

A HISTORY OF THE MAYNARD FINNS Verner Niskanen

The first Finns reached Maynard in 1883. The woolen mill was the enticement that had drawn them here, even though they were not accepted into the weaving department at first. The first Finnish women to become a weaver (1888) was Hannah Linna (nee Weckström) who arrived here that same year. There were 22 Finns in the mill at that time. After learning to weave, she taught 80 workers, a record. Thereafter Finns have worked most of the looms, now at about 70%. In 1892 there were 64 Finns. Kansanoja, one of our oldest Finns, arrived that year.

WORK SCHEDULES AND WAGES

The work day was 10 hours and until 4 pm on Saturday. Wages ranged from four to six dollars per week. In 1894 under a Democratic president, wages were reduced by 10% and the mill ran only 3 days a week, sometimes only 2.

SOCIAL INTERESTS

There were no common goals among the Finns with the exception of men's drinking and card-playing groups. To fill the leisure hours, remembering old country habits, they chose a parson, a judge, a lawyer, a juror and a bailiff who handled any arguments among the men. Matters were usually settled fairly and the condemned fellow was fined, having to pay for the booze. Then the judge and the victim drank it up.

Women's life was generally centered at the home. There were only four families in 1892.

It was dangerous to be out in the streets for the women, especially alone in the evening. You might get a good beating. The citizens of the town, especially the young, harassed the immigrants with all sorts of tricks. Even in the schools, even in later days, Finnish children were mocked by the others.

RELIGION AND CHURCHES

There was no established church for a long time; some minister would come from outside to give an occasional collection sermon. A man called "Antti" from Cape Ann had come to spread God's word. Following the service, Antti and the men had gone and drank up the collection. Once there were plans for communion and the wine had been procured. A guy then announced that the men could drink up the rest without Antti, who left in a huff and never returned. A congregation and minister were formed about 1900, a free church congregation. Then a synod congregation was founded, which later became a Lutheran church. There were also Laestadians and Pentacostalist as well as some of the Salvation Army.

CULTURAL EFFORTS

A temperance society was formed in 1895. The group was small, it is not much bigger now. The temperance society can be considered to be a first attempt at cultural undertakings. Meetings were held in the hayloft of an old stable as well as elsewhere. The early activities bounced back and forth. A member was expelled and then re-accepted the following week. Today the membership is more settled and they own their own hall, a park where they have festivals, a band, an athletic program and a drama group.

WORKER'S SOCIETY

In 1903 the Worker's Socialist Society "Taisto" was formed. It first belonged to the Imatra League. The activities of the temperance society did not satisfy the more open-minded members so they left and founded "Taisto". On leaving the Imatra League, the membership fell from 60 to 12. After they joined the Socialist Party, the membership has continued to grow, being at its highest today, in spite of the communist split. It has its own hall and a festival park with a pond and athletic field. There is a band, a chorus, orchestra, drama group etc. Activity is spirited and it is in a leadership position as far as societal and cultural undertakings are concerned.

NATIONALISTIC ATTEMPTS

In 1904 a Nationalistic Society was formed. Patriotism had struck the Finns. Folks from all the various societies joined. There were plans for a large hall which would be a center for all the Finns. A foundation was built. Arguments ensued. The legal case took 10 years to settle, the lawyers' fees taking the land and the foundation.

BUSINESS VENTURES

The first business was opened in 1890 when Alex Heisson opened a grocery store in the cellar of the so-called Depot Block (tipo bloke).

Around 1900 several Finnish little bourgeois had opened stores selling groceries, food, shoes and clothing. Early on there was a partnership attempt but the manager ran off with the funds and the business failed.

In recent years there have been several restaurants and coffee shops. There are five public saunas, each serving its own political clientele.

COOPERATIVES

The cooperative known as United Cooperative Society was founded in 1906. It was small at first and progressed with difficulties. Now it is the largest and most versatile business in town. The Nationalists also founded their own cooperative which does business mostly with its own membership. They own a store on Main Street.

The living arrangements for the Finns were originally quite crowded and dirty. Living was generally in cellars, 8-9 men in a room, four to a bed. Dirt covered the

floors, one could hardly get in. Today the Finns own hundreds of one-family homes which are clean and neat. By nationality, the Finns are in second place in home ownership. The Finnish population, counting children, is about 2000 today.

SECRET SOCIETY

I have failed to mention the Knights of Kaleva. They also exist locally. They own property in Acton on a lake, where they hold their parties

There are also several farming families scattered around Maynard.

GYMNASTIC AND SPORT CLUB "TARMO"

The club was formed in 1904 independently, using the name "Sauva" (staff). In 1908 they renamed it "Tarmo" (energy), in honor of someone from Pori. Activities and membership grew, possessing a trained group of gymnasts and track and field men, reaching its peak from 1912 to 1916. There were but few meets in which the Tarmo athletic teams did not take first place. Antila, Arola, Hiipakka, Tofferi, Niskala and Sipola and many others have represented the society with honor. During present league days, we have been leading scorers, we have brought home the winner's cups. The present group are all self-made as we have but few Finnish stars. Saarinen, our star on the apparatus events is the only one who was trained in Finland. This year he won first place in the league championships in apparatus events and the Tarmo team won first in staff. The athletes of the current generation are Aromaa, Erickson, Frigard, Jar-vinen, Helander and others. There are many more men in the Young Socialist League, especially runners. Their team won first in relay this year after a fierce battle. The leaders have been Kemppinen and Kansanniva (twice over and for several years). Fonsell, Sipola, Saarinen and currently and for several years, Hiipakka. We have also had the honor of forming the governance of the League in Maynard.