

Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

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September 2013

From The Editor –

Alas, summer is still in our sights, but most of us have fall on our minds. With many schools having begun classes in early August, thoughts are moving from the pool to football fields, Halloween and beyond. As shop owners, this is a good thing, for with the kiddies back in school; moms can begin to look forward to some quiet time at home to sew for fall and holiday. Pack away the swimsuits and pull out the corduroy. With little Prince George already making fashion baby waves, I hope you all are ready for the impact he (via his mom Kate) will be having on the baby boy clothing surge. Just as I predicted last month, already the Aden + Anais swaddling blanket is sold out. And as I write this, we have yet to see the little Prince in any 'outfits'. Just imagine the frenzy that will ensue when the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge finally step out with their little one in tow. Whatever the baby is sporting, beware!!!

We have decided to include in each *Bear in Mind* issue for the next year (until Prince George celebrates his first birthday), a column 'From the Royal Closet, Dressing Your Little Prince'. Each month we will feature garments age and season appropriate for a baby boy. We think this will inspire some refreshing ideas for sewing for the little boys, where for so long there has been so little from which to choose.

We welcome anyone who wishes to contribute to this project, so contact us at 404-255-5083. We welcome your ideas and sewing skills.

And this month we conclude Alex I Askaroff's article of the history of the sewing machine. Remember his books are available at crowsbooks.com. You can Google him by name for some very interesting reading.

Without further ado, enjoy the latest edition of *Bear In Mind*.

Happy Stitching,
Sheila



What kind of sewing machine did you learn to sew on? I learned on my mother's Kenmore in the late 1960's. It sewed the most beautiful button holes. -- T



Little Prince George is only 6 weeks old, but he is already making a wave with his blankets! We share with you two garments that would be so appropriate and comfortable for him or your little prince. Remember, that while they sleep a lot, they do perspire. AND they wiggle around a lot so comfort is of utmost importance!

Our first item is a day gown, a BOY day gown I say. Ours is made of the Swiss Voile in blue check. Carrying through the geometric fabric scheme, we have used Bear Threads Swiss eyelet edge, E-9 in a square pattern. Even the buttons are square. It doesn't get more 'boyish' than this. And why fuss when this little dress is wrinkle shy (a natural trait of the Swiss Voile), and oh-so easy to iron. I did a little fussing by adding just a touch of feather stitching. A little bit of the seamstress' love thrown in.



Our second garment is a bubble, in which every baby is adorable. I am sure this would be the choice for Prince George to wear to meet the Queen and Prince Phillip the first time! This one is made of Bear Threads 'Bearlin' (52% Irish Linen and 48% Swiss Cotton). Because of the blended fabric it will not wrinkle as much as 100% linen (and is about ½ the price!!!). Also, the blend of two natural fibers, it is very absorbent - for perspiration and accidents. The appliquéd duck is from our Silky Cotton and with its supersilk finish is a wonderful contrasting fabric. We thank Old Fashioned Baby for this pattern.



Now on to fall and the Holidays....What shall he wear.

If any of our pattern companies and/or designers would like to contribute as we dress the Royal Baby, please contact us at:

bearthreadsltd@bellsouth.net
404-255-5083

A Brief History of the Sewing Machine

Without the Boring Bits

By

Alex I Askaroff

Continued from August issue

Newton and Archibold

In 1841 Newton and Archibold, in England, designed a chain stitch machine employing an eye-pointed needle, little else is known of their invention. No fun there, I am missing those French tailors already!

So where do we go now, Japan, no, India...Could be! No, we are off to America, la-la-la-laa- America. Where's my hotdog and mayo!

John James Greenough

In 1842 John James Greenough patented a sewing machine with a stitch forming mechanism. It had a device for presenting work onto a double pointed needle with an eye in the middle! How weird is that! I bet he pricked his fingers a few times!

Frank Goulding

In 1843, Dr. Frank Goulding of Macon, Georgia also created a sewing device but once again he failed to develop it, as did Walter Hunt. You'll read a little about him later. What a lot of failures we have in our story! No wonder no one trusted Singer's invention when he tried to sell it...Oop's now I have given the story away! We are getting close to the real inventors so stay with us...

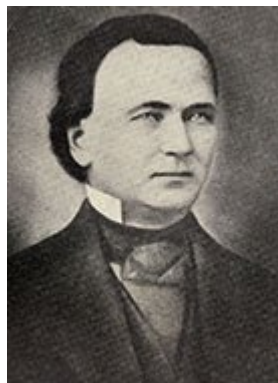
The problem is that no one has yet invented a machine that was much good and they all looked like medieval torture instruments until Walter Hunt. If you saw a machine from 1850 you would say who could use such a monster! It looked like the machine had eaten its operator with just her petticoat showing!

But times are-a-changing. Here comes Walter's machine, and for the first time we see a machine that we can recognise as a sewing machine. One that can be sold to every household.

Things are looking up, especially in America where the inventor of the Safety Pin was hard at work in his basement.

Walter Hunt

Walter Hunt is in his basement. He is arguing with his daughter. Walter has made a sewing machine that produces a lockstitch. What is more, it is not the old fangled type that tried to copy the movements of the human hand. It is a brand new design that really works. It even had two spools of thread. The year is 1834.



