FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
(Funded in part by the National Endowment For The Humanities)

(Funded in part by the Keweenaw National Historic Park Advisory Commission / U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents get married - 1920</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents never got citizenship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents come to Copper Country after</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper Strike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's Jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eläntö Boarding House</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Newspapers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father a Socialist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not influenced by Socialistic Views</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors believed in Marxism - 1930</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist-Bible Camps - NO GOD</td>
<td>5,6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations - Riots</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper Country not geographically remote</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning English in Grade School</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Antagonisms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm children verses Village children</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents encouraged Education but against</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors influential in decision to be a</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minister</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suomi College - 1942</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Teachers at Suomi</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Seminary Experience at Suomi</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention of 1946</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish Experiences</td>
<td>12-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Flying</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suomi College in the 50's to Present (1972)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I'd like to begin, Olaf, by asking about your father and mother, where their home kylä or place was and when they came to America.

Olaf: Well, my father was from north Finland, North central Finland, the parish was Vihanti, he was born in a small village and I'm not entirely sure which of the villages it was, probably near Aaltuva, or Ilveskylä which is—used to be Korpikylä once a upon a time; and my mother came from the Tornio river district of Finland, Norbaten in Swedish, the name of the village was Armasjarvi and the mail address was Luppio.

Art: Do you recall what years that was?

Olaf: Yes, my father probably came during the Copper Country strike, yes, my father came during the 1913 copper strike and the reason it's remembered so well, because of the family story told over and over again, was that as he was coming in England, the announcement was made "tanä samunna Kupari lako alkanut, kaikki joka tahtoi muutta, liikku Kanadaan",--Swede apparently speaking Finnish poorly made the announcement and the migrants were given the opportunity to switch from their Copper Country destination to a Canadian destination, which he did, and then mother came from Sweden about 2 years later and would have probably been in 1915 or 16 because she mentioned that as they were on the high seas, there were frequent scares of submarine attacks by German U-boats.

Did your parents ever discuss with you the reasons why they came to America or left Finland?

Olaf: Well, apparently one of the strong reasons for my father coming was the fact that his father, my great grandfather, had left earlier due apparently to family pressures, uneasiness; he was a "vähy" or a son-in-law in a modestly wealthy home and never quite accepted so he abandoned his 3 sons and his wife, my father being the oldest son, and left and became, as it were, a single man in the United States then. And subsequently died here in Northern Minnesota but at the time my father came, he was in his late teens—17, 18 or thereabouts—maybe a little older—19 or 20. And he came to establish contact, re-establish contact with his father, whom he hadn't seen for a number of years; so there were probably things pushing him away from Finland and equally strong reasons, attracting him here.

Art: But employment was not a major factor then?

Olaf: Well, I'm sure it was because apparently the destination was the Copper Country and it was never apparently too sharp as he related these stories in the home, there didn't seem to be an all-compelling reason of which he was conscious—-

My grandfather died during the influenza, during the flu winter

Art: which was—

Olaf: I think 1918. So there would have been contact for possibly 4 or 5 years. My mother was also, I guess, seeking work, probably adventure seemed to play a little more role in her and then, also, the fact that she apparently didn't have a tremendously good relationship with her father. My mother's father, the maternal grandfather apparently was a kind of rigid type whether the main reason was religious rigidity, Laestadian in northern Sweden, or merely because he had a poor relationship with young people including his daughters so she apparently didn't mind leaving the home in order to escape and gain a certain kind of independence and freedom. Dancing was a big issue, for example, the permission to dance.
Art: Did either of your parents change their names once they got to this country or this shore?

Olaf: No, they didn't change other than the obvious one for marriage.

And when did they get married?

Olaf: They were married in 1920.

So World War I was already over and—

Olaf: Right.

Was your dad at that time in the process of being naturalized, getting his first papers, whatever?

Olaf: No, and he never did. Neither one did; father is dead, mother is living; neither one of them ever bothered to get citizenship, that's the way I think probably characterize it, because there was no compelling reason to do so, not that they might have been strongly addicted to applying for citizenship, except probably for the reasons of language, as long as language was a requirement this would pose some problems for both of them, more so for mother. However, a second thought on that occurs that they, neither one of them, after they had the means: in later years, to return to Finland or Sweden, respectively, to visit, neither, both of them have refused persistently against encouragement to do so, so apparently there was a pretty strong severing of ties with father initially and with mother subsequently. Because she planned to go back in 3 years so there was some rejection of the old, initially with father and then progressively with mother and especially after her mother, after World War II, came to this country and lived here 2 years and then died here, the severence from the old country was complete and thorough.

Did they ever learn how to speak English?

