



Rita telling Rhonda mind-blowing fiction cannot match the Isaac Singer story.

The invention of the sewing machine began with many mechanically inclined individuals including Americans Walter Hunt and Elias Howe. Isaac Merritt Singer perfected earlier sewing machines, then with his astute and disciplined 50/50 business partner, Edward Cabot Clark, the Singer sewing machine market exploded into an empire and relevant brand that survives today.

Rita Farro loved researching the juicy history & relationship between Singer and Clark. Even in the 19th century, Singer, the man, was scandalous with media reports as an uncouth cad in a vortex of wives, mistresses, dozens of documented children, money, drugs, and affluence.

Singer and Clark, two opposing personalities, hated each other, but remind me of the African quote, *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together*. Liking each other was not a requirement. Singer never could have built the company without Clark. Their contributions are far reaching and simply astounding. Sew SCHMETZ & Grabbit® Too!

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In this Issue:

Sewing Star: Singer + Clark = Global Success

Page 3

Needle Points: SCHMETZ Needles Sew with Singer

Page 15

Cover: The Featherweight Shop

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What Inspires YOU to Sew?









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Isaac Merritt Singer & Edward Cabot Clark



By Edward Harrison May (1824 - 1887).

Details of artist on Google Art Project - EgHFKZK23NUOXw at Google Cultural Institute, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21869101

Singer & Clark

There are very few examples of a brand that is so well known, the NAME of the brand replaces the actual thing the brand represents. Still today, 150+ years after the patent was registered, the name "Singer" is synonymous with "sewing machine."

In many ways, the story of the Singer brand reads like science fiction, it is simply unbelievable on many levels. But, at its core, it is about an unlikely partnership between two very different men, Isaac Merritt Singer and Edward Cabot Clark. Together, they changed the world we live in. But, as partners, they were not well-suited. Instead of a complimentary pairing, like salt and pepper, Singer and Clark operated much more like oil and water.

Isaac Merritt Singer was a free-spirited man who marched to his own drummer. Lucky for us, he was a creative thinker, but there is no question he was one of the most uncouth men in the history of business. He was equal parts con man and inventor. His personal life was scandalous, to say the least.

Because Singer became so rich and incredibly famous, stories about his early life have taken on a mythical quality. Like Buffalo Bill or Davy Crockett, it's hard to know what's true and what was fictionalized by Singer's public relations team.

Isaac Merritt Singer was born in New York, on October 27, 1811. His parents divorced when he was ten; his father remarried, but Isaac didn't get along with his stepmother. At the age of twelve, he went to live with an older brother in Oswego,





By Ruth Brandon, Published 1977. Republished 1996.

New York, where he worked in his machine shop, a job he never much cared for, but provided him with the training that changed his life, and the world we live in.

In 1830, Isaac Merritt Singer married Catharine Maria Haley. He was nineteen, she was fifteen. The couple moved to New York City and lived with her parents. By 1833, Isaac was in Otsego County, NY, working at a machine shop. They had two children: William, born in 1834, and Lillian, born in 1837.

Singer's real dream was to be an actor. Actually, he wanted to become a star, and throughout his life, he would clamor to be the center of attention. In 1836, Isaac Singer joined a troupe of traveling players. When the troupe performed in Baltimore, Singer, now 25, met 18-year-old Mary Ann Sponsler, and

the same year his daughter Lillian was born to Catharine, he fathered a son, Isaac, by Mary Ann Sponsler.

The marriage of Isaac and Catharine was effectively over at that point, although the couple did not divorce until 23 years later.

Between acting jobs, Singer would turn to machine shops whenever he needed money. In 1839, he received a patent for a rock-drilling machine, which earned him \$2,000. Singer used this money to found his own acting troupe, the "Merritt Players," with himself and Mary Ann Sponsler as the "stars." Singer performed under the name Isaac Merritt, and Sponsler performed under the name "Mrs. Merritt." Although Isaac was





Singer machine at Essenhaus Village Shops, September 2020.

still married to Catharine, basically, he and Mary Ann entered into a common-law marriage, and she would bear him ten children. The Merritt Players toured the country until the money ran out.

They happened to be in Ohio when the troupe disbanded. Singer took a job in a local print shop, where he conceived the idea of a machine to cut wood blocks for printing images.

