credited with being the first pioneers to arrive in Oxford. They made the initial settlement around 1726, when Oxford was part of Greenwich Township in Hunterdon County.⁴ Axford was an English Quaker originally from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He married Anna Beach there, and then in 1725 the Axfords rented 800 acres in Trenton from Sarah Stevenson, the widow of Quaker surveyor Thomas Stevenson and daughter of Governor Jennings. The lease was for a one year term, and during this time, Axford must have become acquainted with members of the Kingwod Meeting and with George Green of nearby Amwell Township. Axford purchased 1600 acres of unclaimed land in Oxford, perhaps on a tip shared by Thomas Stevenson before his death. Thus armed, the two pioneers, Axford and Green, ventured out, following Indian trails, to locate Axford's land.⁵

The region that was Axford's and Green's destination was described by an early traveler as a "horrid wilderness." Prior to 1726, the surveying teams working for the West

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975). Almost every branch of every generation of Shippen men included the names Joseph, Edward, and William. In family correspondence, some who are referred to as "Juniors" are not the linear descendants of a "Senior." For example, in family letters Joseph Shippen, Jr. is not the son of the Joseph Shippen under discussion here; rather, he is Joseph Shippen I's great-nephew, and son of Edward III. A scheme of relevant family members is included in the appendix to this paper.

⁴ James P. Snell, *History of Warren County, New Jersey*, 1881 (Harmony, New Jersey: Harmony Press, 1981) 609-610. Oxford Township was formed in 1753. Oxford Furnace and Old Oxford (Hazen) were the first villages settled, followed by Butzville, Bridgeville, and Sarepta. By the nineteenth-century, five hamlets or neighborhoods had arisen within the principal village of Oxford Furnace: Tunnel Hill, Dutch Hill, Jonestown, Pittengerville, and Smithville. Oxford has been a part of four counties beginning with Hunterdon, then Morris when it separated from Hunterdon in 1738; next Sussex in 1753; finally, Warren in 1824. See maps in appendix.

⁵ Snell, *Warren County*, 606-607; Yount, *Bulletin*, 967 (8 October 1949); William Clinton Armstrong, *The Axfords of Oxford, New Jersey: A Genealogy Beginning in 1725* (Washington, New Jersey: Genealogical Researchers, 1984), 3-4; Peter O. Wacker, *The Musconetcong Valley of New Jersey: A Historical Geography* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1968), 40. Wacker gives a later date of 1730 for Axford's pioneering journey into Oxford. He notes that in the absence of roads between Trenton and his destination, Axford probably followed the Indian trail known as the Malayelick Path. Sarah Stevenson reappears below, listed as a previous owner of a Shippen-owned tract in Oxford. Cf. footnote 10. Her father, Samuel Jennings, was a Quaker living in London during Edward Byllynge's proprietorship of West Jersey. William Penn was instrumental in Jennings's election as governor of the colony in 1683, although his and Thomas Olive's tenures are referred to as the "illegal governorships" in colonial history. From Governor Samuel Jennings's will dated July 24, 1708 in New Jersey Archives, First Series, *Abstracts of Wills* XXIII, 259, we know that Sarah Stevenson's husband was Thomas Stevenson. He was a surveyor in John Reading's party which surveyed the Oxford and Allamuchy areas in 1715. Information he shared with the Kingwood Meeting was probably responsible for the planting of the Great Meadows (later Hardwick) Meeting in 1745.

Jersey Proprietors had been the only other Euro-Americans to journey through that portion of northwestern New Jersey. The surveyors paid particular attention to mineral deposits and areas located near sources of water, especially if there was sufficient water power for the establishment of mills. Little else is known of George Green beyond the fact that he settled north of Oxford near Green's Pond (Mountain Lake). The early settlers of Hope, Sam Green, Sr. and Jr., may have been relations. George Green probably died sometime between 1748 and 1749. The Moravian missionary Sven Roseen recorded in his diary for September 18, 1748 that he stopped in the furnace village to ask for directions to "the old grandfather George Green's, but was misdirected." Then, in entries in March and April, 1749 Roseen noted that he "crossed the Paeques [Pequest River] on logs to the home of the ninety year old widow of George Green." The widow owned a slave who helped Roseen across the pond when he departed to continue his visitations in the area.⁶ John Axford built a log cabin on his 200 acres near a "great spring." The following year, in 1727, Axford built a stone house near the log cabin. A small number of other families settled in Oxford after John Axford, attracted, no doubt, by the abundant water supply from two rivers and several creeks. These families were engaged in subsistence agriculture. The mineral wealth underlying their lands was most likely unknown by them. This pattern of settlement is consistent with Peter Wacker's historical geography of the area. He notes that in the Musconetcong River Valley, the charcoal iron industry followed the initial agricultural settlement.⁷

⁶ "Diary of Rev. Sven Roseen, 1746-1755," in *Dansbury Diaries*, translated from German original at Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA by Rev. W. N. Schwarze and R.R. Hillman, unpublished manuscript, Monroe County Historical Society, 8, 57, 65. Sam Green, Jr. was the first settler of Hope. A Moravian convert, he sold 1500 acres of land for L563 to the Moravians at Bethlehem in 1769. The sect built and occupied the village of Hope (originally Greenland) for 35 years. Sam Green, Sr., a surveyor for the West Jersey proprietors, followed his son into the area and retired to Hardwick. In 1754, he donated the land for the log gaol in Johnsonburg. Oxford's James Anderson and Maurice Robeson witnessed this indenture. Snell, *History of Warren County*, 151-152.

⁷ Yount, *Bulletin*, 654 (3 March 1943); *Warren County Historic Structures Survey*, Oxford; Wacker, *Musconetcong Valley*, 145, 41, 148. According to Wacker, the surveyors for the proprietors charted power sources first; thus the Oxford area, in the Musconetcong River drainage system and on the Pequest River, would have been noted. The earliest owners of Oxford lands were Dr. Daniel Coxe, the Chief Proprietor of West Jersey, and William Penn. Wacker notes that a Richard Green, possibly the son of the early settler,

Sometime prior to 1741, Joseph Shippen I purchased a large tract of land in Oxford from William Coxe, son of the Proprietor Dr. Daniel Coxe. The purchase was an investment. He was an absentee owner, having retired early from his successful mercantile business in Philadelphia to a plantation in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He leased his Oxford land holdings to Jonathan Robeson from neighboring White Marsh, who was probably an acquaintance. Robeson was from a distinguished Philadelphia family and held official positions in the city. His father and his father's uncle, both named Andrew Robeson, were Scotch Quakers who emigrated to America from Ireland. The uncle had purchased one share in the West Jersey propriety in 1677. Jonathan's father was an experienced ironmaster. He left Philadelphia and established an iron foundry north of the city on the Schuylkill River, near what is today Robesonia, Pennsylvania. It was here that Jonathan Robeson acquired the training and expertise that would enable him to play a significant role in the establishment of the Oxford iron works.⁸

What piqued Jonathan Robeson's interest in Joseph Shippen I's lands is not entirely known. In the local histories printed in Reverend Yount's *Bulletins*, there are frequent, undocumented references to the existence of an early Catalan Forge in Oxford which would have predated the Oxford Furnace. If this were to be true, then as an apprentice at his father's ironworks, Robeson would likely have heard of the forge. Another, more likely possibility is that Robeson heard of the existence of mineral deposits and physical characteristics favorable to the establishment of an ironworks through associations with

George Green, entertained John Lawrence in 1743, when the latter was surveying the division line between East and West Jersey for the proprietors. John Axford's stone house, with additions and covered with stucco, is still occupied today. It is located on Lower Denmark Road. Charles Scranton occupied the house for a time. According to Dennis N. Bertland in *Early Architecture of Warren County* (Harmony, New Jersey: Harmony Press, 1974), 111, George Green's log cabin still exists, incorporated into a larger stone house on the Old Free Union Road in Mountain Lake.

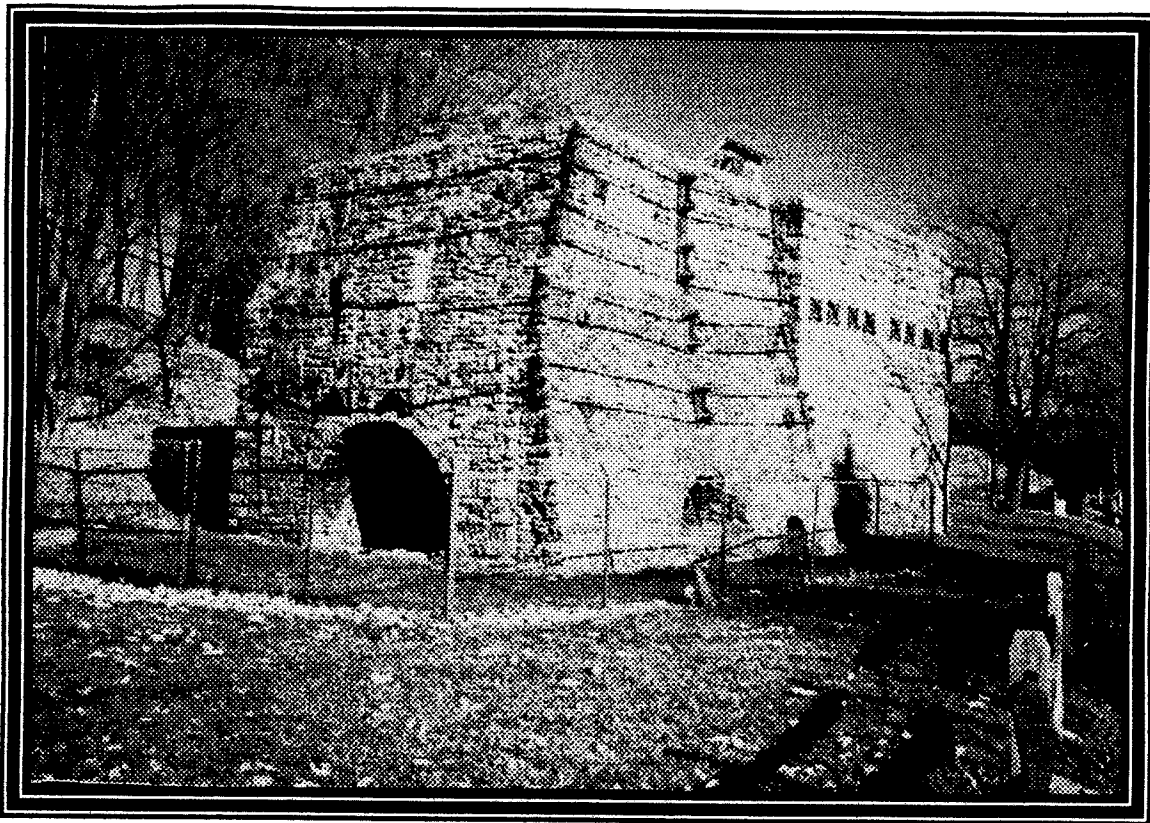
⁸ Yount, *Bulletin*, 330 (11 October 1936) and 318 (21 June 1936); John E. Pomfret, *The Province of West New Jersey 1609-1702* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 90, 286. Pomfret gives the proprietor Andrew Robeson as "Robinson." The Robesons were Quakers who fled their native Scotland for Clonmell, Ireland. All of the West Jersey Proprietors except Dr. Daniel Coxe were Quakers. Andrew Robeson's one share yielded him 1500 acres in Gloucester County, where Jonathan Robeson was born in 1690. The uncle moved to Philadelphia in 1694, Jonathan's father likewise in 1702.

other Quaker proprietors of West Jersey who lived in Philadelphia. Besides his great-uncle, there were the sons of William Penn, Richard, John and Thomas. These three brothers are named in a Sussex County deed as being previous owners of a parcel of Dr. William Shippen II's land. If, as already noted, lands with potential power sources or mineral deposits were particularly noteworthy to the proprietors' surveyors, then the Penn brothers would have been aware of the value of their holdings. Another possible source of information about the Oxford lands for Robeson could have been the Quarterly Meetings of Friends. As Quaker settlers pushed into northern New Jersey, information may have been exchanged at the Meetings which Robeson may have been privy to. Wacker notes that the English Quakers of Philadelphia and southwestern New Jersey traveled up the Delaware River and formed the first settlements in what are now Hunterdon, Morris, Sussex and Warren Counties. Pomfret similarly notes that the Quakers "pushed northward above the Falls" (Trenton) during the second quarter of the eighteenth-century, establishing the Kingwood (Robeson's part-time New Jersey home by the 1740s) and Great Meadows (Hardwick) Meetings in 1731 and 1745 respectively.⁹

Jonathan Robeson began construction of the Oxford Furnace in 1741. The details of the business arrangement between himself and Joseph Shippen I, who held title to the land, remain unknown. The construction was delayed, however, by Shippen's death that same year. Robeson negotiated a new lease with Shippen's son, Joseph II, and resumed construction in 1742. It should be noted that while some sources maintain that Joseph II inherited 2,000 acres in Oxford from his father, Joseph Shippen I's will makes no mention of such a bequest. The will, which is quite short, simply orders that all of his property be

⁹ Yount, *Bulletin*, 318 (21 June 1936); Deeds, Sussex County Book O, 452-454; Wacker, *Musconetcong Valley*, 38; Pomfret, *Province of West New Jersey*, 239. Catalan forges were primitive forges modeled after the type found in Catalonia, Spain. There is hearsay that Penn's surveyors came upon such a forge in Oxford. George S. Humphrey's stories in Reverend Yount's *Bulletin* mention the mixed nationalities of the eighteenth century furnace workers, including "Spaniards." This inaccuracy was probably the result of an association he made with the Catalan forge. John W. Lequear, *Traditions of Hunterdon* 1869 (Flemington, NJ: Democrat Press, 1957), 106-107 places Robeson among the early Quakers in Hunterdon County.

divided between his three sons and one daughter.¹⁰ It is possible that the father designated which properties were to go to each child upon his death, or he may have already given the properties to his children before 1741. Whatever the case, Jonathan Robeson completed his furnace on land owned by Joseph Shippen II, naming it "Oxford Furnace" in



The Old Oxford Furnace as it probably appeared when built in 1741. Stone building at back is the 19c. blowing-house built by William Henry to facilitate his hot blast process

honor of his father, who had been educated in England at Oxford. The first blast was made March 9, 1743.¹¹

¹⁰ Joseph Shippen Will, 1741, No. 196, Philadelphia Will Book F, p. 219. The will is on microfilm at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Whether Joseph Shippen II received 2000 acres or just the 578 acre "Furnace tract" from his father remains to be discovered.

¹¹ As early as 1748 Sven Roseen referred to the village as Oxford Furnace. Oxford became the formal name in 1753 when the township was separated from Greenwich. Some maintain that the name Oxford evolved as a corruption of Axford.

Between 1743 and 1751, Robeson purchased tracts of land in and around Oxford that together eventually amounted to over 3000 acres. The individual tracts are enumerated in a series of Sussex County deeds, dated between 1749 and 1762, which record Robeson's subsequent sales of the tracts to Joseph Shippen II's brother, Dr. William Shippen II.¹² Significant for Robeson was his 1745 purchase of a one-half interest in the pivotal 578-acre "furnace tract" from Joseph Shippen II. This purchase gave him partial ownership of the land on which he had built his furnace, and for which he had been paying rent to the Shippen family for upwards of four years. It is assumed that the two men became co-owners of the furnace business as well as of the furnace tract land.

