

Republic Area Historical Society

SEPTEMBER 2005

BLACK RIVER AREA THE FOCUS OF ETHNIC DAY DISPLAY IN THE TOWN HALL

About 100 years ago the area N/NE of Republic was settled primarily by Finnish immigrants. They worked in the mines and also farmed in the rocky fields of Black River. Ken Salo and Jim Kippola, who have family ties in that area, researched a complete history of the settlers and land of Black River. The other member of the society helped with research and particularly with setting up a display in the town hall.

In addition, a Black River history book was compiled titled "Black River Memories" 1900-1945. It is 253 pages and contains wonderful photos, historical sketches, information from interviews and documents, farm aerial views, log building and maps. All of the families of early Black River are covered in the history. A few

have scanty info but most are very thorough. Some of the early families in the Black River area were William & Amanda Hintsala, John & Alexandra Ojanpera, Antti & Lizzie Ollila, Karl & Hilda Laurila, Helmer & Mary Jarvi, Peter & Hilma Koski and William & Maria Mattila.

The book contains many lovely wedding and family photos and we are able to envision the history of the area and the people who worked so hard to make it home.

If you are interested in buying the soft-cover, 11 x 8 1/2" book, please order from our address on the back page and include your name & address and \$25 (\$20 for the book, \$5 postage) or let any Society member know you would like one, if you live in the area.

Our next meeting is on September 20th at 6 pm at Bethany Lutheran Church.

This is not our usual time or place but a program follows.



OUR DISPLAY AT THE PASCOE HOUSE MUSEUM THIS SUMMER FEATURED SCHOOL DAYS MEMORIES. One room was designed as an old fashioned school room with a "teacher", "students", a black board and a scarred, oak teacher's desk. Guess whose desk it was? None other than our former superintendent, teacher and basketball coach, Mr. Chester Brown!

We displayed many photos of classes, teachers, cooks and other school personnel. We also had several family trees done by '05 graduates and items and information from the Time Capsule buried at the school. The display can still be seen by appointment.

Bits From the Past

To The
Republic Museum:

July 25, 05

I am writing in regards to the letter that I got from the Republic Museum (RAHS) a few years ago. It was written to my father, Robert John Thompson, when he was 91 and still living with me. At that time, he had difficulty writing but he did tell me a few stories about the time he lived in the house you now use as a museum.

My father wasthe second son, the first being Earl, who was born 5 years earlier. I assume it was in that house and the doctor was called in to assist with the delivery.

On January 28, 1915 when he was 8 1/2 yrs. old he was bewildered as he was taken to a neighbor's house on a cold winter for the evening to spend the night. The next day when he came back home he was surprised to see his new baby sister had come to live in his family. About 5 years later his mother, Martha, went to Chicago for surgery and died. His father remarried about 1 year later to Jewel Flack Tislov. She brought with her two young daughters, Elaine and Delyte. Together they had two more children. Betty Jean who was born in 1923 and George who was born 1 year later.

His father (George) was a master mechanic at iron ore mines in and around Republic. His daughter Martha said, "The house they lived in was a company house, and was considered pretty nice for the time."

My dad said, "In the winter it got very cold in my room, which was upstairs. If I took a glass of water to my room before going to bed it would be frozen by morning. I also spent a lot of enjoyable time in my room making airplane models out of wood and practicing the drums, which I played in high school band. My family also had a piano and I was encouraged to take lessons." (Editor's note: Could this be the piano in the museum now?)

After graduating from high school, my father went to Chicago to live with his brother and find work. That left his sister as the oldest child in the family. Not too long after that, when his sister was 9 years old, she asked her father if she could go to Chicago to live with her Uncle Fred and Aunt Alida who were childless. After much discussion, her father reluctantly agreed. She soon arrived at Uncle Freds. My dad would come for Sunday dinner to see his sister. Many times he would bring her a present such as a doll. These were very fond memories for them.

Enclosed is a picture of the house as he remembered it. He drew and painted this when he was ninty-one. Also included is a picture of him with his father, brother and sister shortly after his mother died.

Hope you find this information interesting.

Sincerely,
Marsha Rae Thompson Garner

Stephenville, Tennessee

DRAWING OF THE PASCOE HOUSE MUSEUM, WHEN IT WAS THE GEORGE THOMPSON HOME IN 1915. (Drawing is reversed right to left.) This drawing was done by George's youngest son Robert when he was 91 yrs. old.. Thank you to his daughter Marsha Thompson Garner for these items.