Olaf: Father could, while he was living, speak very adequately to get along with the necessities of farm, selling and buying and trading and handling the agents and so on, mother's is more limited than that, she can get along with the grandchildren; she is very embarrassed to speak English if there is anyone present who can speak Finnish, then she'll say, say this in English.

Your father then went to Canada first and then came to this area?

Olaf: He came first to northern Minnesota, around the vicinity of Ely.

Did he marry your mother there, or here?

Olaf: No, he lived in Ely where my grandfather was and he apparently spent a year or two in Ely area working in the lumber camps, and I guess for a short period on railroad construction and it's not clear in my memory whether the railroad construction was on the Canadian side or on the U.S. side but it was lumber camps in the Ely, Minnesota area. Then there was a move probably in 1917 or so to the Copper Country.

Did he ever mention to you, I believe there was a strike in 1916 in Minnesota, did he ever mention this to you or anything about working class struggles in the lumber camps?

Olaf: No. There was no mention of that. He did say that the reason they left the Minnesota area working in the lumber camps in the Ely, Minnesota area. Then there was a move probably in 1917 or so to the Copper Country.
Art: In this area he settled down into farming—never did mine, did he?

He apparently mined very little; he did have some experience with mining companies but it was apparently for a brief period of time and I always gathered that he was reluctant to talk about this and it was my feeling that either he wasn't tremendously interested about the persistent kind of labor where you report on time, you work at the grace and by the command of someone else, a foreman type, so that he apparently didn't do that very long, he very quickly moved into woods work here, into some farm work and then for a short period of time, he apparently was a manager for a Finnish cooperative boarding house in South Range,—Elântö.

Art: Do you recall, were there just Finns in that boarding house?

Olaf: Yes.

It wasn't tied to the mining company in any way, was it?

Olaf: No, apparently the spirit in the boarding house was more socialistic anti-church, however, not extremely radical apparently.

How long did that "Elântö" survive?

Olaf: It was still surviving after I was born in my time of memory which was

Olaf: I was born in '23 and I remember as a small boy visiting the Elântö in South Range right on the main highway that goes through town about 1 block from the blinker light there and then it burned, it would have been in the late '20's that the building burned and that terminated the activity.

Art: When your father was getting situated here, what types of newspapers did read? Did he read the Työmies? Did he read the Suometar? Do you have any recollection of the press

Olaf: I recall him mentioning, throughout his life he was a reader of the Työmies, mostly Työmies and then apparently he read the other publications from the Työmies publishing house while it was in Hancock and then again while it moved to Superior. I remember Lappatossu, the comic magazine and the annuals and the quarterlies, Vappu Lehti first of May magazine; these were part of the table literature at home all the time.

Did your mother share his views regarding socialism or was that basically his own thinking?

Olaf: I think it was pretty basically his own thinking, she eventually shared maybe not so much from a view point of aggressive, positive, confirmed thinking but sort of a sliding into or identifying with this kind of thinking, she was more interested in originally the social life, the hall life, dancing and she would act in plays, she would take little more aggressive roles in plays usually playing the crucial roles and occasionally I remember putting on a play with him together.

What was the play like? Do you remember the name?

Olaf: No, I don't remember that one, it's so long ago and I did it more or less to humor him. I do remember putting on a play later on directed by a very famous director from the Tyvään teatteri in Helsinki who had been in many cities; I just finished reading his books so I know a little more about him; Pentti Raunio which was "justiina"
and this was a very elaborate production but this was done when I was high school age. His role in the hall life was a musician and he played several instruments but usually he played the small accordion for dancing before the piano accordion became popular, he never played that so in the '30's he played music for the dances and was there for a "key" member in the social life and also he used to play the wind instruments in the bands in South Range and also on the farm later on when he moved to Ontonagon County, Wainola.

Did the church Finns participate in any of these dramas or the orchestra or the dances?

Olaf: Generally the church people would never participate in the dances, except the young people, they would sneak over there once in a while, I guess, they would never participate in the plays or in the more politically educational activities.

How formative an influence was your dad's thinking as you were a young boy growing up? Do you recall any incidents when he took you aside and spoke to you or, I believe you mentioned one time that you had occasion to attend summer school that was run by the working class movement?

Olaf: Yes I was always aware of the fact through my father that there was a certain philosophy, probably more influential in (blank) I always had the feeling, these of course are very subtle and psychologically oriented I guess, I kind of felt negative to my father and I've tried to analyze always why this was, part of it was, in my younger days I didn't, I was very negative about his drinking, he was jejune drunk, he was a very nice person when he was sober which was most of the time but then when he was drunk he was kind of uncouth and sort--his language took on a different tone, his tone of voice and he could be very needling but usually when he was/intoxicated he was relatively pleasant but maybe some of these were normal, some were aggravated so I didn't really believe him too much about social philosophy but there were many neighbors/some of whom have spoken about John Rova and others who could verbalize the concepts of Marxism, let's say, and community-ownership and the fact that the ownership of the wealthy should be restricted and the fact that religion was "myth-invented" or which had grown up and which was now used by the capitalist world to pacify the poor and these sort of morose things, I think perhaps the neighbors had an influence but I remember asking father about certain items and he would explain usually quite patiently what it was all about.

