

**THE  
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*Cover: Louisa County Courthouse, 1818-1905*

**Victoria Iron Furnace  
1840-1862  
Hunter - Stout Operation**

*compiled by*  
**William Kiblinger**

At the death of Thomas Mayburry in the summer of 1840, John Hunter and William Stout, who held a deed of trust on the property, became the owners of the Victoria Iron Furnace. Neither of these gentlemen were prepared to take over the operation of an iron furnace. John Hunter, of course, was the clerk of the court of Louisa County and William Stout was a lawyer in the county.

It is not known who their iron master was during the year they operated the furnace. They may have been able to keep the same people who had been working for Mayburry. It is also possible that they may have "borrowed" the services of Mr. Watkins James who was an iron master and part owner of the Rough & Ready Furnace. Mr. Elisha Melton, one of the stockholders, acted as business manager during the Hunter-Stout operation which ran from August 1840 to the end of 1841.

The furnace remained idle for the next four or five years. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to restart the furnace during this period.

Two brothers, Thomas and Isaac Steers, iron masters from Pennsylvania leased the furnace about 1846 and operated it until the end of the year 1851.

**Steers Operation**

Very little is known about the Steers Brothers' operation of the furnace except that which is recorded in a deed of trust which Thomas Steers gave Reuben B. Davis in December of 1851 to secure a loan made to them by Mr. Davis<sup>1</sup>. Listed below are some of the people named in this deed of trust as having back pay due them.

For Labor at Victoria Furnace	
John Vass	\$79.00
Washington Hudson	41.00
Charles Donohoe	41.25
Henry [R.] Kennedy	23.76
Alexander [H.] Moore	20.14
Henry Rodenzer	30.00
William Sheelor	20.00
George W. Shingler as clerk at Victoria Furnace	50.00

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<sup>1</sup>Louisa County, Va. Deed Book (hereinafter DB) CC p. 35, Dec. 1851.

This list proved very helpful in identifying groups of Victoria Furnace miners in the 1850 Census of Louisa County, Virginia.

The Steers brothers brought quite a few iron workers and miners with them from Pennsylvania. The 1850 census for Louisa County, Va., lists about forty iron workers which means that they probably worked at or for Victoria Furnace since the Rough and Ready Iron Furnace was for all practical purposes, closed down at this time.

A partial list from the 1850 census of men who worked at the Victoria Furnace follows:

Isaac Steers	age 36	iron master	b. PA
Jacob Shay	age 60	iron founderer	b. PA
Henry Rodenzer	age 33	iron founderer	b. PA
Henry Seur	age 56	moulder	b. MD
Charles Donahough	age 55	master shot maker	b. PA
George W. Shingler	age 28	clerk	
William Knighton	age 48	Wheelwright	b. PA
John Vass	age 54	miner	b. PA
Thomas Knighton		miner	
Richard Towsey	age 28	miner	b. England
Henry R. Kennedy	age 32	miner	b. Ireland
Henry Singer	age 29	miner	b. MD
Richard Lavers	age 32	miner	b. England

Several of the "Steers" group remained in Louisa County after the furnace closed down in 1851. Mr. Rodenzer had bought a 194 acres farm near the furnace where he and his family lived until 1852.<sup>2</sup> Evidently he moved back to Pennsylvania after selling his farm to Littleton Talley.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Charles Donahough, the master shot maker also bought property near the entrance to what is now "Bluewater Subdivision" and was still living there at age 75 at the time of the 1870 census of Louisa County.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Donahough and Susan C. Blackburn, a local widow, were married 28 June 1852 by the Rev. Bartholomew Whitlock.

The Knighton and Sheelor families also remained in the county as well as Henry R. Kennedy, the writer's great-grandfather, who had recently

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<sup>2</sup> Louisa County, Va. DB BB p. 2, 3 Jan. 1849.

<sup>3</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB CC p. 95, 8 March 1852.

<sup>4</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB CC p. 157, 26 June 1852.

