

LIFE-ISAAC MATIS

LIFE OF

1862

BORN: January 27, 1862

DIED: July 17, 1931,

The coldest, darkest part of the winter was at hand. The sun that occasionally would make its' appearance by peeping over the horizon would sink again after a few hours of sunlight and warmth. The long, cold, dark winter days would be enlivened by splashes of color that shimmered and glowed from the *aurora borealis* in the Arctic skies.

The family home, a small log cabin was nestled in a clearing in the dense forest in Metajärvi Kylä about 150 kilometers from the Arctic Circle. The family had moved from Paavola to Määttä some time ago and according to custom had changed their surname from Paavola to Mätässari (Island of Määttä). At this particular time the father, Heikki, and the mother, Keisa, had five children. Their names were Maija, age 16; Priita, age 13; Matti, age 11; Jussi, age 8; and Jaakko, age 4.

It is not difficult to visualize the excitement and activity in this cold, winter day in 1862. The older girls, Maija and Priitta, assisted their father in the preparation for the birth of the sixth child in the family. The fires of the "tupa" (combination living room and bedroom), and the "sauna" (bath-house), near the forest, were kept burning brightly for warmth and hot water. The older boys, Matti and Jussi, assisted their father in replenishing the fire wood and in the chores. Jaakko, no doubt wondered as to the reason for this excitement. With the help of a midwife a boy, Isaac, was born on January 27, 1862 in the cleanest room of the household, the "sauna".

As every Finnish rural boy, Isaac was taught to do home chores, to hunt, to fish for trout and salmon, to ski, to row, to work in the fields (plowing, sowing, and reaping), and to use a knife, a saw, and hammer in wood working. His training did not include the tending of the cows, the milking, the churning, the shearing, the carding of the wool, the spinning, the serving, and the cooking, for these were his sisters' chores. His joy came from the lessons learned, the races won, the skills achieved, and the advancement made as he grew into young manhood.

He associated with the many girls in the neighborhood, but the daughter of the largest land owner in the village was the only girl that really meant anything to Isaac. She must have encouraged his attention for he gained enough courage to ask her father for her hand in marriage. The reply was a sharp denial as her suitor was a poor, peasant boy and she was the daughter of a wealthy man. The argument that followed must

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Telluride, Colorado

have been long and heated. So much so, that Isaac vowed that he would prove his worth to his girl, her father and to the world. The logical place would be the United States of America where there was wealth and opportunity. So with limited means he embarked for the land of promise. He landed in America in June 1882 and went to Michigan to work in the iron mines. The language barrier forced him into association with his own countrymen. His sincere determination was to become a part of this new land, so he took out his first citizenship papers in Houghton, Michigan on October 27, 1884.

Working his way West, he labored on railroad gangs in Minnesota and in Colorado. In Wyoming he worked in the coal mines in Hannah. He continued in his desire to be a citizen of his adopted country. He applied for his second and final papers at Evanston, Wyoming on September 1, 1890.

The wealth of the gold and silver quartz mines as well as the opportunities for comradeship among the people that spoke his own language lured him to Telluride, Colorado. He arrived on June 5, 1891 on the small narrow gauge railroad. Now he was twenty nine years of age, seasoned by nine years of association with the hardships, as well as blessings, of his new country. He was a citizen of a free land ready to wrest a living from the high mountains surrounding this mining town on three sides. There were the attractions of a wide-open mining town with its saloons, girls, and gambling of every description. However, none of these tempted this good man who had met, soon after his arrival, the woman, Mary Mäkynen Iivari, whom he was to later marry. Here then were the opportunities to wrest gold from the mountains and save money for their future.

Years added to years as the seasons changed "Coonskin" from bright autumn colors to snowy white and again to the green of summer. A house on 525 Pacific Ave. was purchased and readied for the special event, his coming marriage to his heart's desire, Mary Mäkynen Iivari. Thus Isaac, who was 43 years of age, had forgotten the girl of his youth, as he courted and married this fine, friendly woman who had come to America to be with her husband, Jacob Iivari, only a few months before his death. The marriage was followed by a big "chiverli" and dance in their social center, the Finn Hall. Many polkas, schottisches and waltzes were dances into the wee hours of the morning following their marriage on November 24, 1904.

The dream of every miner was to have a mine of his own to provide for livelihood and greater opportunities for himself and his family. This dream came true for the Finns in Telluride (including Isaac) as they started and worked the "Musta Karhu" (Black Bear) mine. With limited finances this industrious band of men worked in the mine without pay. They carried food and other supplies on their backs up the steep mountain slopes in summer and winter. In return, their faith and work in their "Musta Karhu" Mine was repaid with shares of mining stock. The families in Telluride had to have some means of support. Isaac's wife, Mary, provided for their family of three sons, Henry, Arvo, and Wilho by taking in washing, ironing and keeping roomers on the second story of their home.

Their beloved "Musta Karhu" lived up to expectations and became a big producing mine. Through greed and dishonesty of others, the original owners were forced out. This did not embitter Isaac. He found employment in other mines as his family grew older. He died, respected by all in his community, on July 17, 1931. He was buried in Telluride cemetery.

This honorable man had proven himself to all mankind and to his Heavenly Father as a sincere, humble personality; as a stalwart character; as a devoted husband and a loving father; and as a loyal citizen of his adopted country. His goal of proving his worth to himself and to his fellowmen had been obtained by his own worthiness and by Jesus Christ's teachings, as exemplified by some of the Beatitudes - "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth; Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled; Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

MARY MÄKYNEN MATIS

, Ylistaro, Vaasa, Finland
Durango, Colorado

The mother, Hedvig, born January 10, 1849, was a frugal housewife who helped her husband in the fields. She taught her children to sew, to cook, to shear sheep, comb the wool, spin the wool on the spinning wheel in the "tupa", to milk, to knit, and to make their clothing on the family loom. Her encouragement and fine character cheered their hearts as she told them stories and sang for them during the long winter evenings.

