

Nevadans' inventions reach beyond the state

By Susan Skorupa, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada has a serious history of invention.

Gaming, mining, science and technology all have benefited from the state's inventive output. But a few inventions born in Nevada have had huge impacts worldwide.

Try these on for size:

Jacob Davis, born near the Baltic Sea in 1831, came to the United States in 1854 and ran tailor shops in New York City and in Augusta, Maine, former Nevada state archivist Guy Rocha wrote in an article for the Nevada State Library and Archives. Davis moved to the West and ended up in Reno in 1868, opening a tailor shop on Virginia Street the next year.

In January 1871, a woman asked him to make a sturdy pair of pants for her husband who was too big to wear ready-made clothes. Davis said the woman paid \$3 for pants made of white duck material he bought from Levi Strauss & Co. For reinforcement, Davis used small copper rivets to fasten the pants pockets, a device still used today in Levis 501 jeans and other jeans.

The pants Davis made – some made of denim – proved popular, and Davis asked Levi Strauss to help him with a patent application. The full patent was granted on May 20, 1873. By then, Davis had been named San Francisco production manager, and he sold his tailor shop property to Levi Strauss on May 27. The frame building was destroyed on Oct. 29, 1873, in Reno's first great fire, Rocha wrote.

On May 20, 2006, a historic marker was dedicated at 211 N.

Virginia St. where the shop once stood.

What's interesting, Rocha said in an interview earlier this month, is that the first copper-riveted pants were considered work pants until after World War II, when, thanks to stars such as Marlon Brando and James Dean, who popularized blue jeans in their movies, the pants became a symbol of teenage rebellion.

"You had to have a pair to be cool, to be young, rebellious," Rocha said.

Read the whole story