

A Brief Working History of The Levi Strauss Co: The Two Horse Brand

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The Levi's logo is an iconic logo that has influenced the movement of "Cool" and "Rebel-chic" of a generation. Levi's denim brand has always aimed to send a message to its consumers of individuality, ingenuity, heritage, and innovation. Levi's has been doing this since the brand's inception in 1873. Jacob Davis and company founder Levi Strauss invented the first pair of blue jeans that could stand up to the hard work thrown at them by miners and other hard-working individuals of that time. Because many of the people during that time were illiterate, company founders thought it best to create an iconic image that would be recognized by its consumers. Thus came the two horse patch. This iconic patch features two horses riding off in opposite directions but being prevented by one pair of Levi's jeans. Anyone could walk into a shop and request the jeans with the two horse patch and be given a pair of Levi Strauss denim jeans. This graphic told a story of Levi's jeans quality and durability due to its original design. The original denim pants design consisted of rivets placed at points of stress. This design made for an innovative approach to the durability of the Levi's brand and this approach to workwear. Over time, this image has seen many changes and has even degraded into many less detailed versions. In this excerpt, I'll attempt to discuss the Levi's Strauss brand identity and how it has changed into what we know today as being marked by the Levi's "batwing" which is the Levi's brand's most currently recognized logo.

Before I attempt to discuss the Levi's brand logo and its current look, I will delve into the brand's logo origins. Levi's denim Company founders Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis, knew that

their patent for the denim jeans design would expire in 1890. Because of this, Levi's brand founders needed to quickly design a branding element that could easily be recognized by its consumers. They decided to enlist the help of Landor and Associates design team to set the tone for the Levi's brand's identity. Thus, the graphic of the two horse logo was introduced in 1886. The Two Horse™ brand leather patch was first used on the jeans, otherwise known as "waist overalls", which was the original name for jeans at the time. Its purpose was to demonstrate the strength of the pants and reinforce the company's status as the originator of patent-riveted clothing. This graphic told the story of quality in a way that consumers could quickly grasp. Early on, the Levi's company understood that many of their consumers did not speak English as their first language as well as the fact that many consumers in the blue-collar industry of mining were illiterate. The visual elements within this graphic proved undeniable recognition of the brand and its growing popularity amongst young working class Americans. The Levi's company was formerly known as "The Two Horse Brand ®". The original Two Horse graphic was affixed to the leather patch on the original 501 style jeans. Levi Strauss and company valued their clientele so much that they even decided to create a value version of the waist overalls so that consumers with less buying power were able to afford quality goods. The image of the two horses attempting to tear away at a single pair of Levi's jeans in vain was also printed on a linen patch that was fastened to the value version of the riveted waist overalls.

The Levi's brand lost its patent to the original riveted waist overalls in 1890. This meant that the design for structured workwear waist overalls was now available to anyone or any company that could afford to obtain it. Many of the Two Horse Brand's competitors began to design and elaborate of the original design of these work pants and bring them to the open market. Because

of the brand's loss of the original patent, it was imperative that the brand could differentiate themselves from their competitors. Many graphic design tools of advertisement were employed. The brand created "trade cards" that carried a full color version of the original Two Horse graphic. These trade cards came as "Gifts upon purchase", similar to the elaborate packaging one could expect from a luxury retailer; complete with additional branded items such as carrying cases and authenticity cards. The brand's loyal customers appreciated these trade cards so much that they began to collect them. Subtle changes to the trade card layout were made to accommodate season changes and approaching holidays. To prevent other brand's from adopting this strong iterating graphic, Levi's Strauss and Co. registered their unique iconography not only in the United States, but in Australia, South Africa and Japan by the early 20th century. Corporate historians aren't be sure if Levi's products were sold in these countries during that time, but the company did not want someone copying their famous logo, however remote the possibility or location. Since then, the two horse brand patch design has experienced many iterations.

We can fast-forward to the 20th century where the Levi Strauss Company began to think about how their branding really played a role in their longevity. Time, aesthetic tastes and trends where fashion was concerned began to change. The social climate of the US at the time began to influence the youth. One of Levi's main focuses as a brand was to further social change and foster an air of social progress.

With these changes came the change of Levi Strauss and Co.'s image. The original image of the two horse design in all its glory was a complex image that in a faster moving society was too much to grasp quickly. It would need to be abbreviated. The Levis Red Tab device was revived. Formerly, the Red Tab was the branding device that was used to differentiate the brand's handiwork when the patent expired. National Sales manager, Chris Lucier, came up with the idea of folding a cloth ribbon into the structural seam of the rear patch pocket. This was the inception of the Levi's Red Tab. The Red Tab featured the word "LEVI'S" woven in white thread to a red plane of fabric. This design element was attached to every pair of 501 styled Levi's jeans in 1936 and then later on Levi's brand trucker jackets. By 1940, the Levi's brand "Arcuate Design" otherwise known as the "Batwing" design located on the back pockets of every pair of Levi Strauss and Co. jeans was trademarked. These two design elements became synonymous with the brand's identity and thus made it an easy brand to spot on the street.

