

## Multamäki

Multamäki, Nikolai & Elma

Children: Ernie, Eero

Hearst Relatives: Lemaire

Kills Bear With Axe, Hikes 30 Miles in Bush for Aid: *Toronto Star*, May 26, 1954 by Eero Multamäki

The history begins in Central Finland where both Vieno Nikolai Multamäki and Elma Esteri Kara were born. Although they grew up twenty kilometres apart, they would not meet until Canada. Nikolai (1899) was one of several children. Having completed the local public school, he found employment in the forest industry and in the carpentry trade, before enrolling in a forestry school. Unfortunately, he was unable to continue for lack of funds. This, among other factors, precipitated the move to Canada at twenty-four with his brother, Paul, where employment opportunities were reportedly great. Another deciding factor was the political situation. Finland had gained independence from Russia in 1919, but sentiments ran high, with much support still for that former political system; the situation was so tense that clashes occurred between the Red and White Finns, endangering lives. In 1923, Montreal became the brothers' temporary home for some years; winters were spent in logging camps and summers in Montreal, Kingston or Ottawa doing carpentry work. Nikolai worked

on the famous Montebello Lodge during its construction.

Elma Kara arrived in Montreal in 1928 at the age of twenty-four where she met Nikolai at a Finnish community centre. They married in 1930.

With the Great Depression, work became scarce. Word spread that Ontario was granting homesteads to settlers willing to come to the Hearst–Kapuskasing corridor, where land had been set aside in Eilber township. There were promises of work cutting pulpwood off the homestead for sale to Spruce Falls Pulp and Paper in Kapuskasing. In Eilber Township the lands most accessible to the railroad at Reesor had already been taken by Russian Mennonite settlers, so the Finns were relegated to land four miles north of the tracks. This area was serviced by a clay road, which was impassable, except by horse and wagon. Each homesteader was given seventy-five acres (half lot) with requirements to clear land and erect buildings in order to obtain permanent title. The settlers didn't realize that the almost impassable road wouldn't be

improved for years and, even then, wouldn't be ploughed in winter and would only be passable in summer in dry weather.

The Finnish settlers created their community with thirty-five families and a few single men. The Multamäkis were located a mile east of the end of the road, with no road access whatsoever, except for a walking trail which traversed swampland and spruce forest. The task of setting up habitation was incredibly difficult. From the station platform at Reesor, arrangements had to be made to transport the Multamäki possessions a distance of five miles to the property—the last mile on a pack trail through the bush. On arrival, the priority was to construct a log cabin. This had to be completed before snowfall, as winter temperatures here dropped to forty-five-degrees below Fahrenheit, and snow depths reached over three feet. Also, winter firewood had to be cut and secured in a shelter.

It was a matter of survival for the first year. The forest provided meat, as game was abundant—moose, grouse, rabbit, pike and perch were plentiful in Friday Lake, a mile by trail to the east. Until the pulpwood was cut and delivered, little money was available. Furniture was constructed largely from logs, and boards were hand-sawn from local trees. The home was made of logs, with a tar-paper roof and windows backpacked in from the store at Reesor Siding. Occasionally, horse transport was available for

larger items by borrowing from a more well-off settler. Nikolai built a shingle mill, which produced roof shingles for neighbours, which he bartered for other necessities. Nikolai, an experienced hunter, occasionally hunted moose for other settlers in exchange for goods or help. Trapping provided extra revenue from the sale of fox, muskrat and weasel pelts.

There were no telephones, hydro or radios. Mail had to be picked up and sent out from the store at Reesor Siding. A weekly Finnish newspaper provided the only news from the outside world. As for neighbours, the Multamäki homestead was isolated by a mile-long trail through the forest to the main block of settlers. Only one of the immediately adjacent lots was settled by a family and developed with a cabin. It was occupied for two years and then deserted.

During the first year, three acres of land were cleared and planted in hay, a garden developed, a cow purchased for milk, along with a piglet and six hens. A barn was constructed and a sauna built; also a root cellar—resembling an underground cave—was built to store vegetables. Meat was preserved in Crown sealer jars, and thus made available year round. Life was incredibly difficult. Everyday required back-breaking work from daybreak to dark for the men. It was no easier for the women, who had the responsibility of cooking, cleaning,

sewing, supervising children, taking care of livestock, milking and helping their husbands with the manual work, if time permitted. Clothes were handmade.



Reesor -cattle on the Multamäki homestead

In 1931, the first Multamäki child, Ernie Nikolai, was born at the hospital in Kapuskasing. As a consequence of the difficulty in getting Elma out to the railroad to catch the train, their second son, Eero Ensio, was born at home a year later with a midwife attending. The day after Eero's birth, his father had to go and hunt down a moose as the larder was almost empty.



