FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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Could you tell me a little bit about your coming to America; what it was like when you first came here; when you first came to the Copper Country and how you felt about America when you first came here.

It was little bad, we didn't know the language much. But a young fellow like me, you tried to pick it up and I picked it up. And that's why my older brothers shipped me to college to learn the language.

You said you also learned German there at the college?

Oh, yes. 3 years

So you knew Finnish, some German and you learned English also.

What year did you come to America?

1906. First time

Then you mentioned that you went back and brought your parents in 1910.

My brothers and sisters, they shipped me over there to bring father and mother over here.

Why did you come to America?

Well, I don't know because I had 3 brothers and 3 sisters here, well, I wanted to come too, and see them.

PL: Did you think it would be a better life?

Well, I suppose, because they talked a lot about America and this country and good jobs and all that stuff.

All your brothers and sisters moved to this area?

PL: ya, they were.

PJ: Could you describe briefly what it was like your first house that you lived in?

PL: My brother, he had a nice big house down Gay. Although he had many, many children, too, but still the house was big.

PJ: And there was room for you to stay there.

Oh, yes

What year did you go into service then?

1917

When we declared war on Germany

PL: Yes.

Was there a lot of Finnish boys from this area that went?

PL: Oh, yeh.
Tell me a little bit about your experiences overseas, in Germany, and what you did there.

Well, I went through 3 battles. And one was the Argonne Woods. 12 days and 12 nights. And the bullets they were shooting all over, You didn't know where they were coming from. But God was with me, I didn't get even wounded.

You mentioned to me previously that you interpreter for the commanding officer

That was in Germany.

After the war was finished?

After the war was finished

that's where I was.

Then you came back in

I was corporal in the service. I went through corporal school.

Then you came back to the United States in 1918-19?

1918, yes. We had terrific parades. General Pershing, he came on the same boat; our company was there.

One in New York and one in Washington.

Did you have some other Finnish fellows in your company? That went with you from here?

PL: No

PJ: They got split up and went different places?

How about telling us about your college experiences, what year did you go to Suomi College?

1919. '12 was the last

What was it like there?

I liked it.

PJ: Did you know President Nikander?

Oh, yes.

Tell us a little bit about him.

He was teaching, too, and he really explained everything right

I was in his class.

PJ: What class did you take from Him?

PL: Religion

PJ: You said you went there 2 years; did your brothers and sisters go? To Suomi?
Can you tell me about some of your other experiences, things you remember from Suomi?

Even the funny things?

Sure. Those funny things are the important part of this.

In the fall, Halloween night, one of our students dressed up in girl's clothes. And painted his face. And went in Rev. Hartlund's room. And he went to sleep in Rev. Hartlund's room. Rev. Hartlund was in town; after he came from town, he saw this "girl" in his bed, he spit, psteam, 'come in my bed', and while he started to go in the clothes closet to take his clothes off, then the fellow run out and he didn't know who it was, and boy, the teachers and Rev. Nikander, they tried to ask us who it was. We didn't know, he thought we knew, but we even said, is there something like that happen, ya, and even a month after they tried to ask us who it was; it was Hugo Hillila, (he's dead now) and he was a funny young man, he liked to have fun all the time.

Do you remember any other funny experiences? When you were there, or even when you were in service?

PL: Only in Germany they didn't believe that I was a Finn, they tried to ask me in Germany what part of Germany my father and mother was from, they tried to be kind of funny to see what part of Germany my father and mother.

PJ: Just because you had learned German at Suomi

PL: yes, and I sang them a song and they were sure that my father and mother were German.

PJ: What was your first job in the Copper Country?

PL: It was outside job, shoveling and wheelbarrows, and that's why my oldest brother--because I was sort of skimpy--and the shovels and wheelbarrows were too heavy so he sent me to college. Them days outside work was lots of shoveling, and all that stuff.

PJ: How much money did you get paid for your first job?

PL: It was $48 a month

PJ: Do you remember the strike of 1913?

PL: Yes

PJ: You were in Gay at that time. Did they strike out there, too?

PL: Yes

Pretty bitter feelings?

At times, yes.

Remember any incidents that took place?

