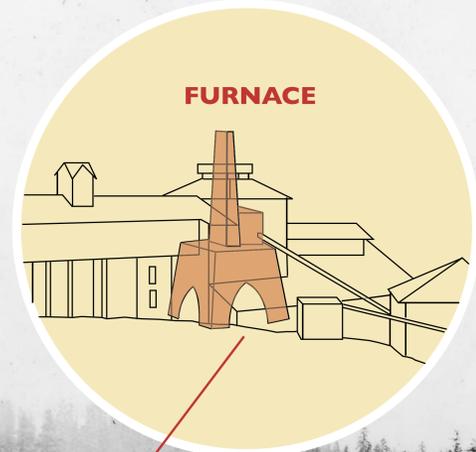


The First Iron Furnace on the West Coast



Panorama of the Oswego iron works by Carleton E. Watkins, 1867. Courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society, Or Hi #1455 and Or Hi #21596.

CHARCOAL WAGON

CHARCOAL SHEDS

ORE HOUSE

CHARGING BRIDGE

(Carts loaded with iron ore, charcoal and lime were pushed across this bridge and dumped into the top of the furnace.)

WATER TANK

(A water cooling system protected the blast pipes from the intense heat of the furnace.)

BLAST HOUSE

(A double turbine water wheel provided power for the blast.)

SUCKER CREEK

STACK HOUSE

CASTING HOUSE

(Pig iron was cast in molds made in the sand floor.)

WILLAMETTE RIVER

Oregon's Oldest Industrial Monument

The Oswego Iron Furnace was the first blast furnace on the Pacific Coast and is the only surviving stone furnace west of the Rocky Mountains. Built in 1866, the furnace went into blast in 1867. It was Oregon's largest manufacturing enterprise in the nineteenth century. The stack was so well built that an attempt to dynamite it in the early twentieth century failed, but left it damaged inside. In 1974 the furnace was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2009 the furnace was restored by the City of Lake Oswego.

"A Cause for Sincere Rejoicing"

Prior to 1867, all iron on the West Coast arrived on ships that sailed around the Horn of South America. Foundries had to pay import duties on this iron. When the Oregon Iron Company was founded, newspapers from Portland to San Francisco hailed it as one of the most important undertakings on the Pacific Coast. "The success of this enterprise... opens to Oregon a new source of commerce and material wealth which can scarcely be over-estimated -- vastly more beneficial and enduring in its results to the State than a mine of precious metals." (Portland's *Weekly Herald*, July 28, 1866.)

About this Photograph

In the summer of 1867, San Francisco photographer Carleton E. Watkins traveled to Oregon to photograph the Columbia River Gorge and other notable sights including the Oswego iron works. He used a mammoth bellows camera with 18" x 22" glass negatives. In 1906 all of his glass plates were destroyed in the San Francisco Earthquake and four years later he was committed to the Napa State Hospital for the Insane where he died in 1916. In spite of the destruction of his negatives and Watkin's tragic death, prints of his work survived including five views of the Oswego iron works.