

The Finnish-American Co-Operative Movement

Finding Aid



Finlandia University
Finnish American Heritage Center
Finnish American Historical Archive

601 Quincy Street
Hancock, MI 49930
(906) 487-7302
archives@finlandia.edu

Creator: Various entities

Dates: ca. 1900 – 1990

Abstract: A comprehensive finding aid to the Finnish-American co-operative material in the Finlandia University collection. The co-operative movement was a characteristic feature of Finnish-American life in the Twentieth century, material core to the Finnish-American radical tradition. Co-operatives sold goods ranging from coffee to shingles. They were also cultural organizations, social spaces, and very often, radical political nexuses. In 1929, the Movement splintered into “red” and “white” camps, the former affiliated with the Communist Party of the United States, the latter often affiliated with the Co-Operative League of America.

Quantity: 14 linear feet (24 boxes/parcels and three oversize volumes)

Languages: English and Finnish

Acquisition: Individual donors and groups

Access: The collection is open to all, without restriction of any kind

Copyright: None

Processed by: Joel Feingold, August – September 2007

Historical Sketch

In North America, immigrant working Finns built a self-sustaining material world all their own—a network of culture and products so vibrant that it survived a catastrophic ideological split in the late Twenties, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and even the onslaught of supermarket chains in the Fifties. Indeed, some of the co-ops lasted until the Nineties and into today, monuments to the strength of the Finnish-American community and its commitments to material autonomy and social justice. Perhaps the most identifiable Finnish American consumers’ cooperative was Superior, Wisconsin’s Central Co-Operative Exchange, which in essence was a nexus of an essentially all-Finnish “nation” built in the shadow of American democracy: a material, social, and political universe, in which working Finns ran their own affairs.

In many instances, the co-operatives were simple grocery stores, while others built a vast consumers network. In the final analysis however, they also appear to have been the material basis of an entire “Finnish American world.” The *Työmies* and other Finnish-language publications could not have been financially solvent for so long without the co-operatives’ advertising fees and, earlier, direct financial assistance. Finnish America’s countless dramatic leagues were often directly funded by co-operatives, and one could not mistake the advertisements for Red Star coffee, or later, “Co-Op” branded goods, in the back of play programs. The same held true for Finnish-American folk-dancing troupes and the Finn halls which were the core of the Finnish-American cultural universe could have been the kind of

spaces Finnish immigrants wanted them to be without being able to serve Finnish-American cake made with Finnish-American Coop flour.

While they lasted, Finnish-American co-operatives offered American Finns an alternative foundation for nationhood; they were the capital underpinning of nationalism without compromises: ethnic cultural autonomy to complement hard-earned American citizenship, ethnic enclaves without internationally enforced borders, and the promise of internal democracy without the unsavory class dynamics necessary to get there. Co-operatives and coop publications helped to turn Finnish and “Finglish” into national ethnic languages given expression by a modern and cosmopolitan press—newspapers and plays, high literature and popular magazines—all without an ascending middle class to own the presses and dominate the social discourse. It seemed too good to be true, and the red/white split in the co-operative movement demonstrates that in many ways, it was. In 1929 – 1931, when the white and red factions split the co-operative movement, the newspapers and magazines followed. The red publications remained more vital, although the post-'31 Central Exchange was able to offer several co-operation themed periodicals.

After the co-operative split, working Finns were suddenly compelled to choose a more “business” oriented co-operative without a sophisticated cultural apparatus—or—a more politically oriented co-operative, replete with social and cultural offerings but limited by its ideology. The split damaged the very spirit of co-operation the factions argued over. But despite the red/white split, Finns in the Upper Midwest still managed to achieve a degree of cultural freedom that no other immigrant group in the United States came close to—and the co-ops were the rich soil from which this uniquely Finnish-American society grew.

Scope and Content Note

Finlandia University’s Finnish American Historical Archive’s collection of materials about the Finnish American cooperative movement consists of 14 