

# Nathaniel's Hat Maker



The history of the Western hat is not that old. Before the introduction of the Stetson hat in the mid-1800s, cowpunchers pretty much covered their heads with whatever they could easily acquire, which, more often than not, was a cast-off from a previous life as a sailor, a miner or a soldier.

John B. Stetson, born in 1830 to a family of New Jersey hat makers, was determined to seek his fortune in other, more exciting ways. Unable to enlist in the Civil War due to his health, he made his way to the new territory of Colorado and joined up with the Pikes Peak Expedition. On the arduous journey, Stetson put his felt-making skills to good advantage making "tent skins." The rest is history. After leaving Colorado, Stetson moved to Philadelphia and set up shop. His, "Boss of the Plains" became hugely popular and quickly found status as mandatory gear for Westerners, or someone who wanted to look like a Westerner.

Dead for over 100 years, Stetson's style of the Western hat hasn't changed much in that time. The process of modern hat-making, however, has. Master hatter Nate Funmaker, a Native American of the Ho-Chunk tribe of Wisconsin, now living in Mancos, is an exception. His

business, Nathaniel's of Colorado, is devoted to creating exquisite hand-made Western hats using traditional methods. From workingman plain to the feathered and dapper, each hat represents many hours of cleaning and preparing a skin, using high-quality fur chosen for its durability and beauty, and shaping and building a hat, using 60 to 100-year-old equipment and methods dating back to the early French trappers.

In terms of style, the three most important considerations in purchasing a hat are the slope of the crown, the roll of the brim, and the number and arrangement of the creases in the crown. But what good is a nice hat if it doesn't last more than a season? That's where the quality and preparation of the felt makes a real difference.

A man who understands the value of a well-made and serviceable hat is usually willing to pay a fair price for it. Considering the lengthy process from the pelt being trapped, transported, and then transformed into a hat, that's not surprising. If you're looking for the quality in a western hat, look no further. Nathaniel's of Colorado can be contacted through their website: [www.nathanielsofcolorado.com](http://www.nathanielsofcolorado.com). ♦