



April 2021

Fireworks Over Cleveland License Plate to the Copper Rolling Mill



Parked next to the railroad and from across the street, this battlefield supporter views the site of the Civil War era Copper Rolling Mill in Cleveland, Tennessee. The 1898 map depicts the Copper Rolling Mill location – today a vacant industrial lot, just south of Cleveland's Railroad Depot on Inman Street.

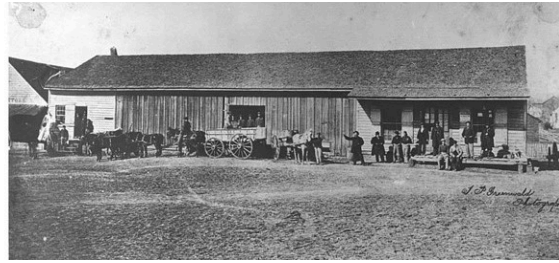
In November 1863 Col. Eli Long's Federal cavalry of 1500 troopers rode into Cleveland with the purpose of breaking up rail and telegraph communications between Bragg at Chattanooga and Longstreet, then threatening Knoxville. Long's raid was one of the most successful, and perhaps most under-appreciated, raids of the War.

While destroying sections of the railroad in the area, Long set fire to the **Copper Rolling Mill**. The only place in the south where sheet copper was produced, the sheets were used by the Confederacy to produce torpedoes (mines), and probably rockets, and some completed ones were placed in the rolling mill to help further its destruction. When the flames reached them, "...the torpedoes...exploded in every direction whirling and hissing through the air in the most dangerous and terrific manner conceivable. In the space of half an hour, upwards of sixteen hundred of these nameless, nondescript, rebel inventions burnt themselves loose from the fiery mass, going off with a successive, rattling, crashing noise, and with thundering, cannon-like explosions, enough to make the uninitiated in the vicinity think *that a battle decisive of the great contest was being inaugurated in the little village of Cleveland.*" *J.S. Hurlburt's History of the Rebellion in Bradley County, East Tennessee, 1866.*

In 1843 copper was discovered in the remote SE corner of Polk County. The lack of roads hindered the northern industrialists' development of the copper mining. In 1847 the first shipment of copper left by mule to the nearest railroad in Dalton, GA. By 1851 the railroad was extended to Cleveland, which then became the closest point on the railroad to the mines. Once the **Copper Road** from

Ducktown to Cleveland was completed in 1853, the copper haulers began carrying the copper to Cleveland and returning to the mines with merchandise and supplies.

In late 1861, as miners left to fight in the Civil War, the northern industrialists who owned the mines closed them. After the Confederacy took control of the Basin the mines were sold to southern capitalists to provide the south with much needed copper. The Confederates soon lost control of the Basin with Union victories in Chattanooga and Knoxville.



Mining engineer and entrepreneur Julius E. Raht's home (1861) and warehouse (1866 photo) in Cleveland. A German immigrant, Raht pioneered the mining and smelting of copper in the Copper Basin. Today the privately owned home stands near the copper rolling mill site. In the photo of Raht's nearby warehouse, Raht stands to the right of the person with an outstretched arm. In early 1861 Julius Raht built the Copper Rolling Mill and managed the highly profitable copper industry as well as a commissary for the miners. After Raht refused to declare his loyalty to the Confederacy, the Confederate government, recognizing the value of the mines and the rolling mill, seized them in accordance with the Sequestration Act. Raht, trying to protect the interest of his northern investors stayed on to help run the operations – until Col. Eli Long arrived. Raht was forced to sign a loyalty oath while his house served as a Union headquarters. Raht then moved to Cincinnati to wait out the War, returning after the War to restart the mines.

Copper was the strategic metal of the Civil War. Copper was essential for a wide variety of war materials from rifle and pistol percussion caps to telegraph wire and bronze cannon. Long's destruction of the Rolling Mill illustrates the growing component of Civil War warfare - destruction of what Grant called "war resources." Access to copper was something else the Confederacy lost when they lost Chattanooga, the Gateway to the Deep South, and the Gateway to the Confederacy's military-industrial heartland in GA and AL.

Although the scar on the landscape of years of copper mining is disappearing in the Copper Basin, the November 1863 destruction of the Copper Rolling Mill in Cleveland is a reminder of an industry that shaped the history of East Tennessee.

Visit the **Museum Center at Five Points** in Cleveland where exhibits focus on the history and culture of the Ocoee region.

The Old Copper Road Preservation Alliance is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of the Old Copper Road. For more information visit: www.oldcopperroad.org.

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