

Antique Knitters Circular

A Publication for Antique and Vintage Knitting Machine Hobbyists

Volume 1, Issue 6 November-December, 2002

Sock Knitting at Wildflower Farm

Pat Lees with her Clearfield Knitting Machine and Sadie.

Read Pat's story about this machine on page 8.



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BABCOCK HOUSE MUSEUM



Reckoning Time

The time has come to evaluate where the Antique Knitters Circular fits in the lives of they who read and he who publishes. What changes in course are needed to bend the publication into a form vital to the antique and vintage knitting machine hobbyist?

This has been an interesting year for me as a publisher. I have met some wonderful, helpful people, and had many compliments on the newsletter. I sincerely thank all who subscribed.

However, a number of factors require that I take a break from publishing to catch up on other obligations. My plan is to break for one year. The January-February Issue of Antique Knitters Circular will end the contract with the first subscribers. The first Issue was free as an introductory sample, and all subscribers will receive a total of seven issues.

Please do not send renewal money until an announcement is made indicating the schedule, new format, price, and other particulars.

During the next several months a determination will be made about resuming the publication. It may be necessary to publish future works on the Internet.

One of the difficulties with publishing a paper document is the red ink....and the blue ink....and the yellow ink... the cost of ink is scandalous!

Antique Knitters Circular

Publisher

Frederic D. Hauck
2428 English Road
Rochester, NY 14616
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Lamb Tuttle
Family
Knitting
Machine



Cover Photo by Pat Lees

Pat is one of the very few owners of a Clearfield Knitting Machine that actually carries the new label. There were no design changes made on the Gearhart Knitting Machine after the business was taken over by the Clearfield Knitting Machine Company.



Clark's Trading Post

The publication of excerpts from the Creelman Catalogue #101 in the last issue of Antique Knitters Circular was made possible through the generosity of W. Murray Clark from North Woodstock, NH. Mr. Clark had called me and offered to loan me historic knitting machine documents for publication in this newsletter and sent me the Creelman Catalogue #101 to begin that process. I also learned from Mr. Clark that he had a sizeable collection of sock machines and that he was interested in completing those machines that had missing parts. He would consider trading knitting machines or parts to acquire certain parts that would satisfy that goal.

Through our phone call, I learned that Mr. Clark is a multi-faceted individual. Knitting machines are among the minor things that he collects. He and his family operate Clarks Trading Post, a prominent tourist attraction in north central New Hampshire. At Clark's Trading Post, Mr. Clark has a well organized Americana Museum, displaying a broad collection of early American antiques, a full sized operational steam railroad, and performances with black bears which he and his family train from time of birth. Years ago, the Clarks trained Eskimo sled dogs.

On September 10, 2002, my wife and I drove to North Woodstock to take advantage of "Steam Weekend" at Clark's Trading Post and to see what I could trade in the line of knitting machines. We spent most of Friday as Mr. Clark's guest, looking at the collection of knitting machines and documents. In particular, I wanted a Home Profit Knitting Machine because they were manufactured in Rochester, NY, where I live. I traded my recently purchased Franz and Pope for a Home Profit Master Machine. I also brought home documents for publication and borrowed an original Master Machine Instruction Manual to reprint.

Mr. Clark is more interested in antique sewing machines than knitting machines. However, he wants to complete a foot-pedal operated Aiken Knitting Machine and needs parts for that rare machine.

On Saturday, we spent the day as ordinary tourists at Clark's Trading Post. What a day it was! We rode on a steam railroad, first as passengers on a 1930 Reo Railbus, then on the steam train where passengers were spooked by Wolfman. Wolfman rode about chasing the train in his special doodlebug, carrying a gun that went "bang", and threatening all kinds of wrath.

A trained black bear raised the American flag, danced with the trainers, and pleased the crowd by riding a scooter, doing summersaults, and eating ice cream through the bung hole of a barrel (from inside the barrel). It looked as though the bears would do anything for a lick of "mumbleberry ice cream" and an abundance of love given them by the trainers.

