The talk will take us from the late 1800’s, when Abbe published his ground-breaking paper on the limit of resolution of an optical instrument, to the turn of the 20th century, when the field of near-field optics experienced tremendous growth, emphasizing recent work on sub-wavelength focusing using negative-index slabs [1]. In the second half of the talk, we will introduce the concept of near-field plates [2]. These are grating-like planar structures which provide focusing well beyond the diffraction limit, at arbitrary frequencies. The subwavelength electromagnetic-field distributions of the plates closely resemble those of negative-index slabs. Practical implementations of these plates hold promise for near-field data storage, non-contact sensing, imaging, nanolithography and wireless power transfer applications. Experimental results on a microwave near-field plate will be presented, which demonstrate focusing of 1 GHz radiation at a resolution of $\lambda/20$ [3].