<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#Invention>

In 1790, the English inventor Thomas Saint invented the first sewing machine design. [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-The_Servant_in_the_House:_A_Brief_History_of_the_Sewing_Machine-3) His machine was meant to be used on [leather](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leather) and [canvas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canvas) material.

In 1804, a sewing machine was built by the Englishmen Thomas Stone and James Henderson, and a machine for embroidering was constructed by John Duncan in Scotland.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-5) An Austrian tailor, [Josef Madersperger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Madersperger), began developing his first sewing machine in 1807 and presented his first working machine in 1814. Having received financial support from his government, the Austrian tailor worked on the development of his machine until 1839, when he built a machine imitating the weaving process using the chain stitch.

The first practical and widely used sewing machine was invented by [Barthélemy Thimonnier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barth%C3%A9lemy_Thimonnier), a French tailor, in 1829. His machine sewed straight seams using chain stitch like Saint's model, and in 1830. The [patent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patent) for his machine was issued on 17 July 1830, and in the same year, he opened, with partners, the first machine-based clothing manufacturing company in the world to create army uniforms for the [French Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Army).

The first machine to combine all the disparate elements of the previous half-century of innovation into the modern sewing machine was the device built by English inventor John Fisher in 1844, a little earlier than the very similar machines built by [Isaac Merritt Singer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Merritt_Singer) in 1851, and the lesser known [Elias Howe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elias_Howe), in 1845. However, due to the botched filing of Fisher's patent at the Patent Office, he did not receive due recognition for the modern sewing machine in the legal disputations of priority with Singer, and Singer reaped the benefits of the patent.

Elias Howe, born in Spencer, Massachusetts, created his sewing machine in 1845, using a similar method to Fisher's except that the fabric was held vertically. An important improvement on his machine was to have the needle running away from the point, starting from the eye.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-9) After a lengthy stay in England trying to attract interest in his machine, he returned to America to find various people infringing his patent, among them Isaac Merritt Singer.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-10) He eventually won a case for patent infringement in 1854 and was awarded the right to claim royalties from the manufacturers using ideas covered by his patent, including Singer.

Singer had seen a rotary sewing machine being repaired in a Boston shop. As an engineer, he thought it was clumsy and decided to design a better one. The machine he devised used a falling shuttle instead of a rotary one; the needle was mounted vertically and included a presser foot to hold the cloth in place. It had a fixed arm to hold the needle and included a basic tension system. This machine combined elements of Thimonnier, Hunt and Howe's machines. Singer was granted an American patent in 1851. The foot [treadle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treadle) used since the Middle Ages,[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-11) used to convert reciprocating to rotary motion, was adapted to drive the sewing machine, leaving both hands free.

Clothing manufacturers were the first sewing machine customers, and used them to produce the first [ready-to-wear](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ready-to-wear) clothing and shoes. In the 1860s consumers began purchasing them, and the machines—ranging in price from £6 to £15 in Britain depending on features—became very common in middle-class homes. Owners were much more likely to spend free time with their machines to make and mend clothing for their families than to visit friends, and [women's magazines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_magazine) and household guides such as [*Mrs Beeton's*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mrs_Beeton%27s_Book_of_Household_Management) offered [dress patterns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dress_pattern) and instructions. A sewing machine could produce a man's shirt in about one hour, compared to 14

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1⁄2 hours by hand.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-draznin2001-19)

In 1877 the world's first [crochet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crochet) machine was invented and patented by [Joseph M. Merrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_M._Merrow), then-president of what had started in the 1840s as a machine shop to develop specialized machinery for the knitting operations. This crochet machine was the first production [overlock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overlock) sewing machine. The [Merrow Machine Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merrow_Machine_Company) went on to become one of the largest American manufacturers of overlock sewing machines, and remains in the 21st century as the last American over-lock sewing machine manufacturer.