No. I guess in Mohawk they had some fights, but I wasn't there

Did the Finns in Gay and other places in Copper Country, Ontonagon, etc., did they get along well with the other people?

PL: Oh, yes
PJ: Did you get along in the Stamp Mill or the mill in Ontonagon, quite well with the other workers?

PL: Oh, yes.

PJ: Even if they weren't Finnish?

PL: We got along fine.

PJ: No difficulties between nationality groups?

PL: No, no. Like my brother had, they lived in different houses, and kids had their own,

PJ: Did the Finns have a good reputation? Among other people, do you think?

PL: Oh, yah, they call 'em good workers.

PJ: They went to work every week?

PL: Oh, yes.

PJ: What did they do for a good time on Saturday night?

PL: There were dances, but I didn't dance; I didn't go to dances. Just because I went to college I 'spose that why I didn't go to dances?

PJ: Did they go to drinking? or some other kind of thing?

PL: Oh, there were, yes, drinking.

PJ: That was what they did on a Saturday night? Go dancing, or go to bars?

PL: Yes.

PJ: What was a Finnish marriage like? was it any different than marriages today?

PL: I don't think so. I think it was the same.

   Got married by a minister.

PJ: They have to ask the parents if it was OK?

PL: Oh, I imagine so, yes.

PJ: Were the funerals generally in the home? Or did they have the funeral at the funeral homes for people who died?

PL: Well, naturally in church.

PJ: Were most of the Finnish people here very religious?

PL: Well, yes, but there was one time this communists, they got quite

PJ: Communists in 1920's?

PL:

PJ: Can you tell me some more about what it was like?

PL: I wasn't with them because they was many in Ontonagon; I just heard about it and read
about it, like in Copper Country too,

PJ: So there weren't really church-oriented?

PL: No

PJ: Was there a lot of temperence societies?

PL: Oh, yes. There was many of them

PJ: In the 1920's? Did you ever belong to any of those groups?

PL: Well, I was in close enough

PJ: Who were some of the Finns who were looked up to? In Hancock area, or Gay area, or area of Ontonagon? You went there in '26 you said. Like Nikander?

PL: Yeah

PJ: He was looked up to by the community? As a leader?

PL:

PJ: Did the Finns of the Copper Country have difficulty finding jobs when they came here?

PL: No, because things were going fast at that time; the mines were working and new mines starting and there was lotsa places to get jobs.

PJ: Did they hold jobs pretty well?

PL: Oh, yes.

PJ: Or did they quit work and start something new? Or did they stay in the same jobs?

PL: Same jobs.

PJ: Were any of your brothers and sisters in the mines at all?

PL: No, stamp mill. One was in the mine for a lil' while. He was older than I am but he didn't like it.

PJ: What was it like living through the depression? 1929-30, you were in Ontonagon at this time. What was it like there?

PL: Like myself I was getting good money, I was machinist.

PJ: And you worked all the way through?

PL: Yes, Sundays, too.

PJ: Did you continue to get paid even though a lot of people were out of work?

PL:

PJ: How did the people feel when the depression was going on? What did they say? What did they do? There must have been some people you knew who were out of work, got laid off.
PL: Where I was

PJ: And neither of your brothers got laid off?

PL: No.

They all worked right through the depression.

Ya

What was your day like? What kind of work did you do as a machinist?

Making new parts for machine and repair the old machinery in the paper mill and I was running a lathe. I was a lathe man.

PJ: How many hours a day did you work?

PL: Eight.

PJ: Eight hours a day, that was even in 1920's?

PL: It was first 10 but then it went to 8 and we liked that, yes.

PJ: How much money did you make? Did the pay go down? during the depression or did you make just as much as before?

No, it was the same thing. Like machinists, they were better than the ordinary guys

So you were making what?

PL: Little more than the regular guys,

PJ: Hundred dollars a month, couple-hundred dollars a month in 1930?

PL: Ya

PJ: What are some of the other—most people consider the depression to be a hard time in the Copper Country because the mines started to close at this time and lot of people had to go and work on WPA, etc., what other hard times were there in the Copper Country, in the Ontonagon area, Gay, besides depression, do you remember any others?