Talking about Clark's Trading Post may seem out of context for this newsletter, but if you ever go to North Woodstock to trade knitting machine parts or borrow historic knitting machine documents from Murray Clark, you will surely learn about his many interests. Who knows? Maybe someone out there wants to trade a locomotive or baby bear for a couple knitting machines.

Anyway, the primary reason for writing this article about W. Murray Clark is to let people know that he has a few sock knitting machines and historical documents that can be bought, traded or borrowed. The number of people searching for antique knitting machines is growing daily. Someone reading this article may find that Mr. Clark has just the machine or document they have been searching for.

As I was looking through Murray's documents for materials to borrow, two of his friends arrived with a special pumpkin. The very large pumpkin was tattooed with a bear and the emblem for Clark's Trading Post. The next day the pumpkin was in front of the Americana Museum.

W. Murray Clark, on the right in this picture, can be contacted by writing to:

W. Murray Clark, c/o Clark's Trading Post, Route 3 Box 1,
North Woodstock, NH 03262.

Website: www.clarkstradingpost.com

Phone: (603) 745-2262





White Mountain Central Railroad

Rail fans can ride steam locomotives and see unique historical rail equipment on display at Clark's Trading Post. Equipment includes Climax, Heisler, Porter, Shay and Baldwin locomotives.

Right:

The 1930 Reo Railbus was manufactured new as a rubber tired highway bus. After three years of highway service, the Reo was converted for use on a railroad in Maine. In storage for many years, the railbus was then purchased and restored by Clark's Trading Post for use on the White Mountain Central Railroad.



Bear Shows

Trained black bears delight and dazzle the crowd with tricks and talent several times daily. Murray Clark's daughter, Maureen, stands with a black bear as it raised the American Flag. In Maureen's left hand is a dish of home made apple sauce, a favorite desert for bears at Clark's Trading Post. Maureen spent 6 months, and many gallons of apple sauce, training a bear to ride a scooter.

The bears are never abused to get them to perform. They enjoy a diet much the same as humans. Many of the bears that found a home at Clark's Trading Post were saved from death when the mother bear was killed before they could survive on their own.

Wolfman

Wolfman lurks in the shadows of the forest, and when least expected, races up to the White Mountain Central Railroad in his speedy doodlebug, jumps out, and startles the passengers with blasts from his shot gun and gestures of anger.



Gimson & Coltman

Have you ever heard of Gimson & Coltman Hosiery Machinery? I hadn't, until John Giokas loaned me a Gimson & Coltman Catalogue. Mr. Giokas generously shared the document with me, and I am sure he would be pleased that I can share excerpts from the catalogue with readers of Antique Knitters Circular.

The front cover of the catalogue on the right shows Leicester, England, as their location. It is interesting that Leicester was also one of three places listed for the manufacture of the Auto Knitter Knitting Machine. No date is on the catalogue that would indicate when the company was in business. The catalogue does make it clear that the company built large commercial machines for knitting and processing knitted goods. Selected pages are published here to show the scope of the business.

