

The sewing machine also contributed to the popularity of certain fashions. Ready-made cloaks for women were a business of a few years' standing when the sewing machine was adopted for their manufacture in 1853. Machine sewing reduced the cost of constructing the garment by about eighty percent, thereby decreasing its price and increasing its popularity. In New York City alone, the value of the "cloak and mantilla" manufacture in 1860 was \$618,400.⁷⁷ Crinolines and hoopskirts were easier to stitch by machine than by hand, and these items had a spirited period of popularity due to the introduction of the sewing machine. Braiding, pleating, and tucking adorned many costume items because they could be produced by machine with ease and rapidity.

In addition to using the sewing machine for the manufacture of shirts, collars, and related men's furnishings, the machine was also used in the production of men's and boy's suits and reportedly gave "a vast impetus to the trade."⁷⁸ The Army, however, was not quite convinced of the sewing machine's practical adaptation to its needs. Although a sewing machine was purchased for the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot as early as 1851, they had only six by 1860. On March 31, 1859, General Jesup of the Philadelphia Depot wrote to a Nechard & Company stating that the machine sewing had been tried but was not used for clothing, only for stitching caps and chevrons. In another letter, on the same day, to "Messrs Hebrard & Co., Louisiana Steam Clothing Factory, N. Orleans," Jesup states: "Machine sewing has been tried with us, and though it meets the requirements of a populous and civilized life, it has been found not to answer for the hard wear and tear and limited means of our frontier service. Particular attention has been paid to this subject, and we have abandoned the use of machines for coats, jackets and trousers, etc and use them on caps and bands that are not exposed to much hard usage. . . ." ⁷⁹ At this period prior to the Civil War, the Army manufactured its own clothing. As the demands of war increased, more and more of the Army's clothing supplies were furnished on open contract—with no



Figure 55.—BLAKE'S LEATHER-STITCHING MACHINE patent model of July 6, 1858; the inventor claimed the arrangement of the mechanism used and an auxiliary arm capable of entering the shoe, which enabled the outer sole to be stitched both to the inner sole and to the upper part of the shoe. (Smithsonian photo 50361.)

specifications as to stitching.⁸⁰ Machine stitching, in fact, is found in most of the Civil War uniforms. One of the problems that most probably affected the durability of the machine stitching in the 1850s was the sewing thread, a problem that was not solved until the 1860s and which is discussed later under "thread for the machine."

SHOE MANUFACTURE

Another industry that was aided by the new invention was that of shoe manufacture. Although the earliest sewing-machine patents in the United States reflect the inventors' efforts to solve the difficult task of leather stitching, and, although machines were used to a limited extent in stitching some parts of

⁷⁷ *Eighth Census, 1860, Manufactures* (United States Census Office, published Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1865), "Women's Ready-Made Clothing," p. 83.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷⁹ National Archives, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Clothing Book, Letters Sent, volume 17.

⁸⁰ The author wishes to acknowledge the valuable help of Mr. Donald Kloster of the Smithsonian Institution's Division of Military History for the preceding four references and related information.