his early life was spent in Oswego. He worked as a
mechanic and cabinetmaker, but acquired an interest
in the theater. Under the name of Isaac Merritt, he went
to Rochester and became an actor. In 1839, during an
absence from the theater, he completed his first inven-
tion, a mechanical excavator, which he sold for $2000.
With the money Singer organized a theatrical troupe of
his own, which he called “The Merritt Players.” When
the group failed in Fredericksburg, Ohio, Singer was
stranded for lack of funds.

Forced to find some type of employment, Singer took
a job in a Fredericksburg plant that manufactured
wooden printers’ type. He quickly recognized the need
for an improved type-carving machine. After inventing
and patenting one, he found no financial support in
Fredericksburg and decided to take the machine to
New York City. Here, the firm of A. B. Taylor and
Co. agreed to furnish the money and give Singer room
in its Hague Street factory to build machines. A boiler
explosion destroyed the first machine, and Taylor refused
to advance more money.

While Singer was with Taylor, George B. Zieber, a
bookseller who had seen the type-carving machine,
considered its value to publishers. Zieber offered to
help Singer and raised $1700 to build another model.
In June 1850 the machine was completed. Singer and
Zieber took the machine to Boston where they rented
display space in the steam-powered workshop of Orson
C. Phelps at 19 Harvard Place. Only a few publishers
came to look at the machine, and none wanted to buy it.

Singer, contemplating his future, became interested
in Phelps’ work, manufacturing sewing machines for
J. A. Leroy and S. C. Blodgett. Phelps welcomed
Singer’s interest as the design of the mechanism was
faulty and purchasers kept returning the machines for
repairs. Singer examined the sewing machine with the
eyes of a practical machinist. He criticized the action
of the shuttle, which passed around a circle, and the
needle bar, which pushed a curved needle horizontally.
Singer suggested that the shuttle move to and fro in a
straight path and that a straight needle be used verti-
cally. Phelps encouraged Singer to abandon the type-
carving machine and turn his energies toward the
improvement of the sewing machine. Convinced that
he could make his ideas work, Singer sketched a rough
draft of his proposed machine, and with the support of
Zieber and Phelps the work began.

Singer continued to be active in the sewing-machine
business until 1863. He made his home in Paris for a
short time and then moved to England. While living
at Torquay he conceived the idea of a fabulous Grecian
Roman mansion, which he planned to have built at
Paignton. Singer called it “The Wigwam.” Unfortu-
nately, after all his plans, he did not live to see its
completion. Singer died on July 23, 1875, of heart
disease at the age of sixty-three.