

An Army of Workers



Who Were the Workers?

Between 1867 and 1888, the iron company's workforce grew from 80 employees to 325. Workers were drawn to Oswego from iron making communities all across America, particularly Pennsylvania and Ohio. Some skilled artisans were recent immigrants from Europe. At the top of the ranks was the Ironmaster and immediately below him the Founder and the Company Clerk. More than half of the workers were engaged in various aspects of charcoal production, a minor industry in its own right. In 1867, pay ranged from two dollars a day for a common laborer to \$240 a month for the Founder.



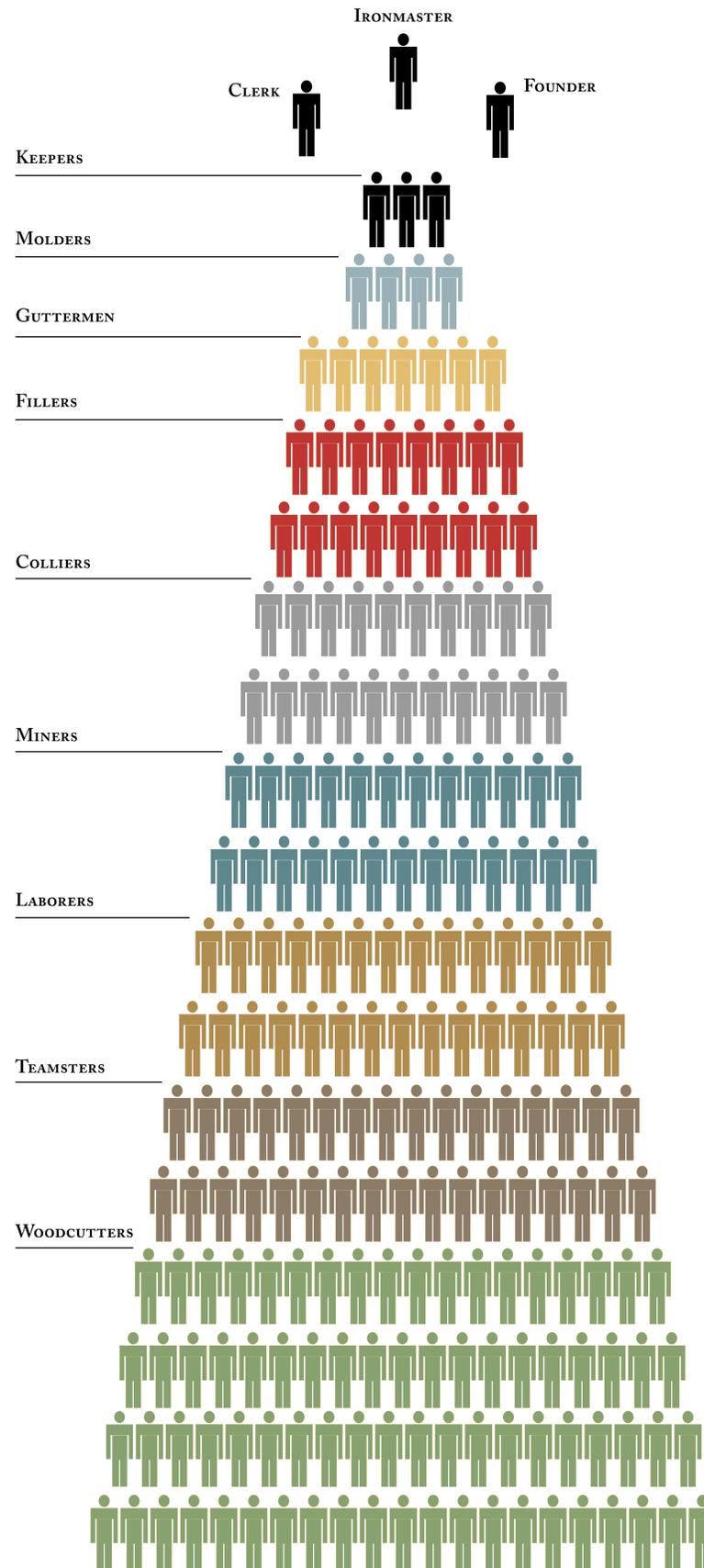
COLLIERS
The colliers, or charcoal burners, came primarily from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and France. In 1867 forty men worked in the colliery and there were forty-five charcoal pits. The number of workers increased dramatically in 1883 when forty workers and their families immigrated to Oswego from the Hanging Rock Iron Region of Ohio. *Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.*



