

= Nittany Furnace =

Nittany Furnace , known earlier as Valentine Furnace , was a hot blast iron furnace located in Spring Township , Centre County , Pennsylvania , United States . Placed in operation in 1888 on the site of an older furnace , it was an important feature of Bellefonte economic life until it closed in 1911 , no longer able to compete with more modern steel producers .

= = Centre Iron Company = =

The preliminaries to the furnace 's construction began in 1885 , when Valentine and Thomas , an old ironmaking firm of Bellefonte , decided to sell off its properties . These then consisted of Bellefonte Forge , on Logan Branch just south of Bellefonte , and Bellefonte Furnace , a cold blast charcoal iron furnace lying about a mile south of the town , also on Logan Branch , as well as holdings in local iron ore mines . Both plants were served by the Bellefonte , Nittany and Lemont Railroad , a subsidiary of the PRR . The ironworks and ore lands were bought on August 2 , 1886 , for \$ 400 @, @ 000 , by the Valentine Ore Land Association , whose principals organized the Centre Iron Company to erect a new iron furnace on the site of Bellefonte Furnace , which was to be torn down . A \$ 600 @, @ 000 mortgage was immediately raised on the properties , to supply the purchase money and funds for rebuilding the furnace . The leaders of the company included Edmund Blanchard , W. M. Stewart , and B. K. Jamison , a Philadelphia banker . The plant was built in 1887 , and the Nittany Valley Railroad was built to supply it with ore . It became necessary to raise additional funds , and in 1887 , the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased \$ 75 @, @ 000 worth of bonds in exchange for exclusive rights to rail traffic to and from the furnace . The first load of ore was delivered by the Nittany Valley on February 28 , 1888 , and the furnace went into blast on March 4 , 1888 . The company was originally headed by Jamison , but by 1890 , James B. Coryell was president and Jamison vice @-@ president . At this time , the furnace had one 70 @-@ foot (21 @-@ meter) stack and three hot @-@ blast stoves , with a capacity of 30 @, @ 000 tons (27 @, @ 200 tonnes) of iron per year . Ore was supplied from local hematite deposits , and the furnace was fuelled by Connellsville coke . In the same year , however , the failure of Jamison 's bank precipitated the closure of the furnace by the sheriff on November 15 , 1890 . It was subsequently sold under foreclosure .

= = Valentine Iron Company = =

The Valentine Iron Company was organized by the bondholders of the Centre Iron Company to take over the furnace , and was incorporated on January 28 , 1891 . The president was J. Wesley Gephart , Bellefonte lawyer and industrialist , and the treasurer and manager was Robert Valentine , of the original ironmaking family . A report just prior to the charter records the permanent board of directors as James H. Campbell , of Wayne , Oliver Hazard Reighard , of Williamsport , Charles W. Wilhelm , of Reading , Daniel Rhoades , Valentine , and Gephart . (Reighard was connected with another Valentine Iron Company , later the Williamsport Iron and Nail Works .)

Gephart was not only president of the iron company (and the Nittany Valley Railroad , still an affiliate) , but an active railroad promoter in another direction . He became president of the Central Railroad of Pennsylvania , which , on December 2 , 1893 , opened its line from Mill Hall to Bellefonte , crossing and connecting with the Nittany Valley about a mile east of Bellefonte . The new line connected with the Beech Creek Railroad , controlled by the Pennsylvania Railroad 's rival , the New York Central Railroad .

At the beginning of this year , the iron furnace had " re @-@ opened " , presumably the result of an upswing in the depressed iron market as the rival Bellefonte Furnace did the same . With the construction of the new railroad , the furnace 's traffic was rapidly diverted over that line , prompting a lawsuit from the Pennsylvania Railroad to enforce the contract made with the Centre Iron Company . While a lower court initially held the contract not to be binding on Valentine Iron , the ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in 1895 , and the furnace was forced

to remove its traffic from the Central Railroad of Pennsylvania . Due to this serious setback , Gephart was compelled to step down as president of Valentine Iron and the Nittany Valley , and thereafter devoted himself to the management of the Central Railroad . He was replaced at Valentine Iron by John P. Harris , and by Mortimer O 'Donoghue at the Nittany Valley . O 'Donoghue also became superintendent of Valentine Iron the next year .

The furnace operated only intermittently under Valentine Iron management , and in early 1899 , it was bought by the Empire Steel and Iron Company , along with the Nittany Valley RR and the associated ore lands . Empire Steel renamed the plant " Nittany Furnace , " and sent Walter Kennedy , vice @-@ president of engineering , to survey the local ore resources in March 1899 . Empire decided to use a mixture of local and Lake Superior ores , and relit the furnace in May 1899 . However , Empire shut down the furnace again in April 1900 , closing it indefinitely . The furnace and railroad were bought at a sheriff 's sale on December 21 , 1900 by a Harrisburg bank with a lien on the property .