PL: No, I don't

PJ: The Finns become involved in politics very often? Political parties?

PL: Oh, that's been always.

PJ: In Ontonagon were they involved in politics? Democratic party or Republican party?

PL: Oh, yes.

PJ: Were you an active member in the parties?

Well, I've been a Republican all my life. Once I voted Democrat; Wilson, because his campaign speech was "Vote for Wilson, vote for peace". And I didn't care for war. A few months after I was going to war.
PJ: Maybe that was the first time you voted then?

PL: I mean, the Democrat. First time I voted, I voted Republican. before.

PJ: Wilson ran in when? 1912-14?

PL: Ya, but then he was president, yes, again he was running, and his campaign slogan was "vote for Wilson, vote for peace". So I voted for him, vow, then few months after I was called to army. But I didn't look at him when we paraded in Washington, they were sitting down, the captain said, "eyes right", to look at them, I didn't look no, no.

PJ: You didn't think he was such a good president, cause he got you over there fighting.

PL: Ya. On his lie, too; that was a lie, when he said so nicely, "vote for Wilson, vote for peace".

Were you an American citizen already at that time? in 1906

Sure. It was 5 years after I landed/that I became American citizen But my oldest brother took 7.

PJ: What was it like living here during World War II in Ontonagon?

PL: I was working hard, I didn't

PJ: Working 6 days a week?

PL: Yes; all of us fellows, in the mill,

PJ: You didn't have to worry about going to war that time.

PL: No

PJ: Do you remember any Finns going back to Finland? After being here for awhile?

PL: I've been telling nice about good ol' Uncle Sam. I've been saying this way: that when I was working for Uncle Sam when I was in the war, he paid me $25 a month. Now I'm not doing a darn thing for him and he's paying me 75-78, so good ol' Uncle Sam, he's in his second childhood. (laughter) That's what he's paying me now, $78.75. And when I was with him 1917-18, $25.

You paid into social security when you were working, though

Oh, yes.

All the way. When you were working in the stamp mill, paper mill.

Oh, yes. They took it from my checks.

What church did you belong to? Did you belong to the church in Gay?

There wasn't no church in Gay but Rautanen used to come

PJ: Had service in the home?

PL: Hall.

Many people there?
PL: Oh, yes.
PJ: And he came once a month?
PL: Yes.
PJ: And when you were in Ontonagon, you went there too.
PL: There wasn't no Lutheran church there that I know of, that time, but now there is

Do you remember any colorful characters, funny characters who lived in Ontonagon, did funny things, people who lived in Gay who were out-of-the-ordinary, not quite the same?

(silence)

What was the people's attitude toward the minister? How did they feel towards the minister? and the church?

PL: They liked it, yes.
PJ: Did they visit the homes then?

PL: If they was invited to, yes.
Like Rautanen took care of many separate congregations, and Gay is not much time

Pj: Quite a drive. Very difficult for him to drive in the wintertime.

PL: But in the hall we talked with him for a while.
PJ: Did you enjoy being a machinist?
PL: Yes.
PJ: Enjoyable work for you.

PL: When I think at first when I came to Ontonagon, great big shovels,
PJ: What did you do?

PL: Shovel. Shoveling dirt there, making ditches and all that stuff.
PJ: When you first moved to Ontonagon?

No, but when I first went to Gay. That was the work down Gay, shoveling.
And my oldest brother said, you go to college so I don't have to shovel. Shovel is too heavy for you.
PJ: Then you went to college and came back and worked as a machinist.

Yes, they gave me a job as machinist at Gay

Pj: How come you moved from Gay to Ontonagon

PL: There was a master mechanic, his name was Jenkins. He was master mechanic down Gay. Then 1925 he quit Gay and he went to Ontonagon to be a master mechanic at the paper mill. Then they needed a big lathe operator so he told the big fellow there, that I know
the fellow I made a machinist out of, he's down Gay, so I got a letter from Ontonagon and he asked me to come to Ontonagon and so I went. And I worked there 28 years until I retired.

PJ: When did you move there? 1926?

PL: 1926

PJ: And lived there until 1954.

