

STETSON WEBSITE: ABOUT US

<https://stetson.com/pages/about-us>

Founded in 1865, Stetson was born from the spirit of the West and grew to become an American icon. John B. Stetson's friendly gesture towards a wayward traveler on the new frontier gave birth to the world's first "cowboy hat." Ever since, Stetson has been a global leader in headwear, a trusted household name around the world, and has become standard equipment for Western aficionados everywhere.

For over 150 years, Stetson has created quality products that are built to last and have deep roots in the American tradition. We have a strong appreciation for objects that are made well and products that get better with age. We still craft our products using much of the same techniques as John B. did so many years ago – with an eye towards meeting the needs of the future generations of frontiersmen, pioneers, industrialists and trailblazers.

STETSON: FAQs

<https://stetson.com/pages/frequently-asked-questions>

I only found this page by accident when I searched for "how to care for my stetson hat." It's buried at the bottom of their home page but it's got pure gold in there!

HOW DO I CLEAN AND CARE FOR MY FUR FELT HAT?

Answer

- Store your felt hat upside down on its crown, on a clean surface or in a hat box to keep the brim from flattening out.
- Remove dust and loose dirt with a soft brush, starting at the left side of the hat and brushing counter-clockwise.
- Avoid exposing your hat to the heat from stoves, radiators, lamps, car windows and enclosed cars in the summer. The combination of the heat and perspiration will shrink the sweatband.

*** If your hat gets wet, shake off the excess water, and turn down the "self-conforming" leather sweatband. This will allow the hat to dry naturally. While the hat is wet, don't let the

brim touch the surface and don't place it near heat. Heat can reactivate the felting process and cause shrinkage.

- To keep perspiration from penetrating the fur felt, occasionally turn down the leather sweatband so it can dry out. -Should your hat, (if it is light colored) become spotted with water or grease, you can clean it with a little baby talc or corn starch - not liquid cleanser, please!
- To put on or remove your hat, hold the brim in front and back, handle the crown as little as possible.
- Your hat will last a lifetime if you follow these important instructions.

WHAT DO THE X'S MEAN?

Answer

The quality of the hat body used to make a hat is the div factor that determines the X's. In felt, it is determined by the percentage of furs used in making the hat body. We use beaver, mink, chinchilla and other animal fur to make bodies. The mixture of which furs we use determines the X's. In straw, the X's are also determined by the body used to make the hat. The tighter the weave and narrower the straw reed used to make the hat, the better X quality is marked in the hat.

CAN A STETSON FUR FELT HAT BE RE-SIZED TO FIT BETTER?

Answer

No, not really. A fur felt hat can be taken down one full size, but not increased. A hat retailer might be able to stretch the hat a little, but when you stretch a hat, after a time, it will go back to its original size.

I RECENTLY BOUGHT A STETSON HAT AND I WAS WONDERING HOW TO REGISTER IT

Answer

We only register 100X quality hats and up. If the hat is of this quality, it should have come with a certificate of registration and therefore there is no need to register it.

HOW MUCH WATER DOES A 10-GALLON HAT HOLD?

Answer

3 quarts

HOW DO I FIGURE OUT WHAT SIZE I WEAR?

Answer

To figure out what size you wear. You will need to find a cloth measuring tape. Measure the circumference of your head at the place where you would wear a hat. Take the measurement in inches and refer to the chart below. If you are in between two sizes, choose the bigger size. You can always pad a hat smaller.

COWBOY HAT ETIQUETTE

6 Cowboy Hat Etiquette Tips

Cowboy hats have a long history steeped in Western culture and tradition, so they come saddled with a list of cowboy hat etiquette guidelines. Consider some of the rules proper cowboys live by when it comes to wearing cowboy hats:

1. The bow on the inside of the hat band goes to the back of your head. First-time wearers might be confused as to which part of their cowboy hat is the front and which is the back. The trick is to look for a small bow tied to the sweatband on the inside of the hat. Make sure the bow is in the back.
2. Give your hat time to break in. First-time hat buyers may not realize that just like a new pair of cowboy boots, cowboy hats need to be broken in. A properly fitted hat is likely going to be uncomfortably tight until you've worn it for a while.
3. It's customary to remove hats indoors. One of the most basic cowboy hat rules is to remove your hat when entering a public building or private home. If you're attending a formal occasion, your hat should remain off while indoors. If it's an informal occasion, feel free to put it back on.
4. Place your hat crown side down when you're not wearing it. When sitting down to dinner, it's tradition to take your cowboy hat off. Before sitting down at the dinner table, place it down on the crown with the opening of the hat facing upwards. This protects the hat brim from getting flattened over time. Alternatively, hang it on a hat rack.

