A TALE OF THREE JAKES

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Any 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 ump-
teenth family member to carry this nomenclatural torch.

If you’ve been diligently read-
ing 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 em-
pirical 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 Arch-
ives). 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
vocation, Young Jacob ultimately slithered past Reconstruction road-
blocks, 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 An-
cesty.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 is 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 Novem-
ber 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 American 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 over-
coming the obstacles he faced when traveling South.

So, having conducted our research, we offer the following possibili-
ties: 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 – de-
cided 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 na-
tion’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???)