When you heard your neighbors speak and also your dad, along with the concepts and the rhetoric, did he ever apply it to local situations either with the mining companies or the church or

Olaf: Oh, yes; they would use local illustrations; I recall for example one of the more communist-oriented, say, pointing at a piece of ground and saying:"this is which will be the headquarters of the collective for this farming area for the "Kolhoosi" after the revolution.

And he really believed that.

Olaf: He spoke it in such a manner and with such conviction that I had no doubts in my mind that he was convinced that when the revolution has come, this will make a good site for the central collective headquarters to administer that portion of Ontonagon County.

Art: Am I guessing right in assuming that this was right around depression time, 1930's? It fits right in. What were the times like here in this area?
Olaf: Well, in the farming area, we never wanted for food. There was always meat, either from the barn or then it was available from the forest, in season or out of season and there was always fish and there were always the farm products, potatoes, rutabagas, and so on, there was a lack, however, for purchase items. I recall such things as shovels being hard to get so that shovels were made out of wood and men would use their ingenuity in making do, they would scrounge for metal, say, to make knives, to make axes, or saws or things like that. And were very ingenious so that we really didn't lack for anything, I remember a big issue being at home on how to get power for the storage batteries to operate the radio and they decided to make a generator and it didn't work because they had technical difficulties to get the propeller, which was homemade, to turn fast enough to give enough revolutions per minute to cause the generator to produce, they got about 3 or 4 amps out of it, really needed 5 or 10 to fill the battery so technically it was a failure but this was the spirit during the depression; to hear people talk about bread-lines and soup-lines which we read about in the paper from the big city and heard about on the radio, seemed quite distant and remote to us.

So they weren't as hard times as they had been pictured to be

Well, I had no doubt that in the cities where you did not have gardens or did not have barns from which to get eggs, milk, and the like; I remember coming to Suomi and people who came from the industrial area of Ohio, students my age, speaking with great passion and with great moving about how they would go out to sell flowers or pencils or things like that to get enough funds with which to buy the necessities of life.

This brings up the topic of your schooling: I'd like to ask you when you first came to Suomi but before that to back up just a bit: where did you go to grade school and high school?

The grade school was a rural school, there were 6 or 7 of them in clusters around Mass, Michigan, in Greenland Township and the superintendent from Mass administered these rural schools, gradually during the late '20's and '30's and then by '40's, most of them were discontinued and all students were hauled by bus to the central school at Mass which again in turn has gone by the way and has been consolidated with Ontonagon, the northern half of Ontonagon County, so the public school was there. The other school that I had when you alluded to a little earlier, there was some educational activity with the halls. I remember belonging to the pioneer society and this is a pattern borrowed from the communist and socialist world, we still have the pioneers in Russia and it impressed me kind of more socially, I do remember that when the leader said, "Are you ready," in unison, the group would shout, "always ready!" and I'm not sure I knew at the time what we were ready for but I suppose it was the revolution. And then as a part of that the socialists or if they had been communists, and the line was never clear to us, we weren't that sophisticated to know the difference exactly between communist and socialist, we were more aware of the fact that we were against the capitalists. They ran summer camps, usually, I believe, these were a week or two-weeks duration during the late '30's. I remember being there as about 12 years old or 11 years old and these were patterned as a summer or kind of a vacation school experience and very strongly and politically oriented or sometimes called communist Bible camps and that has to be understood by those who knew the Bible camps of that period which were conversion-oriented so--I recall these lessons being quite effective, the leader, the teachers for example saying there is no God and very dramatically demonstrating why there was no God and why this was a myth and then on the positive side--

How did he demonstrate, were they some kind of scientific experiments?
No, the one that I remember most significantly about this, she talked for quite some time, half-an-hour or so, early part of the lecture, that there is no God and that a verbal denunciation of the existence of God, and then as a concluding demonstration said, "now I've been here for the whole lecture period, speaking against God and I defy him if he's in existence, he should take punishment upon me and I'm going to walk over to that tree across the little area we were clustered in for the lecture, and let God strike me dead" and the young lecturer, girl, walked over to the tree and walked back and of course nothing happened which was pretty conclusive proof that (laughter) that there was no God except I remember one of the kids that she was at the last few steps of this "defiance walk" made some low noise "boom"; On the positive side, and this made a strong impression upon me, they organized a strike (this was one of the afternoon's activities) and we were striking for an extra piece of biscuit at the afternoon refreshment, which was served about 3 in the afternoon. The cooks had been serving Kool-aid, lemonade, some kind of beverage, I guess I coffee for those who cared for it or were old enough to have it, and then a piece of biscuit, homemade Finnish biscuit and we were striking for 2 pieces, and the cooks set up picket lines and got some scabs together and as I look back upon it, it may all have been arranged by very careful planning and deliberation but we were very serious about striking for that second piece of biscuit. And as I remember it, we won the strike, which should have been part of the lesson too, I guess.

