

## The History of Sloss Furnaces

Sloss Furnaces, located in Birmingham, was one of the Southeast's largest manufacturers of pig iron. James Withers Sloss, a north Alabama merchant and railroad man, launched the Sloss Furnace Company in 1881. Sloss Furnaces produced foundry iron, also called *pig iron* because the hot liquid iron funneled into separate iron molds resembled a sow feeding a litter of suckling pigs. Melted foundry iron was used to create cast-iron pipes and was a component of steel. Since all the necessary components for producing pig-iron could be found in the nearby Jones Valley area, Birmingham was an ideal location for the company. The blast furnaces that were built at the Sloss site brought an influx of immigrants and rural Alabamians to Birmingham to work for Sloss and related industries and thrust Birmingham into the Industrial Revolution.

## Vocabulary

**Coal-** a black rock formed from prehistoric plant remains, composed largely of carbon and burned as a fuel.

**Coke-** a solid material derived from coal.

**Foundry iron-** the intermediate product of smelting iron ore with coke. Foundry iron is intended for re-melting to create cast-iron pipe and as a component of steel. Also called pig iron.

**Iron Ore-** rocks and minerals from which metallic iron can be extracted.

**Limestone-** a sedimentary rock made of compressed shells, sand, and tiny fossils.

**Pig iron-** the intermediate product of smelting iron ore with coke. The shape of the mold used to cool the hot pig iron had a central channel with many individual molds branching off, thus resembling a sow feeding a litter of suckling pigs.

**Raw materials-** materials that came from nature and are in an unprocessed or minimally processed state.

## Activity

Now that the events related to economic, historical and environmental issues pertaining to Sloss Furnaces have been recorded in your historical timeline, focus on one specific period of Sloss Furnace's history for this activity. Your group can choose one from the following:

- the 1870's, when Sloss Furnaces was first established
- the 1920's, when Sloss Furnaces was at its peak
- the 1950's, when Sloss Furnaces began to decline

After choosing a time period, together create a postcard that might be sent by someone living in Birmingham at that time. Include illustrations and a catch phrase, poem, or brief description (3-5 sentences) illustrating the specific industrial issue from that period in the Sloss timeline.