

The Land Between the Lakes Heritage Geocache Challenge 2025 General Stores Between the Rivers

In each geocache box, you should find a sign-in sheet, date logbook and 150 aluminum metal tree tags. We have stamped each tag with numbering specific to that cache location. Collect 1 tree tag per geocache from each of the 7 locations.

- Bring your 7 different metal tree tags to the Golden Pond Visitor Center.
- Exchange them for a special Challenge Coin created just for this event.
- For extra bragging rights, each coin is individually numbered from 1 to 150.
- Once participants have redeemed all tree tags and coins, this year's geocache challenge ends.
- After closing the challenge, we collect the boxes to prepare for next year's event.

Contact Chris Thornock with any suggestions and comments (270-924-2015 or christopher.thornock@usda.gov) .



The Center Furnace Commissary



The company store was generally an employee-only store that generally accepted a form of payment called scrip. This was a non-cash voucher issued by the company ahead of payday so workers could purchase goods.

On the surface, this might seem to be an advantage for the worker, and in some cases it probably could be. But, ultimately, this was a method for the company to ensure worker's wages were re-directed back to the company.

GEOCACHING

Congratulations, you've found it! (Intentionally or not)

It's part of a worldwide game loved by GPS (Global Positioning System) users who are on the internet. It's like a scavenger hunt—it's called geocaching. A GPS user hides a "treasure" (this container), and publishes the exact coordinates so other GPS users can come on a "treasure hunt" to find it.

IF YOU FOUND THIS CONTAINER BY ACCIDENT
Great! You can join with us! We only ask:

- Please don't move or vandalize the container. The real fun is just finding it and recording a visit
- Go ahead and take something if you like. But also leave something too.

www.geocaching.com

Please respect and protect our local heritage by leaving all the cultural material in its current location. Do not remove or disturb the artifacts.



Company stores like the commissary here at Center Furnace had little competition for worker's earnings, since the next nearest store might have been in Energy, Golden Pond, or Ironton, depending on the era involved. The workers at Center Furnace were paid in silver, but allowing purchases on credit created what some call a debt slavery, obligating employees to stay with the company in order to pay their debts.

Chorus 1	Em You load sixteen tons. What do you get?
	Another day older and deeper in debt.
	Am Saint Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
	Em I owe my soul to the company store.

Consider these lyrics to Ernie Ford's, "Sixteen Tons."

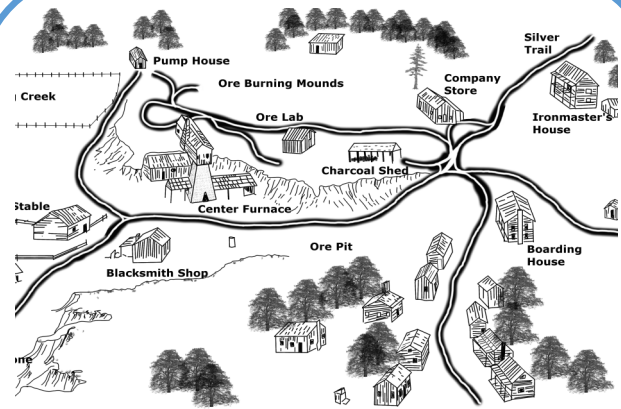
The Economics of Company Stores

There were at least 8 iron furnaces between the rivers in the mid-1800s. Each producing pig iron and each requiring the labor of at least 300-men. Even though much of the labor was done by enslaved people, there was a small community around each furnace.

Many of these male workers had wives and children. With so many families, you can imagine the need for basic groceries and sundries.



Employees posing for a photo at a company store where they were shopping for groceries. Perhaps on credit until the next payday.



The Center Furnace community of workers and their families.

Scrip began as a company store trade credit. Essentially, the store extended credit to the employee in need until payday. A sort of I.O.U. maintained in a ledger by the store. The ledgers eventually were replaced by coupon booklets and then, finally in the form of coins and bills in various denominations like 1, 5, 10, 25, & 50 cents. Or 1, 5, and 10 dollars.



Scrip was originally issued in the form of coins for use in the company store.

Before long, companies like those that ran the iron and timber industries in Western Kentucky and Tennessee were paying employees with scrip instead of silver, ensuring that they could only buy merchandise like sugar, flour, shirts, or even furniture from the company store. While scrip was only redeemable at the company store, there were enterprising locals who weren't employed by the company who figured out how to take advantage. They traded commodities like alcohol for scrip, probably at pennies on the dollar, then redeemed it in the store themselves.

Changing Times

The company store was a major social center of a company town like those found around iron furnaces. It was usually well-stocked with merchandise like groceries, clothes, furniture, etc. though more expensive, people were forced to endure higher prices because of geographical proximity. Traveling 20+ miles wasn't feasible.

Competition from mail-order retailers like Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward eventually helped extinguish the idea of the company store with easily delivered orders for most non-grocery items.

Eventually, it became illegal to pay employees in scrip as most states made it illegal by the 1950s.

