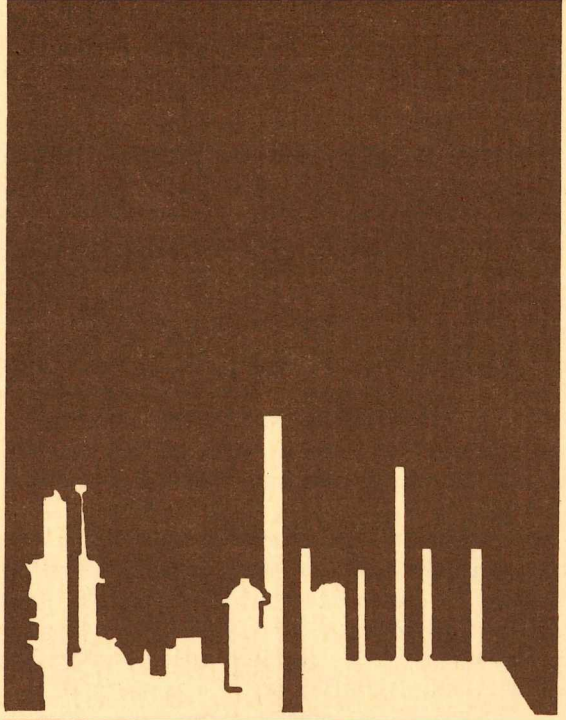


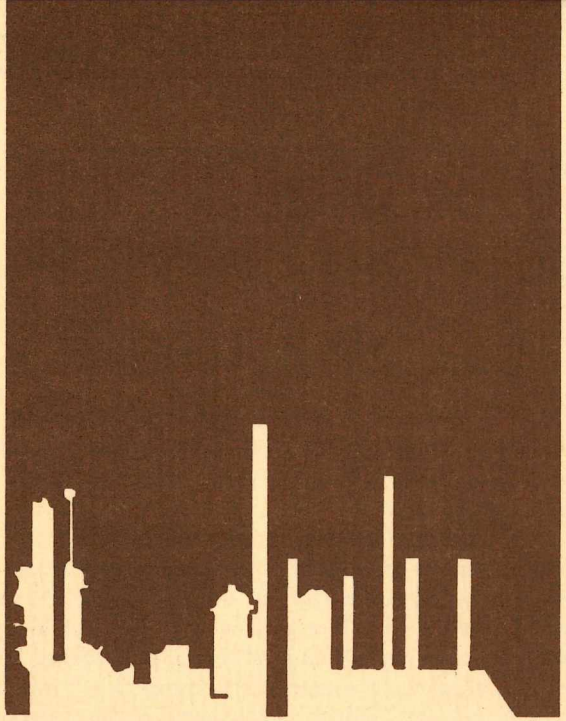
hours

Saturday	10:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.
Sunday	12:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Weekdays by appointment.

Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark
First Avenue North & 32nd Street
P.O. Box 11781
Birmingham, Alabama 35202
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the SLOSS STORY

Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark

In 1876 James Withers Sloss, an Irish farmer's son from northern Alabama, rode into the new village named Birmingham. Already a successful businessman and railroad executive, Sloss joined a small group of entrepreneurs struggling to develop industry in Jones Valley. These entrepreneurs—Colonel James R. Powell, Daniel Pratt, Henry DeBardeleben and others—recognized the great potential for making iron from the area's rich deposits of iron ore, limestone, and coal.

The year 1876 was an auspicious one for Birmingham. In 1876 Levin S. Goodrich, whose grandfather produced iron at the old Tannehill Furnace in the years before the Civil War, produced the first iron in the area using coke made from local coal. Iron produced by using charcoal was too expensive to compete with northern iron, and so Goodrich's experiments at the Oxmoor Furnace demonstrated once and for all the feasibility of iron making in Alabama.

James Withers Sloss was anxious to develop Birmingham's potential as an iron making center. In 1881 Sloss founded the Sloss Furnace Company. Located on the eastern limits of the City of Birmingham, the two blast furnaces Sloss built in 1882 matched the Alice furnaces built only two years earlier by Henry DeBardeleben on Birmingham's western flank. Iron flowed from the Alice and Sloss Furnaces, and the village of Birmingham grew into the great industrial metropolis of the New South.

In 1886, James Withers Sloss retired and sold his company to a group of financiers which included Joseph Forney Johnston, a future U.S. Senator and governor of Alabama. Johnston assumed the presidency of the reorganized Sloss Iron and Steel Company, and the company embarked upon a period of rapid growth. Two new furnaces were built in North Birmingham and extensive coal and ore lands were purchased to ensure a steady supply of raw materials.

A second period of expansion occurred under the leadership of a Virginian, Thomas O. Seddon, who became president in 1888. The Sloss Iron and Steel Company bought 12 smaller companies including several ore and coal suppliers and three furnaces in northern Alabama. At this time the company became the second largest company in the Birmingham district. In 1899, the expanded company was incorporated as the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company.

Sloss Furnaces, the oldest of the company's holdings, was not neglected during this period. The furnaces were rebuilt, and several new structures were added including the blowing engine house and additional stoves and boilers. None of these alterations, however, reflected any major modifications of process or design.

The years from 1927 to 1931 were characterized by a wave of technological changes at the Sloss Furnaces complex. The original furnaces were dismantled and replaced by those presently standing on the site. The new furnaces incorporated several improvements in technology such as a mechanical loading system for raw materials. Other components of the iron making process were also mechanized for the first time, and electrical power was introduced.

In 1952 the United States Pipe and Foundry Company purchased the old Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company, and continued to produce pig iron. In 1969 the Jim Walter Corporation acquired United States Pipe and Foundry, and, in 1971, closed the furnaces standing along the First Avenue North Viaduct.

The Jim Walter Corporation deeded the Sloss Furnaces property to the Alabama State Fair Authority with the hope that the site could be preserved and developed as a museum of industrial history for the citizens of Alabama. The State Fair Authority did not feel that the preservation of the furnaces was feasible, and instead proposed they be dismantled.

The threatened destruction of Sloss Furnaces resulted in great public outcry. A group of citizens organized to champion the preservation of the furnaces, calling themselves the Sloss Furnace Association. Through their efforts the furnaces were deeded to the City of Birmingham, and city voters passed a special bond referendum which raised funds for preservation and development of the historic property. The preservation of the Sloss Furnaces began attracting national attention for the first time when the United States Department of Interior designated Sloss Furnaces as a National Historic Landmark.

The generosity of the Jim Walter Corporation, the dedication and perseverance of the citizens who formed the Sloss Furnace Association, and the support of institutions like the National Trust for Historic Preservation led to the culmination of the project on Labor Day, 1983, when Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark opened to the public.

Sloss Furnaces serves not only as a historic symbol of Birmingham's past, but as a museum and a community center. Sloss Furnaces is more than a landmark or museum—it represents the character and spirit of the south's industrial heritage.