Spinning the Yarn

The ropewalker gathered a skein of bast around his waist. Sufficient fibers to start a yarn were fastened to a hook or “whorl” on the wheel which the spinning jack turned. The ropewalker moved slowly backwards feeding the fibers evenly into the yarn as it spun through his hands.

Here three men and a spinning boy at Charlestown demonstrate the yarn making process.

The large spinning wheels had as many as six whorls on them for as many ropewalkers to spin yarn at once.

The yarn house might be a separate walk or the second story of a ropewalk. A ropewalker would spin about 70 to 100 feet of yarn at most before starting another length. The yarns were looped on bars and pins on the wall and tied together to form a skein of 400 feet called a “junk”.

Photo courtesy of Pieter Burgess the Cordage