Preparing the Fibers

Bales of hemp were opened in the yarn loft or yarn house. There workers [hacklers] hacked the bast fibers by drawing them through a series of hackling combs. This cleaned out remnant hurds and short fibers [tow]. The long fibers were saved and wound into skeins.

Here workers dress the fibers through the hackling combs. There were generally three combs of greater fineness. The waste short fibers were "tow" and used for oakum—a tow and tar mixture used to caulk [fill] the seams of wooden boats.

Hackling benches at Charlestown Navy Yard yarn loft. The raw hemp was laid in on the bench next to the hackling comb. The long hackled fibers were wound in skeins on the smaller benches next to the hackler. The tow for oakum was put on the left side of the hackling comb.

Bale cart to trundle bales of hemp to the hackling benches.