5. Show respect at weddings and funerals. Remove your cowboy hat in church and at indoor weddings and funerals. During funeral processions, it's customary to remove your hat as the casket passes.
6. Wear the right hat for the right season. Typically, straw cowboy hats are worn from May until Labor Day. Felt cowboy hats are worn the rest of the year. This is subjective and depends mostly on the climate and weather where you live.

COWBOY HAT LORE

<https://www.earnyourspurs.com/how-to-wear-a-cowboy-hat/>

Rest It Properly

You know how you prefer to kick back on the couch with your feet up in your “restful stance?” Your cowboy hat has a “restful stance” too. You never want to set it down on a flat surface with the brim-side down.

Why? Well, hats have a memory. If you constantly store your hat with the brim resting on a flat surface, the shape will slowly start to change and the brim will get pushed up in certain places where it makes contact with the table, counter or dresser.

Always “rest” your hat with the crown on the bottom. The crown is stiffer than the brim and tends to hold its shape better.

Keep it on Your Head

Most first-time hat buyers end up with a hat that's too big. They don't realize that hats should be tight – sometimes on the verge of being uncomfortably tight.

When I take my straw hat off after wearing it all day I have a noticeable red spot on my forehead where it grips my skull. Hats expand with heat, so if your hat is tight, it will loosen up on a warm day when you are sweating. Hopefully it's tight enough when you buy it to stay on regardless.

Felt hats tend to stay on better than straw hats, especially in the wind, so they don't have to be quite as tight. And hats also conform to your head over time, so even if it doesn't feel quite right on your head at first, it will likely adjust.

The reason for the tight hat is simple. When you are riding, whether at a rodeo or out trailing cows on a ranch, the last thing you want is to be getting off your horse every five minutes chasing that fancy new hat. It's not just an inconvenience, it's also downright problematic. If you have a herd of cows bunched up and you have to go chasing after your hat, your whole operation will crumble down around you. Plus, a brand new hat can look worn out in a hurry after being blown across the Nevada desert.

My dad feels so strongly about the importance of keeping ones hat on ones head, that he has been known to tell his cutting horse customers that if their hat falls off while they are competing, they will receive an automatic 60 (the lowest score you can get). I know a few have actually believed him. Which brings up another unrelated point...read the RULE BOOK people, but I digress.

Your final option for keeping your hat on without squeezing your melon so tightly is to add a stampede string. Just note, that you will rarely see a stampede string on a rodeo cowboy and I think there are a lot of traditional cowboys that have a hard time drilling holes in their hat for the string. That being said, if you are comfortable with it, go for it. It is a far better alternative than chasing your hat through the sagebrush.

One final note on keeping your hat on, pay attention to the brim size. Especially with straw hats, if you have a big 6" brim, you better be somewhere where the weather patterns do not include wind. A wide brim is great for keeping the sun off, but if you are trailing cows in Southwestern Montana, the wind will make your hat into a flying saucer in no time flat.

Never Set it on the Bed

This may be more of a superstition than a hard and fast rule, per se, but I know some folks who would sooner chew off their arm than allow this to happen.

It is well-known in the rodeo world that if your hat is set on the bed, usually by someone other than you, that you might as well turn out (basically pull out out of the rodeo) that day because the cards are stacked against you in a big way.

Now, there are rituals that may be performed to reverse the damning effects of "hat on the bed," and they vary depending on geography, heritage, and how much you actually believe in all this nonsense. But one practice that I am familiar with is the "spit, throw, and stomp" method.

Step 1: Spit in the hat.

Step 2: Throw the hat on the ground.

