

Who Was "Uncle Sam"?

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

Who is Uncle Sam? As everybody knows, he is that genial, lanky individual dressed in a star-spangled coat and striped trousers and wearing the tall beaver hat who is universally accepted as the symbol of the United States, just as John Bull is the symbol of England. But who WAS Uncle Sam? That is to say, was there a real person who was the original of this figure, made so familiar to all of us by the cartoonists? The answer is: there was, but although Samuel Wilson, a native of New York and a government contractor during the war of 1812, is said by most historians to have been this original, there are a few inconsistencies in the commonly-accepted story of Samuel Wilson's being the original Uncle Sam which need to be reconciled and some account also needs to be taken of a fictitious person, the product of a Canadian humorist, before the history of "Uncle Sam" can be declared complete.

Two states claim the honor of being the burial place of the original Uncle Sam. Recently the United Press sent out the following dispatch which presents New York's claim to that honor:

Catskill, N. Y.—Few persons know that this peaceful Hudson river village is the birthplace of one of the most famous nicknames and trademarks the world has ever known.

Uncle Sam, who was largely responsible for the feeding of the American forces during the War of 1812 was a native of Catskill, according to Charles A. Elliot, a grand-nephew of the famous "U. S."

According to Elliot, this is the story of the origin of the nickname.

There were Samuel, Nathaniel and Edward Wilson, brothers, who were associated in the meat packing business in the Hudson valley early in the Nineteenth century. The countryside knew them as Uncle Sam, Uncle Nat and Uncle Ned.

Samuel, who lived in Troy, came to Catskill during the War of 1812 to take active part in the firm established by Nathaniel. They were under contract to supply beef and pork to the United States army, drawing their supply from Greene, Delaware, and other central New York counties.

Many of the casks shipped from the Catskill dock bore the government mark "U. S." upon them. The nation was young then and the abbreviation of its name was not so common in that day as in this.

So one day, when a boatman asked the man who was loading a pork shipment what the two letters represented, the brander replied: "Why, that means Uncle Sam, the senior partner of the firm."

The boatman thought it was a great joke. He carried the jest down the river, retelling it whenever opportunity afforded.

Thus, Uncle Sam, the American, came into being, a character unintentionally created by an unknown boatman but destined to rank with the world's greatest figures of history and fiction.

After the war, Uncle Sam returned to his business as Troy and his sons Benjamin and Albert. He died in Troy July 31, 1844, and is buried in that city, but his namesake lives on, a truly immortal being in the opinion of his millions of patriotic nieces and nephews.

But Indiana also lays claim to holding within her soil the dust of this famous character and that claim was put forth recently in the following article which appeared in the Indianapolis Star:

Kendallville, Ind.—A woman's intuition and her love of patriotic history has led to the discovery of the last resting place of the original "Uncle Sam," whom admiring millions of Americans have held in worshipful esteem.

A chance remark came to the ears of Mrs. Louise B. Young of Kendallville, associated with your correspondent in the publication of the Noble Farmer, an agricultural publication. Her nose for news scented a story, and arming herself with a camera, she set out for the facts and obtained a picture of the tombstone erected at the grave of Uncle Sam, buried in a little obscure graveyard near Merriam, Noble county, Indiana, on the route of the Lincoln highway. The stonemason made a mistake of thirteen years in the date of his death, which has never been rectified, as the family hoped at some time to erect a monument fitting the character it represented.

Visiting the son, John M. Wilson, ninety-three years old, and his grand-

daughter, Mrs. Clara Zumbaugh, both living at Albion, the following facts were obtained and fully verified:

Samuel Wilson, one of triplets, two boys and a girl, was born at Wilmington, Del., March 4, 1778, the son of Marmaduke and Mary Wilson, who came to America from Scotland. There were no other children in the family.

Growing to manhood there, Samuel with his brother joined the Lewis and Clark Northwest expedition in 1804, accompanying them as far as where Mandan, N. D., is now located. These young men spent the winter there, returning to St. Louis, Mo., in the spring. Later they returned to Troy-on-the-Hudson, N. Y., where they joined with one Elbert Anderson, who owned and operated a general store.