Family Memories



Kodak THOMPSON HOUSE 1915 REPUBLIC, MI

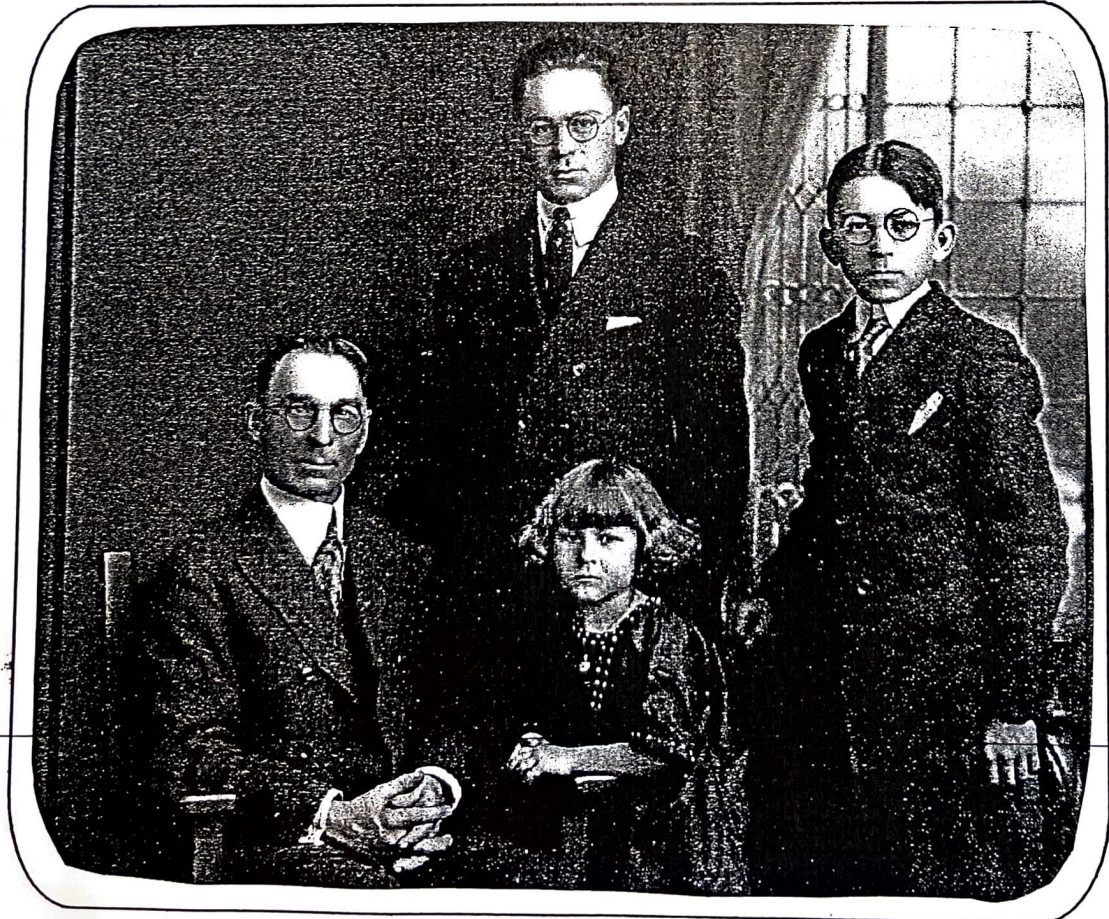
GEORGE THOMPSON FAMILY OF REPUBLIC, ca. 1920

Father: George Thompson--Born Oct 1869 Hunsler, Eng.--Died Dec 1957 Ishpeming, Mi

Older son: Earl G. Thompson==Born Aug 10-1==Died 1997

Younger son: Robert J. Thompson--Born Aug 1906, Died Aug 1999

Daughter: Martha Thompson Prater--Born: Jan 1915 Lives in Blue Springs, MO. Lived in Alaska for many yrs.& postmistress in Glen Allen.



William Mattila

William Mattila was probably born in Kortane, Finland in 1890 and began residing in Humboldt in 1909. The exact date of his immigration is unknown. He probably began work as a miner as that was his occupation on 14 January 1911 when he married Maria Emilia Maki, known as "Miili". She was born 18 October 1890, location unknown, and was working as a domestic servant at the time of their marriage. Both were living in Humboldt and were married in Ishpeming.