## *Victoria Iron Furnace*

come to this country from Cork, Ireland.

It was first thought that the only product of Victoria Furnace was pig iron. Later "finds" show that they also manufactured a number of cast iron products such as steam engine parts, pump parts, and gears, as well as items used in the home.

A cast iron muffin pan said to have been made at Victoria has been passed down through the Henry R. Kennedy family. The muffin pan makes eleven muffins rather than the usual dozen. On the bottom is stamped "No. 10, Best Made, S.R. and Company, 1253" as seen in the accompanying photograph. In any case, the S. R. and Co. probably stands for Steers Rodenzer and Co. since Steers headed up the whole operation and Rodenzer headed up the manufacturing section. My thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Daniel R. Hall of Mineral, Virginia, the present owners of the muffin pan for allowing me to photograph it.

The Steers Brothers' operation of Victoria Furnace was terminated at the end of 1851 according to the terms of the deed of trust to Reuben B. Davis, bringing to an end the longest operation of the furnace during the Hunter-Stout ownership.

During the next ten years or so several attempts were made to operate the furnace with none lasting more than a year. For most of the decade the furnace lay idle.

It is very probable that the shortage of wood for furnace fuel and the difficulty experienced in maintaining a sufficient supply of fuel was one of the main factors that determined the length of each operation. At no time was there a shortage of iron ore.

An iron furnace in areas where coal was available for fuel ran for many years continuously as compared to the short periods of operation for the furnaces in this county where wood was the prime source of fuel.

### **The Warren Operation 1862-1867**

In 1862 Mr. William Warren, Sr. president of Hill, Warren and Company a cotton processing company with plants in Fredericksburg and Richmond became interested in Victoria Furnace. It is very probable that he undertook this project as a patriotic duty to help supply the Confederate Government with much needed iron and lead for it's military forces.<sup>5</sup>

A joint stock company was formed with the privilege of buying the property, dividing it into 100 shares.

Hill, Warren & Co. of Fredericksburg

30 shares

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<sup>5</sup> DB FF p. 442, 30 Dec. 1862.

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Tacket & Ford of Fredericksburg	20 shares
Thomas A. Curtis	30 shares
William C. Stout	20 shares

(Later Hill, Warren bought out Tacket and Ford.)

This group trading as Victoria Furnace Mining and Manufacturing Company with William Warren, Sr. as president bought the property in 1863. William C. Stout, Jr. son of William Stout, Sr. (Hunter & Stout) served as the General manager March 1862 to July 1867. Thomas A. Curtis, son-in-law of William Stout, Sr., served as clerk.

Stout and Curtis and his wife lived in the Mayburry house on the property during the Warren period of operation.

The pig iron from Victoria Furnace was said to be of very high quality always bringing the top price of \$45 per ton in the Richmond market where it was bought by the Tredgar Iron Foundry. The records of the Victoria Furnace Mining & Manufacturing Co. show that the operating costs for the month of July 1867 totaled \$2,103.54. This may be a clue as to why so many attempts at operating the furnace had failed. It was a big operation, requiring considerable financial backing.

The census records of the county seem to show more people working at the iron furnace during the period 1850-1870 than any other occupation other than farming, of course.

During the Civil War period the Victoria Furnace furnished both iron and lead for the Confederate forces according to a statement by Mr. John Jenkins. The Jenkins family owned the adjoining farm and had been supplying some of the iron ore to the furnace.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Jenkins also said that to his knowledge "all iron mines had been worked at a loss to their owners."

About 1867, Mr. Warren having done his patriotic duty for the confederate cause was anxious to get out of the iron business and back to his cotton business in Fredericksburg and Richmond.

The following letter from Mr. Watkins James, iron master for the Victoria Furnace Mining and Manufacturing Co. to Mr. Warren was a status report of the furnace. At this time Mr. Warren was in the process of selling the furnace to Mr. Samuel F. Jordan of Rockbridge County, Virginia.

Victoria Furnace July 8th, 1867

Mr. William Warren, Jr.