= = Nittany Iron Company = =

Once again , Gephart appeared on the scene to save the furnace . With the backing of Philadelphia and New York investors , he formed the Nittany Iron Company , which bought and rehabilitated the furnace , returning it to blast on June 5 , 1902 , under Frank H. Clemson (former chief of mining at Gephart 's Bellefonte Furnace Company) . Other organizers included Lorenzo Terbal Munson , Gephart 's brother @-@ in @-@ law (who was associated with Bellefonte Glass and the Bellefonte Iron and Nail Works) , Archer Brown , and William Sampson . However , prosperity did not return to the ironmaking business . The furnace was idle for two months in 1904 . As steel production in open hearth furnaces became increasingly commonplace (a method better suited for iron made from Lake Superior ore , while Bessemer converters functioned best with Centre County ore) , Nittany Furnace found it increasingly difficult to operate at a profit . The death of Gephart on February 14 , 1905 also dealt a blow to the company , which thereafter shared management with the Bellefonte Furnace Company .

When in operation , the furnace continued to receive ore over the Nittany Valley RR , but the Nigh and Taylor ore banks served by that road had begun to play out . Most Lake Superior ore was delivered directly by the PRR , but some was routed from the PRR onto the Central RR of Pennsylvania at Bellefonte , hauled up to Nittany Valley Junction , and delivered over the Nittany Valley . Other local ore from Scotia arrived from pits on the Bellefonte Central Railroad , which was originally delivered to the PRR at Bellefonte . When the PRR raised rates in fall 1906 , trying to collect Scotia ore traffic via its Fairbrook Branch , the Bellefonte Central responded by delivering the cars directly to the Central RR of Pennsylvania at Bellefonte Furnace , whence they could travel over the Central and Nittany Valley to Nittany Furnace . In 1905 , the furnace began to receive lime from the Whiterock Quarries in Pleasant Gap , about 2 miles (3 @.@ 2 km) along the PRR Bellefonte Branch ; a partner in the quarries was Noah H. Swayne II , who had been made general manager of the furnace the previous year when Gephart resigned on grounds of health .

The furnace continued in anemic health until the Panic of 1907 . As a result of that crisis , it was idle for most of 1908 and half of 1909 . It was operated in 1910 largely to use up its inventory of local ore , and went out of blast on January 23 , 1911 . Bellefonte Furnace had closed in December . The shutdown of the furnaces was to be temporary , but both facilities were no longer remunerative to operate , and no buyer willing to operate them could be found . Leftover pig iron and furnace slag from Nittany Furnace were shipped out over the Nittany Valley RR in 1912 ? 1913 . The furnace and railroad were put up for sale in 1914 and the furnace demolished . The furnace site was later used by the Titan Metal and Manufacturing Company .

= = Legacy = =

Passing through the hands of four owners during its troubled 23 @-@ year history , Nittany Furnace never fulfilled the expectations developed when it replaced the antiquated (charcoal) Bellefonte

Furnace . It should arguably never have been built : by the time it went into blast in 1888 , the price per ton of iron had already been driven below \$ 22 , a historic low , and it would almost never rise above that figure until the onset of World War I. The sprawling steel works of Pittsburgh , fed by Mesabi Range ore , could produce iron more cheaply than the furnaces at Bellefonte ever could . The principal advantage of a Bellefonte location ? proximity to local ore deposits ? was negated by the availability of easily mined , high @-@ grade Mesabi ore , hauled by rail .

Wes Gephart , though his personal brilliance and ability to attract investment , was able to cover the decline to some extent . By his death in 1905 , he had assembled a seemingly puissant empire of two iron furnaces , extensive ore mines , and two railroads . But even during his lifetime , Bellefonte had seen the end of its glory : after 1890 , its population , heretofore steadily growing , would decline for the next thirty years . Nor did Gephart 's empire long survive him ; little more than a decade after his death , the furnaces were demolished , the mines shut down , and one railroad scrapped . Only the Central Railroad remained , staggering to a pauper 's grave in 1918 , sold for the wartime price its scrap could bring . The era of Nittany Furnace was the twilight of ironmaking in Bellefonte . Though not fully apparent at the time , neither the rising lime industry nor any other would replace ironmaking as the guarantor of the town 's prosperity . The fall of the furnaces marked the beginning of a long decline which would see Bellefonte supplanted by State College as the nexus of activity in Centre County .