On 25 April 1913, they purchased 80 acres (SW-1/4 of NE-1/4 and the NW-1/4 of the SE-1/4, Section 28, T47N, R29W) from Gust Raisanen. This was tax reverted land that Gust Raisanen had purchased from the state two years previously. Evidently, when the Raisanen's left, they sold out lock, stock and barrel. The following is quoted from the deed received by William Mattila. "Also the party of the "firt" part assigns to the second party and his heir, all building which "follovin" of the same. One two "tory" log living house, one barn, one horse, two cows, "calf's" one pig and all horse harness, "carriage" and "ext." all situated on the land."

The 1939 tax records show that the log home was constructed in 1912, a sauna in 1919 and a large barn in 1920 and a summer kitchen and garage at the later date. Thirty eight acres of land was classified as cropland. The original home was removed and a new one built in 1947. A unique feature of the Mattila farm was the construction of a dam on the Black River to generate their own electricity prior to the introduction of commercial power into the area about 1951.

Marcia Emilia died after seven years of marriage 31 December 1918 of pulmonary tuberculosis, a common subsequent illness to the influenza outbreak of that year. Children of Maria and William were:

- 1 William John, born 30 May 1911, married Thelma Hendrickson
- 2 Sulo Theodore, born 30 October 1913, married Naomi Fitzsimmons
- 3 Elma Maria, born 08 November 1914, married Larry Laughlin
- 4 George Illmari, born 16 January 1916, married Norma Helmila

5 Laura Joan, born 29 April 1918, married Willard Stoney. Laura was taken in and raised by her mother's sister, Hilda (Niemiaho) Niemi of Ishpeming after Maria Emilia's death.

In 1923, William married Helvi Lakanen, daughter of Daniel Lakanen on the neighboring farm.

Children of this marriage were:

- 1 Helen, born 29 March 1924, married Frank Feigl
- 2 Reino, born 24 April 1925, married Ivadene Johnson
- 3 Ruth Evelyn, born 14 June 1928, married Walter Puroll
- 4 Hjalmer Ray, born 14 November 1931, married Marilyn Rock
- 5 Eli Alexander, born 29 May 1933, married Shirlee Fitzsimmons
- 6 Martha Ester, born 20 February 1937, married Arthur Hill
- 7 Charles Wayne, born 18 October 1938, married Marjorie Koski
- 8 Ronald John, born 23 January 1943, married Susan Piiri
- 9 Fredrick Paul, born 17 February 1945, married Judith Ann (Vanderbogert) Sloney, married Concetta Corello, married Anna Darling
- 10 David Elden, born 05 April 1946, married Wanda Heliste
- 11 Francis Keith, born 23 July 1952, married Kristi Carlson for two years.

After working for 43 years as a farmer and a miner, William retired in 1952 and in that year made a return visit to Finland.