In 1885 Singer patented the [Singer Vibrating Shuttle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singer_Vibrating_Shuttle) sewing machine, which used Allen B. Wilson's idea for a vibrating shuttle and was a better lockstitcher than the oscillating shuttles of the time. Millions of the machines, perhaps the world's first really practical sewing machine for domestic use, were produced until finally superseded by rotary shuttle machines in the 20th century. Sewing machines continued being made to roughly the same design—with more lavish decoration—until well into the 1900s.

The first electric machines were developed by [Singer Sewing Co.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singer_Corporation) and introduced in 1889.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-20) By the end of the [First World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War), Singer was offering hand, treadle and electric machines for sale. At first, the electric machines were standard machines with a motor strapped on the side, but as more homes gained power, they became more popular and the motor was gradually introduced into the casing.

Before sewing machines were invented women spent much of their time maintaining their family's clothing. Middle-class housewives, even with the aid of a hired seamstress, would devote several days of each month to this task. It took an experienced seamstress at least 14 hours to make a dress shirt for a man; a woman's dress took 10 hours;[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-SewingMachine-31) and a pair of summer trousers took nearly three hours.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-19thCenturyFashionandtheSewingMachine-32) Most people except the very well-off would have only two sets of clothing: a work outfit and a Sunday outfit.

Sewing machines reduced the time for making a dress shirt to an hour and 15 minutes; the time to make a dress to an hour;[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-SewingMachine-31) and the time for a pair of summer pants to 38 minutes.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-19thCenturyFashionandtheSewingMachine-32) This reduced labor resulted in women having a diminished role in [household management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Household_management), and allowed more hours for their own [leisure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leisure) as well as the ability to seek more employment.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-SewingMachine-31)

The sewing machine's effects on the clothing industry resulted in major changes for other industries as well. Cotton production needed to increase in order to match the demand of the new clothing factories. As a result, cotton became planted in new areas where it had not previously been farmed. Other industries involved in the process benefited as well such as metal companies who provided parts for the machines, and shippers to move the increased amounts of goods.[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-TheSewingMachineandItsImpactonAmerica-33) In addition to being important for clothing production, sewing machines also became important in the manufacturing of furniture with upholstery, curtains and towels, toys, books, and many other products.[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing_machine#cite_note-TheSewingMachineandItsImpactonAmerica-33)

https://ismacs.net/sewing\_machine\_history.html

In America a quaker Walter Hunt invented, in 1833, the first machine which did not try to emulate hand sewing. It made a lock stitch using two spools of thread and incorporated an eye-pointed needle as used today. But again it was unsuccessful for it could only produce short, straight, seams.

A year later it was patented and [Howe](https://ismacs.net/howe/home.html) set about trying to interest the tailoring trade in his invention. He even arranged a competition with his machine set against the finest hand sewers in America. The machine won hands down but the world wasn't ready for mechanised sewing and, despite months of demonstrations, he had still not made a single sale.

Desperately in debt [Howe](https://ismacs.net/howe/home.html) sent his brother Amasa to England with the machine in the hope that it would receive more interest on the other side of the Atlantic. Amasa could find only one backer, a corset maker William Thomas, who eventually bought the rights to the invention and arranged for Elias to come to London to further develop the machine.

The two did not work well together, each accusing the other of failing to honour agreements and eventually Elias, now almost penniless, returned to America. When he arrived home he found that the sewing machine had finally caught on and that dozens of manufacturers, including Singer, were busy manufacturing machines -- all of which contravened the [Howe](https://ismacs.net/howe/home.html) patents.

A long series of law suits followed and were only settled when the big companies, including [Wheeler & Wilson](https://ismacs.net/wheelerandwilson/home.html) and [Grover & Baker](https://ismacs.net/groverandbaker/home.html), joined together, pooled their patents, and fought as a unit to protect their monopoly.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20171211100906/http://teahippo.uk/oldsewingmachines/](https://web.archive.org/web/20171211100906/http%3A//teahippo.uk/oldsewingmachines/)

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https://www.lowtechmagazine.com/2011/05/history-of-pedal-powered-machines.html