



# Toy Collection

written and photographed by Jill Buckley

Those of us who sew are very often collectors as well. Not just of fabric and thread, but of many other sewing-related items. Often our collections are not limited to one area.

I am no different. Over the years a good many antique and vintage machines, sewing tools, scissors, advertisements and so on, have taken up residence with me. However, I am especially drawn to toy sewing machines.

Where do I begin on this topic? This article will barely scratch the surface as you will soon discover. Toy sewing machines have been manufactured for well over a century, produced in countries across the globe. They come in just about every colour imaginable, many with their very own wooden box, carrying case or lid and, in some cases, their own table. The very early machines were made of cast iron or pressed steel, tin, aluminum, and later, plastic. Once clamped securely to a tabletop, the majority of toy machines are hand-crank operated,

producing a chain stitch. A few were fitted and operated as treadle machines and some even had electric motors added.

Many machines were marketed strictly as “toys” with the manufacturer offering no warranty on performance due to the inexperience of the user (referencing a child). Others were touted as fabulous lightweight machines, ideal for use during travel. The toy machine’s compact size made it easy to pack for taking on vacation. These little machines were advertised in catalogues of most major department stores.

The *Little Reliable*, shown on the right, was advertised in the 1905 Montgomery Ward catalog as a “small, but practical sewing machine” for the price of \$2.25 US. A considerable sum when you see the average hourly wage at the time was 22 cents.

Enjoy browsing my collection! ♦



Editor's Note: All of the machines pictured in this article are from the personal collection of the author.



Identifying these little machines is not always easy, while some have markings, quite a number do not.



If you are really lucky, you find unmarked machines like this example above. This pretty little machine, which has absolutely no markings at all, came with its box, clamp and paperwork identifying it as a *Little Princess* sewing machine, No. 125 Junior Model, manufactured by Hoge Manufacturing Co. Inc., New York, US.



Some toys carried the name of many familiar sewing machine companies. One marketing strategy was to offer the toy machine as extra incentive for the lady of the house when making a purchase of the *adult* machine. You may come across brand names such as Singer®, Brother®, Pfaff®, Elna®, Necchi® and several others.

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Where do you find these treasures? They can be found sitting on shelves in antique markets everywhere, as well as auctions and online. Superb, in-depth information on the subject of toy and miniature sewing machines can be found in two books authored by Glenda Thomas. Neither are available in print, unfortunately, but used copies can be found. The titles are: *Toy and Miniature Sewing Machines: An Identification & Value Guide* (books one and two).



Many machines have look-a-likes. Pictured from left to right: Singer®, Essex®, Grain®.

To my knowledge, these machines known as Wonderstitchers are the only Canadian-made toy sewing machine (examples can be found in blue and green as well).



The variety in structure of these machines can be quite fascinating. Just look at the variation of some handwheels.



A small sampling showing the variety of toy sewing machines in colour, base shapes and open and closed mechanisms.



This photograph illustrates a machine marketed for children and the fact that the photo on the box was not always the machine found inside!



This picture illustrates, at times, the toy machines were marketed to adults.



Here you view a machine that came in a case that could be "transformed" into its own sewing table.



**Editor's Note:** If you would like to share your assortment of toy machines or another unique quilting-related collection with members, please send your photograph along with a brief description to: [editor@canadianquilter.com](mailto:editor@canadianquilter.com). Photographs may be chosen for publication in the magazine or on CQA/ACC social media.