



Antique Knitters Circular

A Publication for Antique and Vintage Knitting Machine Hobbyists

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**1924 GEARHART
KNITTING MACHINE
WITH OPTIONAL STAND**

Gearhart Knitting Machine Company

The Gearhart Knitting Machine Company was founded in 1888 by Joseph Emery Gearhart, a resident of West Decator, PA. In 1890 Mr. Gearhart moved his operations to Clearfield, PA where the business thrived until 1925.

In 1923, Florence Hauck purchased a Gearhart Knitting Machine and proceeded to make socks. Some of the socks were sold to pay for the machine which cost \$60.00 at that time.

After 50 years in storage, the machine was given to her son who then made scarves for family members and friends.

This machine was handed down from mother to son to great grand daughter. A story about Florence's knitting machine is in this issue of the *Antique Knitters Circular*.

Story on page 6, More on page 7



Pictured are Roxana Baechle (left) and Linda Chatterton working intently on socks for a Midland Fair Exhibit and Demonstration.

Roxana Baechle explains the Midland Fair Exhibit as follows:

There is much information packed into very little space, once attention is drawn to it. Portable shelving such as this slatted style is easily moveable and lightweight. (Shelves are also available when needed.) In the background are displayed socks of various types which are labeled by fiber content, ribbing style, and foot style with each having a note about which cylinder was used to produce that particular sock. If a future knitter is interested in locating a machine, it is very helpful to be able to point to a particular sock and relate what cylinder will produce that type of ribbing and the type of yarn that was used.

Sock stretchers are used to enhance the display, yet retain "antique" quality. Also displayed are signs which give a brief history of how sock machines were used, both in the home (for personal use and extra income) and to produce socks for the military effort during WWI and WWII (in private homes as well as knitting rooms provided by the Red Cross and private citizens). There is also information on machines for sale when they are available. Such printed information can keep the knitters from having to repeat the same information over and over again and enable slightly more concentration on the sock. (Occasionally we still have memory lapses between questions and a sock might end up without a foot or with two heels and a toe!)

While knitting, it is very helpful to have socks completed and right next to the knitter. Then, while demonstrating, you can refer to the completed sock and show "this is where we are right now" for example.

(Continued on page 4)

Having everything easily accessible is extremely helpful, and Linda and Roxana have this down to a science. Two types of stands are utilized in order to give prospective knitters ideas on what they might like to use in their own situation. The baskets on Roxana's (TM)Bench n Vice hold tools as well as keep yarns organized. There is even room on the far end for a ball winder, which Roxana finds an essential tool for sock knitters. That particular type of bench will facilitate two machines, one on each side.

Linda has a plastic container holding a ball of yarn which feeds up through the top to prevent tangling and to keep the yarn from catching on nearby objects when confined to small spaces. Linda's stand is constructed from a barstool which has had the seat altered to accept the sock machine in a balanced position. Cup hooks have been added for holding tools, the ribber when not in use, extra weights, the knitted set-up bonnet, and other items.

A desk organizer is helpful for pens, hand tools, scissors, pliers, screwdriver, etc.

A waste basket is always a necessary item, and it is helpful to use a plastic bag lining the basket so you can discard the contents easily. That also enables the basket to then be used for storage as needed when packing up to leave.

In addition to socks, the display may be enhanced with other items that can be made on the sock machine. Although it cannot be seen behind Linda, a stocking cap was on display.

These knitters have several stands available, as they give knitting lessons with the sale of a machine and also have group "knit-in" sessions that last three days. It is helpful for beginners to see different ideas in order to decide how to best individualize and utilize their own personal space later.

Stands may be fitted with a light, water bottle holder, containers for literature and business card hand-outs, oil, paint brush holder (for dusting off machines), wisk broom & dustpan, fly swatter, towel, eyeglass container, etc.--in other words, everything but the kitchen sink!

The unique feature you can't see in the picture is that Roxana and Linda NAME each of their machines and can describe the machine's personality to a T. Each of Roxana's machines has its own "mascot" (a primate), and Linda's has a hippo.

To benefit newcomers to knitting machines, Roxana has produced instructional videos which Linda has assisted in recording. These have proven to be an asset to beginners and veterans alike, as Roxana has several techniques demonstrated which are not available in the old manuals that sometimes accompany machines.

Although many items can be knitted on the sock machine, and Roxana has a never-ending list of ideas, demonstrations are always done using the traditional sock in order to preserve the historical element of these machines. However, it's very evident that these gals are as much into "making history" as they are preserving it. Their advice is to learn from the past, but utilize the future to explore new ideas. There's always a standard challenge to see what else someone can do besides socks. Believe it or not, the list is just about endless!

