

Who Was Levi Strauss?

- A young German immigrant who left New York City to journey west during the California Gold Rush
- The inventor of blue jeans
- A businessman who changed the fashion industry forever
- ✓ **All of the above!**

Find out more in this illustrated book!

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Nonfiction

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Who Was Levi Strauss?



by Ellen Labrecque
illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

Penguin Workshop

For my mom, Marge Cosgrove,
who worked for the Levi Strauss company—EL

For my friend and agent Janet at Storybook Arts,
thirty years on—SM

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Who Was Levi Strauss?

On March 14, 1853, Levi Strauss stepped off a steamship and onto a dock in San Francisco. At that time, most of California was still wild and untamed. But San Francisco was growing fast. Levi was one of thirty-four thousand immigrants to arrive by ship that year. The city was bustling. Theaters, saloons, and supply stores lined the walkways leading to the waterfront. The air smelled of salt and fish from the ocean. Sounds of ship horns blasted through the streets, as people crowded around the docks to buy everything from food to lumber and steel.

Back in New York, Levi had sold clothes and sewing materials with his brothers at J. Strauss & Brother. But now, he set his sights farther,

wider. He was coming to California to expand his business.

When he arrived, Levi looked like the other businessmen. He stood five feet six inches tall, had dark hair and a big beard. He wore black pants, a black vest, jacket, and a bow tie—the style most businessmen wore at the time. Levi blended in with the crowd.

Why were so many people flocking to San Francisco? Gold had been discovered in California in 1848. People were racing west to try to make their fortune. Levi, though, wasn't one of these gold seekers. Instead, Levi knew gold miners needed sturdy clothes—especially pants—to wear while they worked in the dusty riverbeds. Levi planned to sell them rugged, long-lasting pants, but he didn't know how in-demand they would become.

Levi's jeans first became very popular with miners, but today nearly everybody wears them.



More than one billion pairs of jeans are sold around the world every year. They are still made in a similar style, with the same denim material used so long ago. The pants that Levi Strauss made for workingmen are still a fashion favorite today!

CHAPTER 1

Life in Bavaria

Levi Strauss was born Loeb Strauss on February 26, 1829, in Buttenheim, Bavaria. His parents were Hirsch and Rebecca Strauss. Loeb was the youngest of seven children. Five of them were from his father's first marriage. Hirsch was a hardworking door-to-door salesman, who sold sewing supplies such as fabric, thread, and buttons.



Rebecca stayed at home and took care of the children. The Strauss family lived in a cramped space on the first floor of a house that only had a large living room, a kitchen, and one bedroom.

The Strauss family was a close and loving one. The children were taught to help and look out



for one another. The family was Jewish. Loeb's childhood was filled with going to Hebrew School (a school for Jewish children), helping his mother with chores, and playing with his brothers and sisters and his cousins, who also lived in the same town.



Bavaria



Bavarian flag

Bavaria is one of the sixteen states of Germany. It has a population of more than twelve million, and is located in the southeastern part of the country. In the 1800s, Bavaria was a kingdom in the Germanic Confederation (what Germany was called at the time). When Loeb was born, it was ruled by King Ludwig I and about four million people lived there.

Bavaria's capital city is Munich. It is Germany's third-largest city. In September or October, Munich

hosts a giant fair called Oktoberfest that lasts sixteen to eighteen days. People come from all over the world to drink and eat, ride on amusement rides, play games, and listen to music. The city has been hosting a festival like this almost every fall since 1810.



Most people in Bavaria were Roman Catholic, but the Strausses were Jewish. Many people there hated Loeb's family and other Jewish people *just* because of their religion.