During the first years of furnace operation, Jonathan Robeson was considered to be the ironmaster and proprietor. It bears repeating that the exact nature of the business arrangement between Robeson and Joseph Shippen II is unknown, but after 1745 both men were co-owners of the furnace tract and probably of the iron business also. Neither man lived on a full-time basis at Oxford. Joseph Shippen divided his time between his two homes in Philadelphia and Germantown. He visited his investment in Oxford at least once, in 1757.¹³ He also took an active role in provisioning the furnace community. He used his access to the Philadelphia markets to purchase such necessary items as molasses, rum, clothing, and nails. Jonathan Robeson, having practical expertise in the iron business, spent more time in Oxford than his partner did, but his principle residence was in White Marsh, Pennsylvania, where he was a Philadelphia County judge. Sven Roseen recorded in his diary for March 28, 1749 that he went to "the Oxford Furnace . . . and took lodging

¹² The Sussex County deeds, without citations, are outlined in Yount, *Bulletin*, 325 (6 September 1936) and 326 (13 September 1936). The tracts of land are also enumerated in Dr. William Shippen II's will, probated 10 November 1801, *Shippen Family Papers*, Vol. 10, p. 219, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Some of the tracts named in the deeds and in the will include the Loftus, Vansant (sometimes given as Van Sandt), Fulsom, Daniel Coxe, Vanetta (or Van Etta and Van Etten), and Axford tracts, as well as the "river place," or the one acre boat landing on the Delaware at Foul Rift. The tract names provide clues to the family names of early settlers of Oxford. While researching this paper, I discovered that a document at the New Jersey Historical Society in Newark identified as a "land title brief" for the Oxford Furnace was in fact for the Vansant tract of 250 acres, and not for the furnace or the furnace tract. Sarah Stevenson (cf. footnote 5) is listed as one of the previous owners of this tract.

¹³ Cf. footnote 25.

with the owner Jonathan Robeson, a Quaker, whose wife and plantation are down at White Mashers [Whitemarsh].” After the 1740s, Robeson also owned a home in Kingwood, New Jersey, halfway between Whitemarsh and the furnace. After becoming a full partner in the business, he evidently spent more time in Oxford. In 1753, when Sussex County was set apart from Morris County, he became one of the first four county judges by royal appointment.¹⁴

Robeson and Shippen employed Robeson’s son Maurice and Richard Shackleton to manage the furnace and attend to the day-to-day business affairs. The exact division of labor between the two men is unknown. By following Joseph E. Walker’s classification of labor at a furnace, however, it would appear that Maurice Robeson shared the position of ironmaster, or manager, with his father, while Shackleton functioned as the company clerk. According to Walker, the ironmaster had to be skilled in all aspects of furnace operation. He solved problems that arose at the furnace, hired and disciplined labor, and supervised such business details as the solicitation and fulfillment of orders. An ironmaster usually grew up around a furnace, acquiring an intimate knowledge of its workings over the course of many years. Maurice Robeson’s pedigree fits that description. Sven Roseen noted in 1749 that Jonathan Robeson “has his son at the Furnace as overseer,” and judged Maurice to be “a fine single man.” Maurice attended one of Roseen’s services held “at the home of the plantation man, Axford, one quarter of a mile from the furnace.”¹⁵

¹⁴ “Oxford Furnace Ledger Book,” *Shippen Family Papers*, Microfilm collection, Reel 15, container 28, Library of Congress. All subsequent citations to the ledger will be to this source. Yount, *Bulletin*, 967 (8 October 1949), and 332 (25 October 1936); *Dansbury Diaries*, 57; Snell, *History of Sussex County*, 160. In 1741, Justice Robeson of Philadelphia County recorded Edward Shippen III’s transfer of part of his inheritance to his younger brother, Joseph Shippen II, just three weeks after their father’s death. Joseph Shippen II bought his siblings’ interest in the Germantown plantation built by their father. Klein, *Portrait*, 63. Rev. Roseen and Robeson discussed religion during the missionary’s stay at the furnace, with Roseen noting that the Quaker was “irreconcilable so far as music at our meetings is concerned.” This visit occurred five years before Shippen Manor was built, raising the question of where Robeson entertained the missionary Roseen. Local tradition holds that the old stone post office was the first manager’s house.

¹⁵ Joseph E. Walker, *Hopewell Village: A Social and Economic History of an Iron-Making Community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 165-168, 176-178; *Dansbury Diaries*, 57, 78.

The clerk was the manager's right hand man, supervising business affairs, running the company store, and keeping the ledgers. Shackleton was first engaged to build the water raceway to the furnace during the initial construction. An entry in the Oxford Furnace ledger book from 1760 indicates that Shackleton had access to the books and was functioning in the capacity of company clerk. He made a notation on Maurice Robeson's account acknowledging that he personally owed Maurice L55.16.9.¹⁶ He also oversaw orders, as demonstrated by a letter, perhaps written by an assistant clerk at the Oxford company store, to the store operated at the Moravian mission at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania:

Oxford Furnace, Oct. 14, 1756

Mr. Shackleton desires you'd let the bearer John Jarrat have the two pair Leather Breeches he left to be made, and charge same to the Company's acct. Yours, &c.

Thomas Craine

To Mr. Bamber or Wm. Edmunds, at Bethlehem.

The back of the order is endorsed:

Received the 1st of March, 1757, The Sum of Seven Shillings, Two Pence, by making Two pair of New Breeches, on acct of Mr. Robinson & Compy Iron Works, at Oxford. Being the contents of the within order. I say received by me.

X

(John Jarrat's mark)

This note indicates that Shackleton held a position of authority and was able to place orders against the company's accounts, and, more significantly, that "Mr. Robinson" was viewed as the principle owner of the Oxford Furnace Company. This recognition of Robeson as chief proprietor, however, had more basis in custom than in fact, for by the time the letter was written in 1756, Robeson had sold half of his interest in the furnace to

¹⁶More on this below.

his partner's brother, Dr. William Shippen II of Philadelphia. After 1749 the furnace was owned by a three-man partnership, with Joseph Shippen II owning half, and Robeson and Dr. Shippen each owning a quarter interest. The practical aspects of the business continued to be handled by Jonathan and Maurice Robeson and Richard Shackleton.¹⁷

Jonathan Robeson sold part of his interest in the Oxford Furnace to Dr. William Shippen II in 1749 in order to obtain capital for a new forge that he was building not far from Oxford in Changewater. That Robeson was focusing his attention more on the Changewater Forge and participating in a reduced capacity in the Oxford business is evident in court papers from 1755. Joseph Shippen and Company had brought suit for damages against a Mr. Henry Slattery. The company's principals were given as Joseph Shippen, Jonathan Robeson, and William Shippen, with Joseph Shippen recognized as the head of the firm. Robeson's interest in Oxford may have been waning for other reasons unrelated to his new project. Some sources contend that he was disgruntled at his inability to gain a controlling share in the Oxford furnace. Another possibility is that by this time Shippen Manor had been built by the brothers, and there is alleged to have been some resentment on Robeson's part because of the expenses incurred in its construction. It is more likely that Robeson was troubled by the fact that the Shippen brothers' manor house stood on land that he owned one-quarter of, therefore complicating the title for the property.¹⁸

¹⁷ Yount, *Bulletin*, 584 (2 November 1941); Snell, *History of Warren County*, 607. The Moravian Archives at Bethlehem possess other documentation of trade between Oxford and the Moravian community. The Moravians made the leather workpants worn by the furnace workers for protection. It is interesting to note that Richard Shackleton's will in Sussex County Wills, 1790, No. 490S, Book 30, p. 438 lists in the meager 10-item estate inventory a pair of "lether britches." According to Yount, *Bulletin*, 243 (23 December 1934), Robeson's son Maurice, who lived nearby at Green's Pond, assisted in furnace operations from 1750 to 1758. In 1809 Maurice's son Morris (Jonathan's grandson) bought the furnace and Manor from Dr. William Shippen II's granddaughter, Susan Blair Roberdeau. Morris Robeson owned an interest in the Martha Furnace, near Batsto, NJ, from 1800-1808, and with his partners, also built Weymouth Furnace in 1801. A descendant, George M. Robeson, Secretary of the Navy in the Grant Administration, was born in Shippen Manor.

¹⁸ Yount, *Bulletin*, 306 (29 March 1936) and 332 (25 October 1936). Shippen Manor was built at a time when Jonathan Robeson co-owned the furnace with the Shippens. Since the manor was built on company-owned land, and was intended to be a residence for the manager (not for the Shippens), as well as a place in which to feed the furnace workers, it makes sense that Robeson would also have been a part owner of

On January 29, 1756 Jonathan Robeson advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to sell his interests in the Oxford Furnace, describing the property as

... one other tract about 300 acres of land, lying between the Oxford furnace and the river Delaware, about three miles from the said river; and also the one undivided fourth part of the Oxford furnace, with all the lands, plantations and improvements thereunto belonging, containing upwards of 4000 acres, together with the several Negroes, horses, oxen, cattle, teams, stock and utensils whatsoever thereunto belonging; the furnace and ore are known to be very good ... [apply] to the subscriber, at Kingswood JONATHAN ROBESON¹⁹

Joseph and William Shippen bought the bulk of Robeson's Oxford properties, including all of his interest in the furnace, the following year. The consideration consisted of two payments of L350 in cash or pig iron, as well as the right to purchase 100 tons of pig iron for the Changewater forge at L6 per ton annually for three years. It has been suggested that Robeson, a Quaker, desired to separate himself from the furnace at this time because he could not participate in the manufacture of ordnance to supply the British and Colonial troops during the French and Indian War. Five years later, in 1762, Robeson sold the remainder of his interest in the Oxford properties to Dr. William Shippen II.²⁰

In his study of the Shippens of Philadelphia, Randolph Shipley Klein gives a different account of the Shippen brothers' involvement with the Oxford Furnace. His outline begins with Dr. William Shippen II purchasing a three-fourths interest in the Oxford Iron Works in 1749, instead of the one-quarter interest from Jonathan Robeson already noted. Klein makes no mention of either Joseph Shippen I or his son, Joseph Shippen II being involved in the venture this early. Klein then notes that the brothers, William and Joseph, bought Robeson's remaining interest in 1764, instead of in 1762.

the manor. There is no documentation of this, however, and local tradition ascribes ownership of the manor exclusively to the Shippen brothers.

¹⁹ New Jersey Archives, First Series, *Newspaper Extracts* XX, 2.

²⁰ Boyer, *Early Forges*, 149. A 1765 indenture of sale between John and Mary Hughes and Jacob Starn for a two-thirds part of the Changewater forge makes reference to Robeson's settlement with the Shippens. When Robeson sold a two-thirds interest in the Changewater forge to John Hughes in 1762, the right to purchase Oxford pig iron at L6 per ton was transferred to Hughes as well. Yount, *Bulletin*, 301 (23 February 1936).

These discrepancies might be explained by the fact that Klein was relying upon Dr. William Shippen II's daybook and account book as the basis for his information. Spotty entries on Shippen's part may have mislead Klein.²¹

In 1753, and again in 1755, Joseph Shippen II offered for sale some property near the Oxford Furnace. The ads in the *Pennsylvania Journal* advertise 1200 acres, well-watered, within a few miles of Oxford Furnace. It is not known if any buyers came forward. Joseph sold a one-half interest in some other Oxford tracts to his brother William II in 1754, and advertised again, in 1756, to sell half of his interest in the furnace. Except for his brother, there were apparently no buyers. Possible reasons for Joseph II's desire to sell his Oxford holdings can be ascertained from Randolph Klein's summary of Joseph's financial situation during those years. In 1752, at the age of forty-six, Joseph II retired from his mercantile business and took up the life of a gentleman on his Germantown plantation. Such a retirement was expensive, and Joseph II's monetary concerns were further compounded by educational expenses for his eldest son, and the need to provide a dowry for his eldest daughter. With Joseph beset by such considerations, that he and William were able to buy out Robeson in 1757 was probably due to the fact that Robeson was anxious to sell and therefore willing to accept payment in pig iron in lieu of cash.²²

In 1764 Joseph and William Shippen advertised in the *Pennsylvania Journal* to sell the Oxford Furnace, probably because of Joseph's need for cash. Their advertisement stated that "the quality of the iron and the conveniences of the place are so well known, as to render any commendations unnecessary."²³ No buyers responded to the ad. Then, in

²¹ Klein, *Portrait of an Early American Family*, 126-127.

²² New Jersey Archives, First Series, *Newspaper Extracts* XIX, 324 and 516; Klein, *Portrait*, 108, 63-64, 58. In 1756, Joseph II owned one-half of the Oxford Furnace. He was offering to sell one-quarter. There apparently were no buyers. In 1741, Joseph II and his brothers, Edward III and William II, inherited their father's Germantown plantation together. Joseph II bought his brothers' interests in 1752 for L186.13.4. In retiring, Joseph II was following his father's precedent; the elder Shippen retired at the age of forty. Sources frequently refer to Joseph II as "Gentleman Joe," an image he carefully cultivated. Known as a social dandy who postponed marriage in order to pursue various entertainments, Joseph II was among the first subscribers to the Philadelphia Assembly Dances. Many stories survive which reinforce the perception that Joseph II led an extravagant lifestyle.

²³ New Jersey Archives, First Series, *Newspaper Extracts* XXIV, 453.

two indentures dated 1765 and 1766, William II relieved his brother's financial difficulties by purchasing Joseph II's interests in Oxford. Up until this time, William II had been the minority owner of the iron enterprise, and was generally less successful, in financial terms, than either of his elder brothers. Now, however, he was beginning to reap the rewards of a life of hard work and careful expenditure. Dr. William Shippen II began his career as a chemist, but the combination of a lack of formally trained doctors in the colonies and his good reputation led Philadelphians to regard him as "Doctor." In his will, as well as in numerous indentures and deeds, he identified himself as "chemist, and practitioner of physick." A New Light Presbyterian and friend of George Whitfield, William II was a founder of the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia in 1742, and was a trustee of the College of New Jersey at its founding. He supported the American Revolution more actively than other family members, and served two terms at the Continental Congress in 1778 and 1779.²⁴

Dr. William Shippen II's acquisition of the Oxford Furnace in 1766 was an investment. He did not become a full-time resident of Sussex County, nor did he style himself as an ironmaster. He did, however, take an active interest in furnace, visiting several times and sending provisions from Philadelphia for the workers. In June, 1757 he wrote to his brother Edward in Lancaster that he had just "returned from a jaunt to Furnace . . . Bro Jo is at Furnace ." In 1769 he recorded in his daybook that he had been to Sussex and back with the referees who were settling Matthew Lowrey's suit against the Oxford Furnace Company. In September, 1772 he recorded expenses of L3.3.6 for a trip to Princeton and Oxford with his daughter Sukey (Susanna).²⁵ Randolph Klein's study of

²⁴ Yount, *Bulletin*, 306 (29 March 1936); Klein, *Portrait*, 113; William Shippen's Will, *Shippen Family Papers*, Vol. 10, p. 219, HSP. William II's father, Joseph I, strayed from the Quaker religion adopted by his father, Edward I. Both William II and his brother, Edward III were deeply religious, devout Presbyterians. William II helped Robert Smith design Nassau Hall at the College of New Jersey's permanent site in Princeton. Several Shippen men, including William II's son, William III, attended the school at its early home in Newark.

