

Uncle Sam

You've probably seen a drawing of the character Uncle Sam, who represents the United States government. He is a tall, skinny guy with a top hat, striped pants, and a shock of white hair. In a famous World War I drawing, he is pointing a finger and the caption reads, "I Want You for the U.S. Army."

Uncle Sam was a real person. His name was Samuel Wilson and he was a meat-packer and a politician. Wilson was born on September 13, 1766. He grew up in the town of Menotomy, Massachusetts. The town's name was later changed to Arlington. During the Revolutionary War, Wilson was an 8-year-old drummer boy who helped alert his town to an impending advance by British Redcoats. At 14, Wilson joined the army and fought in the war.

When the war was over, he moved to Troy, New York, and opened a meatpacking plant. Wilson earned a reputation among his new neighbors as a friendly, fair businessman. Pretty soon, people were calling him "Uncle Sam." Because of his reputation for fairness, Wilson won a military contract to provide beef and pork to soldiers who were stationed near Troy during the War of 1812. To keep the government-bound meat separate from the other meat in his warehouse, Wilson stamped the letters *U.S.* on the crates bound for military consumption. To Wilson, the letters meant "United States," but that term wasn't in widespread use in those days.

In October 1812, government inspectors toured the meatpacking plant. They asked one of the workers what the *U.S.* stood for, and because he really didn't know, he jokingly said "Uncle Sam," his employer's nickname. From that offhand remark, soldiers began joking that their rations came from Uncle Sam. The name "Uncle Sam" began to mean all government-issued supplies, and later, the government itself.

Drawings of Uncle Sam began to appear in newspapers in New England about 1820. At first, Uncle Sam was a clean-shaven man in a black top hat and black

