

HUNGRY SAM

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All but forgotten now, the exploits of Samuel Lloyd “Hungry Sam” Miller were legendary in the first half of the 20th century. Also known as “King of Gormandizers” “Human Porcine Gobbler” and the “Human Ostrich,” Sam was ordinarily a small eater. He came by his nickname honestly and he defended it with zeal for two decades. He was quick to accept either a challenge or a wager based on his ability to eat, and he drew no fine lines. His feats of fame were well documented in various newspapers locally and across the country, and also in *The Susquehanna* by Carl Cramer (1955). According to Cramer, “Hungry Sam” put on eating shows at farmers’ picnics from Wilkes-Barre to Harrisburg. He first made a splurge in his own neck of the woods around the time of the Spanish-American War when he demonstrated that he could consume more at one sitting than any other big eater.

He was the nemesis of chicken and waffle suppers when they advertised “all you can eat for fifty cents,” and more than one committee shuddered when they saw him walk into a church supper of that nature just when things were getting nicely organized. But “Hungry Sam” was never much given to eating just for the sake of eating. He would gorge himself when the occasion warranted, which was whenever there was a wager or some would-be eating champion appeared on the horizon.

Records of the U.S. Census and the Berwick Roselawn cemetery show that Samuel Lloyd Miller was born August 3, 1857 in Union Township, Schuylkill County. He was the eldest of six children of William and Lydia R. Miller who were farmers. No record was found that Sam married. He appears to have been a laborer, first working as a boatman for fourteen years. Other jobs included wagon driver and laborer for American Car & Foundry (AC&F), but it appears most of the time he worked on farms as a farm laborer. From 1908 to 1920, “Hungry Sam” lived in Derry Township, Montour County, with his usual residence identified as Strawberry Ridge. Later he moved to Berwick where he resided with his brother, Adam A. Miller, two years and also in a boarding home. Below are some of the sensational newspaper articles and headlines concerning his exploits.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported in January 1911:

The crowning achievement of the career of “Hungry Sam” Miller occurred last night at a chicken and waffle supper at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kniss of near Strawberry Ridge. Miller started with five whole chickens and finished with fifty waffles and two cans of pickles. Three dozen small cakes and two large cakes followed. This little entree served to take the edge off his keen appetite. Five big country pies came as dessert, but his capacity had not reached the limit. The combined waffle brigade was again called into action, but their services proved too slow, and Sam seized the eight-quart bucket of waffle dough and drained it to the bottom. At this a halt was called, not because Sam had reached the limit of endurance, but because the stock of edibles had been exhausted.

February 9, 1911, the St. Albans, Vermont *Daily Messenger* reported: "After "Hungry Sam" Miller, New Yorker Thinks He Can Eat More Than the Pennsylvania Man." In April 1911, the *Idaho Statesman* headlined a report: "Hungry Sam Must Defend His Title as Champ Eater." In December 1915, the *Wilkes-Barre Times* featured the following long headline.

"Hungry Sam" Says His Stomach is Failing Him. Columbia County Gormandizer can no longer stand any long distance eating. He is now 58 years old. News will be welcomed with joy by those who give parties.

A New York newspaper article referred to a fair in New York where a man bet "Hungry Sam" \$50 that he couldn't eat 100 fried eggs. "Hungry Sam" ate that hundred and then ate 44 more for good measure, all in two and a half hours. He also topped it off with a couple quarts of milk and a-half dozen pies. On another occasion, according to Carl Cramer's *The Susquehanna*, "Hungry Sam" astounded folks at a county fair by betting hundreds of dollars that he could eat a bale of hay. He went home a rich man after he had burned the hay and devoured all the ashes.

In January 6, 1916, the *Miami Herald Record* reported:

"Hungry Sam" has retired. In Sam's own words, "It don't agree with me no more to eat 144 fried eggs at once." "Hungry Sam" has been the terror of those in charge of church suppers. When he appeared at any supper where "all you could eat" was served, those in charge gave up hope of making the affair a financial success, for he liked to eat until everything in the place was cleaned up.

During World War I, Sam was patriotic and stopped his eating feats. In 1917 when asked by *The Morning Press* if he was eating much these days, "Hungry Sam" said; "Haint you been reading what President Wilson is asking us large eaters to do? Of course, I haint. I'm patriotic. I couldn't think of robbing soldiers of their food."

"Hungry Sam" came out of retirement after World War I and continued to astound crowds with his eating ability, but there were few newspaper accounts of his appearances. He died December 7, 1936, at the age of 79 after a three year illness at the Danville State Hospital. The cause of death was general chronic vascular arteriosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. Sam was survived by two brothers, Adam A. and Montgomery, and a sister, Mrs. Annie Edwards, all of Berwick. Funeral services were held at the home of his brother, Adam, on Second Avenue, Berwick, with burial in the Roselawn Cemetery. A simple man, he will forever be known for his gastronomical feats.

—Newspaper articles from *The Morning Press*, *Democratic Sentinel* and *Daily Mail* (collected by Bloomsburg University Associate Professor, Library-Reference Service, Steve Wiist), and from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Idaho Statesman*, *Wilkes-Barre Times*, *Miami Herald Record* and *Vermont Daily Messenger*.

—U.S. Census records from Schuylkill and Columbia counties.

—Roselawn Cemetery Association records, Berwick, Pennsylvania, book 35, p. 36, interment 816.

—Carl Cramer, *The Susquehanna* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1955), pp. 404-406.

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