

Mount Riga Ironworks Site Salisbury, Connecticut

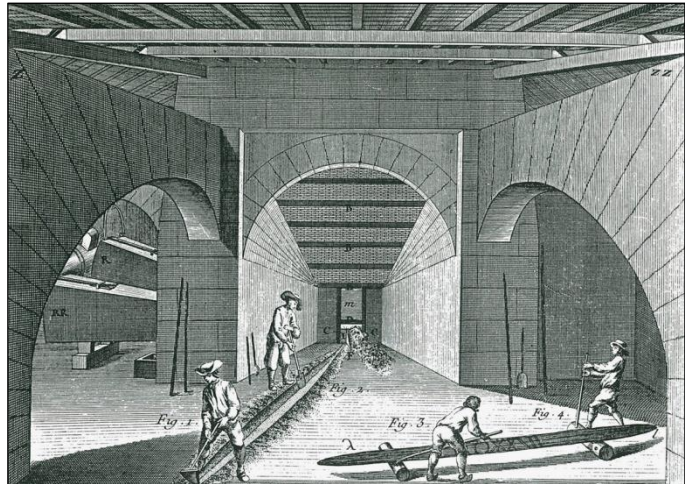
Situated 2,000 feet above sea level on top of Taconic Mountain in Salisbury, Connecticut, is the Mount Riga Ironworks, the oldest standing cold-style blast furnace site in Connecticut.



Mount Riga blast furnace structure

Completed in 1810, the ironworks include the remains of the large stone furnace structure, the foundations of two forges, slag heaps, a fieldstone dam, gate and spillway, a charging platform, and other unknown buried archaeological remains. Part of the greater Salisbury Iron District, the Town of Salisbury was a particular important center because it offered the five necessary components for iron-making: an abundance of hardwoods (charcoal) for fuel, streams to power the triphammers and bellows, high-quality iron ore, limestone to act as a flux and draw out impurities in the ore, and hilly topography to aid in charging (loading and firing) the furnaces. The

Mount Riga furnace was of the cold-blast type, a continuation of English and English iron furnaces of the 17th and 18th centuries. First known as "Mountain Furnace," the ironworks produced pig iron, bar iron, and domestic items. During the War of 1812, ship anchors, including for the frigate U.S.S. Constitution, were also made. Bar iron was shipped to other manufacturers, including the U.S. arsenals at Springfield and Harpers Ferry. A village grew around the ironworks, inclusive of a school, store, post office and about 100 framed houses. The ironworks also brought in many immigrant workers from Wales, Cornwall, Switzerland and the Baltic States, at which time the mountain was renamed Mount Riga. In the 1830s business began to dwindle as wood supplies became low; by the mid-19th century little iron was produced. The ironworks and associated features have undergone little disturbance since they were abandoned and it speaks volumes about the rise and decline of a vitally important early industry. The Mount Riga Ironworks Site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994, authored by AHS director Mary G. Harper.



*Making pig iron at a blast furnace from Diderot's
Encyclopedia 1751-1772.*