Dear Sir-

In reply to the propounded by Mr. B. Jordan, I will state you have twenty mules, all of which are good mules, except two, many of them are first rate. There are five yoke

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<sup>6</sup> Louisa County, Virginia, Chancery file 53.

### *Victoria Iron Furnace*

oxen and two ox carts, four good waggons and two horse carts, there is 2500 cords wood on hand but little coal, more than 1000 cords of that wood is within 1½ miles of the Furnace. There is 800 cords more to cut in this near job. There is no wood belonging to the furnace to cut except one small job except the second growth which can be cut but is rather small. I would say there was any quantity of land within six miles of furnace. It will cost from a shilling to 25 cents per cord. The land upon which it stands with timber on it will sell for from 5 to 8 dollars per acre. The limestone is inexhaustible and costs at Tolersville about \$2.40 per ton. I see no reason why it should ever cost more than that price.

The furnace is in good condition and the Blast now is just as strong as necessary, have plenty to spare. Your blowing fixtures are first rate iron cylinders and the machinery which drives them are all strong and in complete order. We have a hearth just put in of stone of a good quality. The Tuyser side of hearth is of stone from Gil Cox quarry. The furnace has made a beautiful start and will make four tons cold blast iron per day. If a hot blast was put up here the yield would be very large. I know this furnace has in former years made 6 3/4 or 7 tons pig iron per day with cold blast.

The ore bank has been worked on the surface to some extent but there is two shafts in the old workings that have gone down through the vein in both shafts 30 feet and the vein is from 10 to 20 feet wide.

We have driven a tunnel on one vein about 80 yards and there is no telling the length of that vein. This vein of ore has been worked four miles south of the furnace and is a continuous vein. You own 3/4 of a mile of land north of the furnace on high ground through which this vein ought and I think does run that distance and there has never been a shaft sunk north of the furnace. While the vein crosses it beyond any point you ever worked in. Mr. Jordan will be satisfied about the quantity of ore when he sees the place. The houses on the place are in good condition. I believe I have answered all the questions asked. The iron made here is always saleable in Richmond.

Yours Respectfully,  
Watkins James

In May of 1867, the Victoria Furnace Mining and Manufacturing Co.

bought a 120½ acre tract of land from John Hunter<sup>7</sup>. This was probably their last land purchase.

During 1867 Mr. Warren sold off some of his land to six former slaves. This land lying on Contrary Creek and the Mica Road (sometimes called Michaels Road) now Route 700 was surveyed into six lots, three containing 12 acres each and three containing 8 acres each as shown below: Victoria Furnace (Mr. Wm. Warren) to:

Lewis Green	12 acres
Albert Fowler	8 acres
Gabriel Monroe	12 acres
Solomon Jackson	8 acres
Washington Scott	12 acres
Simeon Trice	8 acres <sup>8</sup>

These freedmen may have been former slaves owned by the Victoria Furnace.

During the year 1867, Mr. Warren carried on considerable correspondence with Mr. Samuel F. Jordan, an iron monger of Rockbridge County. This family, known as the "iron barons of the Confederacy" had been one of the chief suppliers of iron for the Confederate cause.

### **Ira F. Jordan Co. Operation**

1867 - 1882

Mr. Jordan made his first visit to Tolersville on 24th of July 1867 to have a look at the Victoria Furnace. Finally an agreement was made to purchase the furnace for \$15,000 and to assume the debts of the Victoria Furnace Mining and Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Samuel F. Jordan and his brother Ira Jordan, trading as the Ira F. Jordan Company operated the furnace for the next ten years or so. During most of this time John W. Jordan, a son of Samuel F. Jordan was the manager; James M. Watts was the clerk and Alexander Trainer was the iron founderer. These men were probably transferred from one of the Jordan furnaces in Rockbridge or Alleghany Counties.