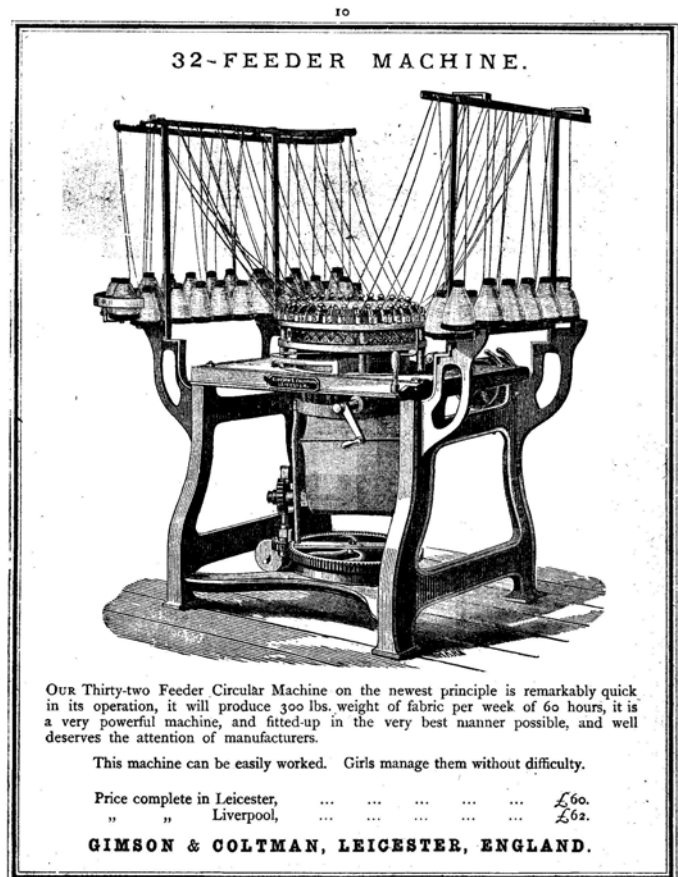
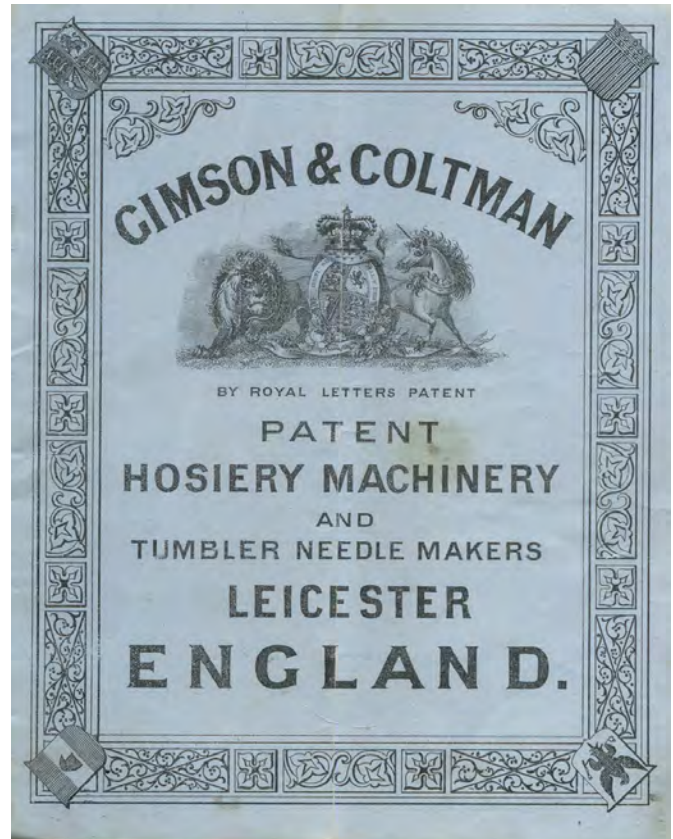
The attitude of manufacturers toward young working girls versus skilled men is illustrated by their sales pitches. The beginning paragraphs in the Introduction are reprinted below.

INTRODUCTION .

WE wish to direct the attention of Manufactures to our Patent Rapid Knitting Machines used in the Making of Hosiery Goods, and to point out some of the advantages our Machines offer, the principal one we claim for them is that unskilled labor only is necessary, girls work them at a saving of from 50 to 80 percent. Testimonials from manufacturers now using them can be seen on application.

The great objects we had in view when we designed those Machines, were simplicity in construction, combined with rapidity of production, and employing unskilled labor.

Their machines included the 32-Feeder Machine on the right which carried the statement "This machine can be easily worked. Girls manage them without difficulty." The Sleeve Machine on the bottom of page 6 could be operated on steam power or by crank, and "Girls work them either way." The Cardigan Jacket Machine on page 6 includes in the machine description the assurance, "like our other machines—easily managed by a girl."



The following article was extracted from the Clearfield Progress News papers 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.

