Frederick Edward Jacobson
The Life of Lanesville!
By Betty Kiilinen Erkkila

Fred and Fanny Jacobson on their honeymoon.
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Frederick Edward Jacobson was born in 1910 in the Lanesville section of Gloucester. He was the son of Jacob Jacobson (1883–1933) and Maria Josefina (Ranta) Jacobson (1880–1961). It should be noted that Jacob was previously known as Jaakko Prepula and both he and his wife Maria were born in Finland, Lapua and Ylistaro, respectively. Fred was one of eight children, five boys and three girls. Two of Fred’s siblings were born in Finland. Fred’s father was the one-time financial secretary of the Quarry Workers’ International Union of North America, Cape Ann; as an avocation he also operated a pool room on Langsford Street in Lanesville. Toiling for long hours with short pay - often at the Fitzgibbon Quarry (once called Bay State Pit and currently known as Bianchini’s Quarry) - Jacob was designated a “quarryman” and “paving cutter.” One summer, Fred’s mother Maria performed some household chores for iconic actress Helen Hayes in Annisquam. The grande dame of the stage gifted Maria with a bathrobe in appreciation.
With Finnish as his first language, Fred was a good student (early years at Lanesville’s Lane School); later he was awarded the Sawyer Academic Medal and History Medal. Like others of the time, he was unable to complete high school and entered the working world. His lifetime partner and wife, Fanny Elizabeth Martin (1914–2007), graduated from Gloucester High School in 1933. Fanny’s activities included: Junior Business Club, Service Club, Bank Collector, and she attained Perfect Attendance for three of her four years. Because of the large size of the class, two separate G.H.S. graduations were held at City Hall.

Fred worked as a landscape gardener and caretaker for several estates in Annisquam and at Bass Rocks in later years. He had a positive outlook on life, generous dollops of humor, and his guiding principle was “This Too Shall Pass.” As a very young man, he was elected to the position of Financial Secretary of the same granite cutters’ union in which his father had served.

Fred married Fanny on August 24, 1935; from their union, they were blessed with two children: Esther (born 1941) who married Charles Hyde and had two sons and one daughter; and Edward (born 1939) who married Dianne Pereira and had one daughter and one son.

Fred and Fanny wed during the Great Depression at Wainola Hall located on Langsford Street, Lanesville. The Hall was colorfully decorated with streamers, Ilona Mattson played the bridal march on the piano, matron of honor was Rachel Jacobson (sister of the groom), and the groom’s attendant was Walt Martin (brother of the bride). Nuptials were performed by the minister of the Bay View Methodist Church. Wedding cake was served and dancing was enjoyed to the melodies of the Huckleberry Finn Band of Quincy. The Hall lights were switched off at 10 pm, as the couple left escaping the sure-to-be hail of confetti, old shoes, etc. Sadly, the Finnish immigrants’ centerpiece of cultural and athletic life, Wainola Hall, succumbed to a runaway grassfire in 1945; it was a cataclysmic loss to the whole village. Because the thought of rebuilding couldn’t be envisioned by the many elderly members, faded photographs and cherished memories were mostly what remained.

Fred and Fanny lived in a cheerful, inviting home, formerly a camp, lovingly renovated and increased in circumference several times by Fred and his “associates” at the corner of Emerald and Vulcan Street in Lanesville. The welcome mat was always out for their countless friends and school pals of their children. Fred was an unassuming, clever man with myriad practical skills: painting,
carpentry, electrical, plumbing, granite work, problem solving, you name it! At the mansions of various summer residents of the Annisquam section of Gloucester, Fred cared for the tennis courts, mowed lawns, tended to minor repairs, and much more. Fanny, with a cadre of women, opened up and closed the seasonal houses; owners often brought along their own cooks, nannies, and chauffeurs to Squam.

Fred was affiliated as a member and past Chancellor of the Knights of Pythias, Ocean View Lodge, in the Pigeon Cove section of Rockport. He and Fanny were members of the Cape Ann Finnish Dance Group in the 1950s and early 1960s. Vivid costumes were imported from Finland and the dancers learned the Polka, Schottische, Finn Hop, Raatikko with Miriam Niemi Lane on accordion and Aino Yrjola Clarke accompanying with her violin. The highlight of their performing days was traveling via auto coach to Washington D.C. to display their fancy foot-steps at Constitution Hall. The twirlers and prancers had such a spirit of energy and fun. After the weekly rehearsals, the dancers socialized at members’ homes. Much frivolity and merriment followed!

