

Some furnaces (figure 3)" were put in blast during the Revolutionary War"²⁵ and production of iron increased during the remainder of the 1700's. Production from those mines was the principal source of North Carolina iron for about 100 years. Thus the acquisition of iron, not gold, was the purpose of the first significant mining activity in the vicinity of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

By 1790 Charlotte was still a small town with a population of only 325 persons.²⁶ The next year George Washington passed through and spent a night in Charlotte. He evidently agreed that it was small for he later wrote in his diary that Charlottetown was "a trifling place".²⁷ One account reported that it did "not deserve the name of a town, (for) it consists only of a wretched court house, and a few buildings . . .".²⁸

Within the last decade of the 18th century two events occurred outside Mecklenburg County that were to profoundly affect the development and character of Charlotte; one was the invention of the cotton gin in Georgia in 1793, and the other was the discovery of gold in neighboring Cabarrus County in 1799. The cotton gin made practical the processing of large quantities of cotton so that much of the agricultural land of the southern United States was converted to cotton growing. Tompkins points out that, ". . .by 1800 the transformation of the South into the cotton plantation system had been accomplished", and that by 1810 nearly all the land in Mecklenburg County had been divided into large plantations.²⁹ At Hayes' Mill cotton ginning machinery was installed. The effect of this transformation was to encourage the system of slavery and to create a rural, wealthy aristocracy living on essentially self-sufficient plantations.



Figure 3. Remains of a Late 18th Century Vintage Iron Ore Reduction Furnace. (from Joseph G. Butler, Fifty Years of Iron and Steel [Cleveland, Ohio: The Cleveland Press, 1923], 23.)