

Post Office brings 'Uncle Jake' timely good tidings

There was genuine concern for a local character known as "Uncle Jake" in the winter of 1916. The man was suffering from diabetes, and it looked as if it was life-threatening.

Though the German immigrant had lived in Bloomington for more than 25 years, he maintained close ties with his family in the old country. According to the *Bloomington Daily Telephone* of Jan. 24, 1917, Samuel Jacobs was very worried because he had not heard from his family in more than a year.

Uncle Jake was particularly concerned about his son, Julius, who was in the German Kaiser's army at the front in the war against France and England. From time to time, the old man sent money to relatives in his homeland.

Uncle Jake became a familiar figure in the post office. Explained the *Telephone*, "Every day Uncle Jake called at the post office for his mail and inquired for the letter that never came ..."

He told the post office employees, "If they



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

(the relatives) are dead, the government will get it (the money), which will be all right."

Continued the newspaper, "As the months rolled by and no word came, Uncle Jake's friends decided that the family in Germany had probably met with ill fortune and that the son had been killed at the front, but Uncle Jake did not give up hope but continued his daily calls at the post office."

Meanwhile, the old man's conditioned had worsened, and he was taken to the hospital with gangrene in one of his legs. Postal employees took up Uncle Jake's vigil for the letter he fervently waited for.

Christmas came and went and still no letter. Even the men at the post office had given

up hope when finally — on Jan. 23, 1917 — a letter came.

The *Telephone* happily informed its readers about the letter. "Deputy Postmaster Walter Burke took the letter and hurried to the hospital with it, announcing to Uncle Jake when he was taken to his bedside, that he had 'a package of German medicine for him.'"

Uncle Jake was very apprehensive about the letter, fearing that it contained bad news. Actually, it was just the opposite. The letter was from his son, who was so far unscathed in the fighting, and the other relatives were safe, as well.

Reported the newspaper in the Jan. 24 article, "Today Uncle Jake is some better, although his condition is such that his recovery is doubtful."

A Jan. 31 article keep the readers up to date on Uncle Jake. "The end is near for Samuel Jacobs, the old German peddler who for 25 years has made Bloomington his home and who is better known as 'Uncle Jake,' and his death will likely take place inside of the

next two or three days."

The article also contained some doubtful information. "It has long been rumored around Bloomington that Uncle Jake is a near relative of a multi-millionaire New Yorker, and the fact may be disclosed after his death if there is any truth in it."

Well, the old man had made a will written in a pocket notebook. In it he had enumerated the names of his relatives, debts and assets.

Finally, on Feb. 7, the *Telephone* wrote the last chapter in Uncle Jake's life story. "The estate of Samuel Jacobs, the old German peddler who was known as 'Uncle Jake,' is being settled up by Attorney George Henley. After Uncle Jake's debts are paid there will be about \$2,000 left which goes to the wife in Germany. Uncle Jake was buried at Louisville Saturday, the funeral being under the direction of Simon Lion, a wealthy German manufacturer of that city."

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