

## Lives that Lift

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### The Man Who Made the Wild Goose Tame

It is remarkable that a boy whose parents were poor, who was one of a family of ten children, and who had few opportunities for book-learning should become one of the best known and most loved men in a great nation. Yet, in a sentence, this is the story of Jack Miner, the naturalist and bird-lover.

John Thomas Miner, later called Jack, and now lovingly known by many thousands of people in North America as "Uncle Jack," was, according to his own statement, "born in the United States, and made in Canada." Jack was the second oldest boy in a family of ten children, and, early in life, had to "put a shoulder to the wheel and help roll the bread-wagon." His classroom as a boy was the great out-of-doors, and his education the most practical. At the age of thirteen the family moved from Ohio to Canada, just across the river from Detroit, and here Jack continued his education in the "University of Hard Knocks," digging ditches, clearing land, and a hundred and one duties that await the pioneer. He loved nature, and took to the woods as naturally as a duck takes to water.

In boyhood he gathered around him pets of all kinds,-rabbits, opossums, coons, foxes, squirrels, crows, ravens, bluejays, and even hawks. Many a trip he made into the virgin forests to study wild life. In this brief biography, much of his boyhood must be omitted in order to tell of his accomplishments in later years.

When Jack as a boy of thirteen was turned loose in the woods of Ontario, the Miner family were not known beyond a few miles of their little farm. But, today, Jack is known around the globe, and particularly in all parts of North America, as the man who originated the sanctuary idea for protecting and caring for the wild fowl on this continent.

An experiment I conducted recently will tell you just how well he is known in Canada. Letters addressed to "Uncle Jack Miner," with no town or province given, were dropped into the mail, and delivered to him at his home without any delay. One of these letters was mailed more than a thousand miles from Kingsville, his home town. Uncle Jack lives on a farm, 'tis true, but the world makes a "beaten path to his

door," and down this path travel noted people from all over the world, to the little farm near Kingsville, Ontario, to see Jack Miner and his birds.

Kingsville has a population of about two thousand people, [in 1835] but when the geese come back to the Miner sanctuary, there have been as many as fifteen thousand visitors in this quiet little town in a single day.

It is not at all surprising that men and women should hunt up Uncle Jack's place, but the strange thing to me is that the wild geese which spend the winter in the Southern States and their summers on Hudson's Bay, should know the way back to this particular spot, and that they come back year after year and bring their children with them.

Visiting his sanctuary about breakfast-time one morning, I was surprised to find visitors there ahead of me. The geese were just taking to the air, and the sky was literally alive with beautiful wild birds as they rose from their feeding-ground on the Miner farm, and started off to Lake Erie for the day honking as they flew gracefully away.

The birds of the whole North American continent seem to know that Jack Miner is their friend He said that as high as twenty-five thousand wild geese had been there at one time, and not only geese, but swans, bluebirds, swallows, martins, robins, and other birds.

He tells of the robins flying into their parlor or "cold storage room," as he termed it, and roosting on the frame of a choice picture. When the youngest Miner boy failed to give these pet robins their breakfast, they followed him to School, and he had to go back home and feed them. A few taps of a spoon on the feed-pan would bring the robins, and they ate from the receptacle while he held it in his hand.

How do these birds know Uncle Jack is their friend? Why do they fly over thousands of farms and light on this particular farm year after year It is an interesting story.

When he grew to manhood, Mr. Miner started what he calls a "one-horse tile-yard." In excavating clay to make tile, great holes were made in the earth which became ponds of water. He bought seven wild geese that someone had trapped, and put them in these ponds. Their wings had been clipped, of course, so they could not fly away. Then he told his neighbors that he planned to bring the wild geese to his home. This was in 1904. Three years went by and no wild geese Miner was the Joke of the neighborhood. Again and again he was asked, "When are the geese coming?"

But early one morning in 1908 the news spread around the neighborhood that the geese had come. There were eleven of them, and they were feeding with the tame geese. They left in May, and must have told their goose friends about the Miner farm, for one March morning in 1909, while Mr. Miner was out watering his horse, he heard a familiar "honk, honk," in the distance, and looking skyward, saw a long string of geese headed his way. To his delight, they lit within a few yards of where he stood, and immediately began to make themselves at home. In 1910 more than four hundred came, and the following year there were more geese than he imagined there could be in all North America.

A wild goose has an appetite like a growing boy and the problem now was how to feed them all. He began feeding them nearer the house hoping the wilder ones would move on, but they were determined to make his home their home.

At the present time it costs thousands of dollars a year to feed these birds. The Government has given some financial assistance and the balance Uncle Jack has raised by lecturing, and from the sale of his book.

During the past twenty years he has probably lectured to more people than any other bird-lover. An announcement that he is to speak will fill the largest auditorium. Although he did not spend much time in a schoolroom his lectures are gripping, intensely interesting, and inspiring.

