

## Howe Comic History - Part 2

Last week we learned a little about Howe's Comic History of Green County, which R. Elsmere Howe printed in 1927. This column will share more information from that humorous 96-page book to show the diversity of information that he included in it.

Solomon Levitan (1860 - 1942) was a local man who served as Wisconsin state treasurer from 1923 to 1933 and again from 1937 to 1939. He spent part of his life in Green County and I'll share below exactly what he wrote for Howe's book.

"When I first came to Green County as a peddler in the early days, the people asked me, 'was hand ihr feil? Thinking it was files they wanted, I ordered a goodly supply, which, by the way, made by [sic] bundles very heavy. The next time I came through and showed them that I had the files they asked for, they laughed at me and explained that they just wanted to know what I had to sell.

"But I liked the good-natured Swiss people, and their hospitable ways. Many of them with their large families lived in log houses, and they were always so kind and accommodating to me. I was never refused lodging in a Swiss home.

"One of the trials of my early days, was when I bought a horse. Her name was Rosalie. I was no judge of horses, and much to my dismay, discovered after my purchase that she was balky. However, I had not paid any too much for her and could not expect a pacer. Rosalie was so balky that many was the time we tried to move her by putting straw under her and lighting a match to it. But she was not to be moved. We tried shooting off revolvers to get her started, but this did not bother her in the least. We advised with those who were best informed on horses, but all seemed of no effect. Finally, I discovered a home remedy which produced results. I bought some ears of corn and as soon as my Rosalie started to balk, I walked ahead of her holding them out and calling 'chum, Rosalie, chum!' And Rosalie came. I had that horse for a long time, until I finally traded her off for a bicycle.

"One day I made a call on Jake Becker, who used to live in the town of Washington, but Jake got tired of peddlers because they took up so much of his time, and he found he could buy as cheaply in the stores. So he put up a sign in front of the house, 'No Peddlers Allowed.' When I got to his place I was very hungry and tired, and before entering the gate I took a piece of chalk and added to his sign 'Except Sol.' When I met him he said, 'can't you read?' And I told him I could, that the sign invited me in. And when he went to see it, to be sure, it read 'No Peddlers Allowed Except Sol.'

Jake felt that he had to get even with me for this. He had been told if a Jew eats pork he will go to hell. And when we met not long ago at the state fair he said, 'Sol, you thought you played a joke on me, but I certainly played one on you. I thought I would send you to hell anyway. Every time you used to come to my house for a meal I told you it was good mutton, when it was honest-to-goodness pork.'

"When I joined the Masons they had one objection to make, and that was that, being a peddler I had no home. The by-laws require that a member must have a home. The members who were designated to make investigation about me, rather liked me and told of the objection that was made. They asked me why I did not get married. I told them my chances were very slim, that although when I went to dances at the homes, they always danced with me, yet when they played 'post office' there never was a letter for me. So what chance did a man have! And they agreed that it was not my fault, and accepted me. I still hold membership in the Smith Lodge No. 31 and Palestine Chapter No. 21, Royal Arch Masons, of Monroe.

"I have always been glad that I came to Green County where so many opportunities were offered me. I brought up my family there and shall always cherish the kindly spirit of the people and what they did for me."

Another page titled, "A Busy Day at the Sheriff's Office" includes a sketch by Howe of a sleeping sheriff sitting beside the boiler with a rifle by his side. It says, "Our sheriff seems to be a kindly disposed sort of a fellow who is ever on the job, and is always courteous and ready to cater to your tastes. He is good natured and easy to get along with so long as you do not step on his sore corns, and providing you pay strict attention to his rules and regulations. He has free access to our jail, whose rooms are large, airy and well ventilated. If you should happen to be in town for a day or so drop in and see him for I am sure he will bid thee welcome. His latch string is always out but as a general thing he keeps the doors well locked."

If you found these two columns interesting, I hope you'll be able to see a copy of this 95-year-old booklet someday and be able to read more of his enjoyable rhetoric.



SOLOMON LEVITAN  
AS HE APPEARED  
IN HIS EARLY  
CAREER—

This sketch was copied from Howe's Comic History of Green County, which was printed by R. Elsmere Howe in 1927. It shows former Wisconsin state treasurer Solomon Levitan, who was a peddler during his early years in Green County.