

Big Louie Needs A Monument As Tall As He Was!

(revised 3/21/12, Dana Richter, Salo Road, Hancock, MI, drichte@mtu.edu)

On September 16, 2013 Big Louie Moilanen, the Copper Country Giant, will be gone for 100 years. He deserves a monument as tall as he was! A tribute to him. A memorial to his honor.

All Big Louie has now is a small granite stone at his grave in the Hancock Lakeside Cemetery. The stone bears his name, his height and weight – not even his birth date or when he passed away are on the stone. Very sad.

Big Louie was born in Finland in 1885 and came to America with his parents when he was just four years old. Big Louie grew up in the Salo area north of Hancock. He worked as a farmer, a miner, a justice of the peace of Hancock, and a saloon keeper. The granary he built on the farm in Salo was moved to the grounds of the Houghton County Historical Society in Lake Linden. This project was coordinated by Mike Gemignani of Franklin who is very keen on seeing a fitting memorial to Big Louie in place.

People the world over know about Big Louie. You can Google him on the internet. His 8 foot 3 inch stature got him a place in the Guinness Book of World Records. In Finland especially, Big Louie is a folk hero. There is a monument to him in the town of his birth in Puolanka Finland. He traveled with the Ringling Brothers Circus, although he did not like the attention and, true to his roots, returned to the Copper Country. Sadly, he died young at age 28.

2013 is a momentous year for the Copper Country. Finn Fest will be here and Hancock will celebrate its sesquicentennial. The Michigan Historical Society will have their annual meeting here. Now is the time to plan a fitting memorial for Big Louie, perhaps in one of the city parks. Porvoo park on the Hancock Canal would be suitable, or the small park up from the Bridge on Dunstan St. or at the Hancock beach park, or the small park on Hancock St. where the farmer's market used to be. These are just some suggestions.

Terry Wiitanen, of Champion Monuments, says he could get a stone monument for cost, and with a brass plaque the project would probably be under \$5000. I already talked with several people who will gladly donate. A meeting will be set and donations will be requested. The cost for a brass statue of Big Louie was quoted at \$50,000, and this may be something to obtain at a later date.

Ideally, the monument should be in place in the spring of 2013. There could be an unveiling at Finn Fest, June 19-23. Then there could be a city dedication and memorial on the anniversary of his passing in September. Other events could also be held throughout the summer.

The monument should be as tall as he was and should have a brass plaque respectfully memorializing his life and all Finnish Immigrants who came here and worked hard. The monument would be visited by many people and be a tourist draw. His footprints could be set in a concrete pad below the monument -- shoe size 19! People would stand in them and have their picture taken. They would say, "This monument to Big Louie is as tall as he was. Look how small I am compared to him!"

The monument could say something like this on a brass plaque affixed to the stone:

**A MONUMENT ERECTED
IN MEMORY OF BIG LOUIE MOILANEN
THE COPPER COUNTRY GIANT OF SALO
BORN 1885 IN FINLAND
DIED SEPTEMBER 16, 1913, AGE 27
8 FEET 3 INCHES TALL, 560 POUNDS
A KIND AND GENTLE GIANT**

Many people including Hancock businessmen have expressed their support for a memorial to Big Louie and donations have been pledged. Jim Kurtti, Director of the Finnish American Heritage Center is strongly supportive of the project and looking into possible locations for the monument. The idea was presented to the Hancock City Council on 2/15/12 and was well received. City Manager Glenn Anderson said the City would find a place for the monument pending approval by the City Council.

Hancock Township Where Big Louie Grew Up Supports a Monument

At its regular February 2012 meeting, the Hancock Township Board unanimously approved "A resolution supporting the establishment of a memorial honoring Hancock Township native, Big Louie Moilanen, and agreed to promote the project among township residents."

Houghton County Historical Society Support

At their board meeting 3/13/12 the Houghton County Historical Society adopted a motion to support the Big Louie Monument Project. They agreed to form a three-person committee to advise and guide the project and maintain a separate fund for donations for the monument.

A quote for an 8 ft. 3 in. polished granite monument with a brass plaque has been received for \$3,400. With a concrete pad to rest the monument on, it is estimated that approximately \$5,000 will be needed. If more is raised a better monument can be purchased. Your support is needed!

DONATION FORM – BIG LOUIE MOILANEN MONUMENT PROJECT

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____ (put *Big Louie Monument Project* on the subject line)

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Tel # or email _____

Send donations to:

**Big Louie Monument Project
Houghton County Historical Society
PO Box 127
Lake Linden, MI 49945**