The following article was extracted from the Clearfield Progress Newspapers dated October 20, 27 and November 3, 1978. The Editor Emeritus of the Progress was the late George A. Scott.

The Gearhart Knitting Machine Co.

(First of Three Columns)

The Gearhart Knitting Machine Co. of Clearfield has been out of business for more than 50 years and not many Clearfielders even remember its existence. In its day, however, the Gearhart Knitting Machine Co. employed upwards of 200 persons and sold its knitters in all parts of the United States and many foreign countries.

Even today, some Gearhart knitting machines are still in use in this country. Others turn up in museums, antique or second hand shops or as family heirlooms, handed down through generations. Indeed, mail from knitter owners still is received at Clearfield and is turned over to members of the Gearhart family to answer.

In January this year, Mrs. Karen White of Greenwich N.Y., Placed this advertisement in Yankee Magazine published in Dublin, New Hampshire: "I have lately, come into possession of a sock knitter manufactured by the Gearhart Knitting Machine Co. of Clearfield, Pennsylvania in the 1920s. Nearly all pieces are included as pictured on a parts sheet; also various communications between the original owner and the company. The only important thing missing seems to be instructions for assembly. A pair of socks to anyone who can supply the missing information.

Mrs. White received replies from a dozen or more persons, including this writer. Mrs. Frances W. Granlun of Philipsburg, who owns a Gearhart knitter herself, passed along the magazine advertisement to us and we found an instruction book in the Clearfield County Historical Museum that provided the assembly instructions and a copy was forwarded to her.

Last month, Mrs. White wrote to thank us for our information and reported "My knitter is now assembled and was functioning properly (as far as I can tell) so I am taking it to a lady in Maine this October who wrote that she made and sold over 100 pair of socks last winter. If anyone can get this operation going, she should be able to do so. I spin and dye my own yarn and want very much to use the knitter for what it was intended, making socks, but for my family and friends, not for public consumption. This whole thing has turned into a very intriguing subject."

Mrs. White wrote that her knitter "was given to me by a friend who inherited it with a house when a young couple living there moved and did not have room to take everything with them. The sock knitter was left because they had never been able to figure out how to use it after purchasing it at an auction. The knitter is in its original box with the name and address of the original owner and correspondence between him and the Gearhart Co."

An indication of the widespread "homes" that the Gearhart knitter has even today were the replies that Mrs. White received. They came from Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, Ohio, New Hampshire, Tennessee and Virginia.

(To Be Continued)

Florence's Gearhart Knitting Machine

This is a story about a Gearhart Knitting Machine. At one time there were over 150,000 circular sock knitting machines in use. Red Cross workers used them to make socks for soldiers during World War I. Housewives used them in the home to manufacture knitted items for sale. Now there are thousands of the several makes of antique knitting machines in forgotten storage places or in the hands of busy hobbyists. A story could be told about the life of any number of those old machines. But the story of Florence's Gearhart Knitting Machine has some twists and turns that make it worth telling. Of course, Florence was my mother, and part of the story came from her own experience.

In 1923, Florence Way Hauck (Mrs. Louis Hauck) bought a Gearhart Knitter. The economy was good in those days and it did not take long to pay off the initial investment of \$60.00 by making socks that my father sold to fellow workers at the brickyard. Then mother and dad started raising a family and times got tough. The depression came along, the farm had to be run, and the kids started using the knitter for a toy. The knitting machine had to be hidden away so it wouldn't get destroyed.

In 1975, my wife was knitting some mittens by hand and mother said, "oh, I think there is an old knitting machine some where in the granary. It is in an old leather travel bag." I couldn't believe what I heard. I didn't think there was a square inch of space at that 25-acre farm that I had not explored. To my surprise, the machine was all there and in good condition. The needles were in a metal box soaked with oil.

With the instructions from the Gearhart 1924 "New Instruction Manual" it didn't take long to have the knitting machine assembled and operating. "The Gearhart Knitter has been manufactured to be used in the home and operated by anyone of ordinary intelligence..." "Don't call in the neighbors or village mechanic." "Be sure you are right then go ahead." These are quotes from the manual.

My first knitting yarn was obtained by purchasing tangled skeins from a local yarn dealer. Untangling was facilitated by placing the skein over an inverted bushel basket, running the strand through the chandelier, then through my fingers and to a temporary take-up cone, a bucket rotated by power of a 78 RPM record player. I haven't made a sock yet, but every one in the family received a new scarf whether they wanted one or not. I made a video with the help of my granddaughter, showing the making of a completed scarf. Florence's Gearhart Knitting Machine now belongs to her great granddaughter.

