

ROBESONIA

· FRIENDS OF THE ·

Winter 2022

Volume 42 Issue 1

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, Inc. PO Box 162 • Robesonia, PA 19551-1230

Robesonia Furnace Ironmasters Mansion

Built by George Ege Circa 1806-1809



Robesonia Furnace began with the establishment of Reading Furnace in 1794 by George Ege. Ege, who also owned nearby Charming Forge, built a Georgian mansion for himself near the furnace, as well as several log and stone tenant houses that remain today. The Ege Mansion is a large, two-story, stone house with fine Georgian details. The house has been enlarged by an open porch on the west side and a large kitchen and service wing on the east and additional out buildings and modifications while it was owned by the Caron Foundation. It remains the centerpiece of the Robesonia Historic District properties. (photos courtesy of www.historic-structures.com, circa 1958)

Welcome!

THE FURNACE MANSION

Robesonia, Pennsylvania

Mr. And Mrs. R. L. Miller



built by

George Ege

1807

Robesonia Furnace Ironmasters Mansion

Built by George Ege Circa 1806-1809

George Ege was born on March 11, 1748, the son of Michael, a soldier in the French and Indian War. He was the son of Bernhard Ege, an immigrant to this country from Wurtemberg, Germany in 1738. When George's father died in 1759, Henry William Stiegel, famous colonial iron master and glass manufacturer, took his sister-in-law, Mrs. Michael Ege and his two sons, George, 11, and Michael, 9, in to his family and care at Elizabeth Furnace. It is supposed that the boys were carefully trained by Stiegel in the best methods of iron manufacture.

George Ege evidently started on his own about 1770, by leasing the Berkshire Furnace near Wernersville. By November 14, 1780, he had supplied the national government with shot and shell amounting to the value of 2,894 pounds. This was about \$8,000.

In 1774, when Baron Stiegel was thrown into bankruptcy, Ege purchased his interest in Charming Forge, near Womelsdorf, for 838 pounds. Later that year, he purchased the remaining portions for 1663 pounds, and became its sole owner. In 1777, he built Charming Forge Mansion.

He married Elizabeth Oberfelt of New Jersey, and had three children, George, Rebecca and Michael. There are no descendants now living.

Ege represented the county in the General Assembly for the years 1779, 1780, and 1782. He was appointed an associate judge in 1791, and served continuously in the post until 1881, a period of 28 years. He then resigned to pay full attention to his extensive iron business. With the resignation of Daniel Heister in 1796 it became necessary to hold a double election in October of that year, for the unexpired term of the Fourth Congress, and a member of the Fifth. Both Federalist aspirants, Joseph Heister and George Ege were candidates for the two contests. Mr Ege won. This was remarkable, as the same man on the same day won twice for the same office. It is the only instance of its kind in the political history of Berks County. Ege was the first Berks man to have an intimate acquaintance with Andrew Jackson. Ege's Congressional career lasted from December 8, 1796 to December 1, 1797, when he resigned.

By 1793, the Berkshire property was lacking in sufficient fuel and water. He then constructed a furnace at Robesonia, called the Reading Furnace, which went into operation in 1794. The ore used at the furnace came from the celebrated Cornwall Mines in Lebanon County. The furnace had a gratuitous supply of much ore as was needed to keep one stack in blast for "as long as grass grows and water flows." They had only to pay the cost of mining. Legend has it that this "Deal" was the result of a card game. After Bethlehem Steel acquired Cornwall, they bought out the Robesonia Furnace and dismembered it to stop this "Drain" of their ore and get rid of a competitor

On October 2, 1794, Tom Nelson, a trusty slave, drove his master to Womelsdorf to pay his respects to Washington, who spent the night in that town. Ege was personally known to the first President, because of his patriotic spirit during the Revolution and his prominence as a large manufacturer of iron.

Rock ^{the} Furnace



- Saturday, May 21
- 2-5pm
- \$5.00 Donation
- Food available
- BYOB



4Play

2022 Upcoming Events at the Furnace Pavilion

This year the Friends of the Furnace have planned a number of events at the Furnace Pavilion:

- Saturday, March 19th Easter Craft Show with Nolde Forest Pottery
- April 23rd, Berks Trail Works. (*This is a rental. Not a Furnace Event*)
- Tuesday, May 17th Annual Furnace Dinner starts at 5pm. Catered by Ozgoods. BYOB Information and sign up is in this Newsletter
- **Saturday, May 21st Music by 4Play. Tickets are \$5.00 per person. Food will be available for purchase.**
- Saturday, June 11th **39 with Honor.** (*This is not a Friends hosted Event*) It is a fundraiser for Wreaths Across America featuring music and food. Tickets are available through 39 with Honor.
- Saturday, August 6th Robesonia Garage Sale. Spaces are available at the Furnace Pavilion for \$10 each.
- Saturday, August 20th, Summer Craft Show

Did You Know?

The furnace pavilion is available to rent for your event or special occasion! It's a great facility with electric, ample parking and historical ambiance.

Call 484.955.7381 to inquire.

Robesonia Furnace Ironmasters Mansion

Built by George Ege Circa 1806-1809

On April 11, 1796, Ege bought 92 acres, 131 perches of land on which he later built the Furnace Mansion. This land had formerly been owned by Conrad Weiser, famous Indian Agent and Interpreter, who acquired the land from the Penn's in 1755. It is said that the building of the Mansion took four years. (This would explain why the years 1806, 1807 and 1809, have all been given for the time of its construction.) It was supposedly built by slave labor. Ege reportedly owned 40 slaves whom he treated with great kindness. Yet, as a Congressman, he voted yes on a slave tax.

The finest of silverware and house furnishings were acquired for this outstanding Georgian Mansion. The first known occupant was Samuel Culbertson, a furnace superintendent.

