

# The Company Store



**The charcoal iron village store became the original version in America of what later became known as the “company store.” The Centre Furnace store provided all the necessities of life for the furnace employees and their families.**

Most furnace workers were hired at a monthly wage — but actually secured but a few dollars in a whole year as actual money. His pay was in “scrip” which was then used as trade in the furnace store. More often than not, the worker’s debt to the store was more than his actual wages. In this way, the ironmaster made it hard for an employee to leave since he always had a debt that needed to be paid. It was, however, not a totally negative situation for those men and their families who had moved to this sparsely inhabited part of the state. They now had the opportunity to buy goods that wouldn’t have been possible if not for the furnace store.

Not only did the store stock everything they needed for daily living such as molasses, vinegar, salt, meat, sugar, coffee, dishes, candles, and cloth; but also “luxury” items such as books, spectacles, razors, silk handkerchiefs, parasols and velvet vests. There also were items for sale made by the furnace blacksmith such as sad irons, lamps, cooking utensils and hardware. Even coffins and funeral supplies were bought at the store.