The ten kilometers (6 miles) trip to church from the country side to the beautiful Ylistaro (Evangelical Lutheran Church) was made regularly every Sunday. Sometimes it was made by wagon, sometimes by sleigh, and sometimes the children would carry their only pair of home-made leather shoes and trudge in the dust of the country road in their bare feet. Neither the heat of the summer nor the cold of the winter, or the long distance daunted the determination of this devoutly religious family to worship their Heavenly Father. During the weekdays, observing the Golden Rule was a family custom, and on the Sabbath the church service was mandatory.

The necessity of earning a meager living, the responsibilities of being the oldest child and in helping on the farm and in the home prevented Mary from continuing her education beyond the Kansa Koulu (elementary school). Her formal education was never continued but the height of her intelligence and beauty of her character was intensified by the adversities and trials caused by the cold geographic location of her native country and by the teachings of honorable parents in a good home.

Grown into young womanhood, Mary was ready and prepared for the destiny that awaited her. One turning point came when she fell in love with a young man, Jacob Iivari, from a neighboring farm. After a short courtship, the congregation observed a notice posted in her beloved Ylistaro church, of this couple's intention to marry. It was a simple wedding in the family's home on December 30, 1898 when the father gave his daughter's hand in marriage to the one she loved. The neighbors for kilometers around joined the family in the wedding feast in the farmhouse. Course after course of food with many cups of coffee were consumed as the men discussed their personal thoughts as well as the problems of the work-a-day world, as the women chatted in groups, and as the children raced excitedly in the "tupa", the farmyard, and the nearby forest.

LIFE HISTORY

BORN: February 10,
DIED: January 31, 1911

The anxiety on the farm in Ylistaro, Finland mounted as the time the first child to be born to the Matti Mäkynen family drew near. The father paced the floor of the "tupa" (large combination bedroom and living room) of their home. Occasionally, he would go to the large fireplace to put wood on the open fire to keep the winter chill away from his wife who lay on their bed in the corner. He was concerned also about the large kettle of hot water that was boiling in the nearby sauna (bath house). He would occasionally dash out into the deep snow of the barnyard to keep the fire burning brightly. Under these circumstances with the oil lantern flickering in the large room throwing light and shadows upon the scene the first child, Mary Mäkynen, was born on February 10, 1875. This same scene was to be enacted a number of times in the same home as other children were born - Esaias, July 10, 1877; Jacob, October 3, 1879; Susanna, November 1882; Elise, January 2, 1885; Helvi, May 9, 1887; Matt, in 1889; and J. Matt, May 24, 1892.

Elementary school was compulsory as well as the hard work on the farm and in the nearby forest. The horse-drawn plow would uproot large rocks from the thin top soil making it difficult for the family to subsist. The cows were tended in the nearby meadow during the long daylight hours of the summer and fed in the small barn during the dark winter months. The hay and grain were cut and raked by hand and placed on tall stakes to dry, grain being gathered into bundles and tied with a single twist of the straw. Firewood for the winter fires had to be gathered. Strawberries, "puolukka" (lingon-berries) and blueberries were plentiful in the forest but needed to be picked and preserved for winter use. These were the chores of the children, including Mary and her two brothers and three sisters. (Two of Mary's brothers died in infancy.)

The father, born June 22, 1848, was a thrifty farmer who was in demand in the neighboring countryside for his skill in carpentry and in cutting and installing glass in windows. He gained a reputation as "Lasi-mestari" (Matt, the glass-master craftsman). His pay was usually in produce and labor given in exchange for his skillful services from his neighbors.

It was a sacrifice imposed by separation when in 1900 the young bridegroom left his bride to journey to the United States of America to find the gold that was reported to be plentiful on the streets of this fabulous country. But alas, the gold had to be taken out of hard quartz rock in the high Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Soon, enough had been accumulated for the husband to send for his wife to join him. On June 28, 1903 Mary bade her loved ones farewell at the Ylistaro Railroad Station. On July 24, 1903, after a long, hard journey in her steerage compartment on the SS Mauretania, Mary arrived in the land of opportunity at New York City. She boarded the railroad train and went directly to her husband in Telluride, Colorado. Their joy was short lived as he died of miner's consumption on November 11, 1903 a few months after their reunion. This dreaded disease caused from the dust of drilling for the yellow metal that had brought his wife to him now left her an "Amerikan leski" (American widow) in this mining town, the "Jumalan kukkaro" (pocketbook of the Lord) as she called it.

As Mary took stock of her situation she surely must have regretted leaving her native land. What was she going to do? With few friends, not being able to understand the new and strange language, and with very little funds, her situation was indeed desperate. However, the skills learned in her youth through overcoming adversities and trials of a meager existence, came to her aid. Did she not have her health, the skills in her hands, the knowledge of how to do things, and the deep trust in her Heavenly Father? No task was too large or a duty too small for her to perform to earn her livelihood. Her industriousness and cheerful disposition must have caught the eye of a "vanha poika" (bachelor), Isaac Matis, who was 13 years her senior. After a speedy courtship they agreed to establish a home for themselves. They were married on November 24, 1904 in Telluride.

Numerous problems beset this couple. The husband was a member of a Finnish Mining Cooperative on the "Musta Marhu" (Black Bear) Mine. This group used their own resources and labor to establish and work this famous gold-producing mine. No salaries were given, instead shares of stock in the mine repaid the hours spent by each man as he worked in the mine development. Further, to save transportation costs at every opportunity the men were asked to carry heavy supplies on their backs up the mountainside to the mine. This difficult situation continued for three years until the Black Bear became a successful venture.