

The Gunstock Iron Mine

For a short while during the year 1827 this spot was the site of an early iron mine. During the previous year an ore bearing vein was discovered here, high up on the western slope of Gunstock Mountain, and an entrepreneur named Branch Harlow saw an opportunity to exploit this resource and began preparing to work the site and produce iron commercially.

He began by building a foundry at Lakeport in anticipation of the production of iron ore from the newly discovered site. He also built a boarding house to provide shelter for the substantial work force that he felt it would be necessary to hire to begin his operation.

One thing he apparently didn't do, however, was visit the mine site itself to carefully determine the quality and potential quantity of the ore that was likely to be obtained from the mine. When the mining operation began, it was discovered that the ore that was recovered was of excellent quality, but, so little of it was found per cubic yard of rock that it eventually proved to be too costly to mine to make utilizing the mine profitable. When the most promising vein was worked for about 10 yards (to a depth of about 6 feet and a width of about 8 feet), it didn't produce enough ore worth smelting to fill even one wagon. After working that vein for another 15 yards or more without getting any better results, the miners moved on to try several other spots on the site – but the results were no more encouraging at those spots.

Toward the end of the operation of the mine, a deadly accident occurred when a charge of blasting powder exploded prematurely, killing one man and injuring two others. This event, plus the poor results that the miners had been getting and the great difficulty experienced in getting the ore down off the steep slope of the mountain, plus competition from iron mine operations in Franconia and other locations in the northern part of the state, resulted in the operation being shut down. Mr. Harlow was reported to have suffered a great financial loss in the failed venture.

Interestingly, some of the ore that was recovered from the mine proved to be of such high quality (about 85% pure) that it could be worked up into useful products by local blacksmiths without even being smelted (although most of it was). Gilford blacksmiths made, among other things, nails from this "Gunstock Iron" which were noted for their unusual softness. It is reported that some of the older structures in Gilford still contain nails made from the ore taken from Gunstock Mountain. A 1962 source describes houses known as "the old Thurston Homestead", owned by Leon Tilton, and "the Orman Sanborn place", occupied by the Yorks, as two such structures.