(Sixth and last of Several Columns)

A 1924 edition of "My Knitting Instruction Book," issued by the Gearhart company which is in the collection of the Clearfield County Historical Society at its Museum at the corner of East Pine and North Front streets, contains detailed instructions for assembly and operation of the Gearhart Family Knitter. Well illustrated with the details of the knitter, the book notes at its beginning, "The Gearhart Knitter has been manufactured to be used in the home and operated by anyone of ordinary intelligence even though they have not learned to run or operate successfully any kind of a machine, or had any previous knitting experience whatever ... Make up your mind definitely that this is going to be good fun and that you will not allow anyone, not even one of your family, to confuse or disturb you while you are learning...Do not let any person be with you offering advice and suggestions while you are learning ... Don't call in neighbors or village mechanic."

Nonetheless, some purchasers naturally had difficulties. A letter to one in 1925 complimented the purchaser "upon the very nice sample of the Children's Hose you so kindly knit for us." However, the letter continued with this advice: "The roll top on your sample measures 4 inches for Measurement No. 1. Please consult the chart for the correct measurement ... Please measure your hosiery and do not send it to us unless it is the length required, as shown on the chart. . . Your tension is too tight. . ."

The finished Gearhart Knitter products were generally outstanding. Mrs. Margaret Surver of Boyce, Va., daughter of Leonard A. Gearhart and granddaughter of the inventor, remembers "as children in the grade schools my sister and I wore the beautiful socks knitted on the machines at the Gearhart factory. I particularly remember the beautiful white wool ones with lovely cuffs done in multicolored yarn. Her sister was Mrs. Joseph A. Dague Sr., of Clearfield.

As noted previously, however, the production of the home-knitters exceeded the demand for hosiery or the ability of the company to market the product. Thus, on June 14, 1926, Leonard A. Gearhart, one of the three sons of the inventor-founder, petitioned the Western District Federal Court of Pittsburgh for bankruptcy approval for the company and his petition was granted. Charles T. Kurtz Sr. of Clearfield and Fred C. Weihenmayer were appointed receivers for the bankrupt firm.

Three days later, on June 17, 1926, The Progress reported that the receivers had "closed a deal with a syndicate of local businessmen through which the business (of the Gearhart Knitting Machine Co.) of manufacturing knitting machines, parts and supplies will be continued. The chief purchaser is Carl H. Patchin of Burnside, a prominent business man of Clearfield County who has been notably successful in lumber, coal, oil and kindred enterprises ... his name is the only one that appears in the deal thus far.

"It was learned today that Mr. Patchin and his associates plan to incorporate under the name of Clearfield Knitting Company ... The new firm will be capitalized at \$50,000 and the work of rejuvenating this once important industry will begin at once ... It is not to be expected that the knitting machine industry can quickly reach the proportions it once assumed in this city, but the news that the business is to be continued at the old stand will be welcome news at this time."

Courthouse records show that the Clearfield Knitting Machine Co. was chartered July 28, 1926 with Mr. Patchin, Aaron P. Clark of Glen Campbell and J. N. Walker of Philadelphia as the stockholders and Mr. Patchin, Mr. Clark and Attorney A. M. Liveright of Clearfield as directors of the new corporation. The new corporation was capitalized at \$50,000 divided into 500 shares with a par value of \$100 each. Mr. Patchin was listed as owner of 25 shares, Mr. Clark 24 and Mr. Walker 1.

The new firm lost little time in getting started. Three days after the charter approval, an announcement letter went out to Gearhart Knitting Machine owners and operators offering to supply machines, parts, yarns and other supplies. Enclosed with the letter were knitting suggestions and a promise to "send you additional suggestions from time to time, and offer further assistance to make your machine knitting more profitable to you."

However, the announcement said "We regret to tell you that we are not going to buy any hosiery or pay knitting wages" and it disclaimed any connection with the former Gearhart Knitting Machine Company and their

contracts, promises, agreements or guarantees.

