

Early Iron and Steel History

History shows that in the beginning of the twentieth century, iron and steel was one of the four major industries for Scioto County.

This can be attributed to our local settlers. During the very early years, charcoal iron was produced with the raw materials being transported by oxen to the river and canal. Later coke iron was produced and distributed by means of the railroad. In more recent times, the production of coke and its by-products, and the manufacture of pig iron and the conversion of pig iron into steel became a single industry.

Scioto County was rich in raw materials. The land was composed of iron ore, limestone and charcoal. Charcoal furnaces were put into operation in Scioto, Lawrence and Jackson Counties; also known as (part of) the Hanging Rock Iron Region. The ore and limestone were dug from the earth, and the hardwood trees were made into charcoal to be hauled to the furnaces and then the pig iron results were taken to the river to be loaded on boats.

The convenience of iron furnaces being located near Portsmouth resulted in the erection of many plants to manufacture iron and steel products. In 1832, Gaylord Rolling Mill was started along the Ohio River and produced iron bars and nails. Gaylord was the first iron mill west of Wheeling, West Virginia. In 1880, the mill was taken over by Portsmouth Iron and Steel Company.

In 1872, Burgess Steel and Iron Works Company was established and took over the Front and Washington Street location around 1880, until a fire in 1899 destroyed the entire facility. Burgess built a new facility in New Boston, which became the steel making location for Scioto County.

Several iron works companies began in the late 1800s, but the larger companies took over many of them in their expansions. In 1916, the Wheeling Corporation took over two smaller companies and built a blast furnace in New Boston.

In 1920, Whitaker-Glessner was formed and with several other firms joined together and formed the Wheeling Steel Corporation. The greatest growth came in 1950, when Detroit Steel Corporation acquired the company and invested \$150 million to modernize the plant and its products.

In the 1960s, foreign competition struck a blow to the local steel industry. In 1969, Cyclops Corporation, based in Pittsburgh, bought the plant with intentions to fight against the competition. However, it was not to be. In 1980, the plant, now known as Empire-Detroit Steel, closed its doors and ended Scioto County's 149 years of iron and steel.