Wounded geese have flown for miles to Mr. Miner's home. One goose was shot five miles from his home, but lit within ten feet of his back-door.

Mr. Miner came into possession of a Scripture calendar with a Bible-verse inscribed for every day in the year. These verses were such a help to him that he wondered how he might pass on the blessing which he had received. As he sat alone one night, watching the fires in a tile-kiln the idea came to him, "Why not put these verses on aluminum tags, put the tags on the legs of the geese and send the messages afar?"

In a short time the fowls of the air were carrying the Word of God to the Indians and Eskimos of the far North and to the inhabitants along the Atlantic in the sunny Southland. On one side of the tag is the inscription, "Write Box 48, Kingsville, Ontario," and on the reverse side, "He careth for you. 1 Peter 5:7." or some other short Bible verse. [at that time] Uncle Jack is the only man alive who has caught and tagged the wild geese, and in this way found their routes of migration.

You may have heard some remark about the "silly old goose," but Uncle Jack says it took a long time for his "single-cylinder brain" to outwit them. There was little trouble in trapping the wild ducks, but it was different with the geese. They permitted him to walk among them, they ate from his hand, but they didn't care to be trapped. After years of experimenting he built a huge trap of chicken-wire netting over a canal, and some of the wild geese followed the tame ones under. Though he has tagged thousands of geese Mr. Miner says he has never yet succeeded in getting a goose to enter the trap a second time. Those with tags on their legs will stand aside, and see the others swim under the trap while they remain outside looking wise.

The geese stay at the sanctuary two or three weeks in the spring until "God's wireless says to them, 'The weather is O.K. at your nesting-grounds.' Then they join in a sort of a God-be-with-you-till-we-meet-again chorus, and rise high on the evening air, and before the stars close their eyes again, these winged creatures are one thousand miles farther on and the rising sun finds them on the same old perch of last year, right near their nesting place."

Uncle Jack says any one can have a sanctuary if he provides a suitable area where the birds may be sheltered, protected, and fed. "Just build the sanctuary," he says, "and the birds will come to you to be cared for."

After spending a few weeks as Mr. Miner's guests the geese go north to Hudson's Bay. Here they spend the summer months nesting and rearing their young. In the fall, they go South again with their families, stopping for another visit with Uncle Jack.

Through these many visits, the geese have learned to know Uncle Jack, and he has learned many interesting things about them. "This bird," says Mr. Miner, "is one of the most intelligent, self-sacrificing creatures on the earth, and as for purity of character, he has gotten the human race backed right off the boulevard into the slums, and no person on earth can study him without profiting by it. Personally, there has been many a time during the last ten years of my life when I have felt like raising my hat to the clean, gentlemanly principles exposed by one of these old ganders." The geese mate for life, and the gander is a constant protector of his family. He would gladly die for them.

The wife of one old gander, which had been named Jack Johnson, became ill and died. Jack mourned for his mate for two and one half years paying no attention to the other geese. His constant and sad

honking was so pitiful they had to dispose of him. Mr. Miner knows that the geese have a language of their own, some of which he claims he can understand, such as cries of distress and warning, etc. He tells of their keen eyesight and says they have a sense of smell which is quite acute.

In speaking of many interesting things he has learned about them, Mr. Miner says, "I know you educated people call it nature, or instinct; and really I have heard such a variety of names for this goose-knowledge that I don't try to look up the meaning of these artificial words; for I am sure if all their meanings were boiled down, and all the man-made, artificial names were all skimmed off, the real interpretation would be – GOD."

After having been a student of nature for more than sixty years, Mr. Miner is a firm believer in a God who loves and cares for His children, and Who is interested in the birds, animals, and every part of His creation.

Have you ever wondered why a rabbit of the North is grey in the summer months and turns white when the first snow falls? Mr. Miner says he has seen rabbits all white in October, and the first snow came within three days. Other years they were grey late in November, because no snow had fallen. Do the rabbits have power to change their color? No, they do not, but an all-wise God cares for them and changes their color at just the right time for their protection.

"As a little boy, says Uncle Jack, "I have often caught a dirty old mossback snapping turtle and would get him by the 'handle' and carry him maybe a quarter of a mile and put him down on his back among the weeds that were higher than my head. And as I have stood back quietly and watched him, his head would come out and he would turn himself over. Then he would turn round and round two or three times and, do you know? He would always start towards water. This experience is beautiful to me, for If God in heaven will give that dirty old four-legged submarine of a mud turtle an animal that lives in a stagnant moss-covered mud-hole, intelligence enough to know which way to go to the water; how much more He cares for us. No matter If we haven't clothes enough to flag a handcar; how smilingly and willingly He will give us knowledge and pure water for both body and soul, and lead us to be worth-while men and women."

And, if you and I have made mistakes if we have wandered away from the right path, He will forgive us for our sins and lead us back to "our Father's house."