

Cambria Iron Works



Nestled along the banks of the Conemaugh river, the Cambria Ironworks Complex stands as a monument to the heyday of America's industrial might. Founded in 1852 as part of the Cambria Iron Company, the Cambria Iron Lower Works is the oldest iron and steel industry site in Johnstown. The site passed through the hands of Daniel J. Morrell and Midvale Steel and Ordnance Company before being sold to Bethlehem Steel in 1923.

At the height of the steel industry, the mills spanned 13 miles along the Conemaugh, Little Conemaugh, and Stonycreek Rivers and produced over two million tons of steel per year. But this industrial might would not last forever. In the latter half of the 20th century the United States steel industry began to decline, and Johnstown was not immune to these economic factors. The Lower Works mills closed for good in 1992, marking the end of an industry that once provided the town with 12,000 jobs. Over the years, the population of Johnstown sank from its 1920 peak of 67,000 to only 18,000 as of the 2020 census.

Nonetheless, three historic floods and the loss of the steel industry have not been able to keep the people of Johnstown down. In 1998 the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority purchased a portion of the property from Bethlehem Steel Company, both parties hoping that the sale would form the foundations for full-scale commercial and industrial redevelopment at the Lower

Works. Indeed, in 2003 the Redevelopment Authority gained access to even more of the property, including the historic pedestrian footbridge, which workers crossed on their way to and from the city's steel mills in decades past.

The site needed serious remediation to clean up the hazardous materials and substances left over from years of industrial use. The Lower Works were designated as one of the first Brownfield Action Team sites in the Commonwealth, and received funding from over thirteen separate federal, state, and local sources.

The team of remediators formulated the Cambria Iron Works project, a revitalization project that combined tourism of the city's steel-making industry with new jobs where the old mills once stood. The property, now part of the Allegheny Ridge State Heritage park, houses three historic buildings, including a working blacksmith shop, as part of a downtown tourism site. It also includes an urban greenway trail along the Conemaugh and across the restored footbridge, providing an expansion of the Johnstown Urban Greenway Trail across the Conemaugh and into the historic Cambria City neighborhood. The site also houses new manufacturing facilities that provide more than 150 well-paying jobs to local residents.



Before



After



Dick Luther

Maintenance Supervisor
Johnstown Welding & Fabrication and Johnstown Plate.

Thanks to the restoration of the Cambria Iron Works, a new international joint venture, Johnstown Plate, is able to open a steel plating operation and create 100 skilled manufacturing jobs for the area. The inner-city location is ideal, adjacent to steel end-users and rail networks."



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