PL: ya.

PJ: You lived right in Ontonagon then?

Yes. He wanted to learn me the machinist's job down Gay. He went down and they needed a big lathe operator, he told them big fellows in the paper mill, I know the guy, I made a machinist out of him. Came to me to Gay and asked me to come work so I went.

He's probably not there any longer.

No, he's dead.

For a long time already, since the war? Did the paper mill go very well after the war? Was it very busy?

PL: Yes

PJ: The same paper mill that's still up there now?

PL: Well, it's different owners. The mill is the same but different owners.

PJ: It's the one that's out of Ontonagon there. To White Pine, along the lake there

PL: Yes. These new owners, their head office is down Ohio some place. I got a letter from there that they bought the paper mill but they brought the men too and they giving me the pension.

PJ: Do you recall some favorite Finnish sayings or stories that you would like to put on a tape, some stories that you remember from before, and you can put them on in Finnish you can, hymn or verse or anything along that line.

PL: [silence]

PJ: When did people get angry? Why did Finnish people get angry? What kind of thing?

Someone did something wrong to them, anybody would get angry.

Do you think they were any different than anybody else up there?

No.

Why did they settle up here?

some place

Why did you come? Just because your brothers lived here?

PL: Yes.

PJ: Why did they come here?
PL: I don't know; they heard a lot of good things about America.

PJ: And they came to the Copper Country?

PL: Yes.

PJ: They thought Copper Country was a good place?

PL: Yes.

PJ: When did they come here? In the early 1900's? Or 1890's?

PL: They must have because I'm 84 and my oldest brother, I was only year-and-a-half old when he came.

PJ: Why do you think some of the other people came here and moved here?

PL: Same thing, there was lot of talk about America, and jobs and they get good money and all that stuff.

PJ: The Finnish people came here because there were other Finnish people here before?

PL: Something like that, yes.

PJ: What did you do when you weren't working in Ontonagon at the paper mill? What kind of things did you do? What did you do at night?

PL: It wasn't because we worked 7 days a week and had to rest too.

PJ: Go out ever? Visiting?

PL: Sometimes. Summertime I'd go ride to my relatives.

PJ: How far did you live from work? From the mill?

PL: Not far. Maybe like from here to that store. It was close.

PJ: So you didn't have to walk too far, like in the wintertime.

PL: No.

PJ: If you walked to work, you didn't take the car in the wintertime.

PL: Oh, no

(end of tape)

PL: I was in Ontonagon when it was in the Mining Gazette, that there's a blacktop road from Mohawk to Gay, well, I didn't believe it, but I went to officer and I told him about the road that I got stuck and he read it in the Gazette, too, I had the Gazette, there's a blacktop road and I'd like to see the road although pretty hard to get time off, but that's allright as long as you don't believe it, so go and take a run up there. That was a long run from Ontonagon to Mohawk and Gay and sure enough. There was a blacktop road.

PJ: When was that? What year was that?

PL: I forget; a pretty long time ago.

PJ: Before the war?
No, after the war

PJ: After the war. And you said one time you were taking a trip with your

PL: Ya, with my nephew, with the car and stuck on the clay road. That wasn't a regular road, only a wagon road.

How did you get—when you moved in 1926? to Ontonagon? By car?

Ya. I had a car then.

And you moved there by yourself?

Ya.

And lived in a small apartment or something?

There was a house with a store and then they had some rooms upstairs, ready, for people

It was a Polish fellow, he had a store there.

A grocery store?

Ya.

How did people get along in the mill? Did they get along quite well?

We got along; didn't have no trouble.

Were there other people besides Finnish people working there?

Oh, yes. Lotsa' them.

Was Ontonagon a big town? 1926?

It was quite a town.

Bigger than now?

No, I think it's bigger now. I haven't been there this summer yet. Generally once a summer I take a ride there. And now they got a beautiful new highway from Greenland to Ontonagon. That's what I like to see, and I haven't seen it yet, so I have to take a ride up there, and see that road.

What did you do in the wintertime around here, around Ontonagon, did people go skiing, skate?

PL: Skiing and skating, started this last some years; there wasn't any when I was living there.