The Gearhart Knitting Machine was manufactured in Clearfield, Pennsylvania. I grew up in Curwensville, PA, just 9 miles up the Susquehanna River from Clearfield. The Clearfield Historical Society has a Gearhart knitter donated by the Gearhart family, along with a lot of documents about Mr. Gearhart and his company.

Shortly after acquiring my mother's knitter, my job as an engineer at Eastman Kodak Company involved the development of a fabric covered drum to be used in Kodak manufactured office equipment. It was a simple matter to make a knitted sleeve on the Gearhart Knitter that just happened to fit nicely on the drum under development. The properties of the knitted sleeve were not acceptable for the requirements of the drum, but within a tinker or two, a yarn winding process was developed that found use in a Kodak office product.

A Research Disclosure document number 17729 was published under my name titled "Compacted Textile Cylinder Cover". Development continued and the process was used to construct multi-layer fabric rollers of various sizes and having a wide range of surface characteristics. It is unlikely that a "Compacted textile Cylinder Cover" would have been conceived without Florence's Gearhart Knitter being pulled out of the granary after fifty years of storage.

In the past twenty years I have collected several Gearhart Knitters and parts of an Auto Knitter. I also have some original sales literature from both companies. You could say that collecting knitting machines is one of my hobbies.

By the year 1999, people were sharing information about the Circular sock knitting machines on the Internet. Just search for 'antique knitting machines' and see what pops up. You will find a newsletter about circular sock machines, an Internet Knitting Machine Museum, and may even discover that there is an annual Circular Sock Machine Conference.

(Article written May 24, 1999) Fred Hauck

Gearhart Family Knitter Makes Great Scarves



Left Florence's knitting machine is described to the Rochester Weaving Guild in 1994. Black bow tie and derby hat fit the vintage atmosphere of the occasion. Members of the Weaving Guild were helpful in selecting quality yarns and best colors for making scarves.

Below Everyone in the family received a scarf. Ends were finished in a variety of styles. Ball and tassel, fringe, and plane stitch locking made simple endings for tubes after stretching and ironing to hold shape.



Restored Sock Machine

Barry Travis, Arlington, VA, provided this photograph of his beautifully restored Black Fricke Auto Knitter. The Black Auto Knitter manufactured by George Fricke is considered one of the better makes of circular sock machines. Barry asserts this is the “machine that I use all the time to make socks.”

Barry also mentions “All of these socks were made using the Bartlett sport weight wool.”



A well organized and well attended CSMSA Conference at Clearfield, PA, June 7-9, 2001, attracted hobbyists from far and wide. Contestants worked feverishly to complete the first pair of socks, while spinners in the background peddled to the beat of old time tunes by Steve Story, MC for the ‘fleece to feet’ contest.



**John Giokas, President
Lamb Knitting Machine Corporation**



The Lamb Knitting Machine Corporation began operations at Rochester, NY, in 1865 prior to moving to Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts in 1867.

The Lamb Flatbed Knitting Machine on John Giokas' work bench is Serial No. 1683, manufactured in Rochester, NY.

On October 25, 1999, Mr. Giokas serviced this knitting machine for Fred Hauck of Rochester, NY, and demonstrated the method of threading up for knitting.

Mr. Giokas said he "never wanted to throw anything away." He was able to supply new needles and needle stops for this vintage machine.

Lamb...Recognized World Wide

DIRECTIONS FOR OPERATING THE TUTTLE KNITTING MACHINE

1. Have the machine screwed to a strong table or bench. See that the top of the needle cylinder C is level. Have the table or bench firm enough to prevent the machine vibrating when in motion. Set the take-up stand N in the hole on the right hand side of the ribber column S, with the long end of the take-up arm HH pointing over the yarn guide L.

Thus began the instructions for operating the Lamb Tuttle Knitting Machine, manufactured by Lamb Knitting Machine Company in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. Now known as Lamb Knitting Machine Corporation, the company began as The Lamb Knitting Machine Manufacturing Company in 1865.

Lamb Corporation now manufactures a line of modern commercial knitting machines and is recognized world wide for their quality products.

Visit the Lamb Web site at <http://www.lambkmc.com/>

Museum Display

Three Gearhart Knitting Machines on display at the Korb House Museum, Curwensville, PA. Note the yarn reel, bobbin winder and scarves. Literature was from the Clearfield Historical Society.

Curwensville is located 9 miles from the Gearhart Knitting Machine factory.

Photo by Fred Hauck

