

THE FINNISH PEOPLE IN MAYNARD

The first of the Finnish people in Maynard came not long after the incorporation of the town, sometime during the 1880's. Conditions being what they were in Finland under Czarist Russian rule, the lure of "streets paved with gold" was too much to withstand. The first five families settled on River Street (as related to me by John Saisa). John's father Topi Saisa, John H. Simons and Weckstrom among the five. Many of the later ones however settled on farms throughout the entire Acton, Stow, Maynard and Sudbury area. By 1894 they were numerous enough so that the Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in 1895, and the Finnish Temperance Society in 1898. People of the Congregational religious persuasion occasionally had meetings in homes and the Temperance Hall with Rev. K. F. Hendrickson and Rev. Andrew Croup coming from out-of-town. In 1903 the Finnish Congregational Pastorate was established with Rev. W. W. Sundeline as the first minister. The Imatra Band was organized in 1899. A newsnote of January 5, 1900 tells of a new Finnish Cooperative store on Main Street. (This was the predecessor to the United Cooperative Society subscribed for in 1905.) In 1903 the Finnish Workingman's Socialist Society was organized.

The Lutheran Church, founded in 1894, built the church building on Glendale Street in 1907-08 at a cost of \$8,000 and dedicated in June 1908. A parsonage was built in 1928 at a cost of \$6,225. It had no synodical connection until November 10, 1908 when it affiliated with the Suomi Synod. They had fourteen pastors up to 1934. A Sunday School was organized in 1906; Ladies' Aid Society in 1906. There were one hundred seventy-five members in 1934 at the 40th anniversary cele-

bration at which Jacob Laurila, chairman of the celebration committee, recited a history of the church. In 1967 the church moved to a new building over the town line in Sudbury, at the junction of Great Road and Waltham Street.

The Finnish Alku Temperance Society was founded in 1895 and moved March 23, 1900 from Harriman Court to the Whitney building. English classes were started with Mrs. James Coulter in charge in November 1901. A temperance society Eastern summer festival with twenty-eight towns represented, five bands, had between one and two thousand participants at Pumping Station Grove, Winter Street, in May/^{16,}1902. and July 4, 1902. October 16, 1903 the Society moved to Darling's Block, corner of Summer and Nason Streets, taking over the Associated Templar's rooms. The Acton Street quarters was converted into an Italian boarding house. July 15, 1904 new quarters were obtained in the old school building on Main Street owned by James Mullin. A naturalization society was organized February 24, 1905 by the Temperance Society. Over one hundred persons went March 1, 1907 to Boston to get first papers. June 18, 1909 fifty went to Cambridge for second papers. July 29, 1910 the Temperance Society/^{opened}~~opened~~ its new building on the corner of Harriman Court and Main Street, which it was to live in until the organization was disbanded in the early 1960's. Through the years, the Summer festivals held in various Finnish communities drew thousands of people from all over the Eastern seaboard. For example, June 26, ¹⁹²⁵~~1955~~, the festival being here at Vose's Pond had three bands, dramas, sports, with about eight thousand people in attendance. The Society also had a Summer place in West Concord called "Punkaharju". Activities of the Society included program evenings, dramas, chorus, a band(the National Band) sports,(Kanto A.C.)

gymnastics, and jointly with other temperance groups in town a yearly campaign to vote liquor out of town.

The Finnish Congregational Church, established as pastorate in 1903 had the following Ministers up through 1913: W.W. Sundeline, L.P. Miettinen, J.E. Sillback, A.F. Wirta, John Vaanen. ^{and} Meetings were held in the Temperance Hall, Haynes Hall(Riverside), harness shop near depot in 1904, and American Congregational Church Chapel in 1905. The cornerstone of the church building was laid May 23, 1913 with one thousand people in attendance, different ministers speaking. The box imbedded in the cornerstone contained: Finnish hymn book, song book, Finnish calendar, picture of W. W. Sundeline(first Pastor), history of the Free Mission Church, names of all memers and officers, Finnish coins, copy of Evangel, Jouluvista, Maynard News, Maynard Enterprise, Finnish Friend, North Star. August 29, 1913 the church vestry was dedicated with appropriate exercises. December 19, 1913 the church dedication took place with many ministers in attendance. The C. E. Society of the Church was set up in 1905 with twenty members. The Sunday School was organized in 1907 with seventy-five members, and the church had sixty-five members in 1913.

In 1903 the Finnish Workingmen's Socialist Society was organized. It carried on sports, dramas, gymnastics, wrestling, acrobatics, dances, program evenings. It bought Voses Pond area and set up the pavilion and track, fixed up the pond for swimming, held Summer festivals there which drew thousands of Finnish people from the Easter seaboard. The Imatra Band became part of this society. The Tarmo Athletic Club was organized which participated in all sports. For those that remember

that far back the basketball rivalries of the twentie's have had no equal since, with Tarmo usually in the lead. A hall was built(John Pettokarju, builder) in 1909 with a two day dedication in November. The hall was enlarged in 1916. The 13th anniversary of the Society was celebrated for three days with the opening of the new hall in January 1917. The United Cooperative Society was initiated by this group. With the passing of years the Society as a viable group is now in 1969 just a memory. The Parker Street Hall was sold in 1920^{69.}

In June 1915 the Knights of Kaleva was organized as "K.R. Knights of Kaleva" and the Ladies Auxiliary "Saluttaren Tupa K.N". The Alku Temperance Society Hall was used for the initiation with 175 persons in attendance. This Society is founded on the great epic poem of Finland "Kalevala". It is similar in precept to the Odd Fellows and Rebe^kkas. It is reported that the Kaleva Society has camp and grounds at a lake in Littleton. In 1933 the parent group set up the "Young Kalevas". The Knights of Kaleva is still alive as of this writing and have headquarters on River Street.

During the Finnish-Soviet Winter War of 1939-40 all of the Finnish organizations in town ^{united} ~~united~~ to raise funds for Finnish relief, with the exception of the Finnish Workers Federation. A symphony orchestra composed of the best Finn musicians in many communities in Massachusetts (including many from Maynard) led by one of Finland's leading directors toured New England for this beneficial purpose.

As with all other ethnic groups, the off-spring of the original settlers have more or less moved into the main stream of American life, into their own homes, vocations, hobbies and raising an American fam-

ily. Quite a cry from the peasants of May 23, 1902 that were ordered "to vacate homes just built by the American Woolen Company on McKinley, Roosevelt and Harrison Streets in the new village because they were packed sixteen to a house built for six, burlap bags fastened to the walls to make rooms in half, spikes in wall for this purpose, wood chopped on floor". Freshly arrived from the old country there was no room otherwise. Quite a far cry, wouldn't you say?