Hunt invented the lockstitch sewing machine (1833), safety pin (1849), a forerunner of the Winchester repeating rifle, a successful flax spinner, knife sharpener, streetcar bell, hard-coal-burning stove, artificial stone, street sweeping machinery, the velocipede, and the ice plough.

Don't forget threads had been around for centuries before the sewing machine. Even sewing threads had to be modified to be used on sewing machines.

His machine took two spools of thread and a needle that looks similar to the ones we use today. It produces a lockstitch. Its only drawback was short seams. Look on the positive side; it would have been great for dolls clothes!

Walter's daughter is giving him an ear bashing in the basement. Does he not realize how many women will be put out of work if he patents his sewing monster! People will starve in the streets!

Eventually Walter gives in and leaves his invention to gather dust. Little did he realise that firstly, he would actually create endless jobs for workers as

sewing machines made clothes cheaper and more available to the masses. But also, he would have become rich in the process. Then he would have been able to send his aggravating daughter to a Swiss finishing school!

Walter Hunt was a prolific inventor and must have had mixed feelings about people because he also invented a repeating rifle!

Still, Walter disappears from our story. He does reappear patenting an improved model of his earlier invention in 1854 (some 20 years after he first developed it) but it is all way too late by then. He also appeared in many court cases between several of the larger sewing machine characters all bluffing their way through court, but that's a long way off.

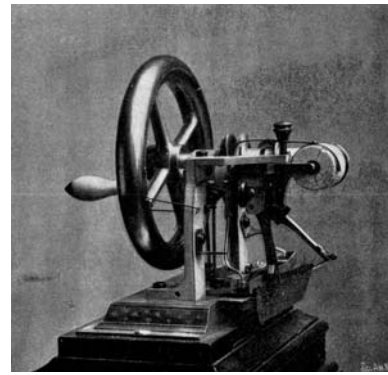
Walter Hunt will always be remembered not for the sewing machine but for another point in history. He invented the safety pin! See what I did there!! Mind you, he also invented a sort of cure- all life preserver tonic. Probably early Wild West snake oil. Best forget about that. So let us finish with this colourful character and get back to business.

John Fisher

In 1844, back in England, John Fisher patented a lace-making machine that sewed. However, the patent was misfiled and John did not pursue his invention.

Elias Howe

The year 1844 was a good year for in America a young farmer was about to shake the sewing world. Elias Howe finished his machine in 1844 and patented it a year or so later. A Massachusetts farmer, Elias went on to become one of the richest men in the world and then his wealth disappeared as quick as snow in summer.



Elisa Howe's Sewing Machine, 1846

Elias tried in vain to sell his contraption, but it had no takers in America. The poor farmer had spent months perfecting a machine that once again copied a hand movement. However he had several good ideas that were similar to Hunt's and took the precaution of patenting them. He travelled to England where his brother, Amasa, had found a possible purchaser and backer. All this ended in tears and a disappointment, so Elias headed home.

On arriving back in America he found things had changed. Much like the computer industry today, a year can be a long time, with new developments taking place almost weekly. Elias found that in his absence sewing machines had hit the big time. Dozens of sewing machine companies had sprung up and many of them were using his patents! Especially his clever needle with the long groove in it to protect the sewing thread that kept unraveling and snapping.

Isaac Merritt Singer

Elias went ballistic; suing everyone he could, including our most famous sewing machine entrepreneur, Isaac Singer. Isaac, in 1850, had won a bet, so he says, to make a better sewing machine than what was available on the market. It was patented in 1851 and changed the world.

Elias Howe was poor at selling his sewing machine but brill in court; he must have had good lawyers. He made a fortune. He made two fortunes, not from producing sewing machines but from suing everyone that did. In addition, those he did not

sue, he charged a ridiculous license fee, just like the BBC does to us here in England.

Eventually, Elias and the other big boys in the sewing industry got fed up with fighting and got together. They formed the Sewing Machine Cartel. Then they fought everyone else. What fun! It was totally illegal and was brought to an end years later by a change in the law. However they all made a mint out of it while it lasted.

Howe then went on to write a rather dubious history of his side of events. This painted him as the only real inventor of the sewing machine. A rather far-fetched picture by all accounts. His monster machine would never have caught on. It could only sew in short straight lengths. Mind you he made a good needle, better than almost anyone at the time.

Sewing Machine Cartel

Just for your records or school project the cartel were, Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Wilson, Isaac Singer, Mr. Grover and his partner Mr. Baker and of course Elias Howe and a few small fry that we won't mention. It was Wilson that really helped with his method of feeding the work through the machine with a set of teeth. It was called the four-motion-feed and is still used today.

Elias could not have been all bad as he used some of his enormous wealth to equip a whole Union infantry regiment in the American Civil War then enlisted himself, as a private.

Out of all these manufacturers, by 1851 Isaac Singer had the best machine. It incorporated many features that we still see today. He really won hands down with his treadle which allowed both hands free for sewing. Although Isaac cannot be credited with any major invention, (he allegedly copied just about everything) he did make a blinder of a sewing machine and had a few patents to boot.