PJ: Not very much, not when you were in your 20's or younger, you must have been about what. 20 years old, 30 years old when you started in Ontonagon?

28.

PJ: Did the owner of the mill have the pension plan started when you got there in 1926?

PL: No, it started many years after.

What were taxes like at that time? How much did you pay for taxes, do you remember?
Single fellow,

PJ: Not much. Did you pay house tax at all, or property tax?

PL: I didn't have my own house, but people, yes.

PJ: And you didn't have your own house until you moved here to Ripley?

PL: Yes.

PJ: So you lived above the store or some other place?

Yes.

PJ: Did you live in the same place from 1926 to 1954?

Down Ontonagon?

Yes.

Yes.

Oh, the same place. The same people own the store too?

Ya.

What was the name of the store?

PL: Joe Felix. Although he was Polish fellow, he changed his Polish long name to Felix

PJ: And you lived upstairs of his store.

PL: Yes

PJ: How do you feel after all these years, since you're 84 years old, how do you feel about life, or what is your feeling about life? And how it's been towards you and how do you think it'll be in the future?

PL: That's something, I can only think of God, he give me really good health, and everything is fine.

Do you think things have gotten better? Since 1920?

PL: Oh, yes.

PJ: What do you think of people today as compared with people of 1920's and '30's? How do you compare them, or do you try to compare them?

If they could see them, they couldn't hardly believe it, living at that time. This young generation if they could see it, because it was altogether different.

PJ: Did the college in 1910 have electricity and all that?

PL: Yes.

PJ: Did the place where you stayed with your brother out in Gay, did he have electricity?

No, there wasn't electricity in the houses them days

Outdoor toilets?
PL: Outdoor toilets in the wintertime, had to run outside

PJ: Didn't have any indoor running water until later.

PL: There was a pump in that kitchen. Hand pump, every house down Gay had a hand pump in the kitchen.

PJ: Did it freeze up in the wintertime?

PL: No, it was in the kitchen. It wouldn't freeze in the kitchen

PJ: What was it like living in the house; was your brother married?

PL: oh, ya.

PJ: Have any children?

PL:

PJ: So you have nieces and nephews, in the Copper Country area.

PL: Yes, one here in Ripley, Mrs. Karkkainen

PJ: What was it like living in that house with your brother?

PL: I don't know, it was fine

PJ: What kind of food did you eat?

PL: Compared with the food from the old country, it was lots better and finer.

PJ: Did you have meat?

PL: Oh, yes. And never heard of pie in Finland, and/apple pies and stuff in America.

PJ: What did the kids do? What did your nieces and nephews do for entertainment out at Gay?

PL: Everything. They were just playing together. Outside, too.

In Gay we were getting $48 a month and it was $18 room and board and they wash the clothes too. That was the price.

PJ: Did they rent out rooms to other people too?

PL: NO.

PJ: Just to you. Your other brothers and sisters, did they get married also?

PL:

PJ: Any particular reason why you didn't get married? Felt like you wanted to be by yourself?

PL: Oh, I was married once.

PJ: Have you?

PL:
Have you? I didn't know that.

Yes.

When you lived in Ontonagon?

Yes. She died.

And you've been by yourself ever since that time?

Ya. She didn't live long after we got married. Was an old lady.

Married in 1940's?

Ya.

What do you think that visitors should look for when they come to the Copper Country? People that have never—maybe been here once or never been here before, what do you think they should look for? What kind of things made you stay here? I'm sure that there are times that you could have moved and gone to Chicago and Detroit?

PL: I don't know, I thought when I retired, I live in Copper Country, my young life so I think I go back there. That was my idea.

What makes the Copper Country great? What makes it good? What's so good about it?

I don't know; I had pretty good job when I was down Gay.

People friendly?

Yes.

Have you ever gone to, did you go in 1920's and '30's, take any trips to Green Bay and Duluth?

PL: No. In '33 I went to Chicago. There was a World's Fair there; Legion had a convention.

PJ: That's right, you're in the American Legion.

PL: Ya. I been down in Ontonagon but they got Legion here in Hancock, too; I was commander there.

When I was Chicago, I bought Paul Bunyan's diaper pin.

