

by Bill Stevens - originally published in *March 2008 Newsletter*

John Abbott established the Abbott Company, a sewing machine manufacturing business in St. Catharines in 1865 or 1866. The company manufactured a single thread machine called Abbott's Noiseless Family Sewing Machine, which would work by hand or treadle. Production ceased when John died in St. Catharines on February 9, 1872, even though two of his sons had been involved in the business. His death announcement on page 2 of the *Evening Journal* (St. Catharines) of February 9, 1872 read as follows: "It is with feelings of sincere regret that we announce the death of J.W. Abbott, proprietor of the Abbott Sewing Machine Factory, one of our most enterprising, ingenious and popular business men. Mr. Abbott we believe was a native of the State of Vermont, and a few years ago removed from that State to Canada, locating at first in Hamilton. The superior advantages of St. Catharines as a manufacturing point subsequently induced him with a few others to remove here, where he has carried on an extensive business for the past six or seven years and where he succeeded in gaining many warm and true friends."

John William Abbott was born on July 30, 1824 in Claremont, Sullivan County, Vermont. His parents were Israel (born November 13, 1792, Charlestown, New Hampshire) and Lydia Kittredge Abbott. John married Alvira Achsah Wellman (daughter of Timothy and Achsah Wellman) on November 22, 1843 in Dunnerston, Windham County, Vermont. Alvira was born on January 31, 1824 in Brookline, Windham County, Vermont. John and Alvira had four children, all born in Dummerston, Vermont:

1. Julia Alice - born March 30, 1845; married July 19, 1872 to George Cushing
2. Henry Eugene - born September 3, 1846
3. George Arthur - born April 8, 1848

4. William Alba - born February 4, 1853

The 1871 *Census* records John's religion as being Congregationalist, of English origin and a sewing machine maker. The factory employed 12 men, and with the help of a three-horsepower steam engine, was producing 2500 machines a year. The average wage of the employees was \$41.67 per month. The machines were sold through two general agents in Toronto: G.W. Grout and Company (until 1868) and W.H. White and Company (1868-72). The Abbott machine, with a black walnut stand, in 1868 sold for \$15 to \$23. An 1871 patent (No. 831) was taken out by Abbott for improvements in the plate of sewing machines.

After John's death, his wife and family moved to Defiance, Ohio. The 1880 *Census* shows Alvira living with her son Henry E., who was working in a machine shop; her son Willie A., who was a bookkeeper; her daughter, Julia A. Cushing, was now a widow, with her 7-year-old son Richard E. Cushing; Julia was working as a dressmaker.

Also living in Defiance was Alvira's son, George A. Abbott and his wife Fanny H. and their family. George is listed as a machinist.

The St. Catharines Museum has an Abbott sewing machine in its collection.