

Did you know?

Home of the Sontiainen

Driving down Highway 2 south of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, one can see a large ship named Sontiainen ("Small Dung Bug"). It turns out the ship was built by a Finn named Tom Sukanen (1878–1943) during the Great Depression. His plan was to use the vessel to sail back to Finland.

Tom Sukanen was born in Kurjenkylä, Finland, as Tomi Jaanus (Domianus) Alankola. He immigrated in 1899 to Minnesota, where he married Sanna Liisa Rintala (1888–1914) born in Korttesjärvi, Finland, and became a farmer. In 1911, he left his family and walked 600 miles to his brother Svante in Saskatchewan and set up a homestead. Returning to Minnesota seven years later, he found that his wife had died, their children living in foster homes, and their farm abandoned.

In 1929 he made a visit to Finland. The journey encouraged him to begin his dream project – making the next trip home on his own sea faring ship. Finally, after six long years he had almost completed his work. Neighbors, however, found him so weak that he had to be helped to his feet, and took him to the mental hospital. While he was in hospital, some locals looted and vandalized the ship and scattered his gear across the prairie. 29 years later the ship was reconstructed and sited to what is now the Sukanen Ship and Pioneer Village Museum.

Tom Sukanen has been the inspiration for a number of plays and artworks like Ken Mitchell's play *The Shipbuilder* (1979), Andreas Schroeder's novel, *Dustship Glory* (1987), the 1985 short film *Shipbuilder* by Stephen Surjik and the 2009 film *Sisu*, by Chrystene R. Ells.

Read more: <http://www.sukanenmuseum.ca>



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