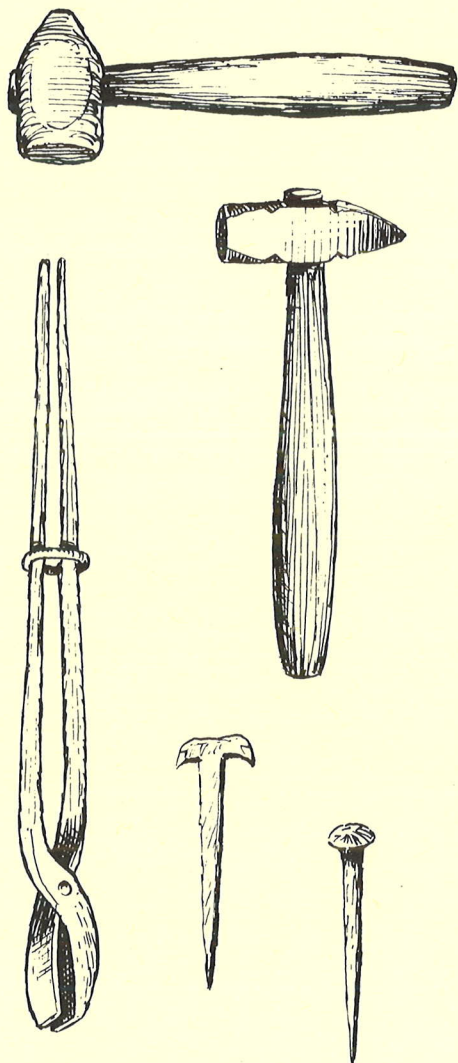


Weymouth Iron Works — A Look Into the Past

By
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On June 16, 1869, the rolling mill of the Weymouth Iron Works burned to the ground. It was again rebuilt only to have flood waters which spilled over Whitman's Pond dam disrupt the company's operation leaving the Iron Works building intact.

All that remains today is the stone office building, the stonework of the dam, and a few feet of broken brick wall. This is all that reminds area residents of an era that they will never know. Many residents remember the upper mill used as a car barn for the electric trolleys of the Eastern Mass. Street Railway Co. Only those with vivid imaginations can picture the factory furnaces blazing in the pre-dawn of East Weymouth.

The Iron Works closed their shop sometime in the 1880's. Three reasons prevailed for this: the invention of the Bessemer Process, the increased cost of transporting coal, quartz, and iron to the works, and finally the highly increased competition with the Pennsylvania Steel Mills.

The company opened on March 4, 1837. Full operation took place during the early 1840's continuing into the next decade. From 1850-1880, the company produced such materials as anchors, chains, shovels, and nails. This was a very prosperous period for the works, with only 275 men employed. These men, many Irish immigrants, toiled usually 12 hours a day, six days a week. Some people say these immigrants and the Industrial Revolution could be responsible for building East Weymouth. The plant was located in the area below the present Police Station, then known as Herrings Island. It was only half its present size. At this time the area where the mill stood was swampy and held only a few scattered houses. The mill stretched from the bottom of Iron Hill Street to an area off Commercial Street. The Iron Works wharf and storehouse were located in an area bordering the Weymouth Back River. Here, at this wharf the cargoes of soft coal from Pecton, Nova Scotia, and the iron ore were unloaded. From the wharf it went through a number of different stations. First, it was pulled on scows where it would either be unloaded and stored, or carted by oxen to the upper and middle mills. These piles of iron used to be located at the base of Iron Hill, where the water-filtering plant is located. Through the years, flooding has wiped out part of the Hill just below Shawmut Street. The foundations of the Iron Works had changed much of the surrounding terrain.

When the Mill was at its peak, it produced nails. Two types of nails were most prominent, the 20 and 40 penny nails. The mills also produced board spikes.

The making of a nail is an interesting process. First the iron ore, quartz, and soft coal were mixed together in the furnace by "puddlers" who worked with long sticks stirring the molten iron until it turned white hot.

After the molten iron had heated to white, it was taken out in a bucket with a pair of tongs. The iron was now hot enough so that the laborers were able to shape it and bend it. It was then pressed through rolls. These rolls were operated by a water wheel. The water which fell from the dam turned the wheel giving enough power to run the rolls.

After a while turbines were used. These needed more water to run and often caused an annual shutdown, whereas before, the plant was forced to close only during a dry season.

After pressed into sheets of several thicknesses, the iron was cut into strips crosswise according to the length of the nails to be made. These strips or plates were worked into shearing machines operated by men (the nail cutters). Sitting on high stools, the cutters would work the plates through the machine by tongs. On one side the nails were cut then the cutter would turn the plate and another nail would be cut etc. In one minute the average nail-cutter could cut one hundred nails.

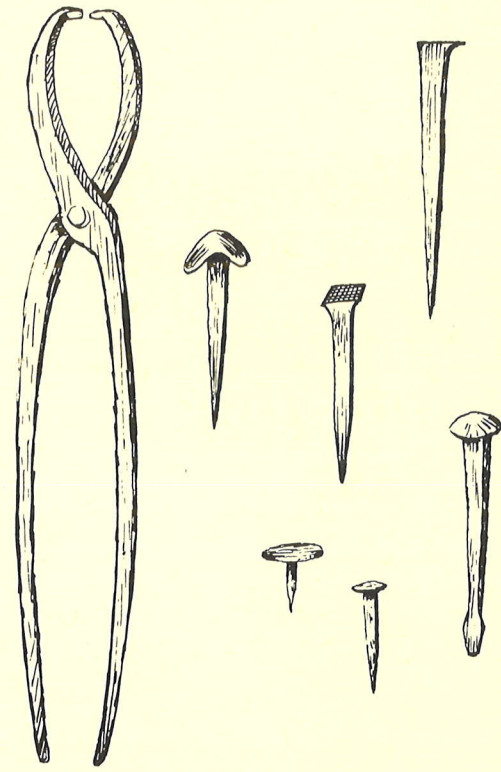
The final step would be to ship the nails to Boston on such sloops as the "General Lovell."

Employees of the Iron Mill were housed by the Company, because of the need for houses. The company owned 15 tenements from the top of Iron Hill Street to the Wharf on the Back River. On Riley Avenue a company-owned boarding house that was split in two is twin houses today.

The last building of the Iron Works was torn down in the mid 1930's after being used for some 40 years as storage facilities by the Eastern Mass. Street Railway Co.

The Iron Works definitely contributed to the growth of Weymouth. It provided work for the residents of the area and also, with the production of nails, had a somewhat small but very necessary part in building homes. For the vessels of war and for ships, a popular way of transportation at the time, anchors were made.

Today perhaps a million or two nails are made in one minute compared to the 100 made in the same period, but the Iron Works provided many contributions to the growth of a successful town, and this contribution should be a cherished part of our historic past!



Weymouth Iron Works

Photo Courtesy G. Stinson Lord