By 1804, George Ege owned and operated Charming Forge with 4,000 acres of land, the Reading Furnace with 6,000 acres and Schuylkill Forge, near Fort Clinton, then a part of Berks County, with 6,000 acres. He also had four farms in Tulpehocken and Heidelberg Townships, which totaled a thousand acres. The latter probably included the land now occupied by the borough of Robesonia, which was founded in 1855. This land at one time belonged to William Allen, who, suspected of being a Tory, lost all his holdings in 1775. In 1785, this land was given to Peter Nagle, a former captain in the Colonial Army. At this time, the rent of "one red rose annually," usually paid to the proprietors by each land holder, was charged to a certain number of bushels of wheat annually to maintain the University of Pennsylvania. This rent was not dropped until 1846. Another part of Ege's farm land was bought from Conrad Weiser, Jr., on June 17, 1779. He paid 200 pounds for 100 acres. In 1824, the assessed value of his holdings was \$380,000.

Continued page 6



August, 1958 NORTH ELEVATION (REAR)

Robesonia Furnace Ironmasters Mansion

Built by George Ege Circa 1806-1809



Mr. George Ege, politician, judge, and successful ironmaster, was distinguished for his great kindness of heart and humane impulses. He died December 14, 1829, at the age of 81.

At present, the property consists of eleven acres of land which serves as a fitting setting for this outstanding spacious dwelling. The main residence, a two and a half story stone mansion, has a wide center hallway and a very fine circular stairway, leading to the upper floors. The seven fireplaces, scattered throughout the home, have interestingly carved wooden mantles. The first floor encompasses a living room, music room, library-study, dining room, two enclosed sun porches, pantry and large kitchen. On the second floor are located the five master bedrooms, a study area and four baths. The third floor, presently unoccupied, has four bedrooms and a bath.

Near the main house is the one and one half story stone guest house. In back of this are two other stone buildings, a large tennis court, a swimming pool and bath house, which was formerly an ice house. Many lovely old trees adorn the property. One of these supports a new specially built tree house. Furnace Creek travels through the property. A large stone and frame bank barn, once converted into a factory, now serves as storage.

The boxwood gardens have been removed over the past several years, mainly because of neglect to the point where they could no longer be made to look presentable. The entrance gates and the stone with plaque mounting in the center of the island are all recent additions.

On the flagpole in front of the house is the Flag of the United States, which is flown 24 hours each day, being lighted from sundown to sunrise.

L. Breininger
Robesonia, Pa.

Robesonia Furnace Ironmasters Mansion

Built by George Ege Circa 1806-1809



September, 1958 ENTRANCE HALL, NORTH END



September, 1958 INTERIOR, DOOR AT WEST END



September, 1958 NORTH WALL OF WEST END

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace 2022 Annual Dinner



Furnace Firehouse Pavilion
Tuesday May 17th, 2022

5:30 - 6:30 BYOB Cocktail Hour
6:30 - 7:15 Dinner Buffet
7:15 Speaker –Edie Shean-
Hammond on Hopewell Village
8:00 - BUSINESS MEETING

- . PRESIDENT'S REPORT
- . TREASURER'S REPORT

OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT : ABBY WERTZ
VICE PRESIDENT : RANDY GARTNER
TREASURER : BARBARA ORTH
SECRETARY : DONNA KUHN
BOARD MEMBERS: TRACY RICE
MARK SPOTS

HAVE AN INTEREST IN SERVING OR DONATING
AN ARTIFACT TO THE MUSEUM? WOULD YOU
LIKE TO SCHEDULE A TOUR FOR YOUR GROUP?
PLEASE CALL 484.955.7381

NEWSLETTER: KEITH RENTSCHLER
BUILDING & GROUNDS: CALVIN YOH
MUSEUM & TOURS: RANDY GARTNER

Registration Form

Name _____ Phone _____

Because the dinner is off premises, we are going with a buffet like we did last year. There will be 2 choices of entrees: Marinated Grilled Chicken or Beef Burgundy. You don't have to choose now, choose at the dinner. Plus salad, soup, rolls and butter, vegetable du Jour, smashed potatoes and desert. You can BYOB. We will supply water, iced tea, lemonade and coffee.

***All this for \$29.95 ***

REGISTRATION DEADLINE TUESDAY, MAY 10TH, 2022
Please make checks payable and send along with form to:
Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, PO Box 162, Robesonia, PA 19551

Membership Renewal Form
(Check your mailing label for your current date of membership)

Date _____ Telephone Number _____

Name _____ Spouse _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Yearly Amount Level		One Time Amount Level	
\$ 10.00 _____ Individual	\$ 25.00 _____ Contributing	\$ 100.00 _____ Life Member	
\$ 20.00 _____ Family	\$ 50.00 _____ Sponsor		

***Memberships for 2021 expires Dec. 31, 2022 *All donations are tax deductible**

**Please make checks payable and send along with Membership Form to:
Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, P.O. Box 162 Robesonia PA 19551-0162**

Did You Know?



That you can schedule a walking tour of the Furnace grounds for your private group? It's true! Call our very own Randy Gartner to schedule. Take advantage of his wealth of knowledge on the Furnace site and operations- 484.955.7381

Sign Up A Friend! How about sharing with a friend or sending them a gift membership?

Inside we share some of the history of the Furnace Mansion, built by George Ege. The information is from a pamphlet authored by Lester P Breiningger Jr, for a house tour event while the home was under the ownership of Mr and Mrs R.L. Miller. Postcard photo above was donated by Estella (Spayd) Renninger, showcasing the Mansion with the front porch roof.



Furnace Mansion, Robeson, Pa.

Friends of the Robeson Furnace
P.O. Box 162
Robeson, PA 19551-0162