



# The Gogebic Roots Quarterly Newsletter

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By Ed Sandene

The Gogebic Roots Quarterly Newsletter is a publication of the Gogebic Range Genealogical Society, Inc. The Newsletter is published quarterly in January, April, July and September. We are located in Ironwood, Michigan, USA. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 23, Ironwood, MI 49938.

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Membership dues are based on a calendar year starting with the date of enrollment. The expiration date of your membership is shown on your membership card. If renewal of the dues is not received by the expiration date a reminder is sent. The reason for this is twofold. First and foremost we value your membership and hope you continue to support us. Secondly, our Bylaws state that a member in arrears 30 days after the anniversary date shall be removed from the rolls. Please keep in mind that one reminder only is required in this same section of the Bylaws and is sent in hopes that your membership continues without a lapse. If any member has a question regarding this please feel free to contact us.

Thanks for your continued support.

## The Parachutist

My earliest memory of events at the County airport is when a Ford Tri-motor airplane visited there. I think that we were there because there would be a parachute jumping exhibition that day also. This would have been my cousin, Walter Simila. The events as described were documented in two newspapers, by his sisters and by one of his fellow pilots.

Walter was born in Finland in 1910 to Kalle and Alma Simila. They emigrated to the United States in 1913 and settled in Ironwood township. Their farm was about one mile East of the Airport and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile South of Airport road. He was to become very familiar with the airport as he grew up. According to his sister Miriam, he was a daredevil from his early childhood. He would climb anything, he ski jumped, rode motorcycles and later took up parachute jumping and anything else that was a thrill to him. You have to keep in mind that this was back in the late 1920's and during the 1930's when a lot of this was just beginning. His sister said he had the first motorcycle at least in that area. He also loved to work on engines and was a mechanic at the Chicago Aviation Corp. His business card lists him as a Master Mechanic and a Parachutist.



According to an article in the July 12, 1941 issue of the Duluth News Tribune, he said he learned to fly straight, then started stunt flying, and then switched to parachute jumping which seemed to satisfy his penchant for thrill seeking. He took his first parachute jump in 1939 while working at the Chicago Aviation firm. He then became a demonstrator for the Triangle Parachute Company. Earl Minkin told me about this chute and Walter's ability with it. Earl said, "He could land on your back steps with it."

I talked to Earl about their exploits and he said they used to go barnstorming to various locations around the area. He was going to check his log books but unfortunately we didn't get to discuss that.

Maybe someday the logbooks will surface and provide some more information. It sounds like they were pretty adventurous.

**I LIVE WITH DANGER**  
**Ironwood, Mich., Daredevil Will Attempt to Break the World's Parachute Record With 50 Jumps in a Single Day**

By Art Juntunen  
 Special Correspondent

**W**ATERSMEET, Mich.—A cool and fearless little guy who thinks playing hop-scotch among the clouds with a silken umbrella is the safest sport in the world will seek to break the world's parachute jumping record Sunday, July 27, at King's Gateway, famous resort near here. He is Walter Simila, 30-year-old Ironwood, Mich., daredevil of the skies. As daring a cloud-hopper as ever pulled a shroudline, he is gunning for the coveted (among parajumpers) title held by George Waltz, who leaped 38 consecutive times in one day on Aug. 4, 1940, at Westchester airport, Chicago.



DAREDEVIL WALTER SIMILA

This is the headline in that paper on July 13, 1941. He was preparing to try to beat the current record for parachute jumps in one day. This record was held by a George Waltz who leaped 38 consecutive times in one day on August 4, 1940 at Westchester Airport in Chicago. Walter planned to make his attempt on July 27, at Kings Gateway in Land-O-Lakes. This was to be conducted as a second class air-show with no planes permitted to fly while Walter was in the air. He had 162 jumps to his credit without so much as a scratch. He had started his aerial career 8 years before when he took up flying and two years ago adopted parachuting as his real love. At that time there were 300 professional jumpers like Simila and the jumping record was a coveted prize among them. Walter had all of the professional papers including those of registered packer and registered mechanic. He had packed a chute in 7 minutes and was a veteran of scores of daredevil shows throughout the land.