The Multamäki Reesor Homestead  
Eero and Ernie about 1934

The homestead became a way of life for seven years as the family waited out the Depression. In the 1930s, a gold discovery was made in McGowan Township to the east and a flurry of prospecting activity occurred. Nikolai, with a single homesteader friend, joined in the hunt for gold, and a few holes were drilled and blasted out in the homestead field. Nothing came of it, but they found a small showing of no value near his friend's property. This endeavour left Nikolai with an urge to prospect, which lasted all his life, and was imparted to both his sons.

For the summer of 1936, the family moved to South Porcupine, where work was available at the new gold mines, and Nikolai was able to earn and save money for the year ahead



Elma, Nikolai, Ernie and Eero Multamäki  
-South Porcupine -1936

In September, the family returned to the Reesor homestead. By 1937, with Ernie and Eero now of school age, the family moved to a vacated homestead within walking distance of the public school (S.S. 4 Eilber). A teacher from outside the area was housed in a home of one settler family each

year. At its peak the school enrollment reached thirty.

Some improvements to lifestyle were apparent at the new location—social events, such as dances at the schoolhouse (music by resident accordion players), and church services, when wandering ministers would appear. There was no church building. A Watkins salesman would come in winter by dogsled to provide essential medicines and products. He would overnight in a settler's home, which was always provided free of charge. Parthia Lake was within walking distance for swimming and fishing, something the children greatly appreciated. Santa Claus always appeared at Christmas at the school. At



this time, only two automobiles existed in the settlement, and could only be driven during the dry summer season when roads hardened up. There was a sharing of transportation of goods from the store for many of the settlers.

The exodus of settlers occurred as work outside the settlement gradually increased. Single men left first, followed by settlers from the more remote homesteads. With World War II, employment was suddenly available everywhere and a wholesale exodus began. Soon, few families remained and the school closed. The Multamäkis followed suit in September of 1940, moving first to Kenogami, Quebec, and then to a home in Hearst (Wyborn) on the river.

This proved to be a great place with recreation opportunities available on the river. Nikolai worked in Hearst as a carpenter during the summer and returned to Reesor for the first winter to cut pulpwood. The family went with him and stayed in an abandoned homesteader's log home. Ernie and Eero attended the familiar Reesor Public School (not yet closed). The family returned to the Wyborn home in April, and lived here for the next two years. At that point, it was decided that a farm property was needed for crops and livestock, to ease financial problems. A farm was located in the northeast corner of Way Township, being Lot 6 Concession 12, about three miles west of Hearst.



Elma Multamäki at the Hearst farm  
-about 1950

Here, the family stayed for fifteen years.

Carpentry work in Hearst and trapping became a way of life. The beaver population had recovered, and fur prices hit a high of \$40 a pelt, at a time when manual labour paid \$10 per day. Nikolai partnered with Walter Eilala, who had a trapline area east of Oba. The following year he secured a line of his own in a remote area south of Hornepayne. With his new partner, John Hook, he spent periods from mid-October to Christmas, and from New Year's to the first of March in the wilderness. They waited for the

waterways to open up, so the return trip could be made by canoe down the Kabinakagami River to Highway 11, west of Hearst.



Nikolai Multamäki on the Gourly Township trapline in 1952

In his absence, Elma managed the farm. She was at times afraid to be alone, and happy at nighttime to have Eero spending his high school years at home. There were a couple of incidents, where strangers would knock on the door seeking food or shelter; food was shared, but overnight shelter had to be turned down. It was not until the fall of 1948 that the Multamäki family was able to purchase their first automobile, a brand new 1949 Ford.

Nikolai was a superior craftsman when it came to building cedar-strip canoes and boats. The canoes were light for easy portage and flights into the bush on the pontoons of aircraft. (One of these canoes remains today, in the possession of Eero Multamäki at his home in Bridgenorth,

Ontario.) In the fall, Nikolai chartered an aircraft from Oba Lake to take in the winter's supplies. This meant that he, with partner, were stuck in the bush until freeze up. After that, the trip out was on skis, with the season's catch of fur drawn by a husky dog to the ACR tracks at Oba, a distance of thirty miles. The hazards of the trapline were always apparent, as an accident would leave a person with no communication with the outside world and no easy way out. Nickolai passed his skills on to his sons. At fourteen, both Ernie and Eero became adept at trapping and hunting to obtain pocket money from fox, weasel and muskrat pelts. In 1946, after finishing school, Ernie decided to take up the trapping profession, and father and son became partners.



Ernie Multamäki with a trapped beaver -1952

Eero chose to continue his education at Hearst High School, now a walking distance of about three miles, graduating four years later. In 1950, Ernie purchased a new Ford three-ton truck, equipped to haul pulpwood, and began working winters at various camps.

