

Name:

Samuel “Uncle Sam” Wilson

Years: 1766-1854

Residence: Troy, NY

Biography:

“Uncle Sam,” is an important symbol in American history as the personification of this great nation. He is most famous for appearing on Army recruiting posters wearing a blue coat, white hair and a top hat, with the slogan, “I want YOU for U.S. Army.” Interestingly



though, the origins of “Uncle Sam” trace back to a meat packer who resided in Troy, New York.

Samuel Wilson, affectionately known as “Uncle Sam,” was born on September 13, 1766 in Arlington, Massachusetts to Edward and Lucy Wilson. At the age of 14, Sam joined the continental army, most likely guarding and caring for livestock. However, his role in the army came to an end with the surrender of General Cornwallis at the Battle of Yorktown, the last major battle in the American Revolution.

In 1789, Sam Wilson and his brother, Ebenezer, moved to the town of Troy, New York where they opened several businesses. One of which was brickmaking. Even today, many of the

buildings in Troy contain bricks made by Sam and Ebenezer. In 1791, Sam married Betsey Mann. Together, the couple had four children: Polly (1797–1805), Samuel (1800–07), Benjamin (1802–59), and Albert (1805–66). Out of the four children, Benjamin was the only one to have children of his own.

“Uncle Sam” is most noted for his contribution to the War of 1812. In that conflict, meat was in short supply. Secretary of War William Eustis went into contract with Elbert Anderson Jr. of New York City to supply rations necessary for the United States Army in New York and New Jersey for one year. Elbert Anderson ran an advertisement in October looking to fill the contract. After finding the advertisement, Ebenezer and Sam (E&S Wilson) secured the contract to supply meat and beef to the army for one year. They sent approximately 2,000 barrels of pork and 3,000 barrels of beef to the U.S. forces. When Sam sent out his stock, there was a “US” stamped on the barrels. Over time, the soldiers associated the “US” to “Uncle Sam.” Over time, any item stamped with those same initials became associated with the name “Uncle Sam.” On July 31, 1854, Samuel Wilson died at the age of 87. In Arlington, Massachusetts there are monuments dedicated to “Uncle Sam” marking the place of his birth. Sam Wilson is buried in Troy, New York.

The image used in the popular recruitment posters goes back to artist James Montgomery Flagg using the Lord Kitchener pose made famous in British WWI posters for the same purpose. However, the name seems to be tied Troy’s own Sam Wilson as the origin of “Uncle Sam.” Furthermore, the 87th United States Congress, on September 15, 1961, passed a resolution which stated, “Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives that the Congress salutes Uncle Sam Wilson of Troy, New York, as the progenitor of America's National symbol of Uncle

Sam.” The first reference to “Uncle Sam” in a work of literature came in 1816, in the book, *The Adventures of Uncle Sam, in Search After His Lost Honor* by Frederick Augustus Fidfaddy, Esq.

By John Fernandez