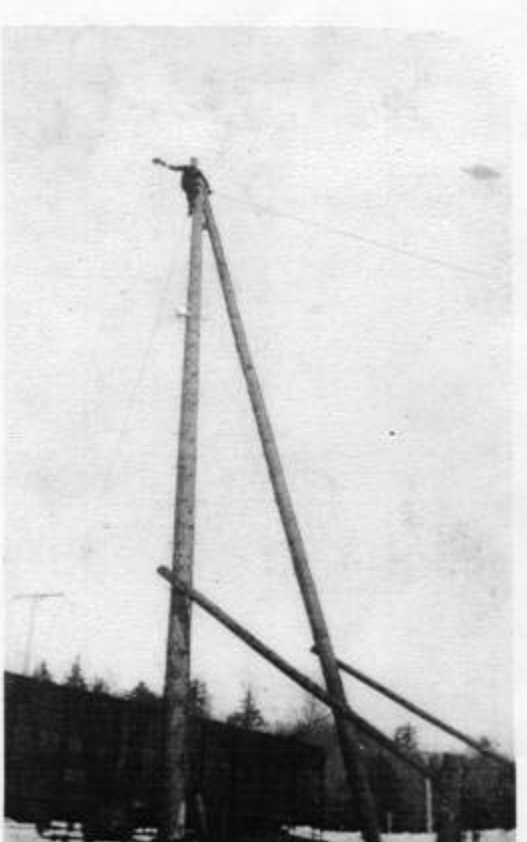
He preferred the triangular chute because he said, the triangular chute travels about 14 feet per second compared to the 21 feet for the circular chute. This he said makes landing easier with less impact. It is also more steerable and doesn't oscillate like the round one. This equipment cost him \$650.00 and would last four or five years. He was doing his training in Ironwood and had some exhibition jumps at other shows before the attempt for the World's record. He had just completed his tests for the professional credentials mentioned. Earl Minkin told me he lost the "riggers license" because he tried this event without waiting the required 30 days.

There was a vast throng of people at the Gateway Airport at Land-O-Lakes on Sunday, July 27, 1941. Pilots were Jerry Gendron and Earl Minkin, both friends of Simila. He was described as a modest, square shouldered active fellow of 30 years. The riggers, experts from Cincinnati, Ohio made sure each of his two chutes were packed correctly for each jump. The jumps were recorded by C. L. Noelcke Sr. an NAA official and manager of the Triangle Parachute Company of Cincinnati.