Orson C. Phelps, a machine shop owner in Boston, heard about Singer's cutting machine and invited him to work on it in his shop, where, coincidentally, Phelps also had some Lerow & Blodgett sewing machines. Isaac Merritt Singer's cutting machine was not a success, but while he was in Boston, Singer conceived a way to improve the Lerow & Blodgett sewing machines. Isaac Merritt Singer received his sewing-machine patent on August 12, 1851.

With financing from Phelps and George B. Zieber, Singer founded the "Jenny Lind Sewing Machine Company," named after Stockholm-born soprano Jennie Lind.

Singer soon drove Zieber out of the company. Phelps manufactured the first sewing machines, but eventually Isaac swindled him out of his stock as well. The company was renamed I. M. Singer Co. and became embroiled in the patent battles with Elias Howe.

Sewing machines were far from new. It is generally recognized that US inventor Walter Hunt invented the first American sewing machine about 1833, but because he failed to patent it at the time, he had trouble staking his claim. US inventor Elias Howe patented his sewing machine on September 10, 1846,





Treadle Sewing Machine

Model: Singer Letter A

Manufacturer: The Singer Manufacturing Co., NY

Made: c1860 Collection: IMCA

Note that the drive wheel for the flat belt is missing.

Source: Oldtimer Sewing Machine by Otto Landgraf, 1991.

Published by Weppert GmbH & Co. KG, Germany.

but he never had enough money to actually manufacture a reasonably priced sewing machine.

Elias Howe defended his sewing machine patent in court cases that lasted from 1849 to 1854. This ongoing litigation during the Industrial Revolution is often referred to as the "Sewing Machine War." While Howe was sitting in courtrooms, Isaac Merritt Singer was busy manufacturing and selling a facsimile of his lockstitch machine. But, the price of \$100 per machine made for disappointing sales. So he literally took it on tour. He employed traveling salesmen and Singer himself used his acting abilities to theatrically demonstrate his machine's abilities at county fairs and circuses, often accompanied by a pretty woman who would alternately dance and demonstrate the machine.

Isaac Merritt Singer wasn't the only patent pirate. In 1856, five sewing machine manufacturers all accused each other of patent infringement. They met in Albany, New York to duke it out. One of the lawyers proposed that, rather than squander their profits on litigation, they pool their patents.

They created the first patent pool, a process which enabled the production of complicated machines without legal battles over patent rights of particular features. They agreed to form the Sewing Machine Combination. For this to work, they had to secure the cooperation of Elias Howe. Terms were arranged whereby Howe would receive a royalty on every sewing machine manufactured by the various companies.





Edward Cabot Clark (c. 1850) Wikipedia, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward_Clark_1850.jpg

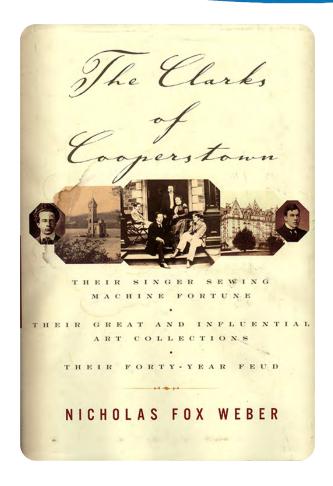
As sewing machines began to be mass-produced, Howe earned considerable royalties (\$2 million) for his invention. Howe contributed much of the money he earned to providing equipment for the 17th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry of the Union Army during the Civil War.

Unable to pay his legal fees, Singer entered into an agreement with his lawyer, Edward Cabot Clark, whereby Clark acquired a 50% share of the company.

Singer built a massive plant near Elizabeth, New Jersey. Up until then, sewing machines had been individually made, one machine at a time. Singer invested heavily in mass producing interchangeable parts, the process developed by Samuel Colt and Eli Whitney for their firearms. Singer was able to cut the price of the sewing machine in half, while at the same time increasing profit margins 530%.

Singer was the first company to bring an affordable home sewing machine into the market. But, initially, there was little interest. Because sewing the family garments was considered "women's work," the time savings was of no interest to most men (who controlled the purse strings). Edward Cabot Clark had a vision of putting a sewing machine in every home. He created the hire-purchase plan, which was the first American installment plan. Housewives in lowa and Kansas could order a Singer sewing machine, and make \$2 monthly payments with their egg money. He also devised a very successful campaign where a sewing machine was offered at half-price to every minister's wife, to be used for community sewing projects. It was an ingenious way to get women in every little town in the country to come together and learn how to operate a Singer sewing machine.