²⁵ Letter from William Shippen to Edward Shippen, 6/2/1757, *Shippen Family Papers*, Vol. 2. p. 195, HSP; William Shippen Daybook, *Shippen Family Papers*, Microfilm Collection, Reel 15, container 27, Library of Congress. The letter is the only surviving evidence that Joseph II ever visited Oxford. Matthew

William II's daybooks indicates that the doctor left Philadelphia several times during the Revolution, when the fighting was too close to home, and during the British occupation of the city in 1777. On one such evacuation, during the winter of 1776, he joined his son, Dr. William Shippen III, at the army hospital in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and assisted in treating the wounded soldiers who were under the younger doctor's care. During the winter of 1776-1777, Sukey Shippen Blair fled with her children to Oxford from Princeton, where her husband, the Reverend Samuel Blair, was on the faculty. In January, 1777, William II journeyed to Oxford to make certain that his daughter and grandchildren were safe. He went next to Bethlehem, and upon learning that General Washington had summoned his Chief Surgeon to Newtown, he rode off to assist his son with the front-line casualties there.²⁶

When William Shippen purchased the furnace in 1766, it was under lease to Jacob Starn, who used the Oxford pig iron to supply the forge at nearby Changewater that he recently bought. Starn remained as manager-lessee of Oxford until William II's son, Joseph W. Shippen, assumed an active role in the family business sometime around 1770. Joseph W., however, lacked experience in the iron business. Whether Starn, or some other

Lowrey and Co. of Oxford was a partnership of three brothers, Matthew, John and Clark. They provided water carriage on the Delaware for iron and supplies between Oxford and Philadelphia, and later owned a store. William Shippen II made numerous notations regarding the suit in his daybook between 1767 and 1770. Lowrey's services continued to be used during the suit.

²⁶ George S. Bangert, "The Shippens of New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, New Series 1:1 (1916) 30-47; Klein, *Portrait*, 191-194; *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 21 (1897-1898) 497. Joseph W. served as paymaster at the Bethlehem Army Hospital. Dr. William Shippen III was named Chief Surgeon of the Flying Camp in New Jersey in July, 1776, and Director-General of the Medical Department of the U.S. Army in April, 1777. He was tried by court-martial in 1780 on charges of profiteering, mismanagement, and incompetence which resulted in needless suffering and death. Although he was acquitted, there was evidence that he did engage in speculating in hospital supplies such as wine and sugar. The suit was largely the result of a rivalry with another Philadelphia physician, Dr. Morgan. "Bethlehem During the Revolt," *PMHB* 12 (1888) provides details into Dr. William III's war time experiences. In December, 1776 he travelled to Morristown to collect 1,000 wounded men and transport them to the hospital at Bethlehem. The Marquis de Lafayette received treatment there for the leg wound he received at Brandywine. Mrs. Alice Lee Shippen spent the winter of 1776-77 in camp with her husband, where, on March 24, 1777, the couple's infant son died. He was buried in Bethlehem.

person, was present to train him and to oversee affairs until he was competent, is unknown. Prior to coming to Oxford as his father's representative, Joseph W. had been engaged in a burgeoning mercantile career in Philadelphia. Unlike his older and younger brothers, Joseph W. did not pursue a medical education. He was apprenticed to his Uncle Edward III in Lancaster, who carried on a fur trading business with the frontier outposts of Pennsylvania. After that training, Joseph W. engaged in several import ventures of his own, sailing to the West Indies to procure import items such as molasses and indigo. A Boston, "Cousin Fayerweather," acted as Joseph W.'s contact and co-investor.²⁷

Joseph W. Shippen's performance as manager of his father's Oxford properties must have been satisfactory, for, after repeated attempts to sell during the years that the Shippen brothers were co-owners, William II settled into a lengthy period of ownership which lasted until his death in 1801. Joseph W. remained as manager of his father's property for twenty-five years, until his early death at the age of fifty-eight, in 1795. William II, perhaps forgetful of the consternation he and his brothers once felt, followed his father's precedent of retaining ownership of his property until death. This resulted in Joseph W.'s dependence upon his father for his entire life. William Shippen's reluctance to transfer ownership of the furnace to his son might have resulted from his disapproval of Joseph W.'s personal conduct. Sometime after his arrival in Oxford, his housekeeper, Martha Axford, bore his child. The couple eventually had nine children, seven of whom survived to adulthood, and Martha came to be recognized as Joseph W.'s common law wife. Why they never married remains a mystery. An Axford family genealogist maintains that there was in fact a marriage, which caused the Philadelphia Shippens great "umbrage"

²⁷ Yount, *Bulletin*, 301 (23 February 1936). In Boyer, *Early Forges*, 150, the author cites a *Pennsylvania Gazette* advertisement which makes reference to "Shippen and Starr's [*sic*] furnace," and also a clerk's letter on behalf of "Jacob Starn & Co." Letters from Joseph W. Shippen to Cousin Thomas Fayerweather, 1760 and 1761, in the *Shippen Family Papers*, Vol. 5, p. 92 and *Stauffer Collection*, No. 1625, HSP show that Joseph W. Shippen voyaged to New Providence, West Indies and procured one cargo of hogsheads, molasses, and limes, and another of indigo. Joseph W. wrote to his cousin to tell him that settlement of the accounts was delayed because they were "excessively confused, I am looking over it and will try to make it as right as I am able."

because Martha was below Joseph W.'s class, but no documentation of the union exists. William II never relented in his disapproval of his son's relationship with his housekeeper, probably due to his devout Presbyterianism.²⁸

Joseph W. was a modestly successful man in his own right. In 1790 he purchased 501 acres adjoining the furnace property. At his death in 1795 he left an estate valued at L581.6.6. The inventory of his estate, however, reveals that he lived with his family in relative simplicity. Three large looking glasses, a Bible and other books, a clock, and eight slaves are the only items that might differentiate his estate from that of any other middling farmer in Oxford. The household furniture listed is not enough to fill the Manor, indicating that there must have been additional furnishings in the house that were the property of his father.²⁹

William Shippen II was present at Joseph W.'s death. He stayed on at Oxford to administer his son's estate and oversee furnace operations, living in the Manor with Martha Axford and the grandchildren who were still unmarried. In his eighties, William II is said to have grown fond of the children in spite of his refusal to accept Martha into the family. One additional piece of information about William II's activities in Oxford at this time can be found in the diary of his granddaughter, Nancy Shippen Livingston. Included in the diary is a letter dated April 20, 1797 from Nancy's brother, Thomas Lee Shippen, who was staying in Williamsburg, Virginia with Lee family relatives. In the letter, Thomas suggests to Nancy that they should "make a large party this summer to visit [their grandfather] in Sussex - What say you to it . . . Shall we fill the Coaches & all go up together?" The following year brought little cause for such festivities, for the children of Joseph W. and Martha Axford, two of them still minors, were orphaned when Martha died. Had Joseph W. outlived his father, he would have inherited all of the elder Shippen's

²⁸ Armstrong, *The Axforths*, 67-68.

²⁹ Sussex County Deeds, Book B, p. 258; Joseph W. Shippen Administration of Estate (intestate), 1796, New Jersey Archives, 651 S. On the Oxford Tax Ratables List, 1773, New Jersey State Archives, Box 84, Book 1801, Item 17, Joseph W. Shippen was assessed for the furnace property, including 350 acres, a saw mill, a grist mill, 16 slaves, 4 servants, and 22 head of livestock.

lands in Sussex County, including the Manor, the furnace, and almost 5000 acres, as well as property in Philadelphia. The bequest was not conferred upon Joseph W.'s heirs, however, because William Shippen II changed his will immediately after his son's death. When William II died in 1801, his legacy to each of his three grandsons, William, John, and Joseph, was a farm of 150 acres with utensils and stock. Each of his four granddaughters, Maria, Ann, Susan, and Abigail, received a lifetime annuity of L60.³⁰

The children of Joseph W. Shippen and Martha Axford grew up and married into respectable local families. Because Joseph W. chose to pursue a course through life that was radically different from that of other members of the Shippen family who lived in Philadelphia, his ties to that city were irreversibly altered. He and his family were assimilated into the village of Oxford. That a Shippen chose to live as one of the villagers for over two decades was extraordinary. And that decision had far-reaching, positive repercussions. The history of Oxford indicates that the village was not ridden with strife or divided into two distinct and separate social groups. Because of the communal spirit fostered by the fellowship at the Manor and around the furnace hearth, and the roots put down by Joseph W.'s family, the village was especially close-knit, bound by identification with, and loyalty to, the Oxford Furnace.

³⁰ Ethel Armes, ed. *Nancy Shippen Her Journal Book: The International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia With Letters to Her and About Her* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1935), 296; Yount, *Bulletin*, 237 (11 November 1934) and 338 (6 December 1936); William Shippen Will, *Shippen Family Papers*, Vol. 10, p. 219, HSP. Martha Axford was the daughter of Oxford's first pioneer, John Axford. We know that William II was present at his son's death because he immediately attached a codicil, dated "Oxford, October 4, 1795" to his will. The codicil stipulates that "whereas my son Joseph W. Shippen is now dead and has left no will but has left his Housekeeper Martha Axford and seven children unprovided for . . ." Martha Axford predeceased William II and thus never collected the L50 life annuity she was bequeathed. Yount quoted a descendant, Morris Crisman, who wrote a family vignette for the *Blairstown Press* in 1894, which repeated a family tradition that Grandfather Shippen also gave each granddaughter a gold watch upon her marriage, signifying his fondness of the girls. Deeds whereby William II's executors conveyed farms to the sons of Joseph W. are in the Sussex County Hall of Records in Newton.

II.

"Hospitality was expressed in everything about the house"

The Manor

Prior to 1741, Oxford was still a "horrid wilderness." The handful of settlers who followed John Axford's trail and settled there were engaged in a daily life-and-death struggle to build their shelters, eke a meager sustenance from the ground, and survive without benefit of medicine, education, or clergy. From the time Jonathan Robeson and Joseph Shippen began their ironworks, the Oxford Furnace became the focal point of the village. It was not only for employment that the local craftsmen and yeomen looked toward the furnace. The furnace, by the nature of the work, dictated the rhythm of village life, for time was kept according to the last pouring of iron, and work "seasons" were defined not by weather and celestial position, but by when the furnace was "in blast" and "out of blast." The furnace provided a locus for the men of the village to fraternize. The company store was not only where families purchased necessary items, but also a clearing house for all financial transactions. Because of the furnace community, a church was established, the first schoolteacher arrived, and Oxford became part of a larger community. Its isolation was broken as new workers arrived and local men delivered the pig iron, firebacks, and other furnace products to distant places.

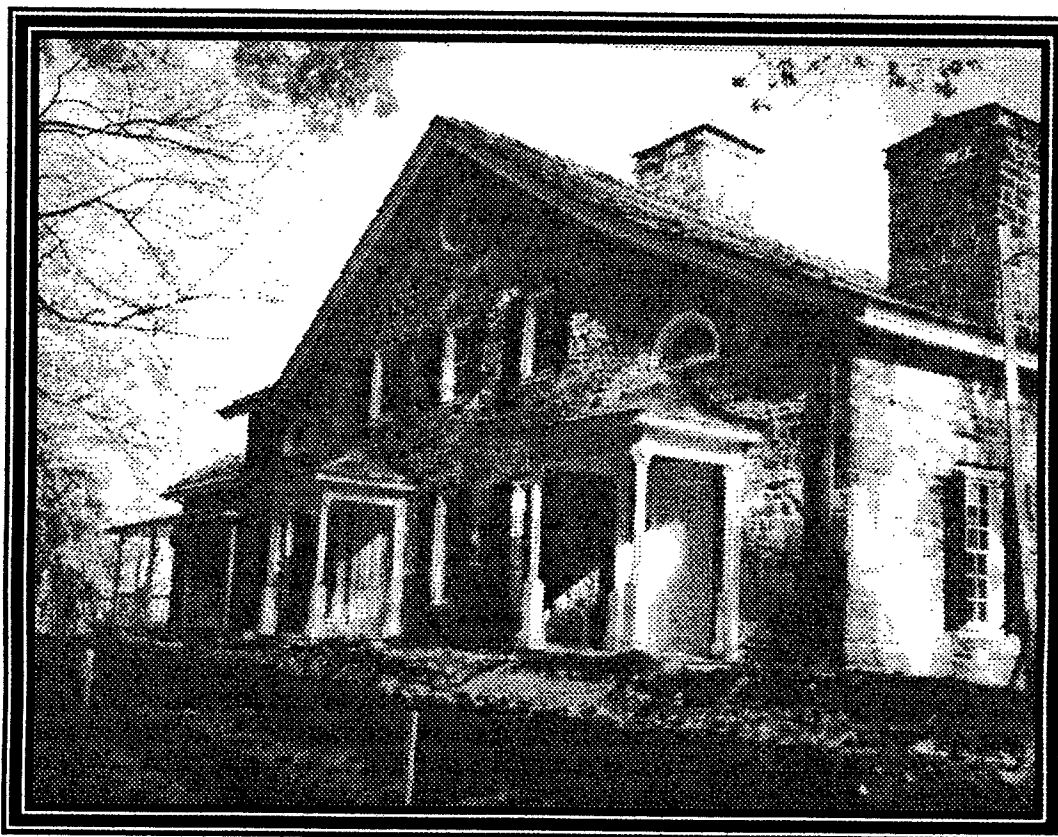
With the furnace thus dominating the life of the village, Shippen Manor, high on the hill and visible to all who passed on their way to work and store, was also a village focal point. To the workers and their families, it must have represented the world outside of Oxford, for its owners were powerful and wealthy Philadelphians, surely more educated and refined than themselves. And yet, a study of early village life unfolds a picture of a relationship between the occupants of Shippen Manor and the furnace workers that can be characterized not as antagonistic, as might be expected, but rather as familial. This familial

atmosphere was fostered by the fact that the manor was not off limits to the workers. In fact, the manor was built in such a fashion as to make provision for common or public rooms. A large kitchen staffed by slaves and indentured servants served meals to the workers of the village in a dining room designated for them. There was also an office where they could meet with the manager. Accessibility, combined with unique circumstances during the long tenure of Joseph W. as superintendent, left behind a legacy, evident in reminiscences and folklore, that endeared Shippen Manor to the village.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the Shippen Manor did not foster jealousy and resentment among the workers was that it was not ostentatious. True, it was larger than any other structure in the area. But it was unlike the estate of Peter Hasenclever, ironmaster at Ringwood, New Jersey, whom Richard P. McCormick describes as having lived in "manorial grandeur." Charles Boyer observes that it was customary for ironworks everywhere to include a mansion or "big house" that "was an elaborate establishment, with extensive grounds embellished with shrubbery, fine trees, and invariably an old-fashioned flower garden." Shippen Manor, at least for most of the eighteenth-century, did not fit this description. When the Manor was built in 1754, it was designed to be functional rather than luxurious. It was constructed from local stone, probably at great expense due to the cost of hiring skilled masons to work so far from their homes. It was not of the "high Philadelphia style" that the Shippens, judging from their homes in the city, were familiar with; instead, it was rather crude. The interior rooms lacked the ornamental embellishments typical of colonial mansions, such as elaborate crown moldings, carved mantelpieces, side and transom lights around doors, and plaster ceiling medallions and wall friezes. The Manor was of an unusual style, with a broad-gabled facade, asymmetric ports, two foot thick stone walls, and three immense but bulky chimneys. The ground floor consisted of a large hall, a parlor, kitchen, and two other rooms, one of which may

have served as an office for the furnace manager since it had a separate entrance. Upstairs there were two chambers.³¹

The distinguishing feature of the Manor, which also provides a clue to the intentions of the Shippen brothers when they built it, is the large second kitchen in the



The back of the Manor today. This was the 18c. front entrance. Door on right entered into the ironmaster's office.

cellar. The kitchen contains a large bake oven that is 5 feet wide and fueled from behind the hearth through an access in the room behind the kitchen. It is believed that slaves

³¹ Richard P. McCormick, *New Jersey from Colony to State 1609-1789* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), 90; Boyer, *Early Forges*, 6; telephone interview with Jeff Martinson, architect in charge of restoration of the Manor, October 1993. Boyer's description of elaborate grounds and gardens applies to Shippen Manor after 1801. Susan Shippen Roberdeau (William II's granddaughter) and her husband, Isaac, added the addition at that time, as well as the crown moldings in the parlor, and possibly the porches. The Morris Robesons, who bought the Manor from the Roberdeaus in 1809, are said to have added the stone wall around the property, as well as wall-enclosed gardens. The Roberdeaus tried to establish an atmosphere of culture and elegance. Visitors recall Mrs. Roberdeau playing a piano - the first in town - accompanied by her husband on a German flute.

or indentured servants kept this oven in almost continuous operation, baking the bread necessary to feed a large number of workers. The room next to the kitchen is believed to have been the dining hall for the furnace workers and house servants. The ground outside the house was graded to permit exterior access doors in both of these cellar rooms. Another feature which supports this theory that the Manor served communal functions is the double front doors. One of the doors could have been designated for use by the workers since it opens into a small room that may have been the manager's office. Boyer's description of the typical ironmaster's mansion notes that "hospitality was expressed in everything about the house. The latch string was always out, and the workmen were expected to bring their troubles, cares, and anxieties to the master or manager for a solution."³² From the physical structure of the building the Manor can thus be interpreted to have encompassed two separate spheres; it served as the manager's residence, with private entrance and kitchen, and it also functioned as a dining hall and possibly a gathering place for workers and servants. If the social order of the furnace community was stratified, it was not so rigid as to preclude close contact.