On August 13 The Progress reported the real estate of the Gearhart Knitting Machine Co. had been sold at a trustee's sale to the Patchin-Clark firm. The sale developed some spirited bidding from three or four bidders, The Progress noted, but the property (the factory building on West Fourth Avenue) was finally knocked down to Walter Welch, Esq., at his bid of \$30,000. Mr. Welch represented Messrs Aaron P. Clark and Carl E. Patchin, The Progress added.

How long the Clearfield Knitting Machine Co. operated is not known. Apparently not too long, for it was in 1928, about two years after the firm was chartered, that the factory building was taken over by the State Highway Department for its District 2 office.

This is the last of the series of columns extracted from the Clearfield Progress Newspapers.

The articles dealing with the Clearfield Knitting Machine Company have come together in this issue more as a coincidence than a planned strategy. The last of the Clearfield Progress columns ended with a very thorough description of the end of the Gearhart Knitting Machine Company and the short life of the Clearfield Knitting Machine Company. It would be easy to confuse the two companies. They operated from the same city and built the same machine. Both displayed Clearfield, USA, on their labels.

Pat Lee's article arrived at just the right time. Her "strange looking knitting machine" turned out to be both a Clearfield and Gearhart. The publisher could not resist showing a last model of Gearhart and Clearfield machines side by side. Note the similarity in the two company labels. (page 9)

A Strange Looking Knitting Machine

by Pat Lees

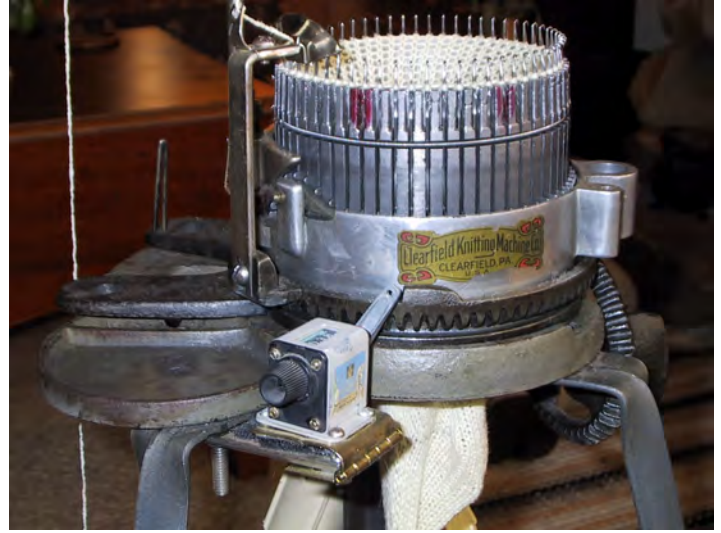
I have loved knitting, weaving and most fiber arts since I was a little girl. This of course led to collecting and using, yarn, needles, and fiber gadgets all my life. Remember those knitting spools and potholder looms? I saw my first flat bed knitting machine in 1978 and was just amazed at what I could do with that. Of course, I had to get one to add to my collection. Since then I have moved to the country, started a flock of sheep and llamas to supply the yarn. I learned to spin along the way too.

About 7 years ago while antique hunting, my husband spotted a strange looking knitting machine and called me right over to see it. We truly did not know what it was but just that it was some sort of knitting machine because the needles were the same as those on the flat beds I had at home. Compared to what they are going for on eBay now, we got a great deal. Especially, after bringing it home, it turns out that the 'box of parts' alongside the machine was actually another entire sock knitter! It just wasn't set up on a stand. The set up machine was a Clearfield with a ribber. The one in the box was a Gearhart. There were even instruction books for both in the box. What a great find!

The poor thing just sat in the living room for a couple of years, because I never had the time to sit down and figure it out. While surfing the Internet one day I stumbled upon a picture of another sock knitter at a website that has a link to join a sock knitters chat group. Well, I joined right away and got so much help from the wonderful people there that I finally took the time to try out the machine. Turns out my Clearfield just needed a clean up and adjustment to work perfectly. This was such an excitement because I had been making and selling wool socks locally using the flat bed machines. But the Clearfield made these beautiful circular socks with a ribbed top and no seams to sew.

