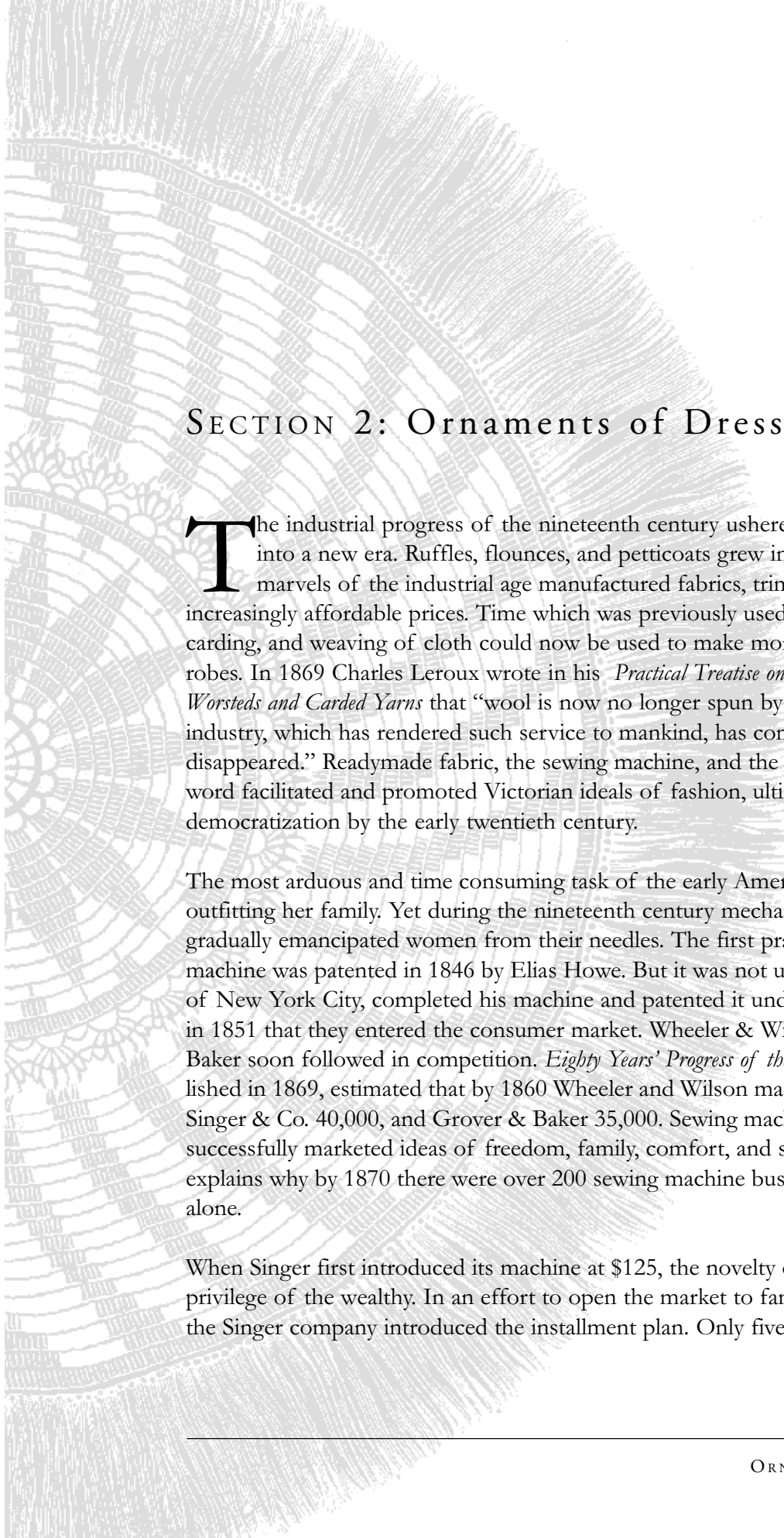




SECTION 2: Ornaments of Dress

The industrial progress of the nineteenth century ushered women's fashion into a new era. Ruffles, flounces, and petticoats grew in size as mechanical marvels of the industrial age manufactured fabrics, trimmings, and threads at increasingly affordable prices. Time which was previously used for the spinning, carding, and weaving of cloth could now be used to make more fashionable wardrobes. In 1869 Charles Leroux wrote in his *Practical Treatise on the Manufacture of Worsteds and Carded Yarns* that "wool is now no longer spun by hand. That branch of industry, which has rendered such service to mankind, has completely and for ever disappeared." Readymade fabric, the sewing machine, and the spread of the written word facilitated and promoted Victorian ideals of fashion, ultimately leading to its democratization by the early twentieth century.

The most arduous and time consuming task of the early American housewife was outfitting her family. Yet during the nineteenth century mechanical innovations gradually emancipated women from their needles. The first practical home sewing machine was patented in 1846 by Elias Howe. But it was not until Isaac M. Singer, of New York City, completed his machine and patented it under I.M. Singer & Co. in 1851 that they entered the consumer market. Wheeler & Wilson and Grover & Baker soon followed in competition. *Eighty Years' Progress of the United States*, published in 1869, estimated that by 1860 Wheeler and Wilson made 55,000 machines, Singer & Co. 40,000, and Grover & Baker 35,000. Sewing machine companies successfully marketed ideas of freedom, family, comfort, and social happiness, which explains why by 1870 there were over 200 sewing machine businesses in America alone.

When Singer first introduced its machine at \$125, the novelty of owning one was a privilege of the wealthy. In an effort to open the market to families of lesser means, the Singer company introduced the installment plan. Only five dollars down was