It was on the trapline in May 1954 that Nikolai had a brush with death. He and Ernie were on foot when a startled bear charged Nikolai. He was able to get off four shots with his high-powered rifle, but the bear continued to charge, pinning him to the ground and attempting to bite his face. Nikolai held it off for a moment by pressing the rifle barrel crossways into the bear's mouth. Ernie delivered a giant blow with his axe to the side of the bear's head, which caused it to roll off his father. He then proceeded to kill the bear with the axe. Nikolai had suffered a broken finger from the bear's mouth and deep scratches across his chest and legs from the claws. Medical aid was urgent, but help lay twenty-five miles across untracked wilderness. Ernie managed to get Nikolai to one of their trap cabins a mile away, where he bound his wounds. He then set off on foot to Hornepayne in search of an aircraft, navigating by compass through the dense bush, wading streams and swamps en route. He encountered another bear, but gave it wide berth. Thirty-six hours later, he arrived in Hornepayne and returned with a float plane to evacuate his father. This incident received

province-wide publicity and a reporter from the *Toronto Star* came to Hearst to interview the family.

*Editor's note: See portions of two of the resulting articles on the following pages.*

Nikolai continued trapping with Ernie for two more years before returning to carpentry jobs in Hearst and some pulpwood cutting. He and Elma continued to farm until 1959, when they moved to McManusville, having sold the farm to Stanley and Anne Girard. Later they would move to Thunder Bay for their last years, to be close to their sons and grandchildren and to a large Finnish population that provided social interaction. Nikolai succumbed to a heart attack in 1977 and Elma passed away twenty years later.

In 1954, Eero married his Hearst High School sweetheart, Helen Lemaire, and together began a series of moves that took them to various towns, but almost always in the north. Each move was a step upwards until retirement near Peterborough, Ontario. Helen succumbed to cancer in 1993.

Ernie also stuck to the north, specifically the northwest part of the province. He was a skilled cabinet and furniture maker and was developing a business as a builder and contractor until his untimely death in a construction accident in 1996.

# KILLS BIG BEAR WITH AXE TO SAVE DAD, THEN HIKES 30 MILES IN BUSH FOR AID

By LLOYD LOCKHART  
Star Staff Correspondent

Hearst, May 25 — Nick Muldamaki, a 55-year-old Finnish trapper, is in St. Paul's hospital here, recovering from loss of blood, shock and a broken finger. He was chased, caught, chewed, and clawed by a black bear in a battle of the wilderness, 75 miles southwest of here.

Muldamaki owes his life to his son, Ernie, 22, who grabbed an axe while the animal pinned his father to the ground. Ernie swung twice and clubbed the giant to death. He said it would have weighed 600 pounds.

"Biggest Bear I've Ever Seen"

"Thank goodness my son was there," said the father. "I was helpless and the bear was eating me alive."

"It happened so quickly I can't believe it did happen," says Ernie. "One minute we were walking over a hill and the next minute the bear was attacking. Dad fired four shots but they didn't do any good. It was the biggest bear I've ever seen. He just kept coming."

After the bear was killed, the son bandaged his father's hand, chest and legs with flour bags. He helped him reach a canoe 500 yards away and paddled six miles to their main camp. En route he portaged. At their cabin, the son realized help was needed. The nearest settlement was Hornepayne, 30 miles through trackless wilds.

"The following morning I told dad not to leave camp until I got back," says Ernie. "I studied a map and decided the way was due north. I compass and started out. I could reach Hornepayne in 16 hours."

per in Rapids

attacked Muldamaki afternoon. Ernie began civilization at 4 lay, covering all but y 9 p.m. He had a few good supplies of his map. He

He



ERNIE MULAMAKI AND THE AXE HE USED  
Wounded Bear Attacked His Father

—Star Wirephoto by Lloyd Lockhart

slipped in swirling rapids, slept on pine boughs and ate sparingly. At 11 a.m., Sunday, he reached his goal.

"I wasn't worried about myself," says Ernie. "I knew I could find my way but when we got back to the lake I was afraid we were too late."

At Hornepayne Ernie informed Ben Lapinski, district game warden, and rescue operations got under way. A department of lands and forests plane from

and flew to Gourlay lake so he could point out the camp.

"That was a real thrill," the hero said. "When we circled our camp dad hobbled from the tent and waved. I knew then he was all right."

The wounded man was loaded on the plane and flown to Hearst for hospital treatment. That's where he is today, and this is his story.

"Ernie and I had pitched camp for the day when we decided to

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**STARTLED BEAR ATTACKS TRAPPER, BUT SON KILLS THE  
BEAST WITH AXE AFTER FOUR SHOTS FAIL TO DO JOB**



—Star Sketch by Staff Artist George Foglia

**DRAWING OF FRENZIED SCENE** as wounded bear attacked men shows bush adventure at its height. With his father torn and bleeding before him, Eddie prepares to attack bear with axe. Father and son believe there a possibility that the animal was a mother with cubs in the vicinity. Attacks on men by bears are unusual

Toronto Star

Editor's Note: Eero was also an accomplished artist creating many scenes of Northern Ontario as found in his website: <http://www.mutamaki.ca/>