By 1855, Catharine and her children had moved to Long Island, and Singer took up residence in a New York City Fifth Avenue mansion with his "wife," Mary Ann Sponsler, and their children. They lived a very lavish, ostentatious life. Singer liked to drive around Central Park in a grandiose vehicle of his own design (which he patented). A 30 ft. long carriage, painted canary yellow and black, drawn by six or sometimes nine horses, with a small band playing on board. It had seats for thirty-one people, beds for the children, and a water-closet.

Catharine finally divorced him in 1860. By that time, Isaac Merritt Singer was leading a double, in fact, triple life. Singer had a "third" family with Mary Eastwood Walters, who bore him a daughter, Alice Eastwood.

Singer also had a "fourth" family with Mary McGonigail, an employee at his company's factory. She had borne Singer five children and set up a household with him as the Matthews family. In 1860, Mary Ann Sponsler saw her husband driving in the carriage with Mary McGonigail openly. This embarrassment was too much for her, and Sponsler created a public scene right on the spot. Isaac was enraged by her behavior, and he beat Mary Sponsler to a bloody pulp. She had him arrested and charged him with assault.

He was released on bail, but Clark worried about the bad publicity a trial might bring to the company. Singer and Mary McGonigal sailed for Europe. But if Ms. McGonigal thought bearing five children gave her a hold on Isaac Merritt Singer, she was to be disappointed. On a trip to Paris, Singer met Isabella Eugenie Boyce Summerville.

Isaac Merritt Singer's Obituary from the Stark County Democrat, August 12, 1875, 6.

1. M. Singer, inventor of the sewing machine which bears his name, died at his residence at Old Paignton, near Torquay, England, July 23d, in the sixtyfourth year of his age. His father was a German, a millwright by trade; his mother was a native of Rensselaer County, New York, where he was born. At an early day the family removed to Os. wego, but the father met with little success in his business, and the son, when about twelve years of age, with very imperfect school education and no money, departed from a home to which he never returned. He soon turned his attention to mechanical work, and maintained himself as a machinist, but he never served any regular apprenticeship and never claimed to be a journeyman. At one time Mr. Singer devoted his leisure hours to study for the stage. He enjoyed the acquaintance and to a limited extent the instruction of Placide, Porey, Clarke and others of the old Park Theatre.

During several years he was a theatrical manager, and gave frequent representations of plays in the interior cities of Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. a certain line of character he is said to have acted with much success. To the close of his life he had an ardent love for theatricals and music, and in the splendid mansion which he had built within the last few years a theatre complete in all its appointments was included. While he was still a young man he invented a steam drilling-machine, which was used with much advantage in the construction of various railways and canals. Subsequently he invented a machine for carving wood, metals or marble. When endeavoring to introduce this invention to public notice and use, his attention was casually directed to the sewing machine.

At that time (1850), though several patents on sewing devices had been granted in this and other countries, no practical machine capable of profitable employment to do ordinary work had ever been produced. Up to that time sewing machines had been experimental merely and had failed to be useful. In eleven days the first Singer sewing ma-

chine was invented and built complete. It contained much that was new and useful. Subsequent improvements, for which numorous patents were obtained, added very greatly to the value of this machine; but it was successful and profitable from the beginning to all concerned in it, securing the inventor a vast fortune. In 1860 Mr. Singer retired from the active management of business and since that time has resided mainly abroad. After several years' residence in Paris he went with his family to England, and finally purchased an estate and settled down at Old Paignton, near Torquay, in Devon-shire. The last years of his life were devoted to the improvement of that property, where he dispensed a liberal hospitality, and to the poor of that neighbor-hood his death will be a severe bereavement.

He married the pregnant Isabella on 13 June 1865, and this marriage endured for the rest of his life (ten more years). They had six children and settled in England. Although they did briefly try to return to New York City, Isaac and Isabella were soundly scorned by the high society she sought. They built a castle in nearby Younkers, New York, and planned an elaborate house-warming party. Hundreds were invited, but few attended. They eventually bought an estate in England and built a 115-room palace known as Oldway Mansion.

During the years of the Civil War, the Singer Company was hanging on by a thread. There were no domestic sales, as most of their agents had joined the army. The women left behind had barely enough money to feed their children. Ironically, having Isaac living in Europe at the time is what saved the company. Singer established a sewing-machine factory in Scotland. He also set up factories in France, near Paris, and in

Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, making the Singer company one of the first American multinationals.