I really don't know how old it is but the manual that came with it is entitled "Knitting Manual of Instruction and Sales", "First Edition Compiled by Clearfield Knitting Machine Co. Clearfield, Pa. U.S.A." dated 1927. The manual has many patterns for different types of socks, baby garments, scarves, etc. They even suggest prices to charge for the socks you make. It's a great resource. They repeatedly say to use only 'worsted wool yarns' for knitting. Another thing that always gives me a chuckle is the warning 'Be sure you are right and then go on.' This is so true. Most of the troubles were caused by me not checking that everything was right.

I have made many hundreds of socks since then and am always still amazed that this antique knitter still works so well. I bet she could go on another 100 years with a little TLC.



Compare the Gearhart Machine on the left with the Clearfield Machine on the right. The machines look identical, although the rear leg under the Clearfield appears to be attached at a different location.



A New Label

The Clearfield Knitting Machine Company made a minor change on its label. “Gearhart” was changed to “Clearfield”. The KNITTING MANUAL of INSTRUCTION & SALES published in 1927 by the new company illustrated the machine with the Gearhart label and called it “the Gearhart Knitting Machine of the present type now being manufactured by the Clearfield Knitting Machine Company”. As stated in the Clearfield Progress article, the new owners intended to begin operations “at once”. That was July 28, 1926. The new label could have been used scarcely more than a year, or maybe less, making machines with that label considerably more rare than those with the Gearhart label. The publisher knows of only two people who own machines with the Clearfield label. Hopefully, I will know of more after this issue gets out. Many Gearhart owners purchased the Clearfield instructions for use with older machines, an example being my mother who bought a 1923 Gearhart. Therefore, one cannot assume they have a Clearfield machine because it was found with the Clearfield Instruction Manual.

The instructions published by the Clearfield Knitting Machine Company may have been more significant than the machines they manufactured. It had 69 pages and contained complete instructions for 65 knitting projects. The copy my mother purchased shows almost no wear and tear, probably because she knew how to knit before she bought it. Strangely enough, it omitted several very detailed illustrations on how to operate the machine. The Gearhart Manual in 1924 and 25 was an excellent beginners book.

In 1975 when my mother gave me her Gearhart Knitter and instruction books, I was impressed with the good condition of the Knitting Manual of Instruction & Sales and made a project out of making a master copy for further duplication. I made a total reprint of the 1924 Gearhart manual. Those books were advertised in earlier issues of Antique Knitters Circular.

BABCOCK HOUSE MUSEUM

by Fred Hauck

Near the south shore of Lake Ontario, between Rochester and Buffalo, New York, there is a cobblestone house that was built for Jephtha W. Babcock around 1848. Cobblestone houses were built in Upstate New York during a period of about 45 years between the 1820s and 1860s.

The New York State Electric and Gas Corp. acquired the Babcock house along with property used for an electric generating plant and preserved the house and farm buildings.

The Town of Somerset Historical Society has maintained and furnished the house since 1987. Now known as the Babcock House Museum, the property at 7449 Lake Road, Barker, NY, is open weekends, 1:00 to 5:00 PM, last Saturday in June thru second Sunday of October. Annually, the Museum is host to the Somerset Old Fashioned Farm Festival on Memorial Day Sunday and a Victorian Christmas on the second Sunday of December.

Through a stroke of good fortune, the Babcock House Museum gained possession of an unidentified antique knitting machine which later was determined to be a Home Profit Knitting Machine. The machine had been in the attic of the Williams family for at least two generations when it was purchased by Mary and Ben Weld. Not knowing what the machine was, the Welds stored it in their basement for a few years. In their words “they had not a clue what it was”. There was no manual with the machine and no visible manufacturers tag. On a whim, they took it to the Babcock House Museum and put a note on it, asking,

“what is it?”

The foregoing information was provided by members of the Town of Somerset Historical Society. I became involved when my friends, Al and Jean Vincent, recognized the machine as an antique sock machine similar to my Gearhart Knitter. Arrangements were made for me to look at the machine, and on a cold day in December, I met Society members at the Museum and helped them set up the machine, giving instructions on lubrication, adjustments and basic operation. A video was made of the setup procedures, and it did not take long for Society members to learn its use and incorporate the knitting machine into the programs at the Museum.