Step 3: Stomp on the hat.

Personally, I think I would have a hard time stomping on a perfectly good hat, but to each his own. Apparently, the ritual releases the bad "ju ju" and you are back in the game.

Keep Your Hands on Your Own Hat

Cowboys are darn serious when it comes to their hats. Basically, don't mess with a hat that doesn't belong to you. If you are itching to pick a fight, the fastest way to do it is to knock the hat off a cowboy's head. But I really wouldn't recommend it.

It should go without saying that you don't wear another man's hat. Accept, on the very rare occasion when you show up to the rodeo after the airline loses all your luggage and for some reason your hat was in there instead of on your head. Then it is perfectly acceptable for your buddy to offer his hat to you and for you to wear it.

Now, there is one final caveat to be noted when it comes to removing and or wearing another man's hat. And that applies when the remover or wearer of said hat is a woman. Many guys are probably still going to be a little annoyed unless the woman is extremely attractive. But, I was always told that if a woman puts a man's hat on her head, she is sending him a message that she plans on removing more of his attire at a later time.

The Bow Goes to the Back

This is a simple one, but oh, so important. The little bow inside your hat's sweatband indicates the rear of your hat. Not unlike the tag in the back of your shirt. A cowboy hat has a distinctive front and back. People who are familiar with cowboy hats can tell within a millisecond whether you are wearing yours correctly.

However, they may not share that information with you.

You know how it is...when you see someone with their zipper down...do I tell them and save them additional future embarrassment by embarrassing them in the moment...at the same time admitting I was looking "down there?"

Your Hat Tells Your Story

There is perhaps no other item of cowboy attire that is more telling than a man's hat. Dyed-in-the-wool western folks can look at a cowboy hat and know instantly whether the wearer is a bull rider, rancher, buckaroo, or stockbroker. The characteristics detected by the eye including shape, material, wear, cleanliness, and color race through the brain in a fraction of a second producing an output that can only be described as judgement. It might go something like this:

I spy with my little eye a spotless flat-brim hat, gray, with a telescoping crown and a beaded edge.

The flat brim and telescoping crown scream "Buckaroo" in a big way. This is intentional.

The word "buckaroo" comes from the word "vaquero" because many of the first cowboys in America were Spanish and white guys had a hard time pronouncing it correctly. The highest density of this cowboy subculture exists in the Great Basin region of Northern Nevada and California. The buckaroo embraces the early vaquero traditions, including

the way he trains his horse and the way he snags a calf's hind legs in the branding trap at the end of a 50' length of rope. You'll often find him braiding rawhide and rolling his own cigarettes. And of course, wearing a flat brim hat with a telescoping crown.

Now, back to this hat.

Without ever opening his mouth, I know this man identifies with the early traditions, or at least wants to present himself that way. I know that he cares about the way he looks when he goes to town.

I never actually mentioned where I spotted him, but let's just say it's at a rodeo or horse show or something like that. The context actually does matter because if he is on a ranch, my brain will take that into account as well.

The fact that his hat looks brand new leads me to narrow my judgement to two conclusions, either A.) This guy does not do any actual work in his hat because it's too clean. Therefore this is probably not a working cowboy or B.) This guy likes to dress up to go into town and he's wearing his "good" hat.

Now, the characteristic of the hat that leads me to my final conclusion is the beaded edge. That tells me that this guy does not make a living as a cowboy and probably is "more hat than cattle." Why? Because a beaded edge isn't really practical for a hat that gets a lot of wear (the beads might eventually come off). And chances are, even if it's his "good hat," it will eventually end up in the "working hat" rotation at some point. Not always the case, but often times it is.

I say all this to say, even if you don't realize it, your hat is telling a story. And the person who is reading it, probably isn't even conscious that he is doing it. Sometimes his judgment is spot-on. Other times, once he actually talks to the person, he realizes that he was completely off the mark.

So, when you go to buy a hat, know the story you want it to tell based on your personality and aspirations. But when you open your mouth, just be you.