When war with Great Britain was declared in 1812, the Anderson store was converted into a government supply headquarters with Anderson as commissary and Samuel Wilson as his superintendent, afterward a quartermaster. Among Mr. Wilson's duties was that of examining and marking all packages for government use. The mark placed on these containers was "E. A.—U. S." Wilson was known by his associates as "Uncle Sam," and one day when a longshoreman was asked the meaning of these initials, he replied by saying: "For Elbert Anderson, the commissary and Uncle Sam, his superintendent, for he and the United States are all one. It represents the government, too." Meant as a joke, the idea took hold and Mr. Wilson's name, "Uncle Sam," since that time, has passed current as a personification of the United States the world over.

Later Uncle Sam began to appear in caricature, in many guises before the Civil war. Although tall and slender, as Mr. Wilson was, it is thought the present conception of Uncle Sam, which began to appear in cartoon in the early '60s, had its inspiration in the tall, gaunt figure of Abraham Lincoln.

"Uncle Sam" had a varied experience during the war. He was on board the Constitution in that famous twenty-five minute battle with the Guerriere when the latter was sunk off Cape Race. In this battle Uncle Sam was cited for gallantry by Capt. Isaac Hull, and when he was honorably discharged he received two land warrants from the government. One of these warrants he sold to his son John M., who now lives at Albion, Ind., while the other went to a Jim Harrison and was also used in Indiana.

After the War of 1812, Uncle Sam went to Pennsylvania where he was united in marriage to a Miss Susan Anderson of Cumberland county. To this union ten children were born—seven boys and three girls, as follows: Noah, David, Andrew, Samuel, Anthony, James, John, Mary, Angelina and Lucinda.

By trade and profession Uncle Sam was a tailor and a doctor. His son, John, now has a lance that was used by Uncle Sam to alleviate the suffering of his patients, in the old days when "bleeding" was regarded as a cure-all for most ailments.

As time rolled on, and the caricature of Uncle Sam became more and more in use, his family developed a strong antipathy to this familiarity, and when they moved to Indiana among strangers they resolved to avoid any further publicity along this line and kept the

growing and to introduce into that territory a new variety of rice that will permit the harvesting of two crops a year and double the yield. The government is distributing the seed, which is especially adapted to the climate there.

Too Late to Change

The rain was pouring steadily down and the children were feeling distinctly unhappy. With their faces pressed close to the window panes they watched the water flowing torrentially

down the gutter toward the drain.

"I am afraid we'll have to give up the idea of going to the zoo, children," remarked their mother. "You see, it's never going to leave off."

"But, mummy," protested little Maurice, who had set his heart on an elephant ride, "we must go! Yes, we must, 'cos I've put it down in my diary that we went!"

Radium rays that penetrate metal 15 inches thick are being used to hunt for hidden flaws in castings in Russia.

identity of Uncle Sam a secret. However, a chance remark furnished a clue which when followed brought the above story, which was freely told and fully verified.

Uncle Sam died March 7, 1878, in Kosciusko county, Ind., at the age of one hundred years and three days. His body was later removed to Merriam where it now rests with other members of the family.

Accompanying the Star story is a photograph of Uncle Sam's grave-stone which has since been widely printed in newspapers throughout the country. On the gravestone appears the legend "Soldier of 1812—SAMUEL WILSON—Died Mar. 7, 1878. Aged 100 Years & 3 ds." From the two accounts given above, it is apparent that, while there is no doubt as to Samuel Wilson being the original of Uncle Sam, the conflicting testimony on his death and burial raises some interesting questions. Did he die on July 31, 1844 or on March 7, 1863 or on March 7, 1878? How did the stone-cutter happen to make the mistake of 13 years in the date of his death? Is he buried in Troy, N. Y., or in the obscure little cemetery near Merriam, Ind.?

The contribution of a Canadian humorist to the history of Uncle Sam is rather an incidental one, but interesting, nevertheless. In 1835 Judge Thomas Chandler Haliburton of Windsor, Nova Scotia, created a character known as "Sam Slick of Slickville, Onion county, Connecticut," whose adventures appeared anonymously in The Nova Scotian. Later it was published as a book by the editor, Joseph Howe, under the name of "The Clockmaker, or the Doings of Sam Slick of Slickville." A copy was lent to Bentley, the English publisher, who issued an English edition.