Strike

To get you into the mentality, was there the, did they try to fulment into that "luokka taistellu" or the class hatred aspect, did that come thru?

Olaf: Yes, it was there, we were certainly aware of it; I was always aware of it, but it wasn't aggressive in such a way that, for example, to organize a deliberate riot, that didn't seem, it was a kind of a peaceful demonstration; I recall, for example, carrying in a parade a sign "Free Tom Mooney" and I had no idea who Tom Mooney was and I was embarrassed to ask anyone why I was carrying this sign which said "Free Tom Mooney" but I knew it was part of the front and yet, if someone said, "knock that sign down", I probably would have done that because I didn't have enough awareness of what it was all about. Later on in College I read about who Tom Mooney was and what the issue was and why he was in jail and then about that time, he was also freed.

Art: Who was Tom Mooney and what was the issue?

Well, Tom Mooney supposedly threw some bombs at a defense bond sale during World War I and he was on the roof apparently in San Francisco, or one of the California towns, and he was put in jail for treason or for unpatriotic behavior and so the socialists of the '20s agitated to free Tom Mooney, as we've been shouting "free Miss Davis" I get the same feeling.

Well, this strikes me as very interesting because some of you said that the Copper Country and this area is a very geographically-remote region and it seems from your experience in socialist thrust that there was a keen awareness of what was going on in America, the broader socialist movement; evidently they were keeping in touch thru what, correspondence? Newspapers? What not?

Oh, yes, and reading of books was, and pamphlets, they were part of the activity, to speak and refer to books and apparently the, as I look back now with a little more adult appreciation, there were whole lists of books published by, for example, the Työmiis publishing house in the '20's and '30's, and newspapers, these quarterlies and periodicals where we had been referring to so that people generally read a lot and were well informed and had less distractions in terms of radio and television.

Art: So that was part of your summer school experience and just very quickly to go back to the educational work in the local hall, was that held on Sunday, by the way? Or Saturday? I heard references to the socialist sunday school.
Olaf: No, I don't--the activities that I remember seem to have been during the summer, that is, the pioneer meetings and the summer school experience; I never recall deliberate conflict with, say, a Sunday morning or even a Sunday afternoon or evening, the one thing I do recall: there was a time there in the late '20's where they was a deliberate effort on the part of the local community to have a New Year's celebration instead of a Christmas celebration. And at least one year there was a "new year tree", it was a Christmas tree but on the first of January and decorated and this was apparently some sort of counter-position to the Christmas celebration at the church hall which was not far away.

When you started grade school, had you, did you know how to speak English or in this where you first learned to speak English in the grade school?

Olaf: I didn't know a word of English other than maybe one or two, I couldn't speak any English in going to grade school, then I remember the neighbor girl saying for example, you're going to go to kindergarten next year and one of the things you have to do is learn English and that seemed like a pretty frightening kind of experience. I recall also during, must have been during the kindergarten year, the school teacher spoke Finnish; we knew it, but we never heard her speak Finnish; the only time I heard her speak Finnish in connection with the school activities, was when we played "hockey" during afternoon recess and when we came back, considerably late, she took myself and 2 or 3 others who were the culprits, into the cloak room and spoke to us in Finnish and I remember her saying that "minä puhun teille Suomeksi etä ymmärrette" and then proceeded to speak in Finnish and then to address us down and to indicate that we were not to do that.

How did the Finnish youngster get along with the other nationalities?

In the grade school, there were no others.
In the country school, every kid in the school, without any exception whatsoever, spoke Finnish and was of Finnish background. Where the getting-along became a little more strained was when we moved to the Mass school, where kids from the village of Greeland and also the village of Mass came, and Greeland was in those days, typically a non-Finnish town with the exception of a Finn who lived there, while Mass was more Finnish and then some of the remnants of ethnic antagonisms came out even in the school, recess fights.

Art: Could you be specific: were there certain nationality groups that couldn't get along, especially? Or was it just a matter of personalities between different groups?

