ED ON MAYNARD CHARACTERS

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When there were thousands of Finnish immigrants and their children here in Maynard, there were men and women for all sorts of jobs.

The Maynard 100 anniversary history book speaks of some of them and my memory provides a few more. Eino Nyholm was a golden gloves champion in the 160 pound category of amateur boxing in 1932. Eino tried to make it as a professional but he was not successful and gave up boxing. He was a Maynard police officer until his retirement.

Leonard Olilla won the 100 meter free style swimming title in 1934. He was the first Maynard Finn to win a first place. Ollilla took part in many swim meets with great success.

Väinö Kauppi was America’s most well-known cornetist at one time. He played in many famous bands. He died in New York City.

Maynard Finns also had a vocal trio: Veikko Mänty, John Erickson and Väinö Kauppi. They sang on a Lexington radio station and at Finnish festivals. Frithiof Tofferi was a well-known flutist, both a teacher and a soloist.

Wrestling was popular among the Maynard Finns. Väinö Ketonen, Matti Kangas and Matti Tervo among others. Matti Tervo also served as a police officer until his retirement.

The athletic club “Tarmo” (part of the local chapter of the Finnish Socialists) successfully held track and field events for the public’s enjoyment.

The Ypsel youth league played basketball at Parker Street Hall where they won the town championship for five years, centering on 1928. The team consisted of “Kike” Kangas, Bill Kangas, Armas Frigard, Jim Leithead, Wäinö Ojalehto, Tony Colombo and Joe Boulden.

Then there were both band and stage directors. I mostly recall Lauri Koski and Oscar Tofferi. Lauri Koski wrote and composed the musical “LaBella”. He also did the script and conducted the orchestra for the performances. “LaBella” was shown eight times which was unheard of here. It was presented at the Finnish Worker࣪’s Hall in New York City and at almost all the Massachusetts Finntowns to full houses.

Of the stage directors, I remember Otto Fonsell from the early years and then Oscar Räsänen who directed in Maynard for many years. I am grateful for his instruction which was not always dispensed with gentleness.

Then I can mention a few others who made themselves famous with their actions. There was Heikki

(the family name is not important here) who was considered to be a believer in the Temperance movement for he was never seen in any of the local taverns. Eventually suspicions of Heikki’s temperance arose. In the summertime, he would be seen each evening walking downtown in the twilight, always carrying his oil canister. How could he be using so much oil for his lamps that the canister had to be filled daily? Some of the neighboring biddies followed him one day, staying well behind him. Their suspicions were right! Heikki and his canister disappeared through a cellar door of the Maynard House Hotel. There the canister was filled with a refreshing beverage that is enjoyed by the mouth.

Then there was an inventor, Joonas. It was said that he was so completely lazy that he tried to invent something that would make life easier for all of us. I remember how he sawed wood for the kitchen stoves of the neighborhood women. He raised the rear wheels of his Model T Ford up off the ground, attached a belt to the driving wheel which in turn drove a circular saw. The only problem was that a stationary engine would soon overheat and it had to be shut off to let it cool. Joonas smiled to himself, satisfied with his invention. The profits were not great but his wife worked in the local woolen mill as a weaver and so there was bread to eat.

Joonas stayed at home and tended the chickens. He tried to invent something so that when the hen had laid an egg in his nest, she would look behind her and not seeing an egg, would hopefully proceed to lay another one. Production would double! The next door neighbors reported that the invention was not successful.

There was also a Maynard correspondent for the newspaper “Raivaaja” who was very proud of his position. The theatrical group of the Socialist chapter pondered at one of their meetings about ways to get more people to their plays. They decided to pick someone from the group to write the publicity since the regular correspondent was not interested in stage plays and thus neither promoted nor critiqued them. Without further ado, I was picked to write. In fact, they had advised the paper that it would be me. Of course, I wrote since I had not learned to say “no”.

A week later as I stepped into the smoking room down at the hall, I bumped into the regular correspondent who inquired of all other men present: “Who could that bungler be who tried to write news in the “Raivaaja?”

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No one knew the answer.

Ed Helander