

Warranted to Be

An AWB member since 1919, Pendleton Woolen Mills stays true to its roots while embracing innovation and change.

DEBBIE RITENOUR

Pendleton Woolen Mills has been producing high-quality, highly coveted blankets, clothing and accessories in the Pacific Northwest for more than 100 years.

At A Glance

Pendleton Woolen Mills traces its roots back to 1863, when master weaver Thomas Kay arrived in Oregon.

The company became known for its distinctive blankets, later expanding into apparel and accessories.

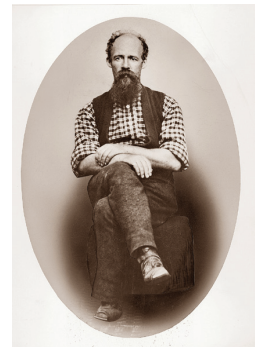
Today, Pendleton is a brand synonymous with quality and craftsmanship.

This story is part of a new series highlighting AWB's legacy members.



Born in rainy West Yorkshire in northern England, Thomas Kay grew up in the woolen industry—literally. By the age of 9, Kay was working in a mill as a bobbin boy, an often-dangerous job that involved replacing the bobbins, or spindles of thread, on the looms. Three years later, he became a spinner's apprentice. By the time he moved to the United States in search of new opportunities in 1857, Kay was a master weaver.

Kay's early life was a far cry from that of the bronzed teenagers who dominated the surfer scene in sunny Southern California a century later, but his legacy would have a major impact on the sport. The iconic blue and charcoal plaid shirt every surfer wore was created by the company that traces its roots back to Kay's arrival in Oregon in 1863. In fact, the Board Shirt by Pendleton Woolen Mills became so popular that an up-and-coming rock 'roll' band named itself the Pendletones in its honor. The Pendletones would later become known as the Beach Boys.



www.pendelton-usa.com

Headquartered in Portland, Pendleton continues to inspire and thrive. Today the brand is synonymous with authenticity, quality and craftsmanship. From its early days as a small producer of colorful trade blankets to its current status as a world-renowned manufacturer of woolen goods, Pendleton has become one of the most respected companies in the Pacific Northwest.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Kay began working at a mill in Brownsville shortly after arriving in Oregon. In 1889, he founded the Thomas Kay Woolen Mill in Salem. He would continue to perfect his trade over the years, turning out the first bolt of worsted wool west of the Mississippi. He also would teach it to his oldest daughter, Fannie, who was instrumental in the mill's management.

After marrying retail merchant Charles P. Bishop and starting her own family, Fannie Kay Bishop encouraged her sons, Clarence, Roy and Chauncey, to follow in her father's footsteps. In 1909, the family purchased a shuttered mill in Pendleton in eastern Oregon. The original mill had made blankets and robes for Native Americans, and after building a new factory, the family resumed operations and began producing blankets for trade with nearby tribes. A year later, Pendleton opened its first retail store in Seaside.

In 1912, Pendleton expanded into Washington with the purchase of a weaving mill in Washougal, just across the Columbia River. The Washougal mill allowed Pendleton to weave a wider variety of fabrics, and the following decade, the company expanded its product line as well by establishing a men's line of clothing, starting with the now-legendary wool shirt. A women's line would follow 25 years later, with the '49er plaid wool jacket becoming one of the company's best-selling products. Pendleton is now known just as much for its high-quality clothing as for its coveted blankets.

Pendleton's popularity grew to new heights in the decades to follow. By 1972, the company was offering year-round attire with new, non-wool clothing made for warmer months. In 1999, Pendleton established a home division featuring towels, rugs and Southwestern decor. Every step of the way, Pendleton listened and responded to its customers' needs.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

Pendleton has been supporting and collaborating with other organizations throughout its history. One of its longest-lasting partnerships dates back to 1916, when the founder of the Great Northern Railroad commissioned the company to create a blanket for the lodges of Glacier National Park. Pendleton has been a staunch supporter of America's national parks ever since. The company established a National Park Collection of blankets in 2016 and has donated more than \$900,000 to the National Park Foundation.

In 1990, Pendleton began partnering with the American Indian College Fund, which provides financial support for Native American students and tribal colleges and universities.

AWB AND PENDLETON: 102 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

Pendleton Woolen Mills joined AWB in 1919, seven years after opening a mill in Washougal in southwest Washington. Since its opening, the mill has been one of the largest employers in the city of about 16,000, with almost 200 employees keeping the mill running 16 hours a day, five days a week. The 300,000-square-foot facility performs the company's dyeing, carding, spinning and weaving processes.

Charles Bishop, the Washougal mill's former manager and fifth-generation descendant of founder Thomas Kay, served on the AWB Board of Directors from 1995 to 1998.



Pendleton's success can be directly attributed to its commitment to quality, value, experience and trust—and to the company's loyal and passionate customers.

The company established an endowed scholarship and has raised more than \$1.6 million for the nonprofit organization through the sales of designated blankets and other contributions. Pendleton also donates a portion of sales of special blankets to the Wildland Firefighter Foundation, the Native American Rehabilitation Association, the Fisher House Foundation and the Center of Southwest Studies at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado.

Other partnerships offer the opportunity for Pendleton to collaborate with well-known clothing designers to create limited-edition products. The first of these collaborations was with Vans in the 1970s when Pendleton sold Vans sneakers made with Pendleton plaids in its store at Disneyland. More recent collaborations include Doc Martens boots made with Pendleton's Pagosa Springs wool, heritage-inspired woven Fitbit bands, and a new line of denim classics with Lee.



BUILT TO LAST

Pendleton's business is inherently tied to sustainability considering wool is nature's most sustainable fiber. Wool is completely biodegradable, naturally decomposing and releasing nutrients back into the soil. It doesn't have to be washed as often as other fabrics because it naturally resists odors and stains, and because it is flexible and durable, it is long-lasting. A special collection of products made with Pendleton Eco-Wise Wool are certified for sustainability, and the company has an internal sustainability committee that reviews current practices and identifies environmentally friendly options throughout all stages of the manufacturing process.

The company's relationships with wool ranchers across the United States are long-lasting as well. Some families have been providing wool to Pendleton for more than 100 years.



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Like its products, Pendleton was built to last. The company has been family-owned and -operated for six generations; its current president, John Bishop, is the great-great-grandson of Thomas Kay. The promise printed on the label of the famous shirts—"Warranted to Be a Pendleton"—signifies the company's commitment to quality and durability.

In 1900, there were about 1,000 woolen mills in the United States; today, the number remaining can be counted on one hand. Pendleton's survival and success can be directly attributed to its focus on quality, value, experience and trust—and to the company's loyal and passionate customers. ☰