WOODCUTTERS
Woodcutters made up the largest portion of the workers. Most were Chinese laborers, who lived in a shantytown at the east end of the lake in the area now occupied by the ball fields in George Rogers Park. *Photo courtesy of Charles Durham.*

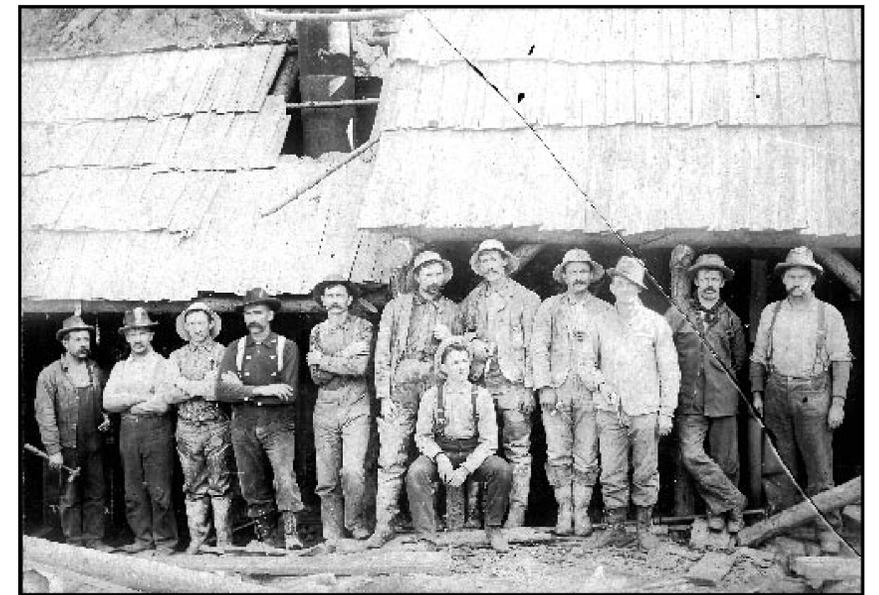


TEAMSTERS
Many of the teamsters were local farmers who hauled cordwood and charcoal for the iron company. The distinctive charcoal wagons could be emptied without a shovel by dropping the side panels or by sliding out the bottom boards. *Photo courtesy of the Berkshire Eagle, Pittsfield, Mass.*

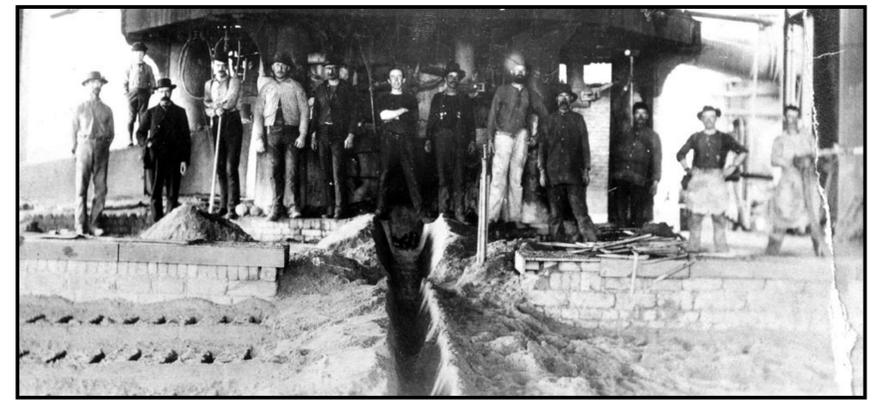


Life on an Iron Plantation

Because of their dependence on charcoal fuel, early blast furnaces were located in rural settings where there was plenty of timber. They operated as "iron plantations," company-owned villages surrounded by timberland. Between 1878 and 1894 the Oswego Furnace was run on this plantation model. The iron company owned the town site, the lake, and 24,000 acres of timberland. Workers were paid in company scrip and shopped at the company store. Many lived in company-owned cottages or boarding houses. Life revolved around the demands of the furnace -- filling and tapping at regular intervals around the clock. During hard times when the furnace had to shut down, the company allowed tenants to live rent-free in hopes of keeping its skilled workers until business picked up.



MINERS
In 1881 about sixty miners were employed at the Prosser Mine. The Superintendent of the Mines was James H. Pomeroy, a mining engineer from Cornwall, England. He may have been the second man on the right. *Photo courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library.*



FURNACE CREW
Furnace work required both skilled artisans and unskilled laborers. Heading up the furnace crew were the founder and keepers who monitored the operation and tapping of the furnace. The fillers worked on top of the furnace, weighing out raw materials and filling the furnace. The guttermen and molders worked on the casting floor preparing the molds and casting the iron. *Photo courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library.*