



Figure 8.—AN ENGRAVING OF THIMONNIER and his sewing machine of 1830, from *Sewing Machine News*, 1880. (Smithsonian photo 10569-C.)

operation.¹³ Years later Madersperger again attempted to invent a sewing machine using a different stitch (see p. 13).

A story persists that about 1818–1819 a machine that formed a backstitch, identical to the one used in hand sewing, was invented in Monkton, Vermont. The earliest record of this machine that this author has found was in the second or 1867 edition of *Eighty Years of Progress of the United States*; the machine is

¹³ There are no known models of these early Madersperger machines in existence. Although the *Sewing Machine Times* reported in the 1907 issue that the 1814 sewing machine was then on exhibition in the Museum of the Vienna Polytechnic, the illustration shown was of Madersperger's 1839 machine. In a letter from the director of the Technisches Museum für Industrie und Gewerbe in Vienna, received in 1962, it was stated that the original 1814 Madersperger machine was in their museum. The photographs that were sent, however, were of the 1839 machine. This machine is entirely different from the 1814–1817 machine, as can readily be seen by the reader (figs. 7 and 10).

not mentioned in the earlier edition. The writer of the article on sewing machines states that John Knowles invented and constructed a sewing machine, which used a single thread and a two-pointed needle with the eye in the middle to form the backstitch. This information must have come to light after the first edition was published, but from where and by whom is not known. Other sources state that two men, Adams and Dodge, produced this machine in Monkton.¹⁴ While still others credit the Reverend John Adam Dodge, assisted by a mechanic by the name of John Knowles, with the same invention in the same location.¹⁵ Vermont historical societies have been unable to identify the men named or to verify the story of the invention.¹⁶ The importance of the credibility of this story, if proved, rests in the fact that it represents the first effort in the United States to produce a mechanical stitching device.

1820–1845

American records of this period are incomplete as a result of the Patent Office fire of 1836, in which most of the specific descriptions of patents issued to that date were destroyed. Patentees were asked to provide another description of their patents so that these might be copied, but comparatively few responded and only a small percentage was restored. Thus, although the printed index of patents¹⁷ lists Henry Lye as patenting a machine for "sewing leather, and so forth" on March 10, 1826, no description of the machine has ever been located. Many patents whose original claim was for only a mechanical awl to pierce holes in leather or a clamp to hold leather for hand stitching were claimed as sewing devices once a practical machine had evolved. But no evidence has ever been found that any of these machines performed the actual stitching operation.

The first man known to have put a mechanical

¹⁴ JOHN P. STAMBAUGH, *A History of the Sewing Machine* (Hartford, Conn., 1872), p. 13; *Sewing Machine News* (July 1880), vol. 1, no. 12, p. 4.

¹⁵ "Sewing Machines," *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1878), vol. 4, p. 205. The 1874 edition does not include this reference to the Reverend John Adam Dodge.

¹⁶ Letters to the author from the Vermont Historical Society (Nov. 13, 1953) and the Bennington Historical Museum and Art Gallery (May 2, 1953).

¹⁷ EDMUND BURKE, Commissioner of Patents, *List of Patents for Inventions and Designs Issued by the United States from 1790 to 1847* (Washington, 1847).