A useful barometer by which to gauge the relationship between the Shippens and the villagers is the folklore and stories that were passed down from one generation to the next. The stories frequently provide a glimpse into the nature and degree of fraternization which occurred in the Manor and around the furnace hearth. Reverend Yount's *Bulletin*, particularly the stories written by George Scranton Humphrey that he reprinted, kept the legends alive and ensured that they would remain so even to the present. Humphrey worked at the Oxford Iron Company from 1875 to 1885, first as company clerk, and then as manager. During his tenure in Oxford he lived in the "old Shippen mansion," which was then being used as a boarding house for office clerks and the few female employees, as well as any visitors. His familiarity with the house is evident in the opening lines of two of his stories:

³² Boyer, 6.

Some years ago, when repair was being made to the old Manor House at Oxford there was discovered in a sort of recess between the heavy stone wall and the roof which rests upon it, a bundle of papers in an excellent state of preservation - covering the period 1741-1800.³³

The stories which follow are presented as though some contemporary of the Shippens is telling the tale. The stories engender a perception that the relationship between the "Old Man" and the villagers was warm and convivial. In one story Humphrey writes

The year's business at the Old Oxford Furnace had been prosperous and the people and the Manor house were in high spirits and ready to share their good nature, if not their profits, with the workmen whose labors at the mine, in charcoal pits, and furnace had contributed so largely to the season's success.

So the "Old Man," Humphrey continues, invited as many workers as could be spared from their duties to dine with him in the "big hall" and to enjoy various festivities. There was a great feast, rum and cider passed around, and after the meal, the chairs were brought together around the fire for pipe-smoking and storytelling. The Old Man's "kindly face beamed with good fellowship."³⁴

Another of Humphrey's stories begins with a preamble stating that it was written sometime between the French and Indian War and the Revolution by a Shippen relative. It refers to the "Old Man at the Manor" as the writer's "kind benefactor." The writer of the story was unable to sleep and, hearing the bell ring that signaled that the casting of iron

³³ George S. Humphrey, "A Jerseyman's Adventure During the American Revolution," Yount, ed., *Bulletin* 150 (15 January 1933); Humphrey, "Adventures of Nicholas Van Zandt," *Bulletin* 595 and 596 (18 and 25 January 1942). Humphrey, a native of Ithaca, NY, was named after his father's friend, George Scranton, one of the nineteenth-century owners of the Oxford Iron Company. Humphrey worked at Oxford when there would have been "old-timers" around who could tell him stories about the Shippens and the early days at the furnace that they might have learned from their parents or grandparents. He obviously had an ear for a story, and his renditions reflect a great deal of local color. Some of the stories in Yount's *Bulletin* must be read gingerly, however, for at times Humphrey's nineteenth-century and Yount's early twentieth-century biases are evident. For example, a story set in pre-Revolutionary days which purports to have been written by a contemporary, and contains a comment about those "hateful Republicans in Philadelphia," has obviously been embellished. Likewise, a story told by an Indian which moralizes about pollution and the destruction of woodlands has also been contrived. Reading between the lines of the stories, however, provides useful clues about life in old Oxford.

³⁴ Humphrey, "Hallowe'en at the Old Furnace," *Bulletin* 187 (29 October 1933).

was about to be made, he arose and went out to join the men around the warm hearth. The tale lends the impression that a member of the aristocratic Shippen family would not be averse to fraternizing with the "common" workers around the hearth.³⁵

Although it can never be determined with any degree of certainty, the "Old Man" of these stories is very likely based on Dr. William Shippen II. His brother, Joseph Shippen II, can be ruled out because he is always characterized in a very different fashion, albeit not entirely accurately. Local amateur historians and descendants of the Robesons, Axforths, and Shippens who recorded family histories without exception portrayed Joseph II as a spendthrift and social dandy who wasted his patrimony. Numerous sources maintain that he was bankrupted because of the Manor, which he was determined to have so that he could entertain his aristocratic friends from New York and Philadelphia in high style. George Bangert goes so far as to say that the Manor was the scene of grand hunts every summer, and during winter, "the old stone house would echo with the sounds of revelry as the guests warmed under the stimulating effect of the well-filled wine cellars." Clearly, "Gentleman Joe's" reputation grew larger than the truth. Randolph Klein's thorough study of the correspondence of all of the Shippen family members would have produced at least one reference to such extraordinary amusements at Oxford had they actually taken place, and he mentions nothing of the kind. Joseph II was a bit of a social dandy in his youth, but his decision to retire at a relatively young age to his country estate necessitated that he be very cautious with his expenditures. At his Germantown plantation he did style himself as a gentleman, but he was forced to do so within limits. He was anxious to sell his interests in the Oxford Furnace in order to finance his retirement and meet family obligations. It is unlikely that the Manor represented anything more to him

³⁵ Humphrey, "The Adventures of Nicholas Van Zandt," *Bulletin* 595 and 596 (18 and 25 December 1942). George Humphrey died in 1940. The *Bulletin* occasionally re-ran his stories, which had been appearing since 1931.

than a dwelling place for the managers and a temporary lodging place for himself or his brother should business require their presence.³⁶

There is greater likelihood that Dr. William Shippen II was the paradigm for the kind, beneficent "Old Man." He was admired for his charity toward the poor, his service to his city and state, and his unpretentious simplicity. Unlike his brother, he did not characterize himself as a gentleman, and no evidence exists which would indicate that he used his ownership of the furnace to aggrandize his position within the community. It would be expected that people would recognize and be familiar with him, for his fifty-two year tenure as co-owner and then sole owner of the furnace would have afforded him ample opportunity to make acquaintances and form close associations among all segments of Oxford society. There is also the possibility that Joseph W. Shippen was the "Old Man" of the furnace. That he was only thirty-three years of age when he arrived in Oxford makes this suggestion less likely. Attempts to guess the true identity of the "Old Man" can never go beyond pure speculation, and miss the significance of Humphrey's stories. The "Old Man" was probably an amalgamation of one or more owners or managers of the furnace who left a positive impression upon the people of Oxford. The stories and folklore they passed down to succeeding generations attest to the spirit of good will and community effort that prevailed over the hardships of everyday life encountered by everyone.

³⁶ Yount, *Bulletin* 332 (25 October 1936), 654 (7 March 1943), 660 (18 April 1943); Bangert, "The Shippens of New Jersey," 43.

III.

"Born in a tuyere arch"

The Workers of Oxford Furnace

The furnace community at Oxford was at first little more than an isolated outpost inhabited by a predominately all-male population comprised of both skilled and unskilled laborers, as well as a number of indentured servants. It was they who staffed the furnace and laid the foundation for what would eventually become a busy community of furnace workers, miners, woodcutters, charcoal and lime burners, wagon drivers, blacksmiths, carpenters, millers, and farmers whose labors were necessary to support the ironworks. The early bachelor-workers were housed in "huts," probably of rough logs, near the plant. The absence of women and the comforts of a real home made the dining hall at the Manor essential. When families did arrive, log cabins were still the normal abode. Peter Wacker notes the prevalence of log cabins in West Jersey, and observes that the persistence of log cabins and barns after initial settlement indicates "minimal clearance and a general lack of improvements upon the property that contained them." In Oxford, most workers did not own their homes and therefore had little incentive for improvement. The cabins were company property and rent was deducted from the workers' accounts at the company store. Wacker's assertion that log cabins associated with ironworks "have no cultural significance" is reflective of the lack of ownership in a company town. Also, logs were readily available in a village where woodcutters toiled from dawn till dusk chopping down trees in order to maintain a constant supply of charcoal for the furnace. Thus, the style of the shelters and homes built

by Oxford's early settlers was often dictated less by national origin and custom than by pragmatism.³⁷

A document of an agreement made on June 20, 1765 between William Shippen II, on behalf of himself and his brother Joseph II, and Robert and James Anderson sheds light on the nature of the log cabins in Oxford. The agreement states that the Shippens grant permission to the Andersons to settle on a 100-acre section of the "furnace tract" for a term of five years. In lieu of rent, the Andersons were to make designated improvements to the land, including building a "good log house" and barn, also of logs, both 20 by 18 feet. The house was to have a stone chimney, and both buildings were to be underpinned with at least two feet of stone. Furthermore, they

shall plant an Orchard containing One hundred Apple Trees and Fence the same round with good split Rails of Oak or Chestnut the second Year[,] and take care to repair said Orchard with Apple Trees as any of the first hundred may Fail or be destroyed[,] . . . and clear and till Eighty Acres of Row Land and clear and make at least Six Acres of Meadow Ground and sow the same with Timothy Grass seed or Clover seed and mow the said six acres of Meadow Ground every year . . . [and the Shippens] may at any time . . . cut and carry away off the premisses[sic] as much Cord Wood as they shall choose . . .³⁸

The Andersons were obviously not furnace workers living close to the village center, but the description of the size of the house they were to build is similar to other company-owned homes. It can also be learned from this document how large landowners like the Shippens improved their lands. At no cost to themselves, their land was cleared, dwelling houses and barns were raised, and farmland was prepared. They not only reaped the reward of having a well-appointed farm to sell after the expiration of the lease, but they

³⁷ Wacker, *The Musconetcong Valley*, 82. Yount's *Bulletin* 644 (27 December 1942) provides descriptions of where many of these old log cabins stood as late as the 1880s. Besides the ones in town, there was a cluster of them along Axford Avenue through Syke's Gap, where the charcoalers worked. In September, 1993 a colonial era log cabin was discovered on Jonestown Road. Hidden behind a newer facade of clapboard, and stuccoed on the inside, the discovery was made when one corner of the dilapidated 16 by 18 foot building fell away and revealed the notched and hewn logs underneath. The Warren County Cultural and Heritage Commission hopes to reconstruct the log cabin on the Shippen Manor property.

³⁸ Document of Agreement, *Tench Coxe Papers*, Oversize Folder 1761-1765, HSP.

also had timber wood cut for their furnace. Because the Andersons were yeomen farmers and not regular furnace employees, they traded at the company store on a limited basis. Robert sold 22 1/2 pounds of veal to the store in 1759, performed occasional work once, and was credited a total of L2.13.0. James cut cordwood and performed odd jobs for a credit of L25.18.3 1/4. Like other farmers, they may have earned additional credits by selling surplus grain and foodstuffs to the company store, grazing company animals on their pasture, or hiring out their wagons and teams. Because cash was seldom exchanged, it would seem unlikely that the Andersons would be able to save enough money to one day purchase farms of their own. By hard work, however, they did eventually attain the status of freeholders. In 1773 Robert was assessed for 60 acres of land valued at L4.16.0, and he owned 7 head of horses and cattle. James owned 43 acres valued at L3.9.0, and 3 head of livestock.³⁹

By 1765, when the Andersons decided to rent a farm with hopes of one day owning land of their own, Oxford had taken on the complexion of a small community due to the arrival of women and families. It also became a center for county trade. For the Andersons and others among the general public who were not directly involved with the furnace, the presence of the company store, the county-wide trade generated by the volume of people passing through the village, and the access to the services of such artisans as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, millers, and carpenters, were a bonus. Cash for goods and services was seldom exchanged among area residents because the furnace's company store functioned as a clearing house for all manner of transactions between both employees and the general public. Employees of the furnace, farmers and hunters who sold provisions to the company store, and independent craftsmen or laborers who performed occasional services for the furnace were paid in credit at the company store, which was

³⁹ Wacker, in *Musconetcong Valley*, 145, notes that small tracts of land were generally not available for average freeholders to purchase until after the 1760s. The Proprietors surveyed and divided the land among themselves, and then sold large tracts to wealthy acquaintances and investors like the Shippens.

recorded into the ledger book by the company clerk. Store purchases and debts to other persons were similarly recorded.⁴⁰

The Federal Census of 1810 is the first for which data on Oxford is available. At that time, there were 2,381 white inhabitants in the township.⁴¹ Men of working age (over the age of sixteen) numbered 594. There were only 7 more males than females, indicating that by 1810 Oxford was no longer a bachelor outpost and had become a community of families. In the absence of pre-Federal census records, the Oxford Furnace ledger book and William Shippen's day book provide clues to the early population of the village. For the years 1759-1761 covered in the ledger, about 135 persons, including both employees and members of the general public, had active accounts. A total of approximately 390 persons had either active or past accounts with balances carried forward.⁴² A very rough estimate of the village population can be obtained from a rather unorthodox source - the company store's inventory. The ledger book shows that in August, 1759, Joseph Shippen sent 56 pairs of men's shoes and 10 pairs of women's shoes up from Philadelphia. William Shippen's daybook indicates that in July, 1767 he sent 47 pairs of "strong shoes" and 3 pairs of women's shoes to the company store. The number of women present, as well as the actual population, may have been more than these numbers would seem to indicate. There were at least three other stores at which Oxford's non-employees could trade. Aaron and Sam Depuis operated a store across the Delaware River in Shawnee,

⁴⁰ George S. Humphrey worked at the Oxford Iron Company from 1875 to 1885, first as company clerk, and then as manager. His recollections of his days in charge of the "M to Z account book" (another clerk had "A to L"), printed in Yount, *Bulletin* 970 (29 October 1949), show that the system had changed very little in a hundred years. He recalled that there was "never a payday at Oxford," and that employees' accounts were debited for such expenses as store purchases, rent, board bills, doctor's bills, train tickets, and even church pew rents. On holidays small amounts of cash were given out, \$5 to married men and \$2 to bachelors. Humphrey humorously notes that workers often resorted to subterfuge in an attempt to get a little pocket money; a "sick grandmother" was a frequent appeal. When the company went bankrupt in 1878, the receiver established the first regular cash paydays in Oxford.