Well, I guess on both sides. The polarization was "Suomalaiset or tois-kieliset". Those who spoke Finnish and we were on that side and then those who did not speak Finnish or were from another, and we were aware that there were French-Canadians for example, Ranskalaisia, we were aware that there were others who were not French-Canadians, who were Irish, or Cousin Jack or whatever the language was; I think on both sides there were those who were kind of "fight prone" and these usually came at the dance halls or occasionally at weddings but usually at the Saturday or Sunday night dances at either the halls, most of the run by socialist groups but there were few that were kind of "general oriented": Courtney Lake was one of the ones which was run by an individual and had no political impact, was strictly entertainment and also during the prohibition times, there usually moonshine was available for those who wanted to buy so it was sold under the counter or in the near-by, round the corner or something like that so that these were the places where fights would take place and was not uncommon for fights to be

end of tape)
so very often these fights would be with Finn on one side and "tois' kiellinen" or a non-Finn on the other but these seemed to be more individuals; there were many Finns who would never—they'd back off from a fight and they just would not fight but there were others who were known as ones who would be incited or just look for a fight.

Did you ever get a feeling that other nationalities were looking down upon the Finns? Did that ever come thru?

Olaf

Yes, I think that came thru some, I was more aware of being from the farm; there were those people who were from the village and who did not have to get hayseed in their hair or dung on their boots so to speak; that seemed to be a bigger issue, we were farmers and the farm kids---

Olaf: In fact, every once in a while in my day already, the opposite was true, there were people who would say, "my, you speak two languages", teachers who came from more populated areas, from lower Wisconsin or lower Michigan, would say, "keep that, don't lose that" so that although we got the feeling although we didn't speak Finn, sometimes we avoided speaking it, and sometimes even refused to speak it, but then on other occasions there was a kind of a double standard there.

Did you get a lot of support and encouragement from your parents and Finnish neighbors in your education? Did they encourage you to go ahead and pursue your schooling?

Yes, this was—the exception in my own case probably was that not all of my neighbors were inamorated and my father certainly was with the idea of pursuing a church education and with the aim of being a minister, they would take exception of that, but to go to school or the sake of going to school for professional training and so on, this was generally praised and regarded highly and encouraged. There was however some feeling of labor doing production work where you could measure it in cords or bushels or piece work or something like that, for example, when I decided to enter the ministry, one of my father's comments was "don't go, you're a 'kansan syväpäälainen'", you'll be a parasite on society and there was a very strong, negative attitude about anyone who is not able to show some visible production. Course this wasn't consistent either because a musician and an artist was not necessarily a production worker and yet, they were highly regarded.

As were the speakers or agitators among the socialists?

Right! And theatre. Theatre was usually highly regarded and when movies began to come, people would go with great passion to see movies made in Finland, some made in Russia, and then, of course, some of the better American pictures.

Can you look back on any specific event or specific person or influence that may be looked critically on this socialist philosophy and turned you towards the church?

Olaf: I guess there was always a sort of a respect for those neighbors, all of them farmers, who bore witness to a church relationship, they were active, we would in fact examine their lives if their horse gave them trouble, did they swear, and if they were kind of peace-loving and were able to tolerate the exigencies of life and so on, this was always to their credit. And if they did have a slip of the lip once in a while, this was usually spoken about. And then a number of these farmers that I think of, would encourage myself and probably the others, too, who were from the non-church homes and they say, well, why don't you do you do this and they would maybe even give a book occasionally, catechism or Bible or Aapinen and this was their way
of witnessing.

So if I hear you right, you're saying that the witness of the lay people was a
determinant influence then. May be more so than a clergyman?

Olf: Yes, well, "generally on the farm I think the Christian neighbors, both neighbors,
were closer, the agitators on one side and the professional clergy on the other, they
were--lived far away, 5 miles away and if they visited, it was in the early days
probably once a month so that the contacts were very loose. I must say that the
others, too, usually the co-op store manager would have books and pamphlets and I
remember receiving on several occasions pamphlets from them which were also educational
on the other side. So there was some awareness of education on both sides of the—

When did you consciously decide in your mind to pursue the ministry as a career,
was it in high school or afterward?

Olf: It was in high school. Yes, I had not been baptized nor gone to Sunday school and
had not had the typical church-home experiences that my neighbors that were church
homes, young people of church homes did have. So about the Sophomore year of high
school, age 14 or so and I remember, 1 year later than my classmates, during that year
felt that I too should have the opportunity of a confirmation experience and so
spoke to the pastor who was serving and then he said, "well, it's too late this
year", but I'll be sure to contact you next year." And he did.

Who was the pastor then?

Olf: Alex Tamminen. So I remember very clearly receiving a postcard from him in the mail.
One session of confirmation has been held, I looked for you, you were not there,
please come next Saturday, (I guess it was) because confirmation I think started
before school was out, and then concluded early in June, a few days—a week or two
after school expired.

That confirmation experience was then probably in what, the middle '30's?

