

NAIL MANUFACTURING IN ESSEX COUNTY

For 150 years after the settlement of Essex County, nails were handmade. Large numbers were used and much labor was needed in their manufacture, which was usually accomplished by blacksmiths' apprentices. The nails were forged from strips of iron, called nailrod, which was rolled at the mills into the right size. It was flat, $3/8$ inch wide and $3/16$ inch thick--about the same of the present day nails.

Large quantities of nails were imported from England, where they could be made less expensively. However, after the "trouble" with England began in 1767, nails were included in the non-importation agreement of the American merchants.

After the Revolutionary War, great quantities of nails were made by farmers, who set up small forges in their kitchens and had their children helped in the process. However, faced with a large demand and a method of supply that was slow and expensive, attention was given to devising a mechanical method of production.

The first machines to make complete nails were invented by Jacob Perkins, son of Matthew and Jane (Noyes) Perkins of Newburyport. Jacob was born 9 July 1766 and apprenticed to a goldsmith in Newburyport. The laboratory and workshop, used by Perkins in Newburyport, was a building in the rear of a house on upper Fruit Street.

In 1790, he invented machines for cutting and heading nails. It is said he produced this machine at Byfield in Leonard Adams' barn. He perfected his machine in Amesbury and a patent was granted to him 16 January 1795.