WIKIPEDIA

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stetson>

Stetson created a rugged hat for himself made from thick [beaver felt](#) while panning for gold in Colorado. According to legend, Stetson invented the hat while on a hunting trip while showing his companions how he could make cloth out of fur without tanning.^{[2][3]} Fur felt hats are lighter, they maintain their shape, and withstand weather and renovation better.^[4]

Stetson made an unusually large hat from felt he made from hides collected on the trip and wore the hat for the remainder of the expedition. Although initially worn as a joke, Stetson soon grew fond of the hat for its ability to protect him from the elements. It had a wide brim, a high crown to keep an insulating pocket of air on the head, and was used to carry water.

As their travels continued, a [cowboy](#) is said to have seen J. B. Stetson and his unusual hat, rode up, tried the hat on for himself, and paid Stetson for it with a [five dollar gold piece](#), riding off with the first western Stetson hat on his head.^[5]

PENNSYLVANIA CENTER FOR THE BOOK

<https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/literary-cultural-heritage-map-pa/feature-articles/stetson-eastern-hat-tamed-west>

Stetson: The Eastern Hat That Tamed the West

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By Joseph Cartaxo and Pauline Holdsworth, supplemented by Alan Jalowitz



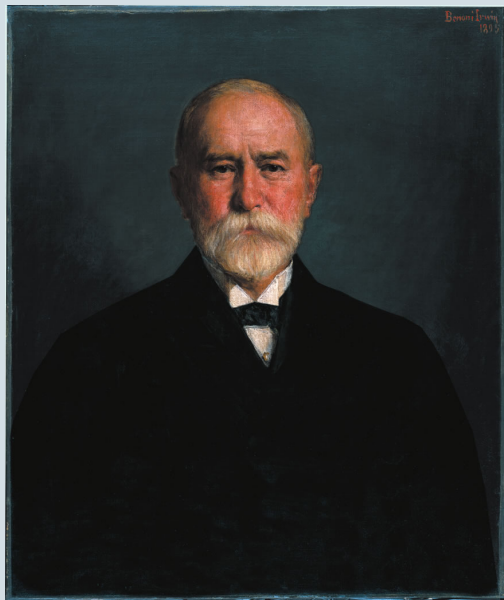
STETSON®

Stetson

Stetson hats have, from their beginnings in Philadelphia, become an American icon. When we think of the American West, we think of vast plains, towering mountains, herds of cattle, and cowboys: the West's most famous protagonists. The image of the cowboy is defined by lassos, boots, jeans, and the iconic cowboy hat. The idea of the cowboy hat conjures up images from John Wayne and Clint Eastwood movies. When a cowboy hat comes to mind we don't normally think of Pennsylvania, but maybe we should. After all, the cowboy hat as we know it today, with its wide brim and high crown was first developed by a man named John Batterson Stetson, a famous Pennsylvania resident. He began his first hat business in Philadelphia in 1865, where he eventually

manufactured the hat that made him famous—the Boss of the Plains. In creating the first cowboy hat, John B. Stetson has made his mark on Western iconography.

John B. Stetson was born in 1830 in Orange, New Jersey. His beginnings were humble as the son of a hatter and the seventh of twelve children. A hat maker or hatter was not a well respected profession at the time. Hatters were seen as unreliable, lazy drunks, but John's determination and good business practices would help change that stereotype. In his youth he was taught the skills of the trade and worked for his father and brother making hats, selling them, buying raw materials, and training other workers. Eventually Stetson made plans to go into business for himself, but before he could start, his health took a turn for the worse. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was told that he only had a short time to live. John Stetson decided to quit the hat business and explore the western frontier before he died. While on his journey he made his way to St. Joseph, Missouri where he got a job in a brickyard. Showing his great propensity for leadership, he shortly became the manager and then a part owner. However, his bad luck continued, and a flood destroyed his facility.



Stetson

John B. Stetson, an Eastern hat maker, would go on to make the West's most enduring icon, the "Cowboy Hat."