Olf: No, it was 1940.

Oh, 1940? Was confirmation instruction conducted in English or in Finnish?

That class in which I participate, I think there were 35 students, an option was given
the students. They could study in Finnish or English, I think of the 35, about 5
elected the Finnish option, most from home pressure; most of them, maybe 1 or 2 by
their own option. The others because they had been given the option at home to do
whichever they liked, chose the English, so the pastor did all his talking and it was
one of those 2-week sessions, 5 or 6 hours a day for 2 weeks and he would do all his
communicating in English and we sang all our songs, or most of them, for devotional
purposes in English probably and then he would ask the questions, there were the 5
Finnish kids, who were taking it in Finnish would sit in one section so he could address
and when he asked them a question, about the same material, he asked it in Finnish
and expect a Finnish answer, using the same catechism, you probably know the book.

Which is—

Olf: In both languages.

Art: And what's the book?

Olf: [pa] Catechism, the one published by the Suomi Synod.
Let's jump ahead a little bit to Suomi College: what year did you enter?

Olaf: 1942, in the fall

That's right during World War II? How was the enrollment then? Were there more women than men because of the war effort?

Olaf: Yes, there were the secretarial department or commercial department, was the largest at that time; seminary and music being quite small, and music being 2-3 students, 5 at the most. There were few men, usually those with physical handicaps of one kind or another so they were deferred from service. Seminary students when they became draft eligible after the war and the draft law, applied for 4-D, which was the ministerial deferment. And most of them received it, there were few denied because this was at the jurisdiction of the local draft board. In one case at least one student got his deferment signed by President Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. But most draft boards because their quota wasn't that pressed, there were 3 for example, 4 from Ontonagon County, 3 Lutherans and 1 Roman Catholic and all of those 4 had 4-D, Divinity deferment throughout the war.

Do you recollect—you mention '42 and right away I started putting things together and I believe that was the year Gene Saari helped bring in the union in the Copper Country, do you recall anything about that?

Olaf: I recall only that Gene Saari was spoken of a great deal and he was apparently very active but this was kind of out of the direct involvement of students, I never met Gene Saari personally at that time, I heard people speak of him and the fact that he was an aggressive and strong leader and was somewhat under the suspicion of those who were identified with management or traditions.

Art: Do you have any recollections of your first couple years, your teachers or where you lived, courses you took?

Olaf: At Suomi?

Yes.

Olaf: Oh, yes, most of them are as to living and teachers are very clear, the junior college experiences—we shared a room with the gentlemen who is now Pastor Henry Kangas in San Francisco with Rev. Edwin Kyllonen and he is deceased and his wife and family; he was at the time editor of the Amerikan Suometar, assistant editor, John Rantamaki was the other editor and as to teachers, there were some very fine teachers, Hanselman, Stanley Johnson, and most of our contact during the first 2 years were with the Junior College teachers, Martti Nissonen, in music and choir.

So after 2 years of junior college experience you went into the seminary curriculum and that was a 3 year program.

Yes,

Who were some of your teachers in seminary?

Olaf: Well, the teacher upon whom most of the seminary fell, burden fell, in my early seminar years was Uuras Saarnivaara, who was at Suomi at least 15 years and had served there for a number of years at that time. The then president of Suomi, Viljo Nikander, son of the founder taught or the seminary courses primarily in philosophy and then in 1946, after the war, Dr. Armas Holmio came to teach, so those teachers were the key leaders, then there were a few teachers who came in to teach hours, I think Rev. Edward Isaac who was pastor of the Suomi Synod church and congregation
in Hancock came in to teach some practical subjects

ART: Was it kind of unusual that a Laestadian such as Saarnivaara, would be teaching at the Seminary, how did that relationship work out? Given the feeling that has traditionally existed between Laestadians and Synod people?

Well, it was always a subject of conversation and sometimes the students would react to it, some with great appreciation and some identified with this, some even chose the step to be identified completely, there were 1 or 2 students who were from the Laestadian background and did become pastors there: Peter Nordstrom, Karlo Kulla, and so on; others took a very strong objection but I think we looked at it more academically and respected the right of the teacher as well as the student to draw his own conclusions so there was some effort on the part of those students who were aggressive to put the teacher down or try to disprove him or press him further so that he would speak himself into a sack or into an impossible situation.

ART Besides your academic work, did the Seminary experience provide you with contact with outlying congregations, in other words, did you have some kind of field work?