Singer died on 23 July 1875, age 63 years. By his five "wives," Singer fathered 24 children, of whom two died young. In his will, Singer acknowledged and set up luxurious trust funds for 22 children.

The wild success of the Singer Sewing Machine Company could arguably be attributed to the business acumen of Edward C. Clark, who owned 50% of the Singer Sewing Machine Company.

Clark was the lawyer who suggested the various inventors pool their patents instead of spending decades fighting it



Edward Cabot Clark's Obituary from the *New York Times*, 1882:

Edward Cabot Clark had a phenomenal grasp of power. He recognized the possession of patents as a key to triumph in commerce; and he had rare acuity about the needs and desires of ordinary citizens. With nerves of steel, and his finger on the pulse of the average American housewife, this well-situated business lawyer in New York City had, at a young age, burst beyond the confines of his milieu. On the surface he appeared to be an ordinary civic leader of correct bearing. When he died after thirty years of growing his money into the stratosphere, one of his business associates interviewed for his obituary simply called him "quiet and undemonstrative." A manager in one of his businesses credited him with a bit more aplomb as 'a delightful companion, genial, entertaining and witty,' but no one seemed to know what a fighter he was. The realities of Edward's professional life, however, were grounded in the rough-and-tumble: nasty litigation, and an affiliation with one of the most uncouth people who ever lived.

out in court. At the time Clark came up with this ingenious never-been-done-before-plan, Isaac Merritt Singer was broke. Singer lived an elaborate lifestyle, and was mired in court cases to defend his patent. Because Singer could not pay Clark for all the legal work, Clark accepted stock in the Singer company.

Even though it was Singer who brought Clark into the company, he must have regretted it many times. They hated each other and there was never any personal friendship between them. Whereas Isaac Merritt Singer lived a publicly scandalous life, with his numerous "wives" and children, Edward Cabot Clark was a well-respected lawyer who lived a quiet, circumspect life. His wife would not allow the uncouth Singer to step foot into their home. Although Isaac was the face of the Singer Company, Clark was definitely the guiding business force behind their success.

The Singer Company was headquartered in New York City, and the Edward Cabot Clark family enjoyed the same prominence as the Astor's or the Vanderbilt's.

Edward Cabot Clark developed a family compound in Cooperstown, New York, where the family's fortune and influence continues to this day. Residences, business, and properties related to the Clark family are all over Cooperstown. From the original family seat of "Fernleigh" to the 1928 Georgian manor of "West Hill," the properties are exceptionally well cared for. The original garden at Fernleigh, located to the south of the mansion, included a servants' house and Turkish bath.

It was the Singer fortune, via the Clark family, that funded the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.







Above: New York, USA - May 12, 2018: The main garden of MoMA, Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan, NY. By ARTYOORAN, www.shutterstock.com. Used with permission.

Above Right: NEW YORK - CIRCA OCTOBER 2016: Exterior of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met), New York City, USA. By Maurizio De Mattei, www.shutterstock.com. Used with permission.

Right: NEW YORK CITY - NOVEMBER 12, 2017: View of landmark The Dakota luxury apartment building and former home of John Lennon, seen from Central Park West.

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Edward Cabot Clark also invested heavily in New York City real estate. He built The Dakota, a visionary apartment house at 72nd Street and Central Park West in New York City. This building was completed in 1884 and was the place where John Lennon was shot in 1980.

By the time Edward Cabot Clark's son, Alfred Corning Clark, inherited the Singer fortune, it was simply wealth beyond any understanding.

And, the question becomes, if you didn't have to work a day in your life, what would you do? Alfred invested in art.

According to Nicholas Fox Weber's <u>The Clarks Of Cooperstown</u>, Alfred [Corning Clark] led a dual life: a quiet family man in America and a gay aesthete in Europe, especially in France, which he declared "the Mecca of brotherly feeling."

Alfred married and had as his children: Edward Severin Clark, Robert Sterling Clark, Frederick Ambrose Clark, and Stephen Carlton Clark, Sr.

Alfred Corning Clark was a generous patron to male artists, and for 19 years his closest companion was a Norwegian tenor named Lorentz Severin Skougaard.

When his father's death forced him to return to Manhattan, Alfred installed Skougaard down the block from the town house where he lived with his wife and children.