After losing his job and his investment, he joined some pioneers on an expedition to Pikes Peak. During the trip, Stetson and his companions obtained many animal skins but had no method of tanning them. The plains they traveled through were bereft of trees and provided no protection from storms or the mid day sun. They would use the hides to make simple tents to protect themselves from the elements, but the raw hide tents would have to be quickly discarded. Stetson found a solution in techniques he had used to make hats for years. He showed the pioneers the process of making felt from animal fur that would be durable and water proof. He helped his fellow travelers make felt tents that would last and protect them from the rain. This method of making felt would be a staple of his hats for years to come. Stetson made his first wide-brimmed felt hat to amuse his friends. It met some ridicule but, because of its aesthetic appeal and its ability to protect the wearer from the elements, it became the envy of many of his acquaintances, including his first patron—a bull whacker who paid him a substantial five dollar gold piece for it. This was the first Stetson hat ever sold.

After about a year, Stetson's health had returned, so he took his earnings and headed back east to the city of Philadelphia to start his own hat business. Stetson had 100 dollars left to start his business by the time he reached Philadelphia. He used that money to buy tools and fur, as well as to rent a room on Seventh and Callowhill. Stetson began by making hats in the styles that were popular at the time. He would sell his hats to vendors and store owners a few at a time, but he soon realized that if he wanted to stand out from all the other hat makers he would have to do something different.

Stetson experimented with different styles by making slight alterations to already established ones. He would add an extra curl to the brim or change the crown a bit to create what he hoped would be the next hit fashion. He would wear his creations and display them to dealers to persuade them to order some for their stores, but they were uninterested in the styles he created and believed that fashion came from Europe and not from the mind of a lone hatter. Fortunately, this took a favorable turn when he created a light felt hat made out of a very fine fur. While showing a store owner his product, a customer became interested and bought the hat on the spot. The owner took an interest and ordered a dozen hats from Stetson.



Stetson

Cowboys in the West became Stetson's first market.

It was his first success, so he immediately took all the money he had and bought the finest fur he could get. The hats Stetson made were suddenly selling, but his profit margins were quite low because of the cost of the fur and the fact that his hats **retailed** for only two dollars. Stetson would receive an order of fur every week and pay for it up front. On one of the days that the order was due to arrive he realized that he did not have enough money to pay for the fur, but to his amazement, the delivery man allowed Stetson to pay for the fur in a week or so without his even asking. Stetson was a religious man and saw this unsolicited payment extension as a sign that God would help and protect him.

After being inspired by this event he decided to make a bold move. **Instead of trying to make the next hit in hat fashion, he figured he would make hats for the working man of the West. Stetson would make the style that he invented during his journey to Pikes Peak. With its wide flat brim and high, straight- sided crown, it was great for protecting the wearer from the rain and harsh sun. Likewise, the hat was ideal for working outdoors. He believed this style of hat would be well received by ranchers, bull whackers, miners, and other western frontiersmen. He called his creation "The Boss of the Plains." To promote his product, he took a gamble and sent a sample hat to clothing vendors in every city in the Southwest with a letter asking them to order a dozen more. Shortly Stetson started receiving orders from all over the region.**

Stetson's success would eventually require this huge factory in Philadelphia to produce enough hats.

Stetson made three versions of the Boss of the Plains hat. The first one, made out of regular felt, sold for five dollars retail; the second one, made out of a very fine felt sold for 10 dollars; and the third one, made out of extra fine beaver or nutria felt, sold for 30 dollars. He never sacrificed quality to engage in price competition. Stetson believed in creating a quality product that would exceed the expectations of its customers. He let his product speak for itself, which is evident in the way he promoted his hat. Instead of sending vendors from the Southwest descriptions of the hats or advertisements for them, he let the hats do the talking. By sending the vendors the hats, he allowed them to try out the hats and see for themselves that they were durable and very functional while still being aesthetically pleasing. Stetson once said, "There is no advertisement equal to a well pleased customer." Almost a year after he started making the Boss of the Plains hats, he moved his operation to a new location at Fourth and Montgomery Streets, then in the suburbs. Since he was no longer solely concerned with the local trade, he decided that it would be more economical to locate his factory where land was cheaper. The final great facility of the Stetson company would be at 1801 Germantown Avenue.

