

Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

Volume 5 – Issue 8 August 2013

From The Editor –

I hope you are enjoying the summer in spite of the rain in the south and the scorching temperatures in the northeast. Such makes for some wonderful days indoors with a great sewing project. Jim and I just returned from our vacation to Norway where instead of reading nonstop, I sewed, sewed and sewed some more. I will have a special issue in the future devoted to the embroidery and history of Norway with some wonderful pictures.

But for now and without further ado, I would like to introduce you to an unofficial guest for this month's issue – Alex I Askaroff. Born in the late 1950's to a Vietnamese seamstress and a Russian/French father, he grew up in a sewing/product design/production family. Two product names, Premiere Baby and Simplantex were, for over 30 years, synonymous with the best of the best in baby products. Prince William was carried in their family's Palm Leaf Basket! Having grown up in this environment and surrounded by continuous designing and manufacturing, he naturally became interested in the machinery aspect of the industry.

Some people are born with the natural gift of being able to tell a story that captures the listener's attention and holds them in his grasp until the end. Mr. Askaroff indeed has that gift. He has written several books that are available through www.crowsbooks.com.

When I decided to do an article on the history of the Sewing Machine, it quickly became dry and nothing but factual...Alex Askaroff came to my rescue when I found this article on the internet. We will begin with Part I this month, with more on him and the conclusion of the article in September.

I think you will find this issue entertaining and informative, so enjoy...

Happy Stitching,

Sheila



Zeitgeist – The Royal Baby

For our generation, you could say that the start of the celebrity baby craze began on June 21, 1982, when Prince Charles and Princess Diana, along with the world, welcomed baby Prince William. We Heirloom enthusiasts certainly remember the adorable Prince William romper! (A Terry Jane Design) This summer the world's infatuation with everything 'baby' and 'royal' has been revived by a new generation of royal watchers. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have welcomed their son, His Royal Highness, George Alexander Louis, Prince of Cambridge.



The birth of the royal baby boy has capped off a three-year long national celebration that began with the wedding of Catherine Middleton and Prince William April 29, 2011. From the wedding to Queen Elizabeth's 60th Diamond Jubilee, and on to the Summer Olympics in London, the Royal Family has enjoyed a new revival of popularity.

The "Kate Effect" is already well known as sales of anything the Duchess wears or uses soars. Everyone knows how the Royal Wedding impacted the wedding industry, and how the Kate

effect has influenced the fashion industry, from clothing to the now famous clutch purse and beyond.

The 'Kate Effect' has taken the fashion world by storm, and the same will follow for the infant. With the birth of their son lies a cornucopia of delight. With bespoke teddy bears, the imperial rattle, a Spode sippy cup, and more, analysts estimate the baby fever could boost the economy by nearly \$400 million around the globe.

Excitement for the Royal Baby has crossed the Atlantic, too, sending clothing designers scrambling. If there was ever a time when baby clothes will be trendsetting it will be now. But if you think trendsetting will mean 'trendy', think again. We are in the middle of the 'royal zeitgeist' effect clear and simple. But Kate is far from trendy. She is all about tradition, conservatism and heritage, as seen from her wedding dress to her maternity fashions.

As the Kate effect on children's clothing hits, particularly clothing for a baby boy, see the potential NOW. If you do not think it will matter, you have not seen the scope of Kate's influence. I see this as the biggest boost in the Heirloom Sewing industry in many years. Everyone will be wishing to copy the wardrobe of this child. In particular, where in recent years boys clothing has taken a backseat, you will see a resurgence of that traditional southern style of boy dressing.

This is one time to be ready and on the band wagon. Prince George will probably not be seen much for the first few weeks, but NOW is the time to start a 'Royal Baby' section in your store and as pictures emerge, try to emanate the clothing by choosing patterns and fabrics for your display. This is the year to go back to tradition.

Remember....If you want trendy and funky children's fashion, you'll have to wait for Prince Harry to have a baby!

A Brief History of the Sewing Machine

Without the Boring Bits

By

Alex I Askaroff

SO, who invented the sewing machine! People are always asking me! It's a great story. Put the kettle on, make a nice cuppa and read all about it. I will take you on a brief and interesting history tour of one of the most useful inventions of the 19th century.

Sewing machine manufacture started slowly and was constantly interrupted. In 50 years the sewing machine went from a circus attraction to a necessity for every household. By the year 1900 over 20 million sewing machines a year were being produced from all over the world.

Was it the Germans who invented the sewing machine? They think they did. Was it the French? Yep, they know it was them. How about the British! We invented everything. Didn't we? The Chinese? In their 5,000 plus-year history and all that silk, they must have invented it...No! How about the Egyptians and all their cotton! No hieroglyphics of sewing machines discovered yet!

The truth is many nations can claim that they invented the humble sewing machine, read on...

What we have to do is look at the facts that we know at present. There is no saying that the facts we have today are written in stone and that some Russian won't crawl out of the Siberian wastelands clutching a wood and ivory sewing machine made by great Uncle Ivan.