Although Alfred was not interested in the sewing machine business, he loved art, and that was clearly the currency his sons valued. They funded and supported many art collections





NEW YORK CITY, USA - MARCH 15, 2020: Madison Square Garden in New York City, USA. By S-F, www.shutterstock.com. Used with permission.

Cooperstown, NY, September, 2016, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum as it opens for visitors. By JonathanCollins, www.shutterstock.com. Used with permission.



in America, started the Museum Of Modern Art, donated dozens of works of priceless art, worth many millions, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

When Edward Cabot Clark died in 1882, thanks to his business acumen and the colossal success of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, he left a vast fortune of \$25 million.

Despite the best efforts of the Clark grandsons to SPEND ALL THE MONEY (Robert and Stephen purchased million dollar masterpieces like you might buy a pack of needles), their fortune was simply too vast to fritter. And, as it turns out, art IS a good investment.

Edward Cabot Clark's great-grandchildren spent the next 50 years giving back the money. Philanthropy became their full time job.

The Clark family has lived in Cooperstown since the mid-19th century. The family's holdings include interests assembled over a century and a half, which are now held through trusts and foundations. The Clark Foundation supports a variety of organizations and causes with donations of \$7.5 million every year. In 2013, it was reported the Clark family businesses employed 4,198 people, with 3,100 of those positions being full-time jobs.

Isaac Merritt Singer had 25 children, and when he died in 1875, 22 of them inherited lavish trust funds.

The Singer Sewing Machine fortune has touched our lives in many ways, and that influence continues to this day, in ways you cannot imagine.





Statue of Liberty in New York City, United States of America. Used with permission. https://www.clipart.com/download.php?iid=1571445&tl=photos

If you ever visited an art museum in New York City, you can be sure there was Clark money involved in the priceless paintings hanging on the walls.

If you ever visited the Baseball Hall of Fame, you have the Clark family to thank.

If you ever spent a vacation in Palm Beach, Florida, you have Paris Singer to thank. The son of Isaac and Isabella, Paris had a scandalous affair with Isadore Duncan, one of most celebrated theatrical figures of the day. She had his child, but they never married. He bought Madison Square Garden for her, but she refused it. After their break-up, he turned his energy and fortune to developing the very colorful, unique Palm Beach.

After Isaac's death, Isabella, moved to Paris. As the incredibly wealthy, good looking young widow of an American Industrialist, she was much sought after, and finally enjoyed the acceptance of high society she was denied during her marriage to the uncouth Singer.

According to Ruth Brandon, (author of <u>Singer and the Sewing Machine</u>), after Isabella Eugenie Boyer Singer returned to Paris, she became the model for Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty.







SCHMETZ needles date back to 1851. SCHMETZ needles continue to sew together in Singer and all home sewing machine brands.

Double Eye – 80/12

Elna ELX705 – 80/12, 90/14, Assorted

* **Embroidery** – **75/11**, **90/14**, Assorted, Twin

Embroidery, Gold – 75/11, 90/14

Hemstitch - 100/16, 120/19, Twin

HLX5 – 75/11, 90/14, Assorted

- * **Jeans** 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, **100/16**, 110/18, Assorted, Twin
- **Jersey** 70/10, **80/12**, **90/14**, 100/16, Assorted **Leather** – 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16, 110/18, Assorted

Metallic - 80/12, 90/14, Twin

- * Microtex (Sharp) 60/8, 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16, 110/18, Assorted **Quick Threading** -80/12,90/14
- * Quilting 75/11, 90/14, Assorted
- * Stretch 75/11, 90/14, Twin

Super NonStick - 70/10, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16

- * **Topstitch** 70/10, **80/12**, **90/14**, 100/16, 110/18
- * Universal 60/8, 65/9, 70/10, 75/11, 80/12, 90/14, 100/16, 110/18, 120/19, Assorted

Double Hemstitch – 2.5/100 **Embroidery Twin** – 2.0/75, 3.0/75

Jeans Twin – 4.0/100

Metallic Twin - 2.5/80, 3.0/90

Stretch Twin – 2.5/75, 4.0/75

Universal Triple – 2.5/80, 3.0/80

Universal Twin – 1.6/70, 1.6/80, 2.0/80, 2.5/80, 3.0/90, 4.0/80, 4.0/90, 4.0/100, 6.0/100, 8.0/100

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