Stetson was a craftsman and businessman, but also a man of integrity and kindness. He believed in investing in his employees and treating them well. He paid his employees a good wage, had an apprentice system that encouraged long term employment, and set up a Christmas bonus system where the employees would be paid a bonus if they worked continuously throughout the year. Stetson's methods of management led to a factory of hardworking and skilled individuals. His efforts changed the perception of the hatter as a lazy, unreliable tramp to a trustworthy, hardworking, artisan. Stetson believed in being thrifty and saving one's money for a proper investment. He passed this idea on to his employees by encouraging them to buy their own houses. He created the Stetson Building and Loan Association to help his employees achieve this goal. Instead of going to the doctor he would have his doctor

come to his office to treat him. Then, he started using his doctor to treat his employees' ailments as well. He soon was hiring more doctors to treat all his employees and he eventually built a hospital that treated not only his employees, but also members of the general public. Stetson provided healthcare for his employees at a time when that was unheard of.

Stetson hats were not just worn by cowboys and ranchers; they were worn by men of every background and social standing. The Stetson hat was adopted by the U.S. military and it is still worn by cavalry troopers for ceremonial purposes. The iconic hat has also been used by British, Canadian, and South African military.

John B. Stetson was an ambitious man who never sacrificed his product or his integrity to become a successful entrepreneur. It was his commitment to quality and practicality that led to the creation of the iconic cowboy hat. John B. Stetson chose Philadelphia to locate his factory, and even though the factory moved to St. Joseph, Missouri in the early 1970s and then to Garland, Texas in 1986 it is still a significant part of Pennsylvania history. Reporter Josephine Abader noted in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* in 1952 that the company The Stetson has been called "the finest hat made in America" by the *Springfield Daily Republican* newspaper, and the Stetson website proudly proclaims, "Stetson, it's not just a hat, it's the hat," – a statement given credibility by the Stetson's history as an icon. Wearing a Stetson has taken on a variety of connotations over the years, from asserting masculinity to making a statement about one's principles.



Images like this cowboy with his horse are entirely in keeping with the Myth of the West, and reflected the values readers of Western novels and viewers of Western movies came to expect.

The Stetson-wearing protagonist of Philadelphia writer [Owen Wister's](#) classic novel *The Virginian* helped connect the hat with heroism on top of masculinity and independence.

Before Wister's novel, reports Ben Macintyre for *The Times*, "cowboys were usually depicted as murderers and hoodlums, and until the late 1880s "cowboy" was an insult, synonymous with "drunkard." In westerns, the hero would traditionally wear a white Stetson and the villain would wear a black one.

Indiana, PA native Jimmy Stewart advertised for Stetson, wearing a costume from one of his many Western movies.

Simple or not, the image stuck. Wearing a white Stetson hat (as many U.S. presidents have done) was meant to indicate allegiance to a certain moral code, which is still associated with the hat. An anonymous contributor to *eHow.com* in a fashion advice column on how to wear a Stetson wrote, "The symbol of a true cowboy is not just his bravado, but what he wears on his head. A Stetson hat signifies not only a hero and a leader, but also a cowboy with class. All of these traits are enhanced by the way the hat

is worn... Take off your Stetson hat as etiquette dictates. It is improper to wear a hat indoors and downright disrespectful to fail to take off the hat briefly to salute a lady."

But an advertising campaign by Marlboro reminded the American public of Stetson-wearing cowboy's former bad-boy status. Marlboro was having difficulty selling its filtered cigarettes, which were initially aimed at women. They decided the problem was that they were telling the American public that their cigarettes were for "sissies," reported Kathleen Schalch for NPR. Marlboro then hired Leo Burnett, an advertising legend of the time, to turn their image around. "I said, 'What's the most masculine symbol you can think of?'" recalled Burnett in the radio broadcast. "And right off the top of his head one of these writers spoke up and said a cowboy. And I said, 'That's for sure.'" And so the Marlboro Man was born.

Marlboro used a variety of models for their ads, some of whom were real-life cowboys, but one thing was always the same: the white Stetson hat pulled low over the man's face as he smoked his cigarette. Phillip Landry, the Marlboro brand owner at Phillip Morris in the 1960s, told NPR, "In a world that was becoming increasingly complex and frustrating for the ordinary man, the cowboy represented an antithesis — a man whose environment was simplistic and relatively pressure free. He was his own man in a world he owned." Many of Marlboro's TV ads during the 1960s featured cowboys in Stetsons leading their cattle around to the theme song from the Magnificent Seven, inviting viewers to come join them in "Marlboro Country," where they too could put their Stetsons on and be assured that they were still in control of the world they lived in.