Even back as early as the Elizabethan Period and later in the time of King Charles I, in the 1640's, people were applying for early patents or royal letters of protection and monopolies for weird and wonderful mechanisms. However we have no firm proof of the machines and as poor old Charlie became a cropper we shall never know. In 1649 they removed his head!

So we had better go by dates, the first that we can be sure of was for the patent in England, in 1755. Yes! Come-on-England. Where did I put my flag!

Charles Weisenthal

One Charles Weisenthal (OK, so he was German, but, he was in England) took out a patent for a needle to be used for mechanical sewing. Unfortunately, what sort of mechanical sewing we do not know for the machine was never mentioned.

Thomas Saint

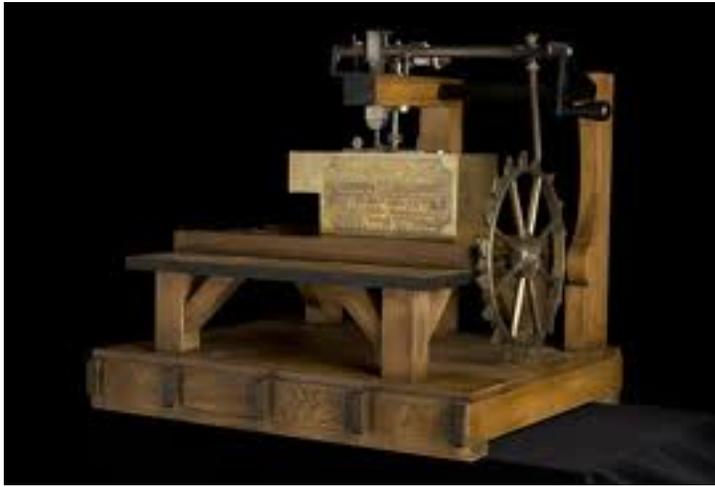
Back once more in England, in 1790, Sorry America, Thomas Saint really cracked it. Not only did he patent a sewing machine but also he provided enough plans that a replica could be built. British Patent No. 1764 was awarded to Thomas Saint, a London cabinetmaker.

Due to several other patents dealing with leather and products to treat leather, the patent was filed under 'Glues and Varnishes' and was not discovered until 1873-74 when the British sewing machine pioneer, Newton Wilson, was researching his history of the sewing machine. He stumbled upon Saint's chain stitch machine and was amazed. He actually built a working model using Saint's patent drawings and a few modifications.

Though the exact replica of Saint's machine **did not sew**, people often patent things with great urgency to protect their inventions. Also patents are rarely the exact final product that comes onto the market. In the case of Thomas Saint, a few minor modifications to his machine, and it sewed like a dream. There is no doubt he would have made these modifications.

Note the case of Elijah Grey! He should be a household name but I bet you have never heard of him? Let me tell you why. Elijah was beaten to the patent office by a few hours by Alexander Graham Bell. Bell went on to patent the talking wire, Elijah went home in tears and faded into oblivion.

In fact recent discoveries have shown that many people actually filed slightly altered patents to stop industrial espionage. Copies of patents were valuable and often sold to the highest bidder. Saint may have even deliberately filed a patent that he knew would not work, to protect his main ideas while he perfected his machine! Actually he never did perfect his machine so that was stupid, but who knows, maybe he would have if circumstances in his life were different.



Thomas Saint's Sewing Machine

So now we know that Saint's patent needed some modification to sew, but I have no doubt he would have performed the modifications if he could have, so we must give him brownie points for effort though no points for giving up early. Perhaps he had an urgent cabinet to finish?

But I have to say, yeehaaa...Another first for England, along with cricket, golf, rugby, soccer, snooker and my favourite...Afternoon tea - promptly at four with cucumber and salmon sandwiches.

Thomas Stone

In 1804 we go to France where Thomas Stone, (not a particularly French name) had patented a machine that we know nothing about...Yet!

That must have been a good year as we have two other gentlemen on the scene, a James Henderson and a canny Scot, and Mr. Duncan for an

embroidery machine. Again, nothing has come to light about their machines but we live in hope.

Baltasar Krems

Around 1810 in Germany, Baltasar Krems made a sewing machine for sewing hats and caps. Because old Balt did not patent his design we cannot be sure of the exact dates but we do know he was German, yavol! I have a sneaky suspicion this was more of a knitting machine anyway! Apparently in Krems there is a bust of the great inventor, and there is a replica of his machine in Krems and in the Deutsches Museum.

Josef Madersperger

Now across the border to the land of snitchzel, googlhump's and lederhosen...Austria.

The year is 1814, Napoleon is about to meet his Waterloo and Josef Madersperger, a humble tailor is building the first of several machines. Although he had been working on his machine since 1807 it was not until 1815 that he was granted patent rights on his model.

