

The Rise and Fall of Oregon Iron

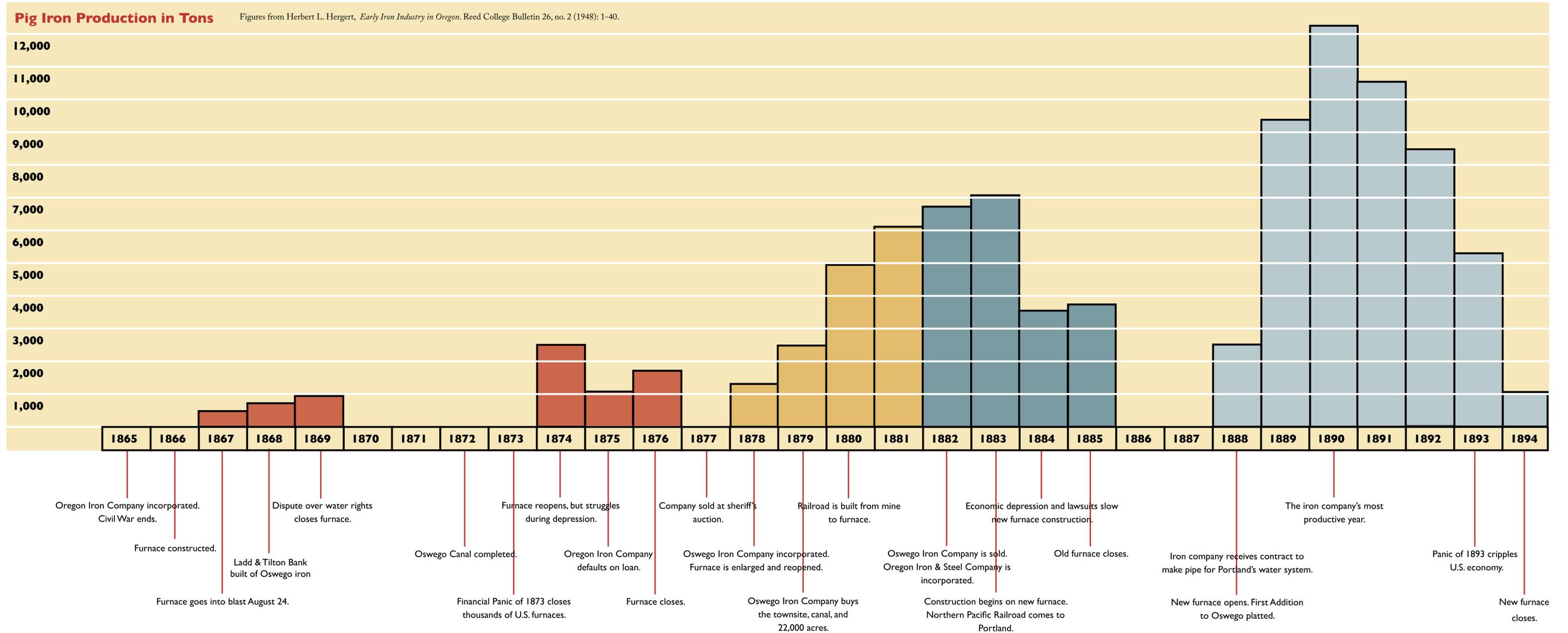


The End of Oswego's Iron Era

The furnace in George Rogers Park was "blown out" for the last time in 1885 when Oregon Iron & Steel built a much larger furnace half a mile north. The new furnace operated until 1894 when mounting debt and the high cost of producing charcoal made it impossible for the company to compete with cheaper pig iron from abroad. The national economic crisis of 1893 hastened the closure of charcoal furnaces all over America.

The relatively short span of Oregon's iron era was due in large part to the fact that iron making here began more than a century after it started in eastern states. By 1900 most American charcoal furnaces had been replaced by giant coke-fired steel mills. The fact that Oswego had no coal reserves meant that its dream of becoming the "Pittsburgh of the West" was doomed. In spite of all the obstacles to its success, the Oregon iron industry survived twenty years longer and produced more pig iron than the combined total of its competitors in Utah, Washington, and California.

The Oregon Iron & Steel Company continued its corporate existence for decades after the furnace closed in 1894. For the next sixty-six years, under the ownership of the Ladd Estate Company and then the Paul F. Murphy Company, Oregon Iron & Steel's vast real estate holdings were transformed into the residential communities of Oswego and Dunthorpe. In one of its final acts, O.I. & S. deeded all responsibility for managing the lake to the Oswego Lake Corporation in 1960.



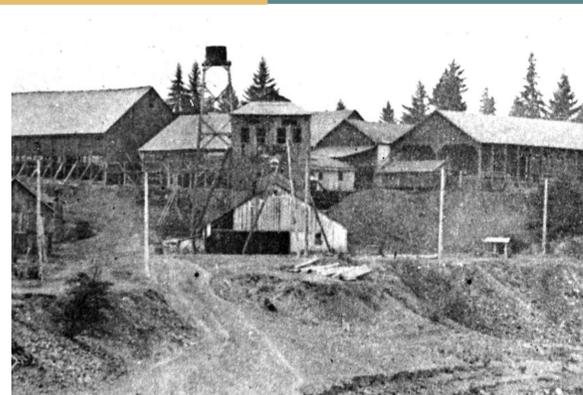
OREGON IRON COMPANY

FIRST FURNACE
Thirty-two-foot tall stone stack.
Maximum daily output: 10 tons.
Dates of operation: 1867 - 1876.
Photo courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library



OSWEGO IRON COMPANY

FIRST FURNACE AFTER REMODELING
Forty-four-foot tall stone stack.
Maximum daily output: 20 tons.
Dates of operation: 1878 - 1885.
Photo courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library



OREGON IRON & STEEL COMPANY

SECOND FURNACE
Sixty-foot tall iron clad furnace.
Maximum daily output: 50 tons.
Dates of operation: 1888 - 1894.
Photo courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library