Of course the answer was there in front of us all the time. Isaac's machine bears a startling resemblance to the gearing and shafts on water mills that had been grinding flour for over 2,000 years. His genius lay in copying and then improving on what was around at the time. Was there a little bit of Japanese blood in him?

Basically, the human mind rarely makes huge leaps in technology. In fact I think it is just about impossible. If it was we would have evolved much faster than we did. I think people see an idea and improve on it. Which, I believe, is what happened with the sewing machine? The perfect example is

Charles Judkins

In 1851 C T Judkins was already exhibiting and selling his weird box-shaped sewing machines. At the Great Exhibition in 1851 Charles Judkins demonstrated his power driven machine by sewing nearly 500 stitches into fabric in one minute. As a point of note his was the only British sewing machine exhibited. How that changed in a few short years. The world was ready for the sewing machine.

From the early 1850's, the handful of inventors turned into hundreds, then thousands and tens-of-thousands. The Singer Company went on to perfect the sewing machine and dominated world production for the next century. To begin with, the press was not very positive about sewing machines. The first mass produced domestic appliance in history had arrived in the household. However it was not as simple as you may think. The first reliable sewing machines were here at last but because we had been plagued by countless poor and faulty machines before so no one trusted these new sewing machines. However once the factories got their production right sewing machines were on a roll.

They say that gun makers like Winchester and Samuel Colt toured the Sewing machine factories perfecting their mass production techniques for arms. Many of the factories that had tried the first

machines had their fingers burnt and were reluctant to waste more money, especially while labour was so cheap.

Isaac Singer went into overdrive, and his early acting skills came into their own, as he paraded his machines around like a fairground attraction.

By the middle of the 1850's everyone could see the light and from then on it was all down to good marketing. Some, like Singer and Pfaff were marketing experts and their machines flourished. Many, like poor old Josef and Bart mentioned earlier, died in poverty.

By the late Victorian period the sewing machine had been hailed as the most useful invention of the century releasing women from the drudgery of endless hours of sewing by hand. Factories sprung up in almost every country in the world to feed the insatiable demand for the sewing machine. Germany had over 300 factories, some working 24 hours a day producing countless numbers of sewing machines.

By 1926 the American patent office had over 150.000 different patent models. Tricky dusting those. Within decades, millions of sewing machines were being sold to every corner of the world and all our clothes looked much better!

Today, there are some sewing machines that are so advanced they can scan a pattern, duplicate it, then store the pattern in case it is needed again and maintain themselves. In addition, if that is not enough, they actually speak to you when there is a problem. Boy do they drive me mad when I am fixing them!

So there we have it, a brief history of the first sewing machine inventors. As clear as mud! Like I said at the beginning, many countries can claim to have given birth to the first sewing machine, but like Elias Howe and Isaac Singer found out, it would be hard to prove in court. □

CREATIVE SEWING MARKET

SEPTEMBER 8 & 9
GRANDVIEW MARRIOTT
ON HWY 280
BIRMINGHAM, AL

**We have 11 new fabrics,
and quantities are
limited at this time so
please come early!**

AS USUAL WE WILL HAVE A
WONDERFUL ASSORTMENT
OF ANTIQUE AND UNUSUAL FINDS
FOR YOUR SEWING ENJOYMENT!
REMEMBER IT IS
CASH AND CARRY ONLY
NO CREDIT CARDS!
COME EARLY AND SEE US FIRST!

FYI

“French Handsewing vs. Machine French Sewing”

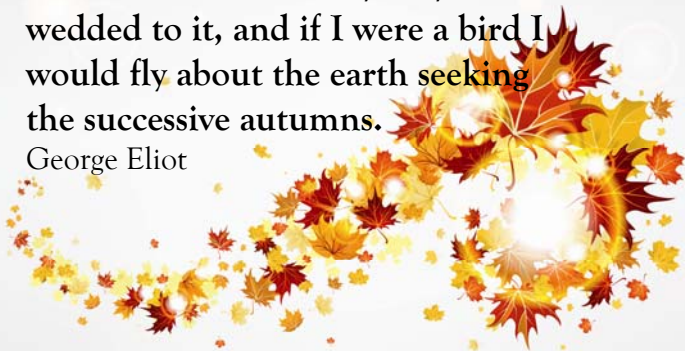
One thing that really upsets me in this industry (second only to the miss-pronunciation of ‘entredeux’! -- see a previous issue for this correction!) is our seamstresses, and worse yet, shop owners, referring to Machine French Handsewing, or French Handsewing by Machine. There is simply no way a machine can do ‘hand sewing’. So don’t show your ignorance, but be smart and say “Machine French Sewing” or “Mock” French Hand Sewing done on the machine.

And that is my FYI for the month –

Sheila

Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.

George Eliot



LITTLE BOY BLUE



Little Boy Blue
Come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow,
The cow's in the corn;
Where is that boy
Who looks after the sheep?
Under the haystack
Fast asleep.
Will you wake him?
Oh no, not I,
For if I do
He will surely cry.

Author: L. Frank Baum
From: “Mother Goose in Prose”

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