

KATULA'S TREADLE

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Restoring the treadle sewing machine

One of the more rewarding projects I've ever undertaken is the restoration of an old Singer treadle sewing machine given to my wife Daisy by her mother, Katula Sampson Daggett.



The machine was stored in the garage for about 10 years prior to restoration. One of the first things we did was to research the internet for information on restoring old sewing machines. There is a wealth of information available including the Singer Company web site. From this site we were able to get the manufacturing information on the machine by submitting the serial number. We were able to determine our machine is a **Model 27**, manufactured **July 25, 1906** in Elizabeth City, NJ.

Getting Started

The first step was to disassemble the machine, label, and store away the components. There were several missing parts. Although all four steel wheels were there, there were only two of the axle pins. The steel frame was otherwise intact.

I decided to sandblast the frame and re-paint it. I was able to fabricate new pins using a pair of round head screws. Most of these old machine cabinets were made of pine with an outer layer of hardwood veneer. The veneer on the top of the cabinet could not be salvaged. We were able to locate via the internet a place in Florida (Constantines Wood Center) where we could purchase veneer.

The problem was neither of us had experience in veneering or replacing veneer. We were able to order a book, the Complete Guide for Veneering through the internet. After reading the book, the next step was determining what type of veneer to use. We purchased a sample veneer kit from Constantines. From the old pieces of veneer from the cabinet we determined the closest match was White Oak, flat cut.

Next was the removal of the old veneer and preparation of the cabinet. On removing the old veneer we discovered the veneer was laid over a sub-layer of some type of pine. In some places the sub-layer was missing. We determined we would need about 16 square feet of veneer to repair the cabinet. I also ordered a veneer roller, veneer saw, glue and thinner.



The cabinet was a two-drawer model. All the drawers were present, however we were missing the drawer frame guides from the right side. Several of the little wooden knobs were also missing from the drawers. Our options were to purchase a router and try to fabricate the drawer frame guides or look for a spare parts cabinet or machine.

A friend of ours told us about an old antique, vacuum and sewing machine repair shop located in Marietta, GA. I visited the shop and owner showed me an old cabinet with three drawers. He had removed the base to make a table. But the cabinet looked like the same design of the one we were restoring. The top layer of veneer was in worse condition than the one we had, but the drawers and frames were intact and in good condition. The owner sold the cabinet to me for \$50. I did not know if the design was the

same but it would cost less than buying a router and materials. I hauled the cabinet home. When I got home I was anxious to show my prize to Daisy. We found the cabinet had the same carvings and designs as the one we had. The only difference was the three drawers instead of two. The shop owner also gave me a tip on restoring. He told me to use denatured alcohol to clean and remove the old varnish surface. This would also restore the grain. I figured I could use the two cabinets to piece the old cabinet I had together. This proved true, as I was able to splice pieces of the old veneer sub-layer and use various drawer parts. The next scenes and pictures are the restoration of the old cabinet.



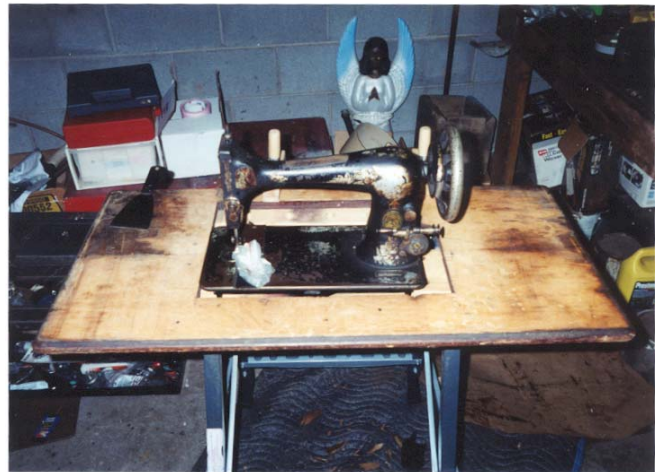
Old cabinet prior to restoration



Cabinet closed



Cabinet top opened



Model 27 Singer Sewing Machine



Laying new veneer



Top with new layer of oak veneer



Cabinet folding door frame



Machine bonnet assembly prior to adding veneer layer



Machine bonnet assembly after adding veneer layer



Finished bonnet and drawer



Top after staining



Top after applying varnish



Finishing drawer assembly



Base Assembly: Finished



Finished: Christmas 2001





Will it sew?



I've forgotten how to thread the bobbin



It sews!

The Finishing Touch

We finished the old treadle about two days before Christmas 2001. Daisy and I dragged the cabinet from the basement to the Dining Room where we installed the machine head. We were done.

We decided to wait until Christmas morning to see if it would sew. Daisy an ever optimist convinced me it would still sew. Her remarks “treadling is like riding a bicycle, once you learn you can always ride one.”

Things did not start out so well as we had trouble remembering how to thread the old bobbin. We were able to download a manual supposedly for models 27 and 28 from Singer Company web site. As luck would have it the manual only shows the model 28, which has the bobbin threading assembly located higher up close to the wheel. After a few attempts we got a few rounds on the bobbin and loaded it. Daisy gave it a whirl and we ended up with a tangled glob of thread. The manual told us we had to adjust the stitch length and tension.

Finally after entangling the bobbin numerous times we made the final adjustment and she sowed.

Katula must have been smiling from heaven, as we never felt so much joy!



Katula Sampson Daggett