

Uncle Sam Jamha

By Richard Awid

Esmeil Muhammed Jamha was born in 1890 in the small village of Lala, Lebanon. He would come to Canada, with a small group of other Muslims at the very youthful age of fifteen years. He had a very warm personality toward his fellow Muslims, other Arabs as well as other Canadians. His warm personality, in time, would allow him to become known to many as simply 'Uncle Sam'.

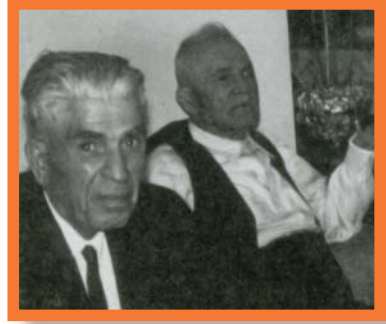
In his early Canadian days, the young Sam Jamha traveled over much of Western Canada as a peddler, selling all kinds of smaller items to farmers and villagers. At times, he would meet up with some fellow Muslims and they would go into some joint ventures.

In addition, Sam would get to know and live with Cree Indians. From the Cree, he would learn about furs and this learning was very fascinating for Sam. Eventually, he became a fur buyer. The Cree Indians taught him how to tell the difference between excellent pelts and poor pelts. They also taught him many native secrets about trapping and preparing the skins the proper way, in order to get the best value for them. By 1927, Uncle Sam was deeply involved in the fur trade. He began to ship furs to Montreal and during another time period, Sam shipped approximately \$50,000 worth of furs to Fred Swartz at the Edmonton Fur Auction Sales.

During the depression years, Sam would experience some very hard times. He became unemployed when the fur value dropped tremendously. This situation became very hard on his wife, Vera, and their three young children. By 1939, however, things got better. Sam started working again and went into a partnership with the Edmonton Fur Auction Sales at that time owned by Fred Swartz and Sol Levine.

After getting on his feet again, Sam went into business for himself and he became a buyer of raw furs, hides, horse hair and wool. Uncle Sam continued to sell his supplies, whenever possible, to the bigger fur buyers, one of which was the Slutker Fur Company in Edmonton.

On December 15, 1974, Sam Jamha was hospitalized and died at age 84 in hospital. He, in time, would be honoured by the City of Edmonton when it named Jamha Road (east of 50 Street, south of Whitemud Drive) after him.



Uncle Sam Jamha (left foreground)