Olaf: The field work in '44-'45, '46, throughout the war years, was really compelled with some strain because to keep the 4-D classification it was necessary to be in full-time program, you couldn't take summers off. So the seminary took efforts to make those summer months an intern year and some of it was done partially to comply with the draft board regulations but also part of it was done because there was a shortage of pastors, some ministers had gone in to be chaplains, so those congregations were vacant so I remember serving, for example, in Detroit during the summer of '45 as an assistant to Pastor Jacob Heikkinen, Now Dr., for many years of New Testament at Gettysburg, so some of these experiences were very good and they were the equivalent of an intern year, that is 3 summers, 3 months a year, so making an academic year.

You've made many contributions to Suomi's life, more recently as the campus pastor and filling many hats as Carl mentioned the other day, I'd like to ask you a little bit about the article you had written for the book that is being published, and more specifically about Haapanen, I think you mentioned at one time that there was a certain convention that stood out in your mind where, do you recall the incident that I'm referring to?

Olaf: Was this where he was up for election?

ART: It might have been.

Olaf: This would have been the convention of 1946 which was the anniversary of, the 50th anniversary of Suomi College, was celebrated in connection with the church convention and there were many dignitaries and I think that year, Dr. Haapanen's term was up; he had served from 1923 to '46, and this was his second to last term because in 1950 he retired. So he had sort of announced that this would be his final term if elected, final 4-year term, and there was considerable agitation as one listened to the conversations in relation to the convention that there should be a person who related directly and without any difficulty in language communication to the American Community. Dr. Haapanen was a native of Finland, had been a young man there and had studied his English as an adult so that it was always easy to tell from his use of his English that he was not a native American. So there was some agitation but the emotional forces of the convention were stronger and could not overcome, could not be overcome, so that even though there was a candidate, I'm not sure my memory is adequate, but it was possibly Rev. Isaac who was born in this country who also spoke Finnish well, but English was his very fluent with him and he wrote very adequately
and enthuaiastically and also represented in the appreciation of the church; I think at that time, a kind of "American thrust", maybe too much of an American Thrust especially as far as Evangelical and fundamentalistic perhaps approach so with a kind of free-wheeling procedure at the convention, named Dr. Haapanen for another term.

Looking back on the experiences you had and the research you've done, what would you see as being the real critical issues that have faced the synod, one of them comes out of your own home experience, the question of church and the socialist movement, what I hear you talking about is the whole problem of Americanization as being another one.

The first convention which I attended was in Duluth and that would have been 1945 or '45. This is where I first became aware of, in a sense, of "changing of the guard" and specifically, and I think I even wrote it into that chapter of the book, was where Dr. Rautalahti, a member of the Consistory was up for election and as an incumbent he was nominated and the nomination, of course, stood and as another nominee from the floor, Rev. Edward Isaac was nominated, and in the election, Rev. Isaac's name got enough votes to sustain his election over the incumbent and I remember particularly the speech that Dr. Rautalahti made congratulating the winner and so on and into this speech was packed the full emotion of the change that sort of dramatized it for me and I on the one hand applauded the changing of the guard and on the other hand, felt great sympathy with passing of long period of traditional life.

Art

I'd like to talk to you now about some of your own parish experiences, when you went--your first call, was that to the Dakotas?

Yes

And you already had some opportunity at that time to do some flying, was the flying something that was acquired when you went on to that position, or had you been in flying before that?

Olaf: I acquired all the flying over there. The interest had been on and off prior to that. As a young boy I wanted to be a pilot. But as I decided to enter the ministry, I put away such foolish things because it just didn't seem to fit, of course. And then right after the war, the girl I was going with, who later became my wife, her brothers bought an airplane, that of course kind of brought it close to home and I shared with them the building of the air strip and so on, this was in 1946. Then also a second thing that happened, I heard that some of the former military pilots of the war had formed a missionary aviation fellowship which became a very significant activity in subsequent years and these were Christian young men who had had Christian experience and now were dedicating their lives to being servants of the servants of Christ as the mission aviation fellowship says. So I saw that there was a possibility to use any of these technical advantages of radio, flying, or whatever they might be, with the gospel, the two didn't have to be separated necessarily so that kind of alerted me to the interest and so even before leaving Suomi, they offered at Suomi at that time for the convenience of those who were interested, a ground school course, they brought over a teacher by the name of Jack Aboret from Tech who was teaching a similar program there and up to then--now since closed, Houghton Sands Airport, and he taught a ground school course which was the 4 basic courses that can be taken before you get in the airplane. And I enrolled in that course and took those and got passing grades and then after completing the seminary requirements, and being ordained, I moved to North Dakota and already had the interest revived and had some of the ground school completed so all I really needed was the technical ability and the mechanical ability of handling the airplane.
Well, you certainly got off the ground in your ministry there!

Olaf: Well, it came quite soon, I went there early in the spring and during that summer I used a car and then in the fall as I had become settled and had gotten most of the things I needed so that there was enough money to pay for flying lessons, I took lessons at Bismarck and then that same fall, already bought my own little airplane and then the next winter, it became a necessity because of the heavy snow in 1949-50, that winter, so that very first year as a very novice pilot I put in more than 200 hours in emergency flying. The airplane was equipped with skills and what had been hobby and a kind of an interest became a necessity.