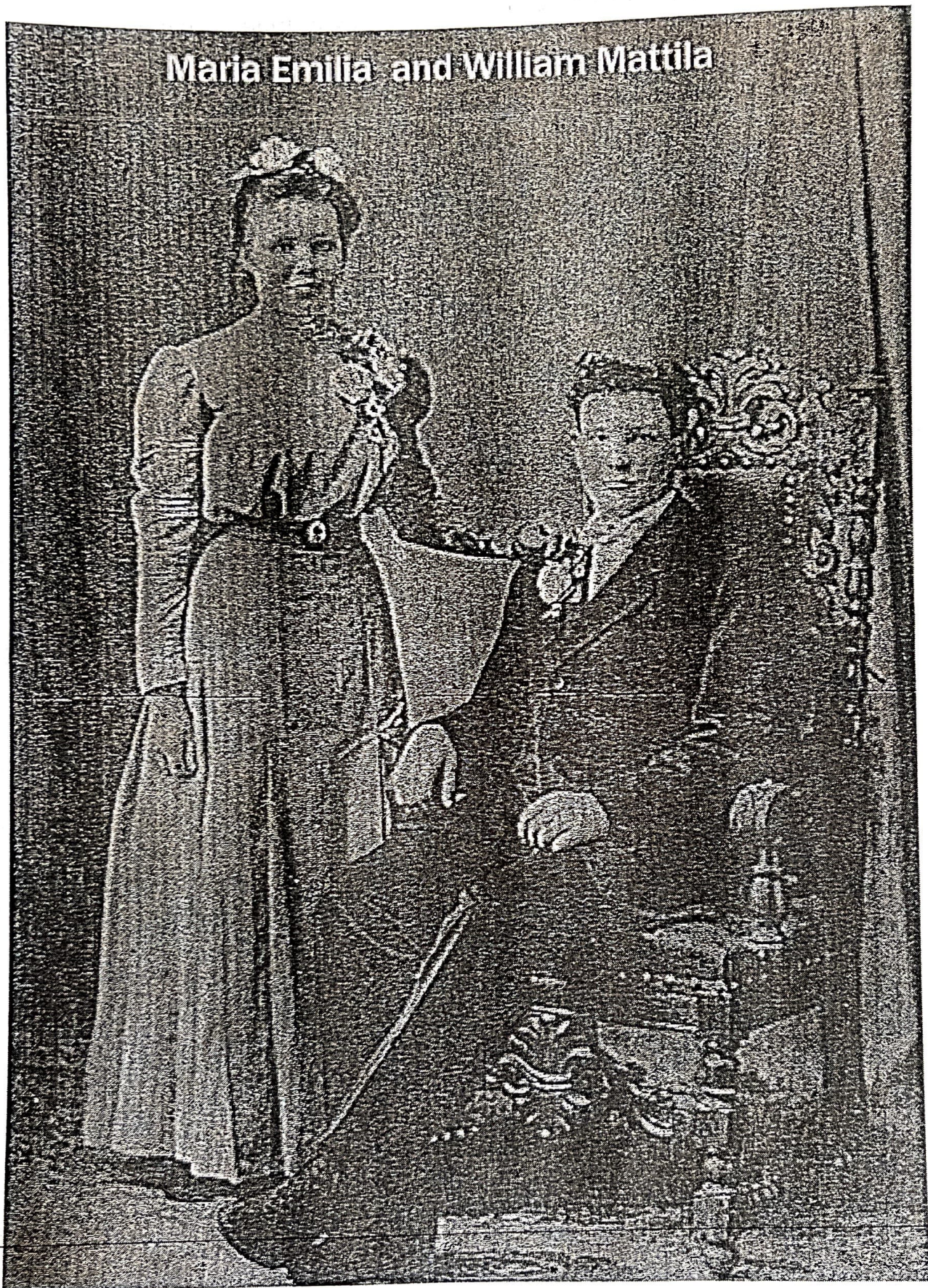
William died May 6, 1977, at the age of 77 in the Morgan Heights Sanatorium after living in Black River for 54 years. His sister Mrs. Eveliina Mattson of Republic was among the survivors.

Helvi died 13 years later in Grants, NM on 24 February 1980 at the home of her son Raymond.

Wanda (Mrs. David) Mattila has informed us that of 31 May 2005, that counting the 17 Mattila children and their descendents, the family count was 187 of whom only nine are deceased.

6

Maria Emilia and William Mattila



WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET OUR NEWEST AND YOUNGEST MEMBER?

BRETT KNAPP visited our museum this past summer and found it very interesting. He is 11 years old (we think) and a budding historian, even taking the time to sketch our museum building. We were very pleased that he became a member of our Society. Brett lives in West Allis, Wisconsin and is Bengt Bengsten's distant nephew through marriage! He was kind enough to send us a picture of himself and a letter explaining his ties to Republic.



BRETT KNAPP

My Relationship to Republic By Brett Thomas Knapp

Back in the 1920's my great-grandfather and great-grandma were invited to visit their brother and sister-in-law in Republic. Axel Davidson had married great-grandma's sister, Lulu.

Axel was one of 6 children and Bengt's wife, Alice was also one of them. My great-grandfather was so taken with Republic he purchased some land from Bengt and also a one-room shack Bengt used for homesteading his land. Bengt moved the "camp" up the hill and placed it between Dave Davidson's place and Tony Davidson's place, just east of his farm on the river. So Bengt Bengsten would be my great-great-great-great uncle (through marriage).

The camp was passed down from my great-grandfather to my grandpa (who is now 86) and will be passed on to my dad and then to me!



LOOKING AHEAD TO CHRISTMAS

The Society has tentatively decided to sponsor a Christmas Tree Festival, where individuals, churches, groups or businesses may decorate a tree in their own special style. Watch for more information in November and put on your creative thinking caps!