EARLY FLASHBACK

Initially with six twosomes, the Jacobsons were part of a yearly collective celebration of wedding anniversaries from 1936 to the late 1940s. The first meeting of the Couples Club was on November 1, 1936, at the 2-room cottage of Sulo & Alice Erkkila of High Street adorned with Halloween decorations. Chowder, hobgoblin salad, donuts and cider were served. Football and baseball were played by all in the field beyond. Coffee and a decorated cake were served in the afternoon. Photos were taken. Neighboring sculptor Walker Hancock showed home movies in the evening. In some years, to remember Couples Club – celebrated collective anniversaries from 1936- late 1940s. (L to R): Bud & Bertha Bulli, Matt & Rachel Kielinen, Fred & Fanny Jacobson, Sulo & Alice Erkkila, Walt & Ginny Martin, Tibby & Lil Erkkinen
their gatherings with photos, the celebrants created human pyramids or positioned on their backs forming a circle. Leading useful, exuberant lives, the couples had little materially but were blessed in other important ways.

To celebrate the Jacobsons’ 25th anniversary in 1960, Annisquam summer boarders feted the couple with the ultimate, splendid monetary gift for a trip to Finland, the land of their heritage! Sailing from New York across the Atlantic Ocean on the Norwegian Stavangerfjord took 10 days going and returning. Delightful encounters took place with myriad relatives in the Nordic country. Speaking fluent Finnish, Fred & Fanny were completely at ease and comfortable with the tongue-twisting language. Much wave action rocked the boat en route home (12 days) in early September. One day the duo was outside the library on the deck of the ship when huge waves, part of a hurricane, began splashing. The heavy doors were securely shut and could only be opened from the inside! No one heard their loud, frantic banging! They huddled in a corner, a mammoth wave the length of the ship came thundering down, causing great fright! Finally, they ran for the doorway to the library; it was miraculously opened for them!

PRANKS & JOKES

At a Supper Club gathering, most likely in the 1950s, Marion (a member of the Couples Club) had just bought a new pair of red shoes and was displaying them. Husband Karl did not want her to wear them, saying it was a sign of a loose woman! The next time the group was celebrating Karl’s birthday all the ladies and men – minus Karl – wore everything red they could think of – dress, skirt, blouse, scarf, jewelry, neckties, and sweaters. Fred donned red Christmas socks. Fred also had discovered a pair of discarded men’s high-laced shoes in an old garage being renovated. The sole of one was loose. He painted them multiple coats of bright red enamel and presented them to Karl as a gift. By chance, the shoes fit! It was a hilarious night! During

the summer months, the Supper Club often picnicked on the seashore’s granite ledges, even sometimes feasting on lobster and steamed clams!

After a Cape Ann Finnish Dancers rehearsal night, the members convened for refreshments at the home of Bob and Betty. At one time Bob had raised chickens, gotten rid of them, and didn’t want any more! By chance, Fred and Matt were looking at a table magazine at the hosts’ home and saw an ad for baby chicks. They carefully removed the whole advertisement and ordered the chicks to be delivered to Bob. A few mornings later, Bob got a phone call from the local post office informing him to come and pick up the chickens. He ended up raising them. Even though no one ever told him who had sent them, Bob probably had some tantalizing guesses. At a later time, the group did enjoy some chicken barbecues!

POSTSCRIPT

With an abundance of sisu, Fanny continued on for well over three decades after Fred sadly left us at age 59 in 1970. She was an extraordinary quilter, an active Lanesville Congregational Church member, and a valuable contributor to diverse clubs and organizations. After Fredi Setä (Uncle Fred) fulfilled his earthly destiny, Fanni Täti (Aunt Fanny) placed a handsome framed photograph of her husband on the table next to the easy chair where she sat to read, converse, or watch TV. Viewing the smiling color portrait, I believe, helped to propel Fanny to keep making positive differences in countless people’s lives. It was also a daily reminder of the enduring, inspirational love and forever bond she shared with Fred Jacobson.

By Betty Kielinen Erkkila, niece of Fred Jacobson