⁴¹ This excludes the 53 classified as "all other free except Indians not taxed" (free blacks) and the 36 slaves. These will be discussed in the last chapter.

⁴² Liber Q of the Oxford Furnace ledger books (cf. footnote 14) is the only extant volume of the ledgers. Estimates of Oxford's total population cannot be extrapolated from the number of account holders because it is impossible to determine how many men were bachelors, how many were only seasonal residents with homes and families elsewhere, and how many lived in neighboring townships.

Pennsylvania. In 1761 Sam Depuis was the largest debtor to the Oxford Company with L84.10.3-3/4 outstanding. He may have been provisioning his store through the Shippens's. As previously noted, Oxford residents traded with the Moravians at Bethlehem. Finally, Matthew Lowrey, with his brothers John and Clark, operated a river transport business between Oxford and Philadelphia, carrying goods not only for the Shippens but for their own retail business as well.⁴³

On the 1773 Oxford tax ratables list, 196 men and 1 widow were enumerated. Of that number, 152 men were freeholders. Widow Gibbs and 44 of the men did not own land and were assessed only for the heads of cattle and horses they owned. Of the 44 men, 22 were sons or relatives (sharing the same surname) of men who were property holders in Oxford. The 22 men without landowning relations were either tenants or boarders who lived on the property of others but were permitted to keep their own animals. Knowlton Township was a part of Oxford until it was set apart in 1764. Because a considerable number of furnace employees and account holders lived there, it is also useful to examine Knowlton's 1773 tax ratables. Two hundred men were enumerated in that township, 152 of whom owned land. Of the 48 who were assessed only for livestock, 21 were sons or relatives of landowners sharing the same surname; 27 were renters or hired men with their own animals.

A comparison of the Oxford Furnace ledger book for the years 1759-1761 with the 1773 tax ratables lists for Oxford and Knowlton shows 55 names in common. Of these, 52 of the men who had accounts with the company owned land, or other valuable property

⁴³ "William Shippen Day Book," *Shippen Family Papers*, Microfilm collection, Reel 15, container 27, Library of Congress. All subsequent references to Shippen's daybook will be to this collection. A memorandum of sales between Joseph Shippen and Aaron and Sam Depuis, 1744 and 1746, *Shippen Family Papers*, Microfilm collection, Reel 10, LOC, indicates that the Depuises purchased large quantities of cloth from Joseph Shippen in Philadelphia. Shippen was acting as an agent for an import firm, receiving a commission for the sale of goods off the ship *Ranger*. Aaron Depuis had been a member of the Germantown synod and may have become acquainted with Joseph Shippen there. The Lowreys evidently did a good business in Oxford. On the 1773 tax list, John Lowrey was assessed for a store, 2 gristmills, a sawmill, and 100 acres. Matthew's son John ("Captain Jack") was a Durham boat pilot known for his skillful navigation of Foul Rift. Snell, 533.

such as a mill, twelve years later. Of the three who did not own land and were assessed only for livestock, two were sons or relatives of a landowner. The third was the Widow Gibbs.⁴⁴ The following table gives a breakdown of the acreage owned by account holders:

NAMES IN OXFORD FURNACE LEDGER AND 1773 TAX LISTS			
# Acres	Oxford	Knowlton	Total
0	3	0	3
1-49	5	6	11
50-99	5	7	12
100-199	13	3	16
200+ acres	7	6	13
TOTAL with land	30	22	52
saw mills	1	1	2
grist mills	3	0	3
stores	1	0	1

It must be remembered that the Oxford Furnace ledger contains the names of both employees and non-employees. The latter group consisted of men who lived locally and traded at the store. They could be farmers who on one or two occasions performed an odd job for the company such as cutting wood, carting supplies, lending their teams, or helping with repairs. They may have sold game, hides, surplus grain, produce, or meat to the store, receiving credit in return. Although it cannot be said with absolute certainty, of the 55 names in common between the two documents under discussion, non-employees outnumber the regular employees 49 to 6. This does not, however, reflect as negatively on furnace employment as a means of attaining freeholder status as it might at first appear. It

⁴⁴ Servants and slaves as tax ratable property will be discussed in the final chapter. One former employee owned just 4 acres, but was also assessed for a gristmill and 4 head of livestock. The Widow Gibbs on the tax list was counted among the 55 names in common, assuming that she had been married to one of the two men named Gibbs in the ledger. Neither reappears on the tax list. She was not a landowner in 1773; her assessment was only for 6 head of livestock. Of the 55 names in common with the ledger and tax lists, 33 were from Oxford, 22 from Knowlton.

must be remembered that a span of a decade or more lies between the two documents. There are surnames on the tax list (the later of the two documents) which correspond to counterparts in the ledger. Thus, former employees' sons, at least in some cases, had inherited their fathers' land. The significance of these numbers is that it demonstrates that the Shippens' economic hold on the community was not oppressive. Although prosperity was not guaranteed via furnace work alone, employment at the furnace did not necessarily lead to peonage either. Conversely, *not* working for the Shippens did not spell isolation and financial ruin.⁴⁵ It has already been noted that the Lowreys prospered from their river transport business. They also ran a store in direct competition with the Oxford Furnace company store, and John Lowrey was assessed for two grist mills and a saw mill as well. John McMurtrie, Joseph McKey (Mackey), Major Robert Hoops and Robert Patterson owned mills on the Pequest River in the section of Oxford that is now Belvidere. Charles Croxall built a grist mill on Beaver Brook in the Sarepta section of Oxford in 1760. The Swayzes, who sold provisions to the company store, owned grist and saw mills in what is now Hope, near the grist mill built by the Moravians in 1770. Cornelius Alberson, Jacob Putts, Frederick Limbock, and William Nice owned mills in Knowlton on the Paulinskill and Centreville Creeks in 1773. All of these mills were in competition with the grist and saw mills owned by the Oxford Furnace Company of the Shippens.⁴⁶ It was not only store or mill owners who prospered in Oxford. There were some farmers who prospered and became "plantation men." John Axford, Jr., son of the pioneer John Axford, died a

⁴⁵ This is in opposition to the situation Stephen Innes found in Springfield, Massachusetts in *Labor in a New Land* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 18. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Pynchons exerted "strong financial claims over more than half the town's individual citizens" through employment, extension of credit, or lease of land, animals, or equipment. Not engaging in a "patron-client relationship" with the Pynchons left a person without a safety net during times of financial hardship, and almost always spelled ruin. Innes sees these patron-client relationships as the transitional link between the Old World manorial system and the emergent capitalist individualism of post-Revolutionary America.

⁴⁶ Innes observes that "as on the English manor, the most symbolic expression of local preeminence was ownership of the community's mills," *Ibid.*, 34. The Shippens did not exert such exclusive control in Oxford, where a number of merchant-entrepreneurs were both independent and successful.

wealthy man in 1809, leaving a personal estate valued at \$2,661, including 3 slaves.⁴⁷ Other prosperous families included the Blairs, Mackeys, Dilts (Dailts), and Howeys.

There are several factors contributing to the low incidence of land ownership among company account holders. That only six men identifiable as regular employees eventually owned land is not as bleak an indictment on the Shippens or furnace occupations as it might at first appear. The disparity partly reflects the nuances of a furnace's occupational hierarchy. The upper echelon of the occupational hierarchy would represent the furnace management: the ironmaster, clerk, and founder. These were the highest paid men at the furnace, and therefore the most likely to purchase property. Militating against this logic, however, is the reality that these were also the men most likely to exhibit a transient lifestyle. As highly skilled workers they were in great demand, with the result that they often changed employment when better offers at other furnaces arose. They also became owners or part-owners of their own furnaces or forges. Most of these men did own property and establish permanent homes, but at a distance from their place of employment. Their routine was to leave their families for the duration of the blast season and then return home for the winter.

This is especially true of the ironmasters. They were men of enterprise and ambition, with access to capital with which to put their vision into action. Jonathan Robeson built Changewater Forge after becoming associated with Joseph Shippen at Oxford, knowing a steady supply of pig iron would always be available. Then he built a home at Kingwood in Hunterdon County, half-way between his Philadelphia home and the furnace and forge. Jacob Starn, the ironmaster under William Shippen, built a forge at Greenwich before moving over to Oxford. He subsequently bought Robeson's Changewater Forge. Only Maurice Robeson, the acting ironmaster during his father's absence, ever purchased property in Oxford. When Maurice died in 1761, his father advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to sell his estate. Included were a 300 acre

⁴⁷ Jonathan Axford Will, 1809, New Jersey Archives, 1196 S.

plantation in Oxford, 200 acres of woodland adjoining the plantation, and 250 acres adjoining the Moravian settlement at Hope.⁴⁸ Thus, of the three masters at the furnace, only one purchased property in Oxford. This result was not a function of their ability to buy. Their skills and financial worth simply enabled them to pursue projects that resulted in an impermanent relationship with Oxford.

The second of the top-level positions at Oxford Furnace, that of clerk and ironmaster's assistant, was at one time filled by Richard Shackleton. The Oxford Furnace ledger indicates that in May, 1761 Shackleton was credited L183.6.8 for his services over a twenty-two month period. Shackleton did not fare well on that salary though. His account for 1760 shows him with debts of L179.3.7 1/4 and credits of just L103.13.4 1/4. That same year he was sued for debt by several parties and jailed by the sheriff. On November 20, 1760 he wrote to Joseph and William Shippen in Philadelphia from the Log Gaol, telling them that they should "order some other body to do [their] business as I do not know when I shall be released . . . I hope some thing will be done that I may have my liberty and [be] released for I have had so much trouble in my mind that I could not do any business as I ought to have done." Shackleton beseeched the Shippens to "consider [his] poor family" because he feared that they might be "turned out of door naked." He also informed the owners that he had left Clark in charge of the store and that "Smith and Cain [the founders] will take care to carry on so long as they can blow." It appears from the letter that Shackleton's troubles may have been linked to the furnace company's business problems. As the bookkeeper, he may have juggled personal and company accounts in an effort to keep things afloat and forestall a shutdown. He also warned the Shippens that he feared that "the sheriff will level on the furnace effects very soon." Whatever the exact nature of the complaint was, the Shippens did not hold Shackleton accountable. The

⁴⁸ New Jersey Archives, First Series, *Newspaper Extracts* XXIX, 378. Maurice Robeson's estate also included 200 acres in White Rocks. His father acted as co-executor (with his brother-in-law, John Rockhill) because his 6 children were minors. Maurice Robeson's residence in Oxford was interrupted by a brief sojourn in Orange County, New York, where he built that colony's first iron furnace.

disarray at the furnace had William Shippen concerned though. In December, 1760 William II wrote to his brother Joseph that "Cain says that Mr. Robeson won't pay my Debts until you pay him, except what he has engaged to the sheriff to pay," and he reminded Joseph that "I have advanced a great deal more than my part of all the demands up there." Finally, William lamented that other business precluded his going to Oxford to handle the problems, concluding "all that is at [the] Furnace will go to wreck if I don't go up." It has already been noted that Maurice Robeson came to Shackleton's aid and lent him L55.16.9. Whether or not that satisfied all of the complaints against the furnace is not clear, but the trouble eventually passed. It took Shackleton almost three years to repay his debt to Maurice.⁴⁹

The third management position was that of founder, of which one author wrote:

. . . no one was competent to manage the practical end of blast furnace work unless he was "born in a tuyere arch." . . . the mysteries could only be solved and handled by a man starting as a laborer and working up through the various positions pertaining to the stock-house and cast-house - first helper, keeper, and finally founder . . . The founders were men separated by the forces of natural selection from their fellow workmen, possessing more than ordinary natural intelligence and good judgment . . .⁵⁰

The founder was responsible for the hour-by-hour supervision of the furnace. Some furnaces employed two founders. This was the practice at Oxford. Where there was only one, he was assisted by a keeper, and between the two, the furnace was watched around the clock, the keeper usually taking the second blast, or night shift. The founder watched the color of the flames emerging from the furnace stack to ensure that the proper charge

⁴⁹ Richard Shackleton to Joseph and William Shippen, *Tench Coxe Papers*, Box 2, large folder 1753-1760, inner folder 12, HSP; William Shippen to Joseph Shippen, Dec. 24, 1760, *Tench Coxe Papers*, Box 2, large folder 1753-1760, inner folder 10, HSP. Walker, in *Hopewell Village*, 19, observes that "the history of Hopewell Furnace was replete with crises . . . The sheriff was a frequent visitor." Thus the financial difficulties experienced at Oxford were not uncommon among iron furnaces. At his death in 1790, Shackleton's meager estate was valued at L29.3.6. Cf. footnote 17. Sussex County's Log Gaol was located in the portion of Hardwick that is now the village of Johnsonburg in Frelinghuysen Township. In 1754 Maurice Robeson and the tenant farmer James Anderson served on the committee to locate a site for the county jail. Snell, 152.

⁵⁰ E. S. Cook, quoted in Walker, 232.

of charcoal, ore and flux had been loaded, checked the color and consistency of the molten iron to check its progress, and determined when it was time to draw off the slag and pour the iron. He was one of the highest paid men at the furnace, receiving pay commensurate with the amount and quality of the pig iron and castings produced. One of the first founders at Oxford was a man named Cane. Sven Roseen made his acquaintance in 1748, noting in his diary for December 22 that among the attendees at a service were "an Irish Catholic, by the name of Cane (Cain), - the founder at Robeson's Furnace, who afterward confessed his unbelief."⁵¹ This was probably the same Cain who was referred to twelve years later in Shackleton's and William Shippen's letters. Walker observes that the founder guarded trade secrets, passing them down from father to son.⁵² This is true of at least one of the founders at Oxford. The company ledger shows a "John Smith, Founder" and a John Smith, Jr.. In 1761, the elder Smith's account balanced at L386.7.7 3/4, one of the highest sums in the ledger after the owners, ironmasters, and the clerk Richard Shackleton. The younger Smith also had an active account, receiving one credit "by work" of L53.12.8, perhaps for functioning as his father's assistant or apprentice. The elder Smith prospered at his job as founder. In 1773 he was taxed for 103 acres and 7 head of livestock, demonstrating that another person in the furnace's management purchased land and established a home in Oxford. From the ledger it can be ascertained that he supplemented his income by selling provisions - veal and 336 pounds of bacon - to the company store.

In William Shippen's daybook, after entries dated 1769 and 1771, is an undated memo in which he calculated operating expenses and anticipated revenues for the furnace.⁵³ The memo is valuable because it gives an idea of the number of semi-skilled and

⁵¹ *Dansbury Diaries*, 31, 74. Roseen alternated spellings of the name, noting that the following June he again met Cain. The company ledger shows that John Cain was credited L46.11.6 in April, 1761; less than John Smith's pay of L67.1.4 (for an undisclosed amount of iron or time period).

⁵² Walker, *Hopewall Village*, 233.

