

## JACOB DAVIS: HIS LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

- \* Born Jacob Youphes in Riga, Latvia, 1831.
- \* Came to America and in 1854, changed his name to Jacob Davis. Operated a tailor shop in New York City and Augusta, Maine.
- \* Moved to San Francisco in 1856, then moved to the gold country town of Weaverville, working as a tailor. In 1858 he left California for western Canada (likely Cariboo and Victoria, British Columbia), where he lived for nine years.
- \* He married Annie (Parksher/Packscher) from Germany, in 1865. They had six children.
- \* Davis returned to San Francisco from Victoria, B.C. in January of 1867. Then he moved to Virginia City, Nevada where he opened a cigar store. Three months later, however, he was working again as a tailor.
- \* In June of 1868 he settled in the little railroad town of Reno, Nevada. He invested his money in a brewery but lost it all. By 1869 he had opened a tailoring shop on Virginia Street. He began making wagon covers and tents from an off-white cotton duck cloth which he purchased from the wholesale house of Levi Strauss & Co. beginning in 1870.
- \* In late 1870 a woman customer came to him for a pair of “cheap” pants for her “large” husband who had a habit of going through pants rather quickly. She paid him \$3.00 in advance for the white duck pants, and told Davis she wanted them made as strong as possible.
- \* Davis had some copper rivets in his shop, which he used to attach straps to the horse blankets he made for local teamsters. When he had finished making the pants, it occurred to him that it might be a good idea to fasten the pockets with the same rivets. The pants were an immediate success.
- \* Within eighteen months he had made and sold two hundred pairs of the riveted pants, and he was beginning to be imitated by other tailors. By 1871 he was routinely using rivets on the pants he made - first on duck pants, but soon thereafter denim, as well.
- \* An old hand at applying for patents (previous applications had been for a steam-powered canal boat and steam-powered ore crusher), he wrote to Levi Strauss, describing his success with the riveted waist overalls and asking if he would like to jointly apply for a patent with him. His riveted overalls were selling for \$3.00 a pair - a premium price.
- \* Levi agreed and in addition invited Davis to San Francisco to oversee manufacture of the riveted pants for the company. Davis and family arrived on April 26, 1873 and the patent was approved on May 20, 1873.
- \* Initially, the pants were sewn by women working in their homes, but demand necessitated the construction of a manufacturing facility in San Francisco, for which Davis was named supervisor.
- \* In the 1874 City Directory of San Francisco Davis' occupation was listed as “manufacturer.” In the 1903 City Directory, his occupation was listed as “capitalist.”
- \* Around 1907 Davis sold his interest in the patent and the manufacturing to Levi Strauss & Co., but he continued to supervise the factory until his death.
- \* Jacob Davis died in San Francisco in 1908.