

Sointula, 100 years

Homecoming Weekend in Sointula was a tremendous success. It was organized by the Centennial Committee as the last in a series of observations of the first 100 years of Sointula. Perhaps 400 visitors joined 800 island residents for the celebration – made possible by the efforts of most of the residents as volunteers.

The weekend started on Saturday, May 18, with an assembly featuring speakers and songs. Local residents Kelly Edwards and Lenny Pohto spoke of "sisu" and "community" as keys to the efforts of the first settlers. Visitors Matti Linnoila (great-grandson of Matti Kurikka) and Peter Lonnberg (representing the Canadian Embassy in Helsinki) spoke of their respective connections to the community. Judy Brunet sang songs she had composed for the occasion.

Saturday afternoon was arranged for visitors and residents alike to renew old acquaintances. A "coffee house" was set up in the old Athletic Hall for visiting and relaxing, and hundreds of people made their way through the Sointula Museum in small groups. The museum had just finished an addition that tripled its space, and included a special exhibit – "100 Years of

Photographs". A local committee had spent a year looking at some 20,000 photographs offered by local families, and selected about 500 for display. Saturday evening concluded with a catered dinner in the F. O. Hall and an impromptu concert by the Hilltoppers, a local group playing old fashioned dance music.

On Sunday, the activities moved into high gear. The community put on a huge parade with nearly as many people marching or riding as stood along the sides of First Street. Then the Sointula Recreation Association and hundreds of volunteers presented a huge picnic at the ballpark. It involved lots of food, artisans' booths, games and activities, entertainment from a stage, a beer garden, and a picnic dinner. The evening was filled with two dances - one offering traditional dance music and the other "baby boomer" rock and roll. Both were sold out. The rock and roll dance was so successful that when the hired disk jockey tried to stop at 2:00am (as in his contract), the dancers on the floor took up a collection and hired him for another hour or so.

Monday was a local holiday and the day for most departures. Still, the fun continued with a pancake breakfast and a closing assembly. At that assembly, Wanda Laughlin, the President of Recreation, spoke of the island's sense of community and its wonderful volunteers. The Sointula Singers closed with a concert of songs about home, and when they sang "Island Home" there were few dry eyes in the hall.

Tom Roper



The two ladies Doris Wirta and Gladys Gemroy were born in Sointula 80 years ago as the Michelson twins, now visiting "home" at the F. O. Hall in Sointula. Tom Roper in the middle. – *Photo: Annemarie Koch.*

Niskanen Award 2001

Finnish-American Historical Society of the West Editor Gene A. Knapp and Treasurer Merle Reinikka have been honored with the prestigious Niskanen Award for the year 2001. They were presented the

award at the annual meeting of the Scandinavian Heritage Foundation in Portland, Oregon. The award states, "Creators and preservers of NW Finnish Historical monographs." i.e.. Accounts of the Finnish-American people and their continuing contribution toward the development of the US.