

Joanna Furnace festival sheds light on old iron-making life

MORGANTOWN — Leave your modern day problems behind for a weekend and journey back into the past to discover how life was lived in southeastern Pennsylvania during the mid-1800s.

This invitation to join in an historic festival is extended to everyone by the Hay Creek Valley Historical Association. Their time-warp event is the Hay Creek Valley Fall Festival, taking place in the present time of September 11-13 at the site of an old iron making site, Joanna Furnace.

Although time has changed what used to be a hustle-bustle community of 1500 people into a landmark frequented only by occasional visitors and historical resurrectionists (volunteer masons, carpenter, archeologists, etc.), for three days in September the Joanna 'community' will once again become a boom town as folks gather to take part in the fall celebration.

According to an Association spokesman, the festival will 'recreate' the life of an early American iron plantation from the 1790s to the early 1900s. Skilled craftsmen will be on hand to demonstrate their own special talents and to show visitors the basic fundamentals of their craft.

"Years ago, craftsmen and farmers didn't write 'how-to-manuals' — they showed their sons and daughters how to do things. The crafts people at the festival learned in that way and are now teaching others how to practice their crafts," stated John Fleming, Association president.

"This oral education is what the fall festival is all about. In 20 or 30 years, if these traditions and techniques are not passed on, they will be gone forever."

To give everyone a lesson in the ways of the past, skilled housewrights will form lumber and structural beams from logs. They will demonstrate the construction of an actual building by joining the structural members using the colonial peg method.

Other craftsmen will split fence posts and also produce hand and machine split shakes that at one time were used as shingles. Blacksmiths will make wrought iron farm implements and kitchen utensils. Others will demonstrate how wooden water pipes were made.

Also on hand will be a wheelwright, broom maker, cooper and basket maker.

For those with an eye toward the less physically demanding crafts, people will be demonstrating the



Historical Joanna Furnace, located near Morgantown, is being reclaimed from neglect and nature's efforts to shadow the old iron making factory behind brush and trees by the

volunteers of the Hay Creek Historical Association. This photo shows the abandoned furnace as it appeared on December 17, 1916.

art of spinning, dyeing, weaving, chair caning, making herbal medicines and sauerkraut, quilting, and other domestic crafts.

And, to the delight of the most discerning palates, the festival will provide taste-tempting homemade bread, shoefly pies, apple cider and apple butter.

Since the Joanna residents of the 1800s toiled hard in the manufacture of iron stoves and ammunitions, they enjoyed the few leisure moments granted them by the ironmaster. For many, their off-work hours were spent in singing, especially hymns — probably vital in bolstering their courage to face those 12 hour work days for 6 or 7 days a week.

And music will highlight this year's fall festival bringing lots of toe-tapping fun on Friday and Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon.

Although not of the time period during which the Joanna furnace was in operation, more than 200 steam engines will be on display during the festival, including steam traction engines, old gasoline-powered tractors and stationary gasoline engines. The engines will be running and many will be used for powering machinery during demonstrations of wheat threshing, feed grinding, corn meal milling, and the operation of a large sawmill.

Serving as an ever-present reminder of the past, the restored Joanna Furnace will be the scene of colorful excitement. For the history buffs, there will be self-guided walking tours of the furnace. Association interpreters will be on hand to discuss the process of iron making, and tell tales of what took place in each of the five buildings on the site.

The furnace has undergone a major facelifting operation since the Association, made up of volunteers from Lancaster, Berks and Chester counties, was given the 10-acre site by Bethlehem Steel in 1979. During the two-years of ownership, nearly 700 people have freed the historical site from vines and brush, patched and repaired, and have given the once forgotten furnace rebirth.

Now, the Joanna Furnace historical site has grown to 25 acres with a recent donation of land by Bethlehem steel, and the Association is planning a festival that reflects this progress — bigger and better.

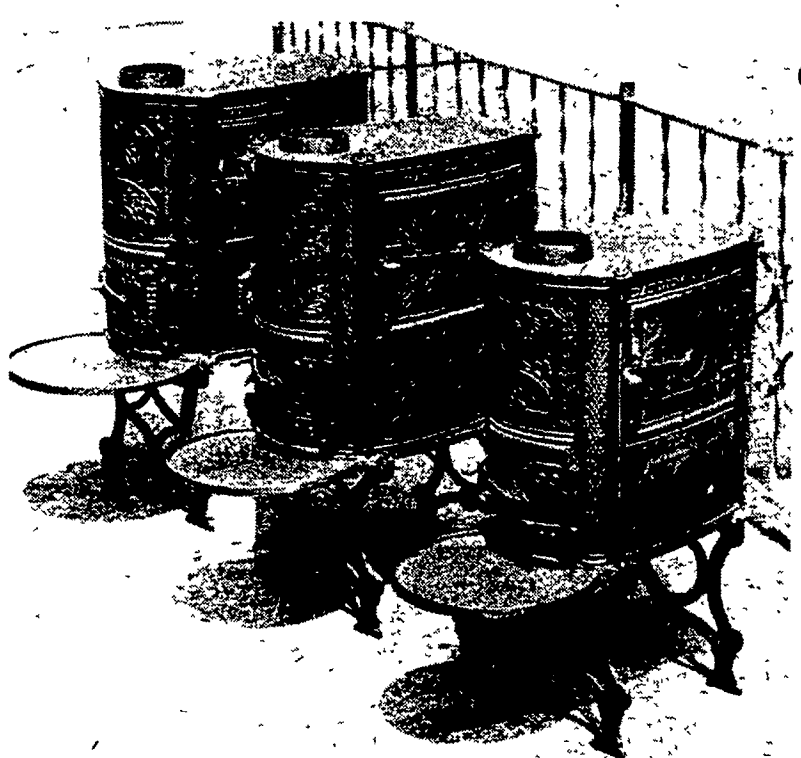
Admission to the festival is \$1 for adults, and children less than 16 years old are admitted without charge. Joanna Furnace is located along Route 10, 3½ miles north of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at the Morgantown Interchange 22. In case of severe weather, the festival will be postponed one week.



Forming a geometric marvel of perfectly placed stone, this entrance to the furnace stack in the casting house formerly spewed out molten iron every 12 hours. It flowed across a sand floor to pig molds, there it was cast into cannon balls, stove plates, etc.



The company store, left foreground, was the place where iron workers received their pay in form of supplies and their orders for the day from the ironmaster. The original mansion at the Joanna Furnace, background, dates back to 1792.



In its 'hay day' during the last half of the 1800s, Joanna Furnace turned out 10-plate stoves, named for the number of sections (plates) that made up the stoves' tops, sides, and bottoms.