

THOMAS AND THEODORE THOMPSON

Petrine Gesine Gabrielsen was born on October 13, 1858 in the parish of Spind, Norway. She married Tarold Thodor Tomassen in 1878. When her husband died Gesine immigrated to America. She left her two sons, Thomas and Tarrel Theodore with her mother.

Petrine Gesine then married Bernt Sakarias Johnson in Whitehall, Michigan, on November 5, 1885. In approximately 1887, Gesine sent for her two sons from Norway. They joined an already growing Johnson family. Gesine and Bernt had five children; Sigval, Gustava, George, Berdina and Jessie. Petrine Gesine died during childbirth on June 27, 1894. She was only 36 years old.

Theodore never used his first name of Tarrel. He went by Theodore or Theo.

The Johnson family resided in Whitehall until approximately 1889 when they moved to South Manitou Island.

Thomas and Theodore Thompson married sisters. Theodore married Matilda "Tillie" Beck on August 21, 1899 and Thomas married Hattie Elsie Beck on October 3, 1900. The brothers moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1900. It was difficult to research the records as they used the surname of "Johnson" out of respect for Bernt Johnson.

Theodore and Matilda's first two children were both born in Grand Rapids. Ralph Theodore was born on January 21, 1900 and Irene Laura on February 20, 1902. Theodore was working as a motorman for the GR Railway.

I believe the brothers moved back to South Manitou Island in 1904.

Thomas Thompson worked as a fisherman. He and Hattie (Beck) had two children. Beatrice was born in Glen Arbor Township on September 11, 1904 and George on March 1, 1907 on South Manitou Island.

Thomas was the US Mail Carrier from 1908 to 1910. Thomas' boat was named the "Beatrice".

Thomas had a very short life. He died on June 14, 1910 at the age of 31 from drowning. The logbook from the South Manitou Life-Saving Station reads as follows:

"At about 10:30 this am. the surfman on duty in watchtower reported that he heard screaming and from movements of a woman on the beach two miles north of the station believed that there was something wrong there. The crew were in the surfboat at the time the alarm was given and pulled to the scene immediately.

Upon arriving learned from the woman who was on the beach that her three year old son had fallen overboard from a skiff about one hundred yards from the shore where the water was twenty feet deep and that her husband had jumped overboard to rescue the child and was swimming

ashore with him when he sank.

At about the same time they disappeared from sight, the skiff drifted ashore. The wife took it and pulled to where she had last seen her husband and son struggling in the water. Caught the child as he rose to the surface, took him into the boat and pulled it ashore.

At about this time the station crew arrived and two of the crew immediately commenced resuscitating the child while the rest of the crew grappled for the body of the father. After working the artificial respiration for twenty minutes, the child was restored to natural breathing.

After about forty-five minutes, the body of the father was recovered and the artificial respiration was worked for one hour and twenty minutes, when a physician arrived and pronounced life extinct and the cause of death, the bursting of a blood vessel.”

The child, George Thompson, was saved but his father died.

Thomas Thompson was buried on South Manitou Island.

Hattie (Beck) Thompson became the Postmistress on SMI on July 29, 1910. She also cooked and cleaned for the members of the Life Saving Service. She later married a member of the Life-Saving Service, William Barnhart. Hattie lived to be 103 years old.

After his brother's death, Theodore took over the mail service. Theodore eventually purchased his own boat and named it after his first daughter, "Irene". He carried the mail over to Glen Haven. In the summer months, Theodore carried the mail over on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In the winter he only had to go twice a week. When the lake froze over, he had to walk across pulling a large sled. Theodore was the mail carrier from 1910 to 1915. He lost the bid in 1916 at which time he joined the United States Life-Saving Service and continued his fishing business for income.

Theodore also used his boat to haul wheat, grain, and potatoes for the farmers on the island over to Glen Haven. The goods were sent on the North Michigan Transit Company to Chicago.

Theodore and Matilda had two more children. Floyd Sigval was born on May 2, 1908 and Clarabell Cesene on December 31, 1909. They were both born in the house that Theodore built on South Manitou Island.

Besides fishing, Theodore rented a small house at the dock where he and Matilda sold cigarettes, cigars, and candy to residents and individuals who came in on the boats.

Matilda (Beck) Thompson died at the small store on July 9, 1912. She died from Peritonitis (appendicitis). Matilda was buried in one of her lovely dresses. She was a beautiful seamstress. Not only did she make all of her own clothes but sewed all of the clothes for the children.

Theodore then hired a housekeeper from Frankfort and went on with his fishing business. He caught white fish and trout in his pond nets. The fish were packed in crates and iced down for shipping to Chicago. Theodore was paid thirty-five cents a pound.

One day Theodore went out to pull up his pond net and got it part way up when he noticed a big fish and knew he couldn't handle it alone. At about the same time a Navy training ship was in the harbor and Theodore saw some of the men in their rowboats. Theodore called over to them to help him bring the fish out of the water. A couple men got out of their boat and into Theodore's pond boat and it took two men plus Theodore to pull the fish out of the water. It was a big sturgeon, which weighed 170 pounds when they got it on the scales. In order to clean the fish they had to get a block and tackle to hoist the fish up to the ceiling in the fish shanty. Theodore cleaned and cut the fish into several pieces. The sturgeon filled up two boxes, which were then shipped, to Chicago. He received forty-five cents per pound for the sturgeon.

Island life was not easy. All groceries and supplies had to be brought over to the island from the mainland by boat. In the winter, ice was cut in large blocks from the little lake, which was located in the center of the island. The ice blocks were used for refrigeration, as there was no electricity. It was hauled by sleigh to sheds in the village.

The children all walked to school. Most of them walked a mile and a half. A wood stove provided heat for the school. The children had to use "out houses" located in the surrounding woods. Once in awhile during the summer months, a minister would come over and hold a church service in the schoolhouse.

Theodore spoke very fondly of August Beck and his family and Bernt Johnson. He remained close with his Johnson stepbrothers and stepsisters.

Theodore decided to leave the island after his son Floyd and daughter Clarabell passed their eighth grade examinations. His son Ralph, had joined the Coast Guard and Irene had gotten married.

The family moved to Manistee, Michigan in 1922. Theodore got a job as a machine helper. They only stayed in Manistee for one year before moving to Frankfort where Theodore got a job on the Ann Arbor Carferry Service. The family stayed in Frankfort for four years. Theodore then moved to Ludington, Michigan where he worked for the Pere Marquette Carferry Service. After two years, Theodore moved to Manistee with his daughter Clarabell and her husband. He lived with them for many years.

Theodore Thompson died on February 3rd, 1966 in Manistee. Theodore will be remembered as a quiet, kind, and hard working individual.

Submitted by Sandra (Thompson) Black, granddaughter of Theodore Thompson.