Stetson

Actor and singer Gene Autry was a hero in the 1950s Westerns, always wearing a Stetson.

Several U.S. presidents have tapped into the suggestive power of the Stetson hat. The introduction to a PBS movie on Lyndon B. Johnson explains, “The real Lyndon Johnson was a mover, a driver, a charmer, a bully -- six feet four inches tall with a size 7-3/8 Stetson hat. He loved food -- chili and tapioca pudding. He loved attractive women. He was a good dancer.” The image of a charming man with a fondness for the simple pleasures in life is crucially linked to the image of a Stetson hat, and Johnson used his hat to convince the public that he was just a common man with common interests. He would throw his hat from his helicopter to the crowds below when he landed – but if the person who caught it wasn’t one of his staff workers, there would be hell to pay. George Bush is also often associated with the Stetson, as is Ronald Reagan, though the latter two in particular drew criticism for adopting a cowboy’s persona in dealing with foreign affairs. In the popular comic strip *Doonesbury*, Bush was often drawn as an empty Stetson hat floating above an asterix, a reference to the phrase “all hat and no cattle.”

American folklore expert Peter Tamony, in *Western Folklore*, argued that the Stetson fits with a culture full of hat references, and has come to be the poster child of that culture. “In figures of speech, the hat is big in traditional colloquial English, and in American phrase and proverb. *To bet one’s hat*, figuratively, meant to stake all...And to give a politician something to *hang his hat on* is to make a proposal for consideration, to give him an issue,” he wrote. Tamony suggests that while the wide-brimmed sombrero is a national symbol of Mexico, the Stetson is its northern counterpart, because despite the occasional sensational headline about the death of the cowboy myth, images of rugged men in Stetsons continue to appear. The Stetson website similarly claims that the Stetson is “an icon of everyday American lifestyle. Because of its authentic American heritage, Stetson remains as a part of history and, for the same reason will continue into the future.”

PA native Tom Mix became an early icon wearing his Stetson ten gallon hat.

Ultimately, the hat’s popularity today owes more to its connections to figures like Annie Oakley, Buffalo Bill, the Virginian, Pennsylvania’s own cowboy star [Tom Mix](#), and the Marlboro Man than it does to the lives of real western settlers, though it could be argued that these fictional western heroes wouldn’t have been the same without the hat they all wore. Bill Bryson complains in an article called “How the West Wasn’t Won” for the *Independent*, “Scarcely a western movie has been made in which at least one character hasn’t taken a bullet in the thigh or shoulder but shrugged it off with a manly wince and continued firing” – when, in fact, nineteenth century guns were slow enough that the bullet would continue to bounce around inside the victim, debilitating if not killing him, instead of exiting cleanly as the movies suggest.

This mythologizing of the West, Bryson writes, is similar to the way the Stetson hat has developed its own myth – many are unaware that it was invented in Pennsylvania by “a Philadelphian who never intended the hat to be exclusively associated with guys on horses.” But whether or not the stories in the movies have factual origins seems to be a matter of little importance for many. What matters is the *idea* of the Stetson-wearing cowboy, which has become much more than a story. *This mythic figure has undergone*

countless shifts over the years, moving from drunkard to good guy to macho man to politician. But the Stetson hat, whatever it may mean at the time, is always in the picture.

COWBOYS + INDIANS MAGAZINE

<https://www.cowboysindians.com/2015/09/stetsons-150th/>

“Today, half the country would like to be a cowboy, while the other half would like to look like one,” Travolta said in *Urban Cowboy*’s publicity at the time. It was yet another realization that there was indeed a lot of truth to the old cowboy saying: Your hat is the last thing you take off and the first thing that gets noticed.

From quintessential screen cowboys such as Tom Mix and John Wayne to leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan to country singers like Hank Williams and Garth Brooks, a Stetson has long been the go-to hat for both the natty celebrity and the true cowboy.

