

GLOUCESTER
400^{TM+}
OUR PEOPLE, OUR STORIES
1623 | 2023

Jo and Matti

A poem by
Laura Plummer



400
STORIES
PROJECT

In 2022, I started researching the lives of my Finnish great-great-grandparents. Josephine and Matti Petkelkangas (Peterson) immigrated to Gloucester in the late 1800s. This poem is based on my findings and is dedicated to their memory.

Jo and Matti

They bravely crossed the ocean
Escaping Russian rule
An older blacksmith, Matti
And Jo, a lovesick fool

They married Christmas Eve
And lived on Langsford Street
Young Matti worked the quarries
So both of them could eat

He quickly learned the language
And taught some to his bride
She'd greet him, "Welcome home"
His heart would swell with pride

Her *viili* was perfection
Her *nissua* was sweet
And when they danced the *polska*
He'd sweep her off her feet

A master of the stone
He worked the whole week through
Jo scrubbed his dusty trousers
And packed his lunches too

They were not long alone
For soon the children came
A tribe of sons and daughters
To bear the family name

When Matti started coughing
Jo looked at him and sighed
"You ought to see a doctor"
"No money," he replied

In Nineteen-Hundred Seven
They lived on Munsey Lane
His cough became persistent
Combined with chills and pain

One morning in the springtime
Jo woke to find him cold
He'd left his body in the night
At forty-nine years old

The pregnant widow crumbled
The babies toddled 'round
Jo laid her head upon his heart
But didn't hear a sound