Under the guidance of the Jordans the Victoria Furnace reached its peak operation. The 1870 Federal Census of Louisa County lists some 44 men who stated that they "worked at the iron furnace" meaning Victoria Furnace since it was the only active furnace in the county at that time. Of course, this number doesn't take into consideration all the local farmers who were supplying wood or charcoal and iron ore to the furnace on a part-time

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<sup>7</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB GG p 47, 27 May 1867.

<sup>8</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB GG pp. 426, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442.

## *Victoria Iron Furnace*

basis from their farms. At this time, Victoria Furnace was probably the largest business operation in the county.

Mr. Samuel F. Jordan, the senior partner of the company died on the 8th of June in 1872. Very soon thereafter the executors of his will began to sell off some of the company's real estate, especially the tracts they had bought as wood reserves for the furnace.

At a sale of Victoria Furnace lands in 1874, the writer's great-grandfather, Lewis H. Butler, was the highest bidder for a 74 acres tract known as the "Gunter-Ware tract"<sup>9</sup>; this being the same tract bought by the Ira F. Jordan Co. from the executors of William Walton's will in 1869.<sup>10</sup> On this tract was located a combined storehouse and tavern built by Mr. Walton in 1836 as a commissary for his Walton Gold Mine operation. Mr. John H. Whitlock, a civil war veteran and a son-in-law of Mr. Butler had been operating the store as a commissary for the Victoria Furnace.

In 1876, a 21 acres tract about two miles from the furnace was sold to Mr. Thomas G. Bowles.<sup>11</sup>

That same year a 15 acre tract located directly across the road from the John H. Whitlock store was sold to a Mr. James Downey.<sup>12</sup> Another small tract located near Mr. Bowles was sold to Mr. Edmund Harris.

During the Jordan era most of the iron deposits had been worked down to the water table and below the water line extensive deposits of iron pyrites (FeS<sub>2</sub>) were uncovered. This pyrite was found to have a high sulphur content.

After the death of Samuel F. Jordan the Victoria Furnace began a slow down which lasted a year or so until it closed down altogether marking the end of the iron era in Louisa County.

In 1872 a process was developed to separate the sulphur from the iron pyrites by "burning or roasting" the ore. About this time Mr. Wm. G. Crenshaw, who was president of the Atlantic and Virginia Fertilizing Company of Richmond, Virginia, became interested in the Victoria Furnace. His company used sulfuric acid in the manufacture of the fertilizer. Mr. Crenshaw leased the furnace property for 99 years to explore for iron pyrites. He soon found that they had "millions of tons of iron pyrites."

*(to be continued)*

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<sup>9</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB 3 p. 210, 5 Oct. 1874.

<sup>10</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB HH p. 2, 1869.

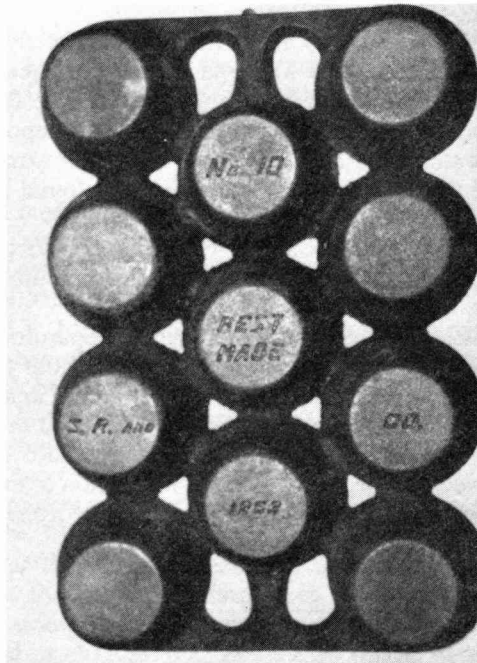
<sup>11</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB 3 p 261, 14 Aug. 1876.

<sup>12</sup> Louisa County, Virginia DB 3 p. 304, 11 Sept. 1876.





Seal of Victoria Mining & Manufacturing Co.



Muffin Tin made at Victoria Furnace