

Some Hancock Township History. Did you know...

***THE FIRST FLOUR MILL IN HOUGHTON COUNTY
WAS IN HANCOCK TOWNSHIP***

by Dana Richter

The Finnish Farmers Milling Company (FFMC), incorporated in 1905, is an early part of Hancock Township history. It is said to have been the earliest water-driven grain grist mill in the Copper Country. Parts of the dam and concrete piping (Photos 1 and 2) can still be found, although it is on private property and one must have permission to go there. It was located on the Boston Creek approximately four miles north of Hancock. The mill was about ¼ mile west of where the Lake Annie Road intersects with the Boston Creek, on the north side of the creek. A farm road once ran along the north side of the Boston Creek, west to the Canal Road, with several farms, now abandoned, occurring along the way. Old maps show two roads crossing the Boston Creek, one at the current crossing on the Lake Annie Road and one at the mill.



Photo 1. The water intake of the Finnish Farmers Milling Company grist mill on the Boston Creek, August 2016. It is the largest structure that can still be seen. The view is to the south. To the left is the broken-down dam which is barely visible. Photo by Dana Richter.



Photo 2. Part of the concrete piping of the Finnish Farmers Milling Company on the Boston Creek that brought water from the dam intake to the water wheel that ground grain to make flour or feed. View is to the west; to the left is Boston Creek. Photo by Dana Richter.

The Finnish Farmers Milling Company operated until 1936 (31 years). When the FFMC was incorporated, the location was listed as Franklin Township. Hancock Township was established in 1861 by the Michigan legislature, thus the boundaries of Hancock Township may have changed. Another possibility is that the exact location of the mill (Photo 3) was not known since it lies near the current boundary between Hancock and Franklin Townships. A 1905 topographic map of the area clearly shows the dam for the mill in Hancock Township.

Not a lot of information can be found in the historical records about The Finnish Farmers Milling Company. Two articles about it appear in the Daily Mining Gazette, one from Sept. 30, 1978 and one from March 25, 1982. The earlier article is longer and perhaps the most complete account of the operation of the mill. The articles were written by Ray Peterson who worked as a reporter and proofreader for the Gazette for over 30 years.

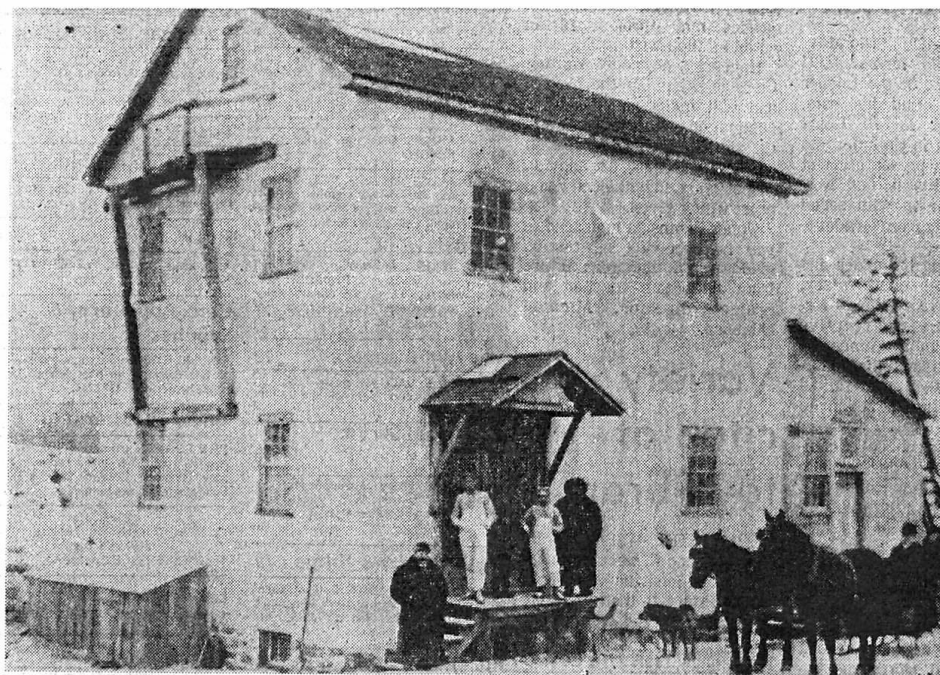


Photo 3. Mostly sandstone foundation of the grist mill that lies approximately 225 yards (0.13 mi) downstream from the dam on the Boston Creek. View is from the west; the Boston Creek flows approx. 100 ft below and 20 ft beyond the foundation. Photo by Dana Richter.

The earlier article is titled “*Finnish Farmers Milling Plant Almost Forgotten.*” The article is accompanied by two pictures (Photo 4), one of the mill (undated) and one of a stock certificate (1919). The first photo shows the mill building in winter with several people standing in front and a team of horses with a sleigh. The men in the picture are said to be Ivar Lingren, Jacob Ojala, Matt Mattson and John Kiiskila, and a lad, Elmer Marjamaa. The first three men were original incorporators of the FFMC as listed on the Articles of Association; the lad is perhaps the son of another original incorporator, Matti Marjamaa. John Kiiskila was the Notary Public on the Articles of Association.

