

Fayette in Photos

Transportation is always an important factor in the profitability of mining. One way to reduce that expense in iron mining is to concentrate raw ore by smelting it into pig iron. To do so, in 1867 the Jackson Iron Company established Fayette, Michigan—named after company official Fayette Brown—twenty miles east of Escanaba at Snail Shell Harbor on Lake Michigan's Big Bay de Noc. Although Fayette lacked iron ore, the small harbor provided adequate shelter to receive it, and Fayette initially had in abundance the other two components needed to make pig iron: limestone

for flux and hardwood for charcoal fuel.

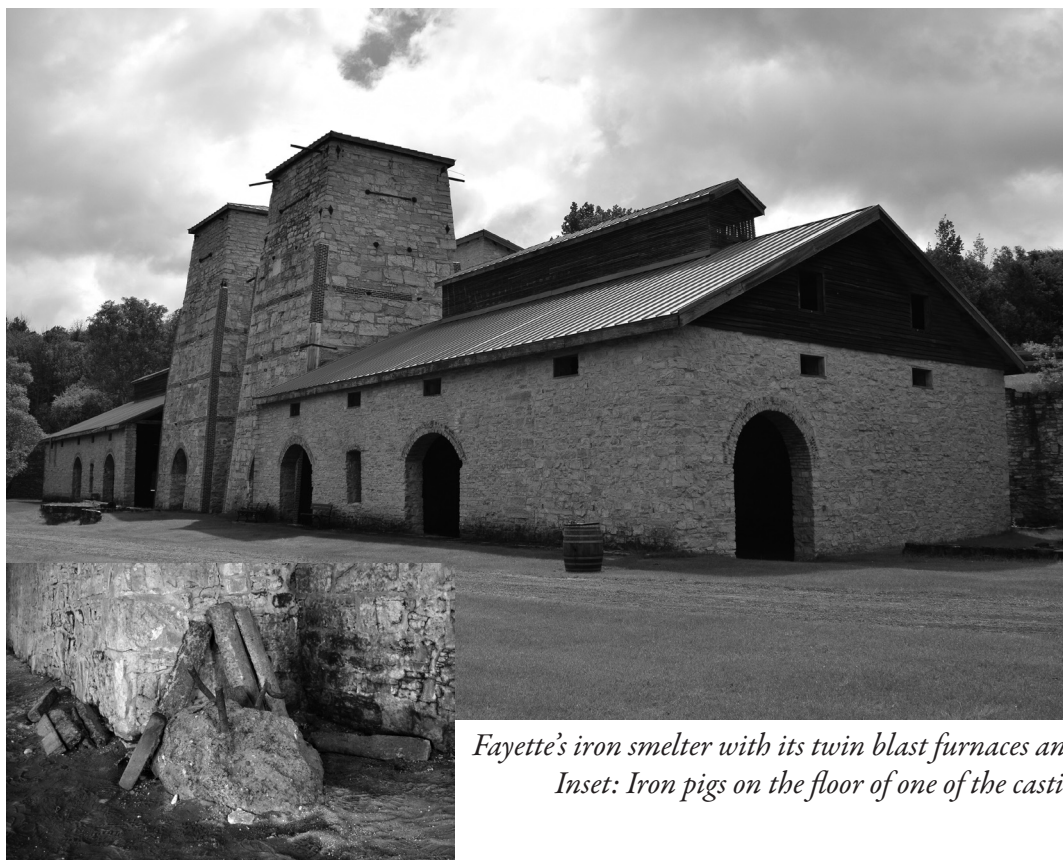
Over the next twenty-four years, Fayette, with about five hundred residents, produced 229,288 tons of iron pigs that it shipped to steelmakers on the lower Great Lakes. Smelting ceased in 1891 due to depleted timber, more efficient competition, and lower demand for charcoal iron. The State of Michigan acquired the area in 1959 and today Fayette State Park has a visitors' center and eleven of the town's buildings open to the public. (Editor's photos.)



An overview of central Fayette from the north. The smelter is to the left, with the roof of the company's stone machine shop partly visible above the right end of the smelter. The three buildings immediately to the right are the roofless remains of the stone company store, the wooden company office building, and the town's hotel with its three dormers. The wooden building farthest right contains the town's theater.

Given Fayette's isolation, the company had to provide for its residents. Beyond the ruins of the company store lies Snail Shell Harbor, where supplies were landed.

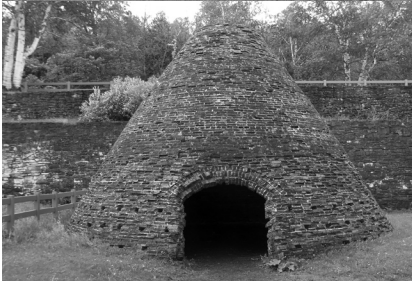




*Fayette's iron smelter with its twin blast furnaces and casting rooms.
Inset: Iron pigs on the floor of one of the casting rooms*



Fayette's theater hosted local events and such traveling acts as Professor Ed Loomis and his Dog Circus, which took the stage in June 1885.



Workers quarried the dolomite cliffs to the left for limestone, processed for flux and for sale in lime kilns such as the restored one at right. Hardwood lumber from the area was converted in charcoal kilns (inset) to fuel the iron smelting.

Fayette's substantial hotel also boarded workers.





Fayette dwellings, surviving or restored, include the superintendent's house across the harbor from the smelter, a middle-class home, and a laborer's cabin.

