

25-B Birth of the Blues - Blue Jeans, That IS

A young German immigrant named Levi Strauss arrived in San Francisco in the 1850s. He brought with him a large supply of canvas that he planned to sell to miners for tents and wagon covers. He soon found, however, that what the miners really needed were tough work pants. Nothing that was available at the time could hold up to hard use in the mines. Seeing an opportunity to meet a need, Strauss had a tailor sew the canvas into work pants. The pants were an instant success.

Strauss ordered more cloth from his brothers, who owned a dry-goods business in New York. Instead of canvas, they sent him a tough French cotton called *serge de Nimes*. San Franciscans soon shortened the name to denim. Another denim-like fabric, named *Gene* by the French, gave Strauss's new product a name that has stuck- jeans.

Miners complained that the pockets of the pants often ripped out when stuffed with rocks and

tools. Strauss's tailor suggested using copper rivets to strengthen the pockets. The change was a big hit with miners and other workers.

At first, jeans were a drab, brown color. This was the natural color of the fabric. Strauss thought his pants would sell better if the color were brighter. He began dyeing the cloth a deep blue-and blue jeans were born.