⁵³ The memo includes expenses for a new mill (L300), bellows repair (L100), casting house and coal house (L100), keeping for 10 horses, wagons, carts, and food.

unskilled workers he intended to employ at his furnace. Included in the operating expenses of L2,363 were:

a Manager and Clerk @ p/ann[um]	L140
Founders wages 600 tons piggs @	L150
“ 50 tons castings @	L100
2 Fillers @ 90/ 8 mo[nths]	L72
2 Barkmen @ 60/ 8 mo	L48
3 good carters @ 80/	L96
2 laborers @ 60/	L48
woman servants wages	L15
wood at 2/3 cutting	L460
coaling “ [burning wood for charcoal]	
1800 loads @ 10/6 (2/ for wood)	L565
1000 ton of ore digging @ 2/6	L125
70 load limestone digging	L5

In order to place Oxford's labor force into a meaningful context, it is useful to compare these figures with those for other furnaces during the same period. Arthur C. Bining observes that the number of men required to run a furnace was not very large.⁵⁴ He found that the average furnace staff consisted of:

a clerk @ L70 - 120 per year
 2 founders @ 2/6 per ton pigs, or L12 per month each, plus
 @ 20/ per ton castings with molders, or
 @ 40/ per ton castings if poured by founder, less
 founder's pay to keeper to assist 2 guttermen
 2-3 fillers @ L5 per month each
 a few laborers @ L2-4 per month each, or L1-2 with board
 1 potter (molder) for few week's work
 @ 4/ per hundredweight, or
 @ 6p per piece flaskware

In addition to the furnace workers there were also various full and part-time occupations:

12 colliers @ 11/8 per 100 bushels
 miners @ 3/6 per ton, avg. 1-2 tons per day = 3/6 - 7/ per day
 woodcutters @ 2/6 per cord, avg. 3 cords per day = 7/6 per day
 blacksmiths @ L7 per month
 teamsters @ L20 per year with board

⁵⁴ Arthur C. Bining, *Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century*, 1938 (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1987), 69, 106-111.

As will be seen below, Oxford's labor force was comparable to what Bining describes. The absence of molders from William Shippen's memo is not unusual. Bining notes that at furnaces where heavy, open-cast items such as firebacks and stoveplates were made in addition to the pig iron, it was usual for the founders or founder and keeper to supervise the work. Itinerant molders traveled from one furnace to the next, staying long enough to stock the company store's inventory of smaller flaked ware items such as pots and kettles. If they worked regularly, skilled molders earned a little more than the founders.

William Shippen's memo indicates that he expected to sell 600 tons piggs [*sic*] at L8 a ton, and another 50 tons of castings at L20 a ton, for gross proceeds of L5,800. These were ambitious figures. An accounting of Oxford Furnace's production was made for the three blasts from 1761 through 1763. The results must have been a disappointment for William Shippen. In 1761 Oxford produced 87 tons pig iron and 3 tons cast iron. In 1762, 310 tons pigs and 50 tons castings were made, and the results for 1763 were 243 tons pigs and 41 tons castings. The three year total of 640 tons of pig iron and 94 tons castings netted the company L6,241.8.0.⁵⁵ William Shippen II personally sold some of the iron made at Oxford to acquaintances in Philadelphia. His day book contains numerous entries recording the sale of firebacks and stoveplates. These were sold by weight, with the ornately decorated firebacks averaging between 100 and 500 pounds.⁵⁶

Working alongside the founder and keeper were two fillers, one for each 12-hour blast. Fillers were assisted by nondescript laborers who wheeled cartloads of stock (charcoal, ore, and flux) from the stock house to the bridge house, a routine referred to as "putting up the charge." The furnace was charged every half hour with 15 bushels of

⁵⁵ *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 14 (1890) 201. It is interesting to note the decreased production for 1761 - after the financial difficulties experienced by William Shippen and Richard Shackleton in the last months of 1760. Bining, in *Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture*, 159, found that the price of pig iron in 1760 was L7 a ton at the furnace and L9 a ton in Philadelphia (transportation costs were factored into the city prices). By 1789 the city prices were L8 a ton for pig iron and L20-30 a ton for castings.

⁵⁶ In October, 1766, Shippen sold firebacks weighing 104 and 225 pounds to Richard Bache and Samuel Burge. Firebacks are perhaps one of the more famous products of colonial iron furnaces. They often bore the date and place of manufacture on their faces. Oxford's included the coat of arms of King George III.

charcoal, 400-500 pounds of iron ore, and 30-40 pounds of limestone. Filling was a hazardous job with the highest absentee rate of all of the furnace occupations. The fillers were prone to burns and accidents, as well as to illness because they passed back and forth between the extreme heat of the stack and the cold open end of the bridge house. Fillers were not considered to be skilled workers, but once trained, they were indispensable. Since scales were not used until the second quarter of the nineteenth century, their "practiced eye" was the only means of charging the furnace with the proper proportions of stock. Walker notes that filler's wages were higher than for common laborers and below those of the more highly skilled furnace workers.⁵⁷ At Oxford in the 1760s, John McAdee was credited L7.2.4 for filling the furnace for two months and 1 day. He may have been substituting for a sick or otherwise absent filler, for the pay he received was very low. Had he worked for 8 months at the same rate of pay he would have earned only L28.9.2, far below the L36 in William Shippen's memo and the L40 Bining estimated. McAdee supplemented his income by cutting wood, earning L9.10.0 for 68 cords in 1759.

Blacksmiths were found among the skilled workers at the furnace, although they were usually not considered to be regular employees of the company. They performed their services independently, for the furnace and for the general public as well. They made hardware, repaired and sharpened tools, and shod the workhorses. Walker observes that their shop, like the furnace hearth in winter, was a social center for the men and boys of the village. An early blacksmith in Oxford was Edward "Ned" Robeson. His shop was in the Knowlton vicinity near the Delaware Water Gap. The missionary Roseen noted in 1749 that he came through the gap in the Blue Mountain, crossed the river, and came to Ned Robeson's house where there were many God-fearing women in the neighborhood, including Robeson's wife Elinore, and others at the McMuries and Howees. Robeson may have also run a ferry across the Delaware because Roseen twice noted crossing the river at Edward Robeson's ferry for a 5 pence toll. He evidently prospered by his trades.

⁵⁷ Walker, 141, 236.

His will, probated in 1765, indicates that he owned plantations on both sides of the river as well as a personal estate valued at L382.12.9 Andrew Waggoner's will indicates that he was a blacksmith in Knowlton when he died in 1788. He owned 200 acres in 1773. The Oxford Furnace ledger indicates that Philip McDeed performed smithwork, as did Eleazar Smith, who earned L23.19.6 in 1760, and an additional L43.2.6 by cutting cordwood. At his death in 1790, Eleazar left an estate valued at L171.15.0, including "a quantity of iron," 25 pounds of iron, and a set of smith's tools.⁵⁸

Unskilled laborers were at the bottom of the hierarchy of furnace occupations. Except for guttermen, these jobs were the most numerous in terms of the number of hands needed. Guttermen worked one or two to a blast, raking the sand beds in the casting arch and digging the sows (main gutters) and pigs (side channels) into which the iron flowed when it was tapped by the founder. Large numbers of colliers, miners, and teamsters worked long hours to keep the furnace supplied with the necessary ingredients. Colliers had to be very experienced in order to turn out high quality charcoal. They lived in huts in the forest because their coaling pits needed constant surveillance, lest they flare up and consume the wood instead of slowly smoldering. Sven Roseen mentions meeting an Oxford collier named Gammel.⁵⁹ A later collier was Michael Welch, who earned L5.19.0 for 34 coal baskets at 3/6 each. Welch supplemented his collier's income by cutting cordwood but was in debt to the company for L28 at the end of 1760. According to his memo, William Shippen needed three good carters. Philip Panter and James Hannah performed this job during the years covered by the ledger. Panter "wheeled cordwood" on two occasions. In July, 1759 Hannah earned 6 shillings by "halling a load of Boards from

⁵⁸ Walker, 237; *Dansbury Diaries*, 71, 64, 58, 7; New Jersey Archives, *Abstracts of Wills* XXXIII, 357; XXXII, 214. Edward Robeson's ferry is often confused with the Foul Rift ferry associated with "Robeson's Furnace." Edward Robeson left a 200 acre plantation on the Jersey side of the river to his daughter Mary Albertson and a 250 acre plantation on the Pennsylvania side to daughter Sarah Lowrey, wife of John Lowrey (of Matthew Lowrey & Co).

⁵⁹ *Dansbury Diaries*, 78.

Pattersons” and 12 shillings for carting. He was a full-time laborer at the furnace, regularly receiving credits of between 6 and 14 shillings “for work.”

At the very bottom of the furnace hierarchy were the woodcutters, the most labor-intensive occupation with the highest number of employees. Twelve men were listed under the cordwood account in the ledger. Nineteen more, including farmers and men who had other jobs at the furnace, supplemented their incomes by cutting wood on a part-time basis, receiving 2/6 per cord for their labor. John McSimmons, Patrick McDeed, John McCollister, Henry McCloskey, Stephen Ward, Jeromus Taylor, and William Moore cut wood for a living in order to provide the 5,000-6,000 cords of wood needed annually. Two men who cut wood on a part-time basis, William Goodwine and Conrad Woolweaver, eventually owned plantations of 100 acres each.

**PERSONAL ESTATES VALUES FOR DECEDENTS IN OXFORD AND KNOWLTON
1750-1800**

ESTATE VALUE (pounds)	BEFORE 1782		AFTER 1782	
	#	%	#	%
0-99	20	39.2	11	29.7
100-199	8	15.7	15	40.5
200-499	13	25.5	5	13.5
500-999	6	11.8	5	13.5
1000+	4	7.8	1	2.7
TOTAL	51		37	

Note: shaded area represents majority of inventories reviewed

The economic status of the furnace community *in general* can be viewed by examining personal estate inventory values for decedents in Oxford and Knowlton. The table above demonstrates that 54.9% of inventories taken before and during the

Revolution and 70.3% of post-Revolution inventories were valued at under L200.⁶⁰ It is evident that the majority of the residents in the furnace community were of modest means. This was not an aberration from the norm, however, as residents in many parts of rural America experienced similar circumstances, including post-war poverty. The low estate values seen here cannot be fairly attributed to the presence of the furnace in the community; if anything, they are an essay on rural America more than on the furnace. Oxford's farmers, who also comprised a large percentage of the lowest tier of furnace employees by virtue of the occasional or part-time labor they performed, received the greatest representation among the inventories counted.


The limited evidence that is available makes it unwise to draw broad conclusions regarding the economic impact that Oxford Furnace had upon its employees and community. It has been noted that the lapse of more than a decade between the company ledger and the tax list causes the number of employees who owned land to appear smaller than it probably was. The number might be increased to give a truer indication of land ownership by including sons of employees who in 1773 owned land inherited from fathers who were former furnace workers. The fact that semi-skilled, unskilled, and part-time workers were the most likely to buy land, establish residency, and have their wills probated in Oxford partially explains the low acreage and estate values. It also demonstrates that at the very least, furnace employment was not a dead end. It seldom led to prosperity, but it did not condemn a worker to poverty either. Finally, the instances of long-term employment and property ownership indicate that some degree of satisfaction must have existed among furnace workers.

⁶⁰ Wills and Inventories, Sussex County, New Jersey Archives, microfilm collection; New Jersey Archives, *Abstracts of Wills*. Land owned by the decedents was not included in personal estate values. Inventories were categorized before and after the Revolution to determine if post-Revolution inflation and poverty made an impact. Inventories counted were randomly selected and not limited to furnace workers.

IV.

“I give you joy of the late declaration of Independence”

Oxford in the Revolution

he citizens of Oxford were ready to answer the call of duty when hostilities broke out between the American colonies and Great Britain. The men of the village had established a tradition of military service in the local militia two decades earlier when they were called upon to defend themselves in the French and Indian War. General Braddock's defeat at Fort Duquesne in 1755 sent reverberations that were felt in Oxford and throughout the Minisink Valley.⁶¹ Then the amicable relations between the white settlers of Sussex County and the local Delaware Indians became tainted by fear and were finally shattered by violence.

Sven Roseen's diary underscores the harmonious co-existence of settlers and Indians prior to 1755. He records passing by "wikwams" near the Van Ettens' property in the vicinity of Foul Rift. There was also a cluster of wikwams on Sam Green's property where he occasionally stopped to visit and to proselytize. Some of the Indians apparently accepted Roseen's message of salvation and were baptized.⁶² Further evidence of comity is provided by the Oxford Furnace ledger book. It indicates that at least two Indians, "Indian Philip" and Moses Tatamy, traded at the company store. Philip made one purchase at the store in 1759 and then sold provisions - perhaps game or fur - to the store on three occasions. He is probably the same "Indian Philip" who Roseen credited with saving the

⁶¹ The region known as the Minisink encompasses both sides of the Delaware River valley from Port Jervis (Machackemeck) to the Water Gap. Although Oxford's current boundary lines fall outside the Minisink, they did extend into the region until 1764. See map in appendix.

⁶² *Dansbury Diaries*, 51, 57-58. The diary erroneously states that the Indians were Mohicans. This is either an error on Roseen's part due lack of familiarity with his assigned territory, or a misassumption by the translator. The Indians of the Minisink were Delawares (Lenni Lenape in the Indian tongue, also called Shawnees or Minsi by Euro-Americans), related to the Iroquois (Mengwe, corrupted to "Mingoes" by white men). By the terms of the treaty made at the Great Council held in Easton, PA in 1758, the Delawares withdrew westward to join their Mingo brethren on the Susquehanna River.

lives of five white men who had fallen into the Delaware River. Moses Tatamy was a Delaware sachem who was present at the Great Indian Council at Easton, Pennsylvania in 1758. His son, William Tatamy, served as translator for the Presbyterian missionary David Brainerd while he labored for the gospel in the area from 1744 to 1747.⁶³

The three years between the fall of Duquesne in 1755 and the Great Council of 1758 were marked by sporadic outbreaks of bloodshed. Although the townships north of Oxford, particularly Pahaquarry and Walpack, took the brunt of Indian attacks, reports of massacres incited fear and hysteria that reached the furnace community. The men joined the local militia and helped defend the several forts along the Delaware River in the northern part of the county. In November, 1755 Oxford's Captain John Anderson led 50-60 Jerseymen across the Delaware to Easton, Pennsylvania in answer to Mayor William Parson's call for aid. This same unit is also credited with defending Westfall's blockhouse on the Neversink during a skirmish.⁶⁴ Peace was restored to the Minisink Valley in 1758. The Great Indian Council held at Easton, Pennsylvania formally ended hostilities between the white settlers and the Delawares. Chief Teedyuscung and representatives of the Six Nations of Iroquois met with Governor Bernard of New Jersey and representatives of Pennsylvania's Governor Denny of Pennsylvania, including Benjamin Franklin. In exchange for money the Indians retired to the Wyoming Valley on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna.⁶⁵

The citizens of Oxford, like most in Sussex County, responded promptly to the initiation of hostilities between the colonies and Great Britain. Revolutionary Committees of Safety were instituted in every town to foster support for the cause. Delegates were designated to attend the County Committee of Safety. The minutes of a county meeting on August 10-11, 1775 indicate that Oxford was represented by John Lowrey, Captain John

⁶³ Oxford Furnace Ledger Book, 111; A. Van Doren Honeyman, ed., *Northwestern New Jersey*, Vol. 2 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1927), 701.

⁶⁴ *The First Sussex Centenary*, (Newark, NJ, 1853), 35.

⁶⁵ Snell, 38-39.

