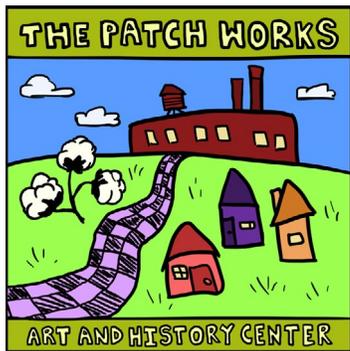


A TALE OF THREE JAKES

By Nina & Jake Elsas, The Patch Works Art And History Center

Anyone motivated enough to make a Family Tree will eventually hit a common snag: “Who among the thousands of these similarly-named dead people is my actual ancestor???” It won’t take long for an internet archeologist to discover – especially when plodding through a vast, genealogy database like Ancestry.com – that John Smith isn’t a unique name (god bless the poor sod seeking the one-and-only John Smith).



As it turns out, “Jacob Elsas” isn’t entirely unique either. In fact, our 21st Century Jacob à la The Patch Works is, like, the umpteenth family member to carry this nomenclatural torch.

If you’ve been diligently reading our history blurbs since Chapter One (who isn’t???),

you’ll recognize immediately this redundancy: history is full of unanswered “what’s, when’s, who’s, and why’s.” We can’t emphasize enough (ad nauseam!) that discussing Cabbagetown’s history requires a certain... flexibility.

Most normal people born prior to the Wide World of Interwebs probably won’t have produced a lot of physical evidence detailing every minute of his/her/their existence. Cabbagetown takes that improbability and owns the hell out of it. Big Time. Sure, certain empirical truths exist (e.g.: the Mill’s managers took meticulous notes on operations, staff, employees, strikes, undercover spies, etc.; these documents are lovingly housed at the **Georgia Tech Library Archives**). And, sure, if a person causes a disturbance in the Force and becomes the national media’s Poster Boy for Big-Business Baddies (read: Oscar Elsas and his questionable handling of the 1914-1915 Strike – more on this later)... well... that’s solid gold for historians.

Simply put, finding copious documentation on your average, law-abiding (or just successfully slippery) Shlomo or Golda isn’t going to happen. And when Young Jacob departed his ancestral homeland, that’s what he was: an average, working-class stiff. Being a working-class stiff, however, may have come with some benefits – foremost that Young Jacob could fly under the radar. Whether of not he got conscripted into the Union Army or sauntered South on his own volition, Young Jacob ultimately slithered past Reconstruction roadblocks, initially setting up shop (literally) in Cartersville shortly after the Civil War ended. No easy feat.

But just for fun, let’s conjure up a few Ancestry.com-approved Multi-Jakes. For the remainder of this Chapter, we’ll focus on the ever-so-popular Union Jakes (yes, there’s more than one on record).

ACT ONE: 1861. A steamboat docks at Ellis Island. “*Ich bin ein free Amerikan mensch!*” Young Jacob exclaims loudly, skipping gleefully down the gangplank. “*You’re in the army now,*” replies the Union Army recruiter.

SCENE: [INTERMEZZO: Our research – using the aforementioned Ancestry.com – did indeed uncover some Union Jakes, most of whom the Union Army snagged immediately after they walked off the boat. Act One’s “Private” Jacob unwillingly became a Yankee on July 24th, 1861... and cunningly deserted on August 31st. That sounds like the kinda guy who’d run a Cotton Mill Empire, right???

ACT TWO: [For the sake of word count, before continuing, please repeat the dialogue from the above narrative, starting with “Ich...” Then, you may proceed...] “*Alles gut!*” Young Jacob looks proudly toward heaven with hand over heart. “*Ich bin ein Amerikan mensch und vill fight für freedom until var ist done.*”

SCENE: [INTERMEZZO: This Union Jake mustered into New York’s 68th Infantry on July 31st, 1861 and beat on his mighty drum (yes, he was the regiment’s little drummer boy) all the way to November 30th, 1865, whereupon he mustered out as a Sergeant at Fort Pulaski, Georgia. He must’ve been a helluva drummer. Sounds like our boy, right???

But this version spent his first few Amerikan years drumming through the war, instead of bunking with his Elder Uncle Jacob in Cincinnati. Nein!]

Feh. This play blows. Let’s try prose! Well, another Union Jake was living in Ohio when the Army snagged him in June of 1863. Ah-ha! But, alas, this version was born in Ohio. Plus, he was 23 (too old). PLUS, he was a farmer.

Nicht mehr! So, from whence did this tale – that Young Jacob was a Union soldier – emerge? Well, **The Patch Works** tried to find answers at the “source” (i.e.: the GA Tech Archives). The first evidence of him serving seemed to occur in the 1940s, when an Elsas descendant dropped the story during an interview. Although we certainly didn’t read every document in the Archives, we feasted on a cornucopia of Jacob’s own writings. He never mentioned being in the Army. In fact, quite the opposite – with great pride, Jacob discussed overcoming the obstacles he faced when traveling South.

So, having conducted our research, we offer the following possibilities: 1) Perhaps he served, but just didn’t want to publicize it. Maybe he believed a Yankee Past might sully his hard-earned, southern bona fides. Fitting in was difficult enough for a Jewish immigrant in 19th century Atlanta. Adding “Union Soldier” might’ve marginalized him.

2) Perhaps he never served, but his descendant – in the 1940s – decided to ride a nationalistic (and profitable) wave that had formed around a global event: World War II. Fictitiously casting the founder of the Mill as a Union soldier might have been good for business, since the company was neck-deep in making products for the nation’s war effort. Cha-CHING! Either theory results in one intention: to protect the family business. Is there anything more important???

Next Chapter: Young Jacob, footloose and fancy-free, saunters South. (War? What War???)