 Were you and Helen married at that time when you began your ministry there?

Olaf: No. We weren't married until 2 years later. '50.

'50. How long were you in Dakota?

Olaf: I was there 3 years

And from there to, was it Peabody?

Olaf: Air Force.

Art: Air Force?

Olaf: Yes.

Were you overseas then during the Air Force?

Olaf: No, in Texas, fighting the battle of Texas. (Laughter) We lived right next to the Alamo, no I was assigned into a training unit and this was one of the training units, once one became into a training squadron, many of these training people just stayed where they were put. The rate of turn over in training squadrons was annoyingly slow to some people.

Art: There are so many questions I could ask you about your different facets, but I'd like to jump to more recent times, to Suomi College, and as you came back to live here, what kinds of changes did you notice, say in the community around Mass and now you live in South Range, before mining had been quite active and now it was quite different, wasn't it?

Olaf: Well, I never remember the mining being active in Mass. The mines closed about the time when I was born. So their operations were living memories originally and then merely just historic. Probably the biggest change, I think, was in the fact that church life, for example, the change had taken place from this Finnish oriented, or immigrant oriented, to English oriented and this was very evident in the number of people attending the 2 services, where they were run one following the other. And then the fact that the Finnish-speaking only clergy, and there weren't too many of those any more, these just weren't there any more or were in retirement or if active, they didn't have a major role any more.

Art: Did you notice the same kind of change in the student body at Suomi, being more from the church to all over?

Olaf: Oh, yes, this was already in our seminary program, half of our seminary lectures were in the late '40's still in Finnish under Dr. Saarnivaara's leadership. In the '50's they changed very rapidly so that probably by the mid-'50's there were no lectures in Finnish any more and partially because the students just couldn't cope with it. So the seminary program had changed and then, of course, the seminary was gone.
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In the student side the same thing took place, when we were students it was quite possible to have a "Konventi" meeting which was run entirely in the Finnish language while at the same time the student body changed so that Konventi could not be run, which was a Finnish Club, that is the meetings had to be conducted in English, no longer was it possible to have Finnish programs and no longer did strictly Finnish-oriented activity draw anything such as Finnish Independence Day or---we did revive after my return, for example, Laskiainen had just become an afternoon off and I always felt a little badly about that, so while I was in position to do something about that as the acting Dean of Students originally, we just revived it but gave it a kind of a new "guise", keeping the old winter sports' day under the Laskiainen name with just letting it mean winter sports and it has grown and has continued for a number of years and it's a great thrill for students to get out in the snow, it has to be a little more organized than it once was, you have to have charter buses and things like that, which kind of make it a little less painful to get to the hills.

In those 7 years, what one thing or one development or whatever, would you classified as your, say, most gratifying or exciting experience or thing that you were most happy to be involved in?

Olaf: I've enjoyed particularly the revival and rekindling of interest in ethnic, not necessarily in language used, but ethnic in terms of revival of the appreciation of ethnic culture and the fact that there is apparently in the ethnic culture something which transcends or moves beyond or outside of the limitations or restrictions merely of language--when I see this, say in the Indian community, it certainly has been true in the black community and it certainly is true in the Finnish community and I think an activity such as Finn Fair in 1971 is a pretty dramatic display of the fact that a lot of people are interested so I think this trend will probably continue; whence it will go, I doubt if it will ever get to the point where people will just want to speak Finnish or learn it to proficiency and it certainly isn't necessary apparently; Finn Fair can be run in English.

Does this sentiment pervade the Copper Country, do you feel that there is in this community, now more than before, kind of an ethnic appreciation?

Olaf: Well, this would certainly seem to be true with the kind of work that Mikko Jarvenranta, the cultural consultant did, where it was kind of amazing that the community would "take" to him and what he represented. Part of it may be the fact that he had a pleasing personality but I suspect that there was also equally supporting that the fact of what he represented and the office he bore and the fact that the U.S. Government through its office of Education was interested. I don't see this quite so dramatically in some of the other ethnic groups, other than the Indians, they had a pow-wow for example, recently and this drew considerable interest. I don't see this in the Cornish or the people from English background, there may be a little more in the Croatian and Slavic, I don't see this too strongly in the Italian although there's still some activity but there seems to be some possibility that these kinds of things might be revived and the Finns, of course, because of recency are in a little better position and Suomi College appears to be inclined to support this kind of activity at least to some degree.

I think you've had a very unique ministry here because you've been not only involved in the school in many ways, but in the community serving on the school board and different capacities

(end of tape)