McMurtrie and Lieutenant William White. The committee asked the delegates to report the names of any residents in their towns who refused to sign the Articles of Association (loyalty oaths). Men between the ages of 16-50 years who failed to sign up on militia muster rolls were to be similarly reported. They were also compelled to pay 4 shillings per month proclamation money. At the same meeting Captain McMurtrie and Lieutenant White asked the committee to certify as to their "place of abode, character and reputation, being desirous to go to Boston" to join George Washington and the Continental Army. They thus became Sussex County's first active patriots.⁶⁶

In spite of the efforts of the Committees of Safety to promote and enforce patriotic sentiment, loyalism was prevalent in certain sections of the county. Enclaves of loyalists were reported to have been located in the Oxford locales of Knowlton and Harmony. The Knowlton Committee of Safety alerted the county body to the possibility of loyalist riots there. William Shippen expressed his doubts about the absolute loyalty of the area in a letter to his brother Edward dated January 4, 1777:

... as my daughter Sukey had been driven out of Princeton with her children &c It was proper for me to see what was become of her & therefore . . . I proceeded to Oxford Furnace in the Jerseys & there I found them in a Tory Country yet out of the road of the Enemy.⁶⁷

William Shippen's apprehension about his daughter's proximity to Tories serves as a clear indication of his allegiance to the cause for liberty. In fact, his record on the subject was impeccable. Bining might have been describing him when he observed that "almost without exception, as a group the ironmasters stood for the American cause from the very beginning of the conflict and were among the most active in the struggle against the mother country." This was due to their resentment of prohibitive British regulations on

⁶⁶ *Sussex Centennary*, 56-58.

⁶⁷ "Notes and Queries," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 21 (1897-98): 497.

them, and the inclusion of iron on the list of enumerated items in 1764.⁶⁸ William Shippen was an ardent supporter of the Revolution from the outset, and many of his letters survive to demonstrate his patriotism. On July 27, 1777 he wrote to his brother:

I give you joy of the late declaration of Independence as it will give not only more union but more force to the measures of defense . . . we now have in our power what never happened to any People before in the World. I mean an opportunity of forming a plan of Government upon the most just national & equal principles.⁶⁹

Further evidence of William Shippen's loyalty stems from the aforementioned assistance he gave to his son, Dr. William Shippen III, at the Bethlehem army hospital, and his two terms as a Pennsylvania delegate to the Continental Congress in 1778 and 1779.

William Shippen's credentials as a *bona fide* patriot were not sufficient to completely clear Oxford Furnace's record for posterity. In spite of evidence to the contrary, rumors and suspicions about the furnace gained currency and were perpetuated by some of the early history writers. This might be partially explained by the fact that certain members of William Shippen's family in Philadelphia, particularly his nephew, Edward IV, entertained British troops during General Howe's occupation of the city in 1777. Edward's daughter, the beautiful Peggy Shippen, was courted by the British officer Major John Andre before she married General Benedict Arnold. Aside from this, the only documented evidence found that casts a shadow on Oxford's record involves two prominent furnace employees. John Smith, Sr., the founder, and his son, John, Jr., were declared Tories by the Committee of Safety and suffered seizure of their property in 1778. This posed a significant loss for the elder Smith; in 1773 he was assessed for 103 acres and 7 head of livestock.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Bining, 124.

⁶⁹ William Shippen to Edward Shippen, *Shippen Family Papers*, Vol. 12, p. 41, HSP.

⁷⁰ New Jersey Archives, Second Series, *Newspaper Extracts* III, 46. Listed with the Smiths were the notorious Tory agitator James Moody, as well as members of such Oxford families as the Hoaglands, Harneds, and Insleys. Honeyman, p. 614, 729 makes contradictory assertions that the Coxe interests at Oxford were seized (Joseph Shippen bought the Oxford tract from Daniel Coxe's son William before

For as many instances of Oxford Furnace's disloyalty, there are an equal number of hyperinflated legends extolling its contributions to the war effort. Yount's *Bulletin* includes George S. Humphrey's "Legend of John Castner," which extols the heroic efforts of an Oxford lumberman to deliver cannon balls to Washington's troops at Morristown. Although the authenticity of Humphrey's story is doubtful, it has become assimilated into local folklore and is frequently recounted as fact. Early histories strip away Castner's heroics and simply accept at face value that the furnace *must have* manufactured cannon balls, but no proof exists. Harry B. Weiss's version has Oxford's cannon balls being driven to Morristown on wagons laden with flour and meat from the Moravians at Hope. Snell reported that the Major Robert Hoops of the Oxford militia sent meat and grain from his slaughtering house and grist mill in Belvidere to Washington's starving troops in Morristown.⁷¹

The truth of Oxford's participation in the war effort is probably less infamous than some legends would indicate, and more modest than in others. The war was a time of sacrifice and deprivation for everyone, but the business of iron making probably continued uninterrupted, albeit hampered to a degree by the absence of some of the village men. This loss was felt most by the families left behind to carry on arduous daily chores. Furnace and families alike may have experienced the occasional loss of indentured servants who ran away to join the army, thereby escaping the completion of their terms. At furnaces where cannon and shot were cast, men and indentured servants seeking leave to join the army were required to obtain the permission of the local Committee of Safety.

1741), that all of the Shippens in Philadelphia were Tories, and that the Tory owners of the furnace halted iron production during the Revolution to avoid aiding the patriots. He adds that the new state government took charge and resumed furnace operations. Joseph Krungold, ed., in *The Oxford Furnace 1741-1925* (Belvidere, NJ: Warren County Historical Society, 1975), p. 24 states that rumors of Oxford's disloyalty stemmed from the suspicion that the furnace manager Jacob Starn may have been a Tory who received backing from the royal governor - an obvious error because Oxford's Jacob Starn died in 1774.

⁷¹ Yount, *Bulletin* 551 and 552 (23 February and 2 March 1941); Harry B. Weiss and Robert J. Sim, *The Early Grist and Flouring Mills of New Jersey* (Trenton: NJ Agricultural Society, 1956), 124; Snell, 534. The name John Castner is absent from the Oxford Furnace ledger book, the 1773 tax ratables list, and all lists of early families. The Castner legend gained wider currency when local poet A. M. Sullivan published "The Ballad of John Castner" in *Songs of the Musconetcong* in 1968.

Snell lists the names of almost a thousand soldiers from Sussex County who served their country in the Revolution. Seventy of the surnames correlate to names in the Oxford Furnace ledger book indicating that a good number of Oxford's sons answered the call to arms. Most of these men served in the Western Battalion of the "Jersey Brigade" commanded by Brigadier General William Maxwell of nearby Greenwich. In addition to Captain John McMurtrie and Lieutenant William White, noted above, Oxford's representatives among the officer class included Major Abraham Besherrer, Lieutenant Lawrence Lomasson, Captains James Anderson and Samuel Westbrook, and Sergeant John Linn. Mrs. Robert Hoops participated in the efforts of an organization of Sussex County ladies and was appointed to receive donations for the relief of the soldiers.⁷²

Along with its heroes, Oxford had its share of loyalists and deserters. The infamous loyalist agitator James Moody, who offered 200 guineas for the ears and nose of William Livingston in response to the governor's placing a bounty on him, was from Oxford, where he owned 500 acres along the Delaware River. His property was confiscated when he joined the British army in 1777. A young man named Ian Lowrey was arrested in 1781 by Major Robert Hoops on suspicion of having been an associate of Moody. He was held for trial in the dungeon of the Easton, Pennsylvania prison. Men found at home who were known to have enlisted were taken into custody by the local Committee of Safety and charged with desertion. In 1777 six men from the Oxford area were convicted of high treason by the court in Morristown and sentenced to be hanged. In the case of the Shannon brothers, Daniel and John, Major Robert Hoops and other Oxford residents sent petitions vouching that they had already served time in the army. The tenant farmer James Anderson sent a petition on behalf of John Mee, and the friends of Barnet

⁷² Snell, 65, 68-74.

Banghart, including John McMurtrie, vouched for him. All six of the condemned men were pardoned in exchange for re-enlisting in the army.⁷³

⁷³ Carl E. Prince and Dennis P. Ryan, eds. *The Papers of William Livingston* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1980), Vol. 4, pp. 173-174; Vol. 2, pp. 112-116.

V.

“He has a good name . . . [and] maintains good order”

Bound Labor and Paternalism at Oxford

On July 13, 1841, in the middle of a national depression resulting from the boom and bust cycles endemic to the new market economy, George and Selden Scranton, owners of the Oxford Iron Company, advertised in the local paper for “Twenty Wood Choppers to whom fair wages will be paid.” The Scrantons advertised again in 1851 for “1 young man for clerk in store, 2 good journeymen blacksmiths, and 20 good wood choppers.”⁷⁴ By this time in the history of Oxford Furnace it is quite possible that these ads drew an eager response from men seeking employment. America was industrializing, and jobs at “manufactories” had become desirable as the swan song of the Jeffersonian agrarian idyll was heard around the nation. In Oxford, new technology in the form of the “hot blast” had increased productivity, making it possible for the small furnace in Warren County to contribute even more iron to the Industrial Revolution. First implemented in 1835, this innovation in iron manufacture was the result of experiments conducted by owner William Henry. Many colonial charcoal iron furnaces foundered when they attempted to make the transition to the hot blast, but Oxford’s success in this regard was predicated upon the recent opening of the Morris Canal. The canal ensured that a cost-effective and steady supply of coal, a better fuel than charcoal, would be readily available to the furnace. Finally, perhaps the most visible manifestation of the new technology in Oxford was the advent of the railroad in 1856, making the transportation of coal and iron less expensive and faster than ever before.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “Wanted at Oxford Furnace,” *Belvidere Apollo* (July 13, 1841); “Wanted,” *Belvidere Intelligencer* (January 30, 1851). According to the Fifth U.S. Census, Oxford’s total population in 1830 was 3,665 persons, including 3,553 whites, 7 slaves, and 105 free blacks. Total Warren Co. population was 18,634.

⁷⁵ Henry increased production from 18 to 30 tons per week by developing the hot blast. In 1842, owners Selden, George, and Charles Scranton doubled output to 60 tons per week with the introduction of

This atmosphere of growth and progress was not yet evident in the early days at Oxford. Had advertisements such as these been posted in 1741, or any time prior to the Revolution, it is unlikely that they would have drawn an enthusiastic response. With land cheap or free, able-bodied men could afford to be independent and establish farms of their own. Working for wages in isolated and often undeveloped areas was not something free men aspired to. Joseph E. Walker observed that American employers in the early eighteenth century faced a labor shortage that was unparalleled in Europe, where widespread unemployment created a labor market favorable to business. The ironmaster's problem was compounded by the remoteness of furnaces from the labor markets that did exist in the coastal cities. Even if the more highly skilled positions could be filled by immigrants from the British Isles who possessed the specialized skills coveted by furnace owners, it was next to impossible to fill the lower paying, unskilled positions. Walker points out that "ironmasters, therefore, turned to involuntary workers to fill much of their need for unskilled labor and sometimes for skilled as well."⁷⁶ A European traveler observed of the early American iron industry that:

The skilled workmen are partly English and partly Irish with some few Germans, though the work is carried on after the English method. . . . The unskilled laborers are generally composed partly of Negroes (slaves), partly of servants from Germany or Ireland bought for a term of years.⁷⁷

From this description it seems as if the European sojourner had toured Oxford, for it is an accurate portrayal of the complexion of that furnace's labor force. Documentary evidence

anthracite coal and a hotter blast. In 1834 Henry hired Selden Scranton, who later became a partner along with his two brothers. Henry quit the partnership in 1841, but family ties remained, as both Selden and Charles married daughters of Henry. The Morris Canal opened in 1832 and passed just south of Oxford in Washington. Mule-drawn carts carried coal from the canal to the furnace. Charles Scranton shrewdly invested in the Warren Railroad Company. The new road afforded the Scrantons a connection between their furnaces in Oxford and Harrison (later renamed Scranton), Pennsylvania.

⁷⁶ Joseph E. Walker, "Negro Labor in the Charcoal Iron Industry of Southeastern Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 93 (1969), 467.

⁷⁷ Israel Acrelius, quoted in *Ibid.*, 467.

suggests that both indentured servants and slaves were present at Oxford, although the number and occupation of these bound workers cannot be determined.

Sharon V. Salinger's study of indentured servitude in early Pennsylvania points out that the use of this form of unfree labor depended on a complex series of relations. The market for indentured servants fluctuated with periods of economic expansion and retraction, times of war and peace, and the relative supply of servants and slaves. Geography was a factor in that proximity to port cities and local custom also figured into the equation. In the South, slaves were generally preferred over indentured servants for a variety of occupations. Thus, Virginia ironmaster David Ross staffed his ironworks with over 220 slaves, and he "would not hire a white artisan to do any task essential to iron manufacture if he could help it." The most important factor influencing a prospective master's decision to engage a servant, however, was cost. The average eighteenth century price for four years of service was L14, versus three times that amount for a slave. Because servant masters could realize their investment in three to four years, the lifetime service of a slave was often considered by northern masters to be a negative rather than a positive factor. The uncertainties associated with the iron business in the form of restrictive British laws, price and market vagaries, and doubts about long-range participation in a risky form of investment probably gave ironmasters additional reasons to seek the shorter commitment of servants. Theodore Kury observed that in New Jersey "slaves had been tried in a few smaller ironworks during the early years, but were eliminated in favor of employing European indentured servants." Although Kury offers no explanation for the ironmasters' preference for servants, the reasons were probably due to the cost factor and, in the case of western New Jersey ironworks, proximity to the port of Philadelphia which facilitated access to newly-arrived Scotch-Irish and German servants.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Sharon V. Salinger, *"To serve well and faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 47, 73; John Bezis Selfa, "'Tis not the blure of Coals, the Sound of the Bellows that makes a Furnace productive': Labor Management at Martha Furnace, New Jersey, and Oxford Iron Works, Virginia, in the Early Republic," unpublished paper, 1993, 14-15; Theodore Kury, "Historical Geography of the Iron Industry in the New York-New Jersey

The 1750s were the peak years of the servant trade, just when Oxford Furnace was becoming firmly established and maintenance of a steady labor supply was of paramount importance. Oxford's owners, Joseph and William Shippen and Jonathan Robeson, were sophisticated Philadelphia residents, presumably well aware of the parcels of human cargo that were arriving at the city docks. The Shippens even had a personal contact in the trade. A third Shippen brother, Edward, with their brother-in-law Charles Willing, advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1731 that the firm of Willing & Shippen had "newly arrived servants . . . available for all 'sorts of business.'"⁷⁹ On October 26, 1745 Jonathan Robeson purchased the indenture of a Scotch immigrant, John Drummond, for whom he paid L18 for six years of service. Whether Robeson employed Drummond in his own household in Philadelphia or at Oxford is unclear. A subsequent indenture, however, more definitively points to the employment of indentured servants at Oxford Furnace. On June 5, 1746 two Irish brothers, Ferdinando and Francis O'Neil, were bound for four years to Robeson and Joseph Shippen jointly, at a price of L15 each.⁸⁰

Indentured servants would not have received wages in the form of store credit for their work at Oxford Furnace. Thus, the ledger book contains neither their names nor notations delineating their status as servants. The 1773 tax list is the only other source of information which positively points to the presence of indentured servants in Oxford.

Highlands: 1700-1900," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography, Louisiana State University, 1968), 68. Salinger notes that between one-half and two-thirds of the immigrants who came to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from Great Britain and Europe arrived as indentured servants. Wacker, in *Land and People* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1975), 210-219, notes that Philadelphia was the main port of entry for Scotch-Irish (after 1710) and German (after 1720) immigrants, many of whom filtered across the Delaware into Hunterdon County, above the English Quaker high-water mark at Trenton.