Kiiskila is still a common name in the area. It is possible that John Kiiskila in the picture was a local farmer, as there are two John Kiiskilas listed in the directory of the Franklin area. John Kiiskila was also listed as president of the corporation on the 1919 stock certificate in the photo. However, a John Kiiskila was also a Hancock attorney at the time. In a Gazette article dated August 1911 he addressed the Houghton Co. board of supervisors arguing not to merge Hancock

Photo 4. Finnish Farmers Milling Co. and stock certificate are from the Houghton Daily Mining Gazette, September 30, 1978. Photo is undated, but stock certificate is from 1919.



AN early photo of The Finnish Farmers Milling Company of Hancock in Salo was uncovered and shows some of the early stockholders and employees, among them being Ivar Lindgren,

Jacob Ojala, Matt Mattson and John Kliskila. Small lad is believed to be Elmer Marjamaa.



STOCK certificates of many former Copper Country businesses have been uncovered through research. This one was owned by Arthur Marjamaa and cost him \$40.00 for four shares of stock in the Finnish Farmers Milling Co. The Gazette's Raymond Peter-

son did the research work for the story used here. He had considerable aid from many who knew items relative to the onetime active firm.

Township with Calumet Township as petitioned by some local residents. But that is another story.

The Gazette article says the mill closed in 1936 because it became obsolete, presumably due to electricity coming in and powering a mill in Houghton. Listed in the article are approximately 50 stockholders in the mill, many with names that are still familiar in the Franklin and Salo areas. John Waara of Salo and William Mattson of Hancock are mentioned as employees of the mill, and Waara worked at the time of the mill's closing. From the article: "Mattson's father, Matt Mattson, a carpenter, moved to Salo in 1904 and was one of the carpenters on the project in 1905. His son Raymond, still on the Mattson farm, said 'Mattson was the miller there in early years.'" Indeed, Matt(i) Mattson was one of the original incorporators of the FFMC. It is worth quoting the article regarding the operation of the mill:

"The mill was established near the Boston Creek and operated by water power in the fall of the year and through December and again in April. Two men operated the mill on 8 to 12-hour shifts, 40 barrels of flour ground in a shift. Water was received from the Franklin Mining Company dam [built] in 1860. It is now known as the Boston Dam. When the water was let out from the Franklin Dam in the evening, it reached the dam near the mill 12 hours later, its course being six miles, Waara said."

"The dam provided water to a second dam near the mill so a source of water was available when needed. A heavy cast iron 12-foot wheel to which about 20 water cups were attached created as much as 40 hp. for the mill. The wheel was on the site for many years before it was scrapped. The mill was used by farmers of the surrounding areas until the Houghton Flour Mill became a more convenient place to grind feed at any time of the year, its source mainly electricity. At the closing of the mill, Matt Lukkari, miller, and Waara, assistant miller, were the sole employees. They were paid \$1.50 a day for their work."

The second article in the Daily Mining Gazette about FFMC, dated March 25, 1982, was much shorter. It was simply titled "*Finnish Farmers' Milling Co.*" It said the mill could produce 35 barrels of ground wheat, barley, rye or oats per day, and was used by 20-25 farmers locally, and later by farmers in the three surrounding counties; it operated for only five months out of the year. The article concludes by saying, in later years a grist mill also operated on the Trap Rock River northeast of Lake Linden. The picture accompanying the article may be the Trap Rock Valley mill.

Another brief mention of the mill was found in the Daily Mining Gazette from August 17, 1910. The short note is titled, "*Wheat potential cash crop in Houghton*," and says: "The mill at Salo, the only flouring mill in the copper country [sic], cannot purchase all the wheat grown in the territory even in the present condition or restricted production. All the mill can do is grind such wheat as the farmers bring to it, for a fee of either cash or wheat. It cannot purchase the wheat outright. And merely growing wheat for his own use is not a particularly profitable matter for the farmer."

A hand-written ledger book from the FFMC was found in the house of John and Clara (Larson) and Henry Waara on the corner of the Salo and Boston Crosscut Roads. The book contains a list

of shareholders and stock registers beginning October 14, 1905 and ends October 1919. The book also contains a work log, partly written in Finnish, with lists of names and hours worked at the mill. Many of the names are familiar in the area today. The monthly work log columns are: Total Time, Rate per Day, Amount, Balance, When Paid, and Remarks. Under the Remarks column some of the pay was made in shares. The rate per day was anywhere from \$1.70 to \$4.50 for “teaming”, “carpenter”, “labor”, “single horse”, and “horse”. There is much history that could be obtained about the individuals associated with the mill in this ledger book.

A longer history of the Finnish Farmers Milling Company has been written containing references and many personal interviews of township people who still remembered the mill. The history can be found at the Finnish American Heritage Center Archives and the MTU Library Archives. If anyone has documents or additional information about the FPMC please contact Dana Richter.

A history of Hancock Township is being compiled by Ann Kemppainen. If you have information or documents about any aspect of Hancock Township history please let us know. Many things still need to be researched and written about. The township is fortunate to have the Waasa Cemetery with many early residents buried there. Once there was a dance hall at the corner of the Waasa and Salo Roads, but little is known of it. There is said to have been a Waasa School prior to the Salo School but its location is unknown. These and other things should not slip into oblivion. Thank you!

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Note about the author. Dana Richter is a forest ecologist (MTU, Ret.) and historian who lives in Salo, Hancock Township, and owns a small piece of the Boston Creek near where the Finnish Farmers Milling Company was located. In 2012-13 he headed the campaign to establish a monument to the famous Copper Country Giant, Big Louie Moilanen, who grew up one mile north of Dana’s property. The monument is at the Finnish American Heritage Center on the campus of Finlandia University.

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