

Levi Strauss

1829–1902



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Levi Strauss started his own business in 1853, making strong work pants for miners. His company, Levi Strauss & Co., is still popular today.



As you read the biography below, think about the determination that Levi Strauss had that helped him accomplish all that he did.

You probably know the name Levi Strauss from the familiar brand of blue jeans that are sold today. Strauss made those jeans to provide **prospectors** and miners with a pair of pants that could stand up to the hard work that they did.

Strauss was born in 1829 in Bavaria, now a part of Germany. He came to the United States in 1847 to join his brothers, who owned a dry goods business in New York City. Strauss began working with them but wanted to start his own business.

In 1850 Strauss took a ship to San Francisco, carrying a supply of cloth, silk, and other items to sell to the people who were moving to California to look for gold. He also carried some heavy canvas, which was used on the covered wagons that traveled West. During the journey, Strauss sold everything but the canvas to fellow passengers.

Arriving in San Francisco, Strauss had no cloth to sell except for the canvas. He cut up the canvas and sewed it into trousers. His “Levi’s” were tough and durable, and became popular with working people. Strauss founded Levi Strauss & Co. in 1853, the same year he became an American citizen. Later,



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VOCABULARY

prospectors people who search for gold

Strauss switched to denim, dyed with indigo blue dye, creating the first “blue jeans.”

In 1872 Strauss received a letter from a Nevada tailor named Jacob Davis. Davis had an idea to reinforce the seams and pockets of pants with wire rivets to make them more durable. However, Davis did not have the money to apply for a patent. Strauss asked Davis to come and work for him, and Strauss started to make all of his jeans with these copper rivets.

In addition to his business, Strauss was a strong supporter of the Jewish community in San Francisco. He donated money to several causes, including the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum and Home, the Hebrew Board of Relief, and the University of California.

Strauss died in 1902. He had never married and had no children, so he left his company to his four nephews. Today, Levi Strauss & Co. manufactures all kinds of clothing, and its worldwide sales are more than \$5 billion per year. Strauss is said to have disliked the word *jeans*—he always referred to his product as *overalls*. But the Levi’s name is now famous and his blue jeans are sold all over the world.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. For what was Levi Strauss best known?

2. **Elaborate** How was Levi Strauss able to improve his product?

ACTIVITY

3. Design your own article of clothing that you can use for a specific need. Sketch your idea on paper. Then think about something you could add or change to improve your product. Include this in your sketch, too.