⁷⁹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 7, 1731, quoted in Salinger, "To serve well and faithfully," 96. Salinger observes that merchants considered indentured servants to be an ideal commodity for generating easy cash. A parcel of servants consisted of 40 servants, each of which netted the importer a profit of L10, or L400 per parcel. *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁰ George W. Neible, "Account of Servants Bound and Assigned before James Hamilton, Mayor of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 31 (1907), 86 and 32 (1908), 363-364. The latter volume also cites William Shippen's purchase of two Dutch children's indentures in 1746. It is unlikely that the children worked at Oxford because William Shippen was not yet a partner in the furnace. William Shippen's Daybook contains references to numerous household servants.

Furnace manager Joseph W. Shippen, the son of owner William Shippen, was assessed on behalf of his father for the furnace property, including 4 servants and 16 slaves. Oxford residents John Axford, Abraham Axford, John Hendrickson, Jacob Wicuff, and John Loder & Company were each assessed for owning one servant and four slaves. That servants were outnumbered by slaves in 1773 may be a reflection of the declining popularity of indentured servitude which occurred after 1750. It also illustrates the fact that when availability rather than cost became the salient consideration, even small-scale Oxford masters were quite willing to switch from one form of bound labor to the other. In the case of the furnace, where more hands were required to fill labor needs, the decline in the number of indentured servants may also indicate that wage laborers were no longer unwilling to relocate to the growing village of Oxford, at least for part of the year while the furnace was in blast. For the Shippens, paying wages for eight or nine months was probably less expensive than supporting a servant year-round. Slaves were always needed to perform the jobs that free laborers were unwilling to do.⁸¹

The use of indentured servants was not without problems for masters. Servants often ran away, especially during wartime. During the French and Indian War servants escaped from serving out their terms of service by volunteering for naval expeditions to the West Indies. During the American Revolution they ran off and joined the army, although they were supposed to obtain leaves from their local Committees of Safety. Such permission would have been denied to servants employed at ironworks because of the critical nature of the work to the war effort. Escapes were not limited to times of war, however, and the growing prevalence of the problem, with the money lost to masters, contributed to the decrease in popularity of redemptioner labor. Jacob Starn, the manager-

⁸¹ Owners' awareness that idle servants and slaves was money lost is evident in a letter from Jasper Yeates, 18th century owner of Hopewell Forge (in Lebanon Co. - not the furnace in Berks Co.) and Mount Hope Furnace, to his manager. Yeates ordered that work was to continue during the period of mourning for his co-partner's suicide, because "otherwise . . . the horses, [and] negroes . . . would be dead expense." Quoted in Walker, "Negro Labor in the Charcoal Iron Industry of Southeastern Pennsylvania," *PMHB*, 93 (1969), 472.

lessee of Oxford Furnace and owner of the Changewater Forge, advertised in newspapers at least six times for the return of runaways. In 1772 he offered a reward of L8 for the capture of Daniel M'Shane, a runaway from Changewater, who Starn described as "5 feet 10 inches high, of a blackish complexion; he has a black beard, is fond of strong liquor, very quarrelsome when drunk; he stole from said works a bay Mare."⁸²

Starn's description of the runaway M'Shane points to another problem frequently associated with indentured servitude. Peter Wacker observed that "the newspaper advertisements of the day list more runaways . . . labeled as 'Irish' than they do for any other European nationality," and "most were located in West Jersey and were agricultural laborers or were involved in the iron industry." A contemporary observer noted that "the Irish . . . had too great a love of drinking and quarreling." The prevalence of servants of Scotch-Irish origin among Oxford's labor force suggests that problems such as these may not have been uncommon. Quaker ironmaster Jonathan Robeson apparently had some success in maintaining control over his workers. In 1749 Sven Roseen commented that Robeson "maintains good order at the Furnace (called Oxford) . . . Also in other respects he has a good name." The missionary was no doubt pleased to add that "whoever drinks to excess, or is profane, is not allowed to work for him."⁸³

African-American slaves were also used at Oxford Furnace from its earliest days. One might expect that the Quaker Robeson would have objected to the use of slaves. His advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to sell the furnace in 1756, in which he listed the furnace property as including "several Negroes," disproves that supposition.⁸⁴ Jean Soderlund found that the Friends were often substantial slaveholders who were forced to make a choice between the egalitarian emphasis of their religion and losing a valuable

⁸² New Jersey Archives, First Series, XXVIII, *Newspaper Extracts* IX, 80.

⁸³ Wacker, *Land and People*, 211; Vecoli, quoted in Wacker, 211; *Dansbury Diaries*, 78. Sharon Salinger, in "To serve well and faithfully," 102, noted that in Philadelphia tavern keepers were prohibited by law from serving strong drink to servants or slaves, but the laws were largely ignored.

⁸⁴ Cf. p. 12.

source of labor. Because of the early labor shortage, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was unable to rally support for prohibiting slave ownership among members until 1776.⁸⁵

Local tradition holds that the slaves associated with Oxford Furnace lived in a stone house behind the Manor. There was a separate burial ground for them on the hillside above the Manor which was lost when the land was developed for other purposes. Slave names do not appear in the furnace ledger but some of their names were preserved by Shippen family genealogists. A boy named James Burr is said to have carried Martha Axford's train as she took her daily walk. Dinah, Mose, and Uncle Remus were others. The Reverend Sven Roseen paid special attention to African-American slaves, as well as to any Indians and children he met, viewing them as fertile soil for the planting of God's word. The blacksmith Ned Robeson owned a female slave named Johanna and her daughter. Johanna's brother was a blacksmith at Broadhead's, where Roseen regularly spoke to a gathering of black slaves. Robeson evidently permitted Johanna to attend those meetings. Roseen also noted meeting the slave woman owned by the widow of George Green.⁸⁶

Letters written by Richard Shackleton and Joseph W. Shippen indicate that the slave workers at Oxford Furnace were treated with some degree of care and concern. When Shackleton wrote to Joseph and William Shippen from his jail cell in 1760, he included among his many concerns that "two of the Negroes is very sick, Tom and Paul and keeps their beds [*sic*]." In June, 1770 Joseph W. Shippen wrote to the Sussex County sheriff because two slaves, one his and the other belonging to Ben Depuis, were being held in jail and charged with theft of property belonging to Robert Hoops. Joseph W. explained

⁸⁵ Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 4-5. Salinger saw a little more ambivalence among the Friends, noting that they "felt no pangs of conscience over the institution of indentured servitude. However, the Friends wrestled often with the morality of slavery." "To serve . . .," 72.

⁸⁶ Yount, *Bulletin*, 607 (12 April 1942); *Dansbury Diaries*, 68, 74, 57, 65. Archaeological excavations have uncovered the foundation of a stone outbuilding on the northwest side of the Manor. Judge Daniel Broadhead was a Moravian convert in Dansbury (now East Stroudsburg), PA. Snell noted that the last former slave in Warren County was John Wooly, who in 1881 was 90 years old and living in Oxford, having belonged to the Philip Mowry estate. Snell, *History of Sussex and Warren Counties*, 77.

that he was unable to go to the jail and tend to the matter because he was sick in bed, but he was concerned about the prisoners' welfare and instructed the sheriff to feed them and forward the board bill to him. Written at other times, these letters might be evidence of nothing more than not wanting furnace property to be lost. In both of these instances, however, the writers were suffering a degree of personal inconvenience (crisis in Shackleton's case) and still took the time to remember the plight of others.⁸⁷

In 1772 Frederick King of Morristown advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* that he had apprehended a "negro man named Ezekiel Green - aged 26 . . . says he was taught trade of forgerman by Jacob Starn . . . then sold to Hugh Hughes . . . then to 3 others." That Ezekiel's specialized training made him a valuable property is reflected in the number of times he was sold and re-sold. It also points to the fact that ironmasters were not averse to teaching certain skills to slaves. Thus they were not always relegated to the most menial tasks. No other records exist to tell exactly how slaves were used at Oxford Furnace, but their increased use after the Revolution and until the end of the eighteenth century indicates that they were a very necessary segment of the labor force. In 1773 there were 16 slaves assessed as furnace property. When Joseph W. Shippen died in 1795 his personal estate included 8 slaves.⁸⁸

Oxford's plantation men used slave labor to work their land. On the 1773 tax ratables list, there were 5 men who owned 4 slaves apiece, in addition to the furnace's 16 slaves. These numbers may have been haphazardly collected by the assessor, because the wills of several other Oxford residents indicate that there were more slaves in the village, and the number was increasing with time. John McMurtrie's estate was valued at L977.5.1 in 1791. He ordered that his widow maintain their mulatto girl Sal until she reached the age of 18 years, then she was to be freed. John Blair's estate was worth L644.18.6 in

⁸⁷ Richard Shackleton to Joseph and William Shippen, *Tench Coxe Papers*, Box 2, large folder 1753-1760, inner folder 12, HSP; Snell, 63.

⁸⁸ New Jersey Archives, First Series, XXVIII, *Newspaper Extracts IX*, 363; Joseph W. Shippen Administration of Estate, 1796, New Jersey Archives, 651 S.

1798, and included 4 slaves. Samuel Blair's estate in 1806 was valued at \$1,282.92 with 3 slaves. Abraham Axford was assessed for 4 slaves in 1773 and had 5 when he died in 1792. When his wife Sarah died in 1806 her estate worth \$783.59 included 1 adult and 2 child slaves. John Axford, Jr.'s estate was worth \$2,661.01 in 1809 and included 3 slaves. These wills indicate that only the wealthiest of Oxford farmers could afford to buy and keep slaves. New Jersey passed an "Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" in 1804. The Census of 1810 shows that there were still 36 slaves in Oxford, as well as 53 free blacks. The 1830 Census shows 7 slaves and 105 free blacks in Oxford. These last figures point to an in-migration of free blacks, probably in search of employment at William Henry's furnace.⁸⁹

Most discussions about bound labor usually touch on the subject of paternalism. Paternalism becomes even more significant when the labor force of an ironworks is under scrutiny, because the customary organizational scheme is often likened to a kind of feudalism. Even the use of the terms "ironmaster" and "manor" connote certain inherent relationships and social ordering. The nature of the paternalism associated with the institutions of slavery and indentured servitude is fairly straightforward. Owners made most if not all of the critical life decisions for their subjects. Thus, occupation, place of abode, daily schedule, social interaction, and frequently food and apparel were within the purview of the master. At ironworks, even free workers are often depicted as subjects of the master. They were in fact kept in a degree of submission through their dependence on the communal dining hall at the Manor and on the company store via the system of credit in lieu of cash wages. Because ironworks were by necessity isolated in rural areas, any services, such as those of doctor, teacher, or clergy were oftentimes brought at the behest

⁸⁹ John McMurtrie Will, New Jersey Archives, 502 S; John Blair Will, NJA, 765 S; Samuel Blair Will, NJA, 1106 S; Abraham Axford Will, NJA, 517 S; Sarah Axford Will, NJA, 1105 S; John Axford Will, NJA, 1196 S. An earlier slave owner was John Allison, who owned 1 slave with an estate valued at L522.2.6 in 1759. New Jersey Archives, *Abstracts of Wills* XXXII, 11. Oxford's 36 slaves in 1810 comprised only 7.5% of all slaves in Sussex County. Oxford ranked 5th among the county's 15 towns in terms of ownership, and second among towns that later formed Warren County.

of the management. There was an unmistakable element of self-service in these "benefits" provided by the owners and managers, since healthy, educated, and morally disciplined workers were good for business.

John Bezis Selfa observed that at Martha Furnace, owner Samuel Richards demonstrated concern for his employees' welfare by "attempting to inculcate values in them that he deemed suitable through education and religion." Toward that end he built a schoolhouse and hosted evangelical itinerants. This may have been Jonathan Robeson's intention when he invited the Reverend Sven Roseen to hold services at the furnace. Clergy supply was a problem all over thinly populated Sussex County. The First Presbyterian Church of Old Oxford (Hazen) was founded in 1744, but it had to share its ministers with Greenwich and Mansfield-Woodhouse, and lost them entirely after the first year or so. Roseen noted the people's hunger for preaching of any kind, making his evangelistic efforts all the more fruitful. Oxford did not have a school for the children until 1790, when Elias Jones, a Welshman from Philadelphia, opened a school in Old Oxford.⁹⁰

Unfortunately for Samuel Richards, "his efforts to inculcate punctuality and sobriety through evangelical religion did not . . . yield the desired results." Richards had to contend with absenteeism, drunkenness, "frolicking," brawling, and insubordination from his waged laborers. Discipline was meted out in the form of withholding of wages, fines, and occasional prosecution, although the more indispensable highly-skilled offenders often went unpunished. By virtue of their ability to obtain employment elsewhere, they were "able to exercise perogatives about the workplace that clashed with those of their employees." The Virginia ironmaster David Ross contended with more insidious forms of misconduct. He was vexed by such problems as waste, loafing, and "bedevilment"

⁹⁰ Selfa, "'Tis not the blure of Coals," 38; *Dansbury Diaries*, 74; Yount, *Bulletin* 644 (27 December 1942). Roseen noted that Mr. Lawrence no longer came to the area to preach. He was referring to Oxford's Rev. Daniel Lawrence, who preached intermittently until 1749. Roseen's message of universal grace was not always well received by Oxford's predominately Scotch-Irish Calvinist Presbyterians. The schoolteacher Jones was the first of several generations of Joneses, giving rise to the Jonestown section of Oxford. Early schools were opened by subscription and students paid tuition.

(sabotage). Harsh discipline often backfired by lowering morale, and firing was out of the question. Ross found that offering incentives such as extra food, better clothing, or time off, was his best course of action.⁹¹

There are no diaries for Oxford Furnace similar to those kept at Richards's and Ross's ironworks. As a result, it cannot be known to what extent problems such as those faced by Richards and Ross were manifest at Oxford. Drinking was very prevalent in early America, where even rural villages had one or more taverns and home-brewing was common. While most eighteenth century Americans did not consider the widespread consumption of alcohol to be a social problem, at ironworks, as at urban craft shops, it was actually a serious form of worker misconduct. Absenteeism, job accidents, dereliction of duty, and shoddy workmanship cost employers untold amounts of money. An early Sussex County historian noted that drinking had become a "hideous evil" and a "pestilence [that] raged unchecked" during the fifty years before the American Revolution, and the "kindred vices" of gambling, rioting and blasphemy posed a threat to social stability.⁹²

At Martha Furnace, where fishing, hunting, and "getting drunk" were the chief recreational activities, liquor posed a major problem. Arthur D. Pierce found entries in Martha's diary noting the consequences, including "William Rose & his Father both drunk & lying on the crossway. The old woman at home drunk," and "Peter Cox very drunk and gone to bed. Mr. Evans made a solemn resolution any person . . . bringing liquor to the works enough to make drunk shall be liable to fine," and lastly, "Wm. Rose died very sudden in the coaling, supposed drunk." It is very likely that the owners of Oxford Furnace experienced at least to some degree the effects of alcohol among their employees. Snell recorded the existence of ten taverns in a distance of twenty miles on the road between Easton and Hope, and Oxford was located right in the middle. The Lommason

⁹¹ Selfa, 36-39, 29-31.

⁹² Edsall, *Sussex Centennary*, 42. Edsall's strong language reflects the heightened social consciousness about alcohol related problems that followed the Second Great Awakening and the reform movements of the 1830s, which gave rise to numerous state and local temperance societies.