And it’s been that way practically since John B. Stetson handcrafted his first hat in the early 1860s in a battle with the wilderness. What originally began as an attempt to weatherproof himself with a big brimmed hat on the Western plains has become a great American success story and a potent symbol of Americana. One hundred fifty years later, it’s like Coke or Kleenex — a name known around the world that’s come to mean not just the brand but the thing itself. Stetson equals cowboy hat.

That fact is not lost on Hollywood. It would probably be easier to say who hasn’t worn a Stetson than to name-check every actor who has. But a Stetson’s so much more than a potent film prop.

“Stetson isn’t only great because of who has worn them,” says Ricky Bolin, a former professional bull rider and current general manager of Hatco, which manufactures Stetson Hats in Garland, Texas. “Stetson is also great because

they've been made in America continuously for the last 150 years following the same principles laid out all that time ago. We still follow them today."

You may know the famous story about when and how those principles originated. Born in New Jersey in 1830, John Batterson Stetson learned about hatmaking from his father, a hatter who had a successful company called the No Name Hat Company. When Stetson got tuberculosis in his 20s, he went west both to improve his health and to mine for gold. The West did wonders for his health, but while he managed to reach Pikes Peak in Colorado, he didn't find his fortune. What he did find was a big idea: a market out West putting hats on the heads of pioneers traveling out in the elements. He figured a lightweight fur felt hat might be just the thing.

He had some anecdotal evidence from his own frontier experience. On the Pikes Peak expedition, instead of using untanned, often putrid, animal skins for warmth and shelter like the other gold seekers did, Stetson made himself blankets, a tent, and a broad-brimmed hat from felted fur shavings. When, later in his travels, a cowboy bought his distinctive hat right off his head for a \$5 gold piece, Stetson knew he was onto something.

In 1865, he moved to Philadelphia, borrowed money from his sister to get set up, and launched his own hatmaking company. In 1869, he re-created the hat he sold to the cowboy and started marketing the newly minted "Boss of the Plains" for \$5 retail.

And the rest is cowboy hat history.

Stetson would become well-known as a hatmaking magnate whose name was synonymous with not just quality but also durability and beauty. The company itself was as innovative as the hats and won many an award. As an owner, Stetson was known for caring for his employees (archival photos show factory workers in front of the Philly plant holding Thanksgiving turkeys gifted by the company); as a philanthropist, for giving generously. He gave such substantial gifts to the University of DeLand, near his vacation home in Florida, that it was renamed John B. Stetson University in 1889 (later changed to Stetson

University). The Hatters continue to honor their benefactor with the school's Stetson-wearing cowboy mascot, "John B."

Stetson founder John B. Stetson and William "Buffalo Bill" Cody

Stetson's craftsmanship could already be seen making its way to celebrity stardom in the 1880s in William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West show. Cody, who liked to look the snazzy part, usually wore a broad-brimmed Stetson, both while performing and in his private life. Annie Oakley wore one, too. In Wild West publicity, they're always pictured in their hats.

Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Dale Evans all wore Stetsons. And if he was properly put together, so did Mr. Potato Head.

Rather than have custom-shaped hats shipped to the set for Daniel Craig and Harrison Ford (who, by the way, wears a Stetson fedora in the *Indiana Jones* series), Favreau and costume designer Mary Zophres (*No Country for Old Men*) hired a hat shaper, and Range sent them open crown hats with flat brims that could be easily creased and shaped as the filmmakers saw fit.

From *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza* to *Wyatt Earp* and *Tombstone*, Stet-son has played a vital role in countless westerns. What would *Midnight Cowboy*, *Silverado*, *Killer Joe*, *True Grit*, and *The Lone Ranger* (both the TV series with Clayton Moore and Disney's recent big-screen adventure with Armie Hammer and Johnny Depp) have been without the hats? It's such an institution, on-screen and off, that a black Tyler-style Stetson worn by Garth Brooks is actually in the Smithsonian Institution.

John Wayne once proclaimed Stetson "the hat that won the West." Quality and craftsmanship are what made the hat a star in the first place.

