

II. American Sewing-Machine Companies of the 19th Century

During the second half of the 19th century there were more than two hundred sewing-machine companies in the United States. A few of the companies manufactured commercial-type machines for factories, which were increasing in number and type with each decade; however, most of the companies were primarily concerned with the manufacture of sewing machines for the home. A representative number of these family machines with information concerning the company and dating by serial numbers are pictured in figures 68 through 132. A great many of the companies were licensed by the "Combination," but not all. Some companies were constructing machines that did not infringe the patents, some companies infringed the patents but managed to avoid legal action, and many companies mushroomed into existence after the major patents expired and the "Combination" was dissolved in 1877. Of this latter group, most were short-lived. Although they were free of the royalty charges of the earlier decades, it was difficult to compete with the established companies. A few were successful. Establishing the exact dates that the companies were in existence is difficult. Their records were incomplete or have disappeared. Many of the "Com-

bination" records were lost by fire. A summary of the existing records kept by the "Combination" of the companies paying royalty for the patents held is given in figure 37.

As will be noted in the following listing, only a small percentage of the sewing-machine companies were in business for a period of more than ten years. Of those that continued longer, all but a few dozen had disappeared by 1910. In the 1960s there were about sixty sewing-machine companies listed in *Thomas' Register of Manufacturers*, many of which were manufacturing highly specialized sewing machines for commercial work; only a few produced family- or home-sewing machines. By 1975 it was difficult to find a single family machine that was totally produced in the United States, although several companies still distributed sewing machines under their American company names. Foreign competition had increased, and the high cost of skilled labor in this country had made competition in this consumer-product field increasingly difficult. The countless varieties of American-made family sewing machines, so evident in the 19th and early 20th centuries, were no more.

<i>Sewing Machine</i>	<i>Manufacturer or Company</i>	<i>First Made or Earliest Record</i>	<i>Discontinued or Last Record</i>
Aetna	Plaver, Braunsdorf, & Co., Boston	ca. 1867	ca. 1869
	J. E. Braunsdorf & Co.	ca. 1869	ca. 1877
Akins and Felthousen	—, Ithaca, N.Y.	ca. 1855	—
Alsop	—	—	ca. 1880
American Buttonhole, Overseaming and Sewing Machine (Fig. 68)	American Buttonhole, Overseaming and Sewing Machine Co., Philadelphia, Pa.	1867	ca. 1877
Later New American (Fig. 69)	American Sewing Machine Co., Philadelphia, Pa.	ca. 1877	after 1888