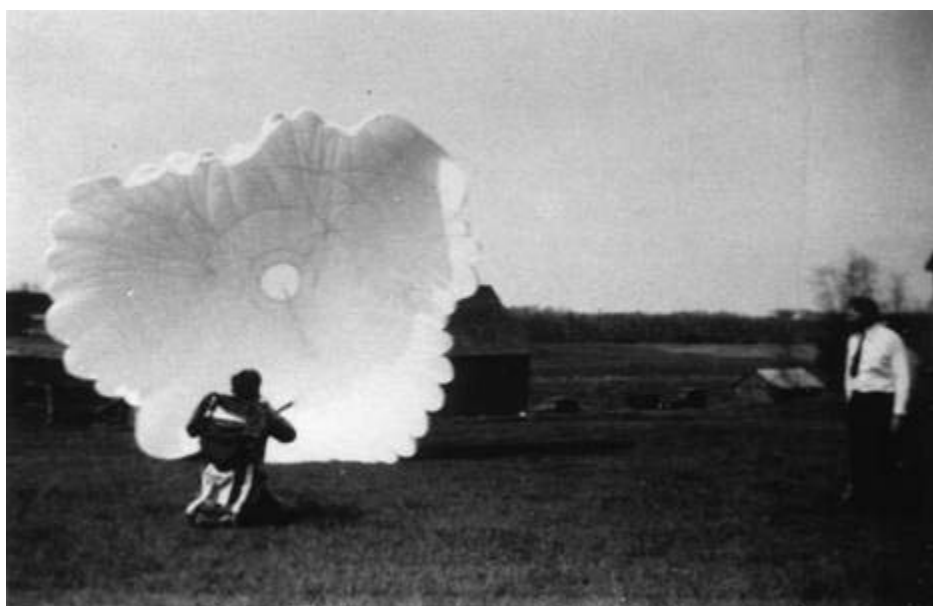


This was taken at the Gateway Airport on that eventful day. In the front row starting at the left are his sisters Miriam and Evelyn, the woman with the hat is his mother Alma, then his wife, and Walter in the white jump suit. His brother Carl and sister Irma are to the right in the picture. In front by the parachute is Judy who is Irma's daughter. Walter made his first jump at 4:50 AM and at 1:58 he passed the record of 38 consecutive jumps. Then he rested for lunch, and continued on until sundown with his last leap, the 46<sup>th</sup>, which was a new world's record. A ground crew of experts from the Triangle Parachute Company assisted as did one girl rigger, a Miss Cheryl Williams. She had planned to take her first solo leap alongside Walter but had to cancel due to the high winds. According to Earl the high winds slowed down the attempt for a new record. He said Walter could have made many more if it had been a calm day. In fact at about 2:00 in the afternoon he had to stop for a while because of the winds.

“I live with danger” seemed to be Walter’s motto throughout his life. His mother said they had to keep an eye on him all the time because of his activities. When he would visit a logging camp where they were working the men would urge him on because he liked to climb anything that was available like this log jammer.



He also had one of the first motorcycles in the area. He loved working on engines and did a lot of work for others.



Here Walter is landing at their farm. His sister Evelyn said “he often came home by parachute”. Miriam said once he came home from a trip and instead of landing at the airport he had Jerry Gendron fly him over the farm. His mother was working in their potato field and he landed right alongside her. Needless to say she was a little surprised. Jerry Gendron also took Walter’s mother up for her first airplane ride which thrilled her.

Miriam said she used to fly with Jerry and Earl starting at an early age. Earl used to say, “Hey kid, you want to go for a ride?” Once on the way back from Land-O-Lakes he cut the engine and told her she had to jump. After awhile he powered it up again and had a good chuckle about that. Miriam said when she left with Earl, Walter had told her “You sit in that seat, don’t you dare jump”. That was because he knew that his sister wanted to do what he was doing. At that time she was “just a kid” so she listened to her older brother. He was 15 years older so Miriam was barely in her teens if even that when she started her adventures in the air. She liked doing loops with Jerry and once flew in an open cockpit biplane but she doesn’t remember who the pilot was.

This story was put together with the help of Walter's sisters , Miriam and Evelyn. Evelyn provided some pictures, his business card and also gave me information about Walter's life. Miriam provided a lot of information about Walter and also about her own flying experiences. The Duluth News article provided excellent information because it was done as a personal interview with Walter . A cousin, Del Lehto, who's mother is pictured below with Walter, also provided pictures



AILI SIMILA

WALTER SIMILA

Thanks to my cousins for being so helpful.

Written and edited by Ed Sandene

**Our newsletter has been created by Joe Carlson since we started producing it. Joe has recently written a local historical novel. He will be actively involved in the marketing for this project, The Murder of Andrew Sigler. It should be back from the publishers shortly. One of our original society members, Connie Conley Noyes, has stepped up to the plate to take over the newsletter. The format and material contained within may be changing. We invite our members to submit ethnic recipes, and genealogy Most Wanted Ancestor queries (dealing with our area). The amount of space allowed for queries will vary-dependending on other articles for the newsletter.**

**Queries should include;**

**Ancestors name –first, middle, last, maiden if a female.**

**Names of parents, siblings, birth or death dates, place of residence.**

**Time period you believe they lived on the Gogebic Range.**

**Any connected friends or family surnames.**

**How you are related to the person you're researching.**

**And most importantly; a way to contact you.**



### **Our Officers are**

**Gary Harrington, President**

**Diane Egan, Vice President**

**Andrée Carlson, Secretary**

**Eddie Sandene, Treasurer**

**Carol Schleker, Membership**

**Dwight Filippini, Cemeteries**

**Tim Egan, Librarian**

**Our board meetings are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month  
from 10 am to noon at the Bessemer Historical Society**

**Everyone is invited to attend.**