The Levi's Red Tab has also seen its own iterations and re-iterations over the years as well. This design element along with the Batwing stitch design remained the foundation on which the brand built its visibility. Levi's began to release the tab in various colors to set apart new denim designs in the 1960's such as their bell bottoms, 501 straight cut jeans, and boot cut jeans. An orange tab was introduced to help set these special styles apart from the regular clothing items the brand would stock. In 1970, the Red Tab became a brown tab with a carrot on it to denote the collaboration between Richard Linklater, an American actor and filmmaker who was popular around the time. The collaboration was called "Fresh Produce" and is no longer in production. If you are lucky, you may be able to find this tab in a vintage shop. By 1988, the Silver Tab made

its debut along with the Levi's baggy style jeans. Baggy jeans were on trend during the 80's as boot cut and bell bottom jeans styles were put on the back burner.

Today, Levi's continues to invent and re-invent its brand image affectively and functionally to keep up with the demands of its loyal customers with new styles that are on trend, great collaborations with popular artists and celebrities that stand for pressing issues faced by society and great craftsmanship. They have done this consistently while maintaining the Levi Strauss and Co. brand identity as a fixture of both fashion, pop culture, and politics.

Levi's branding over time...

Informational links

[Two Horses. One Message. - Levi Strauss](#)

[50 years of the Levi's® Batwing Logo: 5 Fun Facts - Levi Strauss](#)

[Levi's Logo - Design and History of Levi's Logo](#)

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<https://www.fastcompany.com/3036283/how-levis-turned-a-design-evil-into-a-design-signature>

http://levistrauss.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016_CompanyTimeline_Long_F.pdf

<https://www.levistrauss.com/unzipped-blog/2017/03/01/levis-tabs/>

TIMELINE

19TH CENTURY

- 1829** Levi Strauss is born in Buttenheim, Bavaria.
- 1847** Levi Strauss, his two sisters and mother sail for America, where they join half-brothers Jonas and Louis in New York. Levi joins their dry goods business.
- 1853** Levi Strauss arrives in San Francisco and opens a wholesale dry goods business, selling clothing, blankets, handkerchiefs, etc., to small general stores throughout the American West.
- 1854** Levi Strauss donates \$5 to a San Francisco orphanage only one year after arriving in the city to open his dry-goods business. This is equivalent to approximately \$110 and begins the company's tradition of sharing its prosperity with the community.
- 1866** Levi Strauss & Co. headquarters are at 14-16 Battery Street, where they remain for 40 years.
- 1871** Levi Strauss & Co. gives \$100 to the Chicago Relief Fund to help rebuild after the fire of 1871.
- 1872** Jacob Davis, a Reno, Nevada tailor, writes to Levi Strauss, telling him of the process he invented to rivet the pocket corners on men's pants. He suggests the two men take out a patent on the process together and Levi agrees.
- 1873** Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis receive a patent on the process of riveting pants by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on May 20. It is patent number 139,121. They begin making copper-riveted "waist overalls" (the old name for jeans) in San Francisco.
- This first pant was the original 501® jean but it didn't have that name yet: it was simply called "XX"—an industry term meaning highest quality, and also the term for the high quality denim used in their manufacture.
- The jeans have one back pocket with the Arcuate stitching design (the same design they have today), a watch pocket, a cinch, suspender buttons and a rivet in the crotch. The rivets on the back pockets are exposed.
- 1886** Two Horse™ brand leather patch is first used on the waist overalls. Its purpose was to demonstrate the strength of the pants and reinforce our status as the originator of patent-riveted clothing.
- 1890** The rivet patent goes into the public domain, so that Levi Strauss & Co. is no longer the exclusive manufacturer of riveted clothing.
- Lot numbers are first assigned to the products being manufactured. 501® is used to designate the famous copper-riveted waist overalls.
- 1897** Levi Strauss donates funds for twenty-eight scholarships at the University of California, Berkeley. These scholarships are still in place today. He also gives money to the California School for the Deaf and supports other local charities.

LEVI STRAUSS & CO.

<https://www.famouslogos.net/levis-logo/>



<— The original Two Horse leather patch that is still used on the back of Levi's Jean designs today



<— A display of Levi's Red Tabs. The tab itself is also a trademarked design element. Levi's manufactures red tabs that only feature the tab itself and the trademark "r", though to be knock off jeans but they are indeed authentic Levi's brand clothing.



<— A snapshot of the "Arcurate", otherwise known as the Levi's Batwing, the stitch design element featured on the rear pockets of all Levi's brand denim.



<— An original vintage 1960's trucker jacket featuring the Orange tab.



<— The graphic design for the Levi Strauss and Co. brand used on billboards, merchandise, store awnings and the like. The red shape was inspired by the Arcurate stitch design used on the rear pockets of Levi's jeans.