Society members, Jean Stisser and Stella Robison have become proficient with the Home Profit Knitter and do demonstrations at the annual events, making many scarves in the process. A great amount of interest in the antique knitter is shown by the visitors at the Museum.

BABCOCK HOUSE MUSEUM



Home Profit Knitting Machine

The Master Machine at the Babcock Museum was my first introduction to the yet unidentified Home Profit Knitting Machine. I was immediately impressed by the smooth action of the machine. It appears that the brass cylinder provides a good bearing surface for the needles. Later, I recognized the knitter in Ralph Kanko's Knitting Machine Museum and learned that the Home Profit Hosiery Company was based in Rochester, NY, where I reside. A Master Machine was soon placed on my wanted list.

This summer, I took a Gearhart Knitter to the Somerset Old Fashioned Farm Festival to knit scarves with Jean and Stella. I brought their machine home after the festival to clean it up for the Museum.

In another stroke of good timing, I acquired my own Master Machine through a trade with W. Murray Clark when I visited Clark's Trading Post in September. Mr. Clark also loaned me a Home Profit Instruction Manual, enabling the reprinting of a manual for the Babcock House Museum and others.

The work of reprinting the manual and cleaning up the Machine is nearing completion, and the Somerset Historical Society will soon have all they need to learn sock making, including the use of the ribber attachment. Jean and Stella are looking forward to demonstrating the machine again at the "Victorian Christmas" this December.

Master Machine —Design Changes

I have two observations about the Master Machine owned by the Museum. It had no marks or holes to indicate a manufacturers tag had ever been attached. Secondly, the legs were attached to the base in a manner that prevented a firm mounting. Apparently, the company recognized these as omissions and made positive changes. A diamond shaped manufacturers tag was added, and the legs were changed from round to square at the joint. This photo of the Babcock machine shows the round bosses where the legs are held by a single bolt. On later machines the bosses were square. It appears that the Babcock machine was built prior to these improvements.

The Home Profit machines had no numbers of any kind to indicate a likely time of manufacture.



Making Scarves

Jean Stisser and Stella Robison Wear old fashioned garments as they knit scarves at the Somerset Old Fashioned Farm Festival, which is held annually at the Babcock House Museum, Barker, New York.



Jerry Gaiser from North Plains, Oregon, wrote the following article about finding a sock machine at a collectables show and consented to its publication.

The publisher gave the story a title and placed it in this issue for you to enjoy. Thanks Jerry.

“One of those Lucky Things”

by Jerry Gaiser

While I'm fairly new to CSM, I've been hand knitting, on and off, for a couple of years.

My first sock machine was an Auto Knitter that is a candidate for what you shouldn't buy. It is in bad shape. The cylinders had all swollen and for the most part it's only useful for parts.

My second machine was a 60 needle Gearhart that was purchased on eBay. This one had been reconditioned and had a sock started and I actually cranked out a couple of inches of fabric before circumstances got in the way and both my hand knitting and machine knitting came to a standstill.

My last machine was one of those lucky things that happen to everybody but me. We went to a collectibles show this past weekend. Managed to get in early on Saturday and going down our first row of booths I spied what seemed to be a sock machine in an old box. It turned out to be another Gearhart. A quick check showed that it was in pretty good shape. Needles were loose in the cylinder and it seemed to have all the accessories.

When I asked the price, I was shocked to learn the seller only wanted \$40. Needless to say, I immediately pulled out my wallet and paid the man before he changed his mind.

I'm amazed at the condition and what I got for my \$40. All accessories, including a Tabulator Attachment in it's original box, 4 cylinders (54, 60, 72 and 100 needle), a couple ribber plates, numerous boxes of needles - including some in their original packaging. Except for a bit of rust and in bad need of a clean up, it's in pretty good shape.

Now if I can figure out how to set up a new sock, I'll be on my way....;-)