PJ: Paul Bunyan's diaper pin?

PL: Ya.

PJ: It's a big one alright.

PL: Oh, you bet. And you should have seen the Paul Bunyan stuff in Chicago. My goodness! The buggy, too. You haven't seen those buggies, the horses used to pull those.

PJ: Oh, they had those.

PL: Ya. And we were this high, I could just get my fingers up on top.

PJ: How long did you stay in Chicago?
A whole week.

Did you drive down there?

No, train.

Were there quite a few trains up here then?

Oh, yes.

Lot of trains came to Houghton, Hancock and Ontonagon area.

Ya. And I made a thing for World's Fair, too.
And I saw it over there.

PJ: What did you make? In the machinist's shop?

PL: Ya. The Fair company asked all the business places, and Copper Country, too, to send something; whatever they would want to send; they didn't say what they had to but whatever the company each think they could send so the paper mill had me make Paul Bunyan's porcupine quill; it was a crowfeet, \( \frac{4}{3} \) inches long,

It was a quill-like?

Ya. And there was lot of Ontonagon boys and the superintendent, Lloyd Heard, and we went the same bunch and we see

I said, there's a dandy, Mr. Lloyd right away, started to say, "there was hundreds of people all around.

PJ: So you got to see it when you went to Chicago

Yes. And then the lumber company, Ontonagon, they made a Paul Bunyan out of a great big

Boy, there was lot of Paul Bunyan stuff there.

That must have been the major attraction, the Paul Bunyan stuff.

Ya.

Did you take any other trips when you were living in Ontonagon besides to Chicago?

No.

That was the only trip you made. Take any after you retired? In 1954?

No.

PL:

In 1954 you moved to Ripley and lived here. Visit my relatives here.
Like down Gay, too, I have a niece and nephew.
There's only two of us left, me and my sister. And this coming November she will be 89

I'd like to thank you very much for the time for this interview. And I'm sure Suomi College is very appreciative of this.

(end of tape)
Memoirs of Paul Lanto

CHILDHOOD DAYS

My parents were originally from Finland. After they married they moved to ______. In 1910, my father worked as a farmer. Mother and Father raised 9 children. Whenever anyone became ill, we returned to Finland, home care was very good. As a family we took part in church, school church. The teacher who influenced me the most was ______. The good times we had were swimming, fishing, skating, clean rivers in Finland.

MAKING MY MARK

When I started on my own, I was a farmer. Since then I have worked hard, was operator of steam mill.
The first time I voted for U.S. President was in 1928. Getting married was wonderful. The local minister often came from Calumet. The neighborhood was friendly. The people in our neighborhood were very good. Each person had 3 cents. People got riled up here when mines began closing. In our community we looked up to the minister. My biggest accomplishment was ______. The best time of the year here was ______.

REFLECTIONS

Today my feeling about life is that my life has been good. In this area we need visitors who come here should. My prediction for the future of this area is ______. Collecting these memories about it ______.
Paul A. Lantto, 83, passed away suddenly at his home in Ripley on Tuesday afternoon.

He was born April 12, 1888 in Pudasjarvi, Finland, the son of Valpuri and Matt Lantto. He came to the U.S. in 1906, settling in Gay where he was employed by the Mohawk Mining Co.

He was a graduate of Suomi College and a veteran of World War I, serving overseas in France as an attendant of the Blackjack, General Pershing.

Mr. Lantto moved to Ontonagon in 1929 where he was a member of the Ontonagon Amie of Eagles, the Modern Woodsmen of America and past chaplain of the American Legion Post of Ontonagon.

He was also employed there as a machinist for the National Container Corp., retiring in 1952.

Mr. Lantto had lived in Ripley since 1954.

He was a member of the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church of Hancock.

Surviving are a sister, Mrs. Anna Nisasko of Detroit, and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.

Funeral services will be Friday at 1 p.m. in the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, with Rev. James A. Clark and Rev. Martin Hollinien officiating. Burial will be in the military section of Lakeside Cemetery.

The body will be taken to the church one hour prior to services. Friends may call at the Watz Chapel today, Thursday, afternoon and evening.