

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 invention, 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. Lerow 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 vertically. 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 Greco-Roman mansion, which he planned to have built at Paignton. Singer called it "The Wigwam." Unfortunately, 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.