“It is computed the demands from New England for iron ware have this year sunk upwards of ten thousand pounds; as the people of that province now fabricate the more common articles among themselves.” This English note reprinted in The New York Gazette, January 3, 1765, indicates an increased home production in iron despite British restrictions on manufacture in this country. Although the first colonists had used wood and string, and sometimes leather, in making hinges and locks, some wrought pieces were imported by the more prosperous of the early settlers. However, colonial workers were filling much of the local need as the demand for imported ironware declined. A variety of products were cast at colonial forges, while individual metalworkers turned out hand-wrought hinges and hasps, locks and latches, and vari-shaped escutcheons.

The earliest wrought hinges used in the colonies were a common strap type. Long or short they were usually plain, sometimes crude, and always durable. At an early date this type was revised and decorated with the common spear- or cusp-shaped termination. It was the iron-workers of New York, New Jersey, and Long Island who evolved the distinctive circle-eye end. One of the earliest patterned hinges was the familiar cockshead, the design of which probably dates back to a period earlier than Rome. The butterfly, or “duftale,” was also an early favorite, judging from the numbers found. Most common among hinges and most simply functional were, and still are, the H and HL type. As with the cockshead hinges, it is almost impossible to distinguish the English from the American, since England supplied many of these hinges to the colonists.

In the span of years between latch-string and tooled bolt, wood and casting, the demand for more elaborate and decorative hinges increased, while American craftsmanship in wrought iron reached a high peak in artistic excellence. As in other crafts the work varied from region to region. Types made in Massachusetts or Connecticut differ in design and workmanship from that of Pennsylvania, and they in turn differ from each other. It was the

Above: Side hinge with incised supporting brace and pointed finial. Center: Lock escutcheon, Pennsylvania, middle of the xvIII century. The wrought iron illustrated in this article is the gift of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 1949.
Various types of hinges. **TOP**: Butterfly hinge with pin joint; below, a variation of the “bean” type with wrapped joint; right, strap hinge, Pennsylvania, with heart and tulip design. **MIDDLE ROW**: Cockshead hinge; early strap hinge from the Hudson Valley region. **BOTTOM ROW**: Side hinge with pintle joint; conventional half-strap hinge, later in date than the other two.
Pennsylvania Germans who led the way in the use of iron for decorative purposes, realizing perhaps earlier than other craftsmen the potentialities of the medium. Many solid old oak doors were adorned with graceful volutes and assorted flowers. More and more kinds of regional differences could be noticed, from the utility iron of New York, to the highly decorated craftsmanship of the Pennsylvania Germans. The large and delicately wrought side...
hinges and the conestoga bracings illustrated are peculiarly the work of Pennsylvania artisans made in the second half of the eighteenth century, a time when such craftsmanship reached its peak.

Early latches are differentiated by their cusps and grasps. The Suffolk latch has an upper and lower cusp joined by a handle. When the lower cusp was omitted by using the end of the grasp as a nail, driving it into the door, it was called a single cusp. Most often the Suffolk latch has matching inverted cusps, but occasionally elaborate decoration distinguishes the upper plate.

The Norfolk latch has the grasp welded to the back plate, or escutcheon. This latch often had the grasp held by a pin at the top and free at the bottom—a swivel-lift knocker grasp. It was the most popular form of wrought latch but was outmoded when a cast door latch was patented in 1840 and manufactured in quantity.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century locks and latches became extremely complex. But before craftsmanship in locks ended with Yale beautiful examples of the knocker latch and press lock were made, and they still grace many American homes and collections of Americana.