To the English Sam Slick was the typical American, in his shrewd sayings, his shrewd business dealings and in his boasting that the United States was the greatest nation in the world. Consequently the pictures of Sam Slick, as drawn by Hervieu, a Frenchman, and Leech, the artist who made Punch famous, for the English editions of "The Clockmaker," came to be looked upon as the symbol of the United States and some unknown artist, whether English or American is unknown, at some unknown time, went a step further with the conception of the typical American. He added a goatee to Sam Slick's smoothshaven face, put some stars in the hatband of his tall hat, some more stars on his coat and stripes on his trousers, held down by long straps, and behold—Sam Slick was Uncle Sam, the symbol of America henceforth!



Scraps of Humor

HIS MISTAKE

The telephone operator was spending a holiday by the sounding sea. On the first morning, however, she had occasion to rate the maid of the lodgings for real or imagined negligence.

"Why didn't you call me as I told you, this morning?" she demanded. "I did, miss," replied the maid, with an injured air. "I called out 'Seventh thirty' and all you ses was 'Line's busy!'"

Why?

A woman engaged a new maid, who seemed to be self-possessed and independent.

On the first morning after her arrival not a sound was heard in the house, so the mistress rang the bell. There was no reply. Finally she called up the stairs:

"Are you awake, Mary?" "Yes, rather," answered the maid. Why?"

EASILY MADE UP



"I can make up my mind in a moment, Miss Sharpe." "No doubt, Mr. Sapp—it shouldn't be much of a task."

Genius

My faith in genius great and good. Occasionally must relax. I don't believe John Milton could have figured out his income tax.

Too Realistic

During the making of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," they naturally came to the scene where Simon Legree has to whale the tar out of Uncle Tom. Everything was ready, the lash lifted and about to fall when Uncle Tom let out a yell.

"Hold everything," he bellowed. "I forgot to put on the cork undershirt."

Nerve

Busy Business Man—Can't you read? The sign on that door means private.

Canvasser—I know—and I'm glad it's there. If there's anything I hate it's being interrupted when I'm talking to a prospective customer.

WANTED THEM OUTSIDE



Goof (seeing lady of house angry)—I guess you want me to take my gum shoes outside? L. O. H.—Yes—and without removing them, please.

The Unattainable

He said he was a highbrow elf. He talked us all to sleep. He couldn't quite explain himself. Because he was so deep.

Just as Good

Movie Star—I can never marry you, Joe, and— He—But what? Movie Star—If you'll come around at the studio tomorrow I'll introduce you to my double.—Everybody's Weekly.

Tough Luck

"Did yer 'usband' get the job 'e went after?" "Naw, 'e went an' yawned jus' as they was goin' ter give it to 'im."

Wonderful

Johnny—I'd like to live in Iceland. Mother—Why? Johnny—Teacher says that up there the days are six months long—and just think how big an all-day sucker would be!

Trouble Ahead

Edwards—I don't think much about drums, but I think I'll get my little son one for his birthday. Chester—You don't know much about boys, either.

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Noted Star of the Pittsburgh Pirates, writes:

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Lloyd Waner

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Expect Banded Birds to Explain Mystery

Bird enthusiasts, who wish to help solve the mysteries of bird migration, will have plenty of employment trying to get returns on the 270,000 birds that have been banded under the auspices of the United States biological survey. Returns on banded birds, according to Frederick C. Lincoln, in charge of this activity of the survey, now amount to 10,338 cases. Knowledge of the movements of the bird after its first banding, gained from these return reports, enables ornithologists to get precise information concerning bird migration, a mystery that has puzzled mankind since the time of Aristotle. Ducks supply the most returns, Mr. Lincoln said. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that many banded waterfowl are taken by the millions of hunters in the field during the hunting season. Prominent among the bird problems of economic interest which banding may be expected to solve, Mr. Lincoln points out, is the control of red-winged blackbirds that do much damage to the rice crop of the South and of California in late summer and early fall.

The wise farmer never harrows the feelings of his wife.

A reasonable woman is one who isn't unreasonable all the time.

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