He had tried in vain for years to get his machine right, and in 1839 he almost cracked it. In 1841 his machine was awarded a bronze medal but he could not find a manufacturer to take it on. Josef had invested every penny in his invention and spent his whole life working on it. However he was still making the same old mistake trying to make his machines copy the hand movement of sewing girls. Eventually Josef gave his model away and a few years later, in 1850, he died a pauper in the poor house in Vienna. Sounds tragic but dying rich ain't no picnic either!

He is still held by the Germans as the inventor of the sewing machine. They even have a statue of him.

Hold on I hear you shouting! What about America! Well at last, we come to the home of the brave and the land of the free.

John Knowles

In 1818 John Knowles and his partner, Dodge, strap on your guns boys! made a sewing machine. It really stitches! But there is a catch! Isn't there always! The machine will only stitch a few inches of cloth before the cloth has to be taken out and reset. What a waste of time. Much faster to still carry on hand sewing, so chuck that in the bin!

At this rate it looks as if no one is going to figure out the first piece of engineering to enter the domestic household. But we have not finished, the wheels of the industrial revolution are turning and great minds are at work.

Henry Lye

In 1826, Henry Lye of Philadelphia, PA, patented a sewing machine of sorts but fire destroyed the patent office and his invention. Don't worry there is more fire coming up!

We now skip back over the ocean to France, home of frog legs, brie and snail snacks. I bet their buffets are fun!

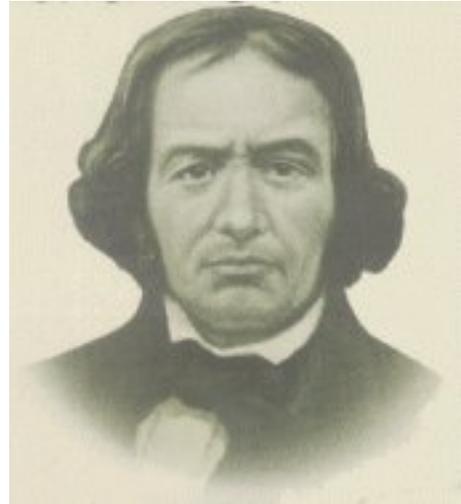
Barthelemy Thimonnier

In 1829-30 the first real sewing machine that we know of was born. Barthelemy Thimonnier (I'm going to call him Bart now as it makes my head hurt spelling his name) took out a patent for a barbed needle to be used in his sewing machine. The machine, made of wood, actually worked, producing a chain stitch, you know the sort of stitch you find across potato sacks. In fact it worked so well that he gained a contract to build loads of them. They were used to sew uniforms for the French army.

Before long Bart was sewing away with dozens of machines taking work from the hungry tailors of Paris. We all know what Frenchmen are like when their blood is up. Madame Guillotine was still

warm from their revolution. In 1813 it all came to a head at his workshop in Rue de Sevres where 80 of his wooden machines were busily sewing sway.

The angry tailors, now out of work because of the modern machine gathered outside Bart's premises and stormed in. At first they threw garlic at the machines but to their amazement they bounced off! They decided to have a booze up and torch Bart's workshop. The crowd watched as poor old Bart headed for the hills, his business in flames.



Portrait of Barthelemy Thimonnier

Bart, unperturbed and with that usual French resilience, started all over again with an even better model. Nevertheless, those sneaky tailors knew what he was up to and set about the poor fellow, this time with far more powerful weapon, strings of onions!

Bart fled to England just like the many aristocrats that had feared for their lives during the French Revolution years earlier. Where was the Scarlet Pimpernel when he was needed, eh?

Bart flogged his patents to a company in Manchester but never regained his former success and although he had made the first reasonable sewing machine it did not stop the poor old tailor ending up like his Austrian counterpart. Poor old Bart died in poverty in Amplepuis on the 5th of August 1857.

We have to step back a little and ask ourselves why so many workmen were afraid of machines. Well it all boiled down to jobs. They had no idea that the industry they were destroying would actually end up employing untold numbers of workmen across the globe. The fact is, like many of us today, they feared change.



To make things worse for poor old Bart he probably witnessed the birth of the real sewing machine industry as when he died in 1857 many of the major inventors had produced practical sewing machines and made loads of dosh from them.

Meet the new L-2 !

It is 9/16" or 14mm wide and carries a 1/4" ribbon. It is perfect for the beginner of novice because it allows more lace for the seam allowance.

However, we are jumping ahead. I do hope you are enjoying the history so far.

Continued next month -



FYI Define "Zeitgeist"

Zeitgeist is defined as the spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time. It literally translates to 'spirit of the time', and is the intellectual, thought or fashion that typifies and influences the culture of a particular time. Certainly we are in 'British Zeitgeist' at this time with the birth of the Royal baby!

And how do you pronounce 'zeitgeist'? Think of it as two syllables. Zeit can be pronounced to rhyme with fight only with a 'z' of course. Geist sounds a bit like ice with a 't' on the end.

And now you know.....

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