



Image: "I Want You" U.S. Army Recruiting Poster, designed by James Montgomery Flagg, printed by Leslie Judge Co., New York City, c. 1940, photomechanical print on paper, Albany Institute of History & Art Library, PB 0477



Object: Uncle Sam's Chamber Pot, unidentified maker, England, c. 1800-1820 slip-decorated earthenware, courtesy of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, Troy, New York





# The Capital Region in 50 Objects

## Uncle Sam

Samuel Wilson was born in Menotomy (now Arlington), Massachusetts, in 1766. At the age of twenty-three, he and his brother Ebenezer moved to the village of Troy, New York. In the late eighteenth century, Troy was a small community whose abundant waterpower, rich agricultural land, and growing commercial opportunities attracted New Englanders whose cities were becoming crowded and natural resources were dwindling.

The meat packing business and the War of 1812 transformed Samuel Wilson into the iconic figure we now know as Uncle Sam. During the war of 1812, he oversaw the provisions from Troy that were being sent to soldiers. Once ready for shipment, the casks filled with preserved meats were marked with the abbreviation "U.S." As it was one of the first times the abbreviation "U.S." was ever used to mark goods sent to soldiers, they did not know that U.S. stood for United States. Instead, they joked the provisions came from Uncle Sam, referring to Samuel Wilson.

This story became nationally recognized in 1961, almost 150 years later, when the U.S. Congress approved the resolution declaring Samuel Wilson the "real" Uncle Sam.

Today, the site most associated with Uncle Sam Wilson is 144 Ferry Street in Troy, where he lived from the 1820s until his death in 1854. In 1989, Hartgen Archeological Associates conducted a survey of the property and excavated this handsome chamber pot, certainly once owned by Samuel Wilson and his family.

## Vocabulary

**Casks** – a container that is shaped like a barrel and is used for holding liquids and preserved foods

**Excavate** - remove earth carefully and systematically from (an area) in order to find buried artifacts or human remains.

**Iconic** – widely known and acknowledged especially for distinctive excellence

**Provisions** – a stock of needed materials or supplies

**Recruit** – to persuade (someone) to join you in some activity or to help you

## Uncle Sam

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

Use the depiction of the object, image, and corresponding text to answer the following questions.

1. What is the object? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who owned the object? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What do you think the object was used for? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How did Samuel Wilson get the nickname Uncle Sam? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is Uncle Sam a symbol for today? \_\_\_\_\_

6. In what year was the poster printed? Why is that year significant? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What was the goal of the poster? Why was it necessary? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What other symbols did the artist use in the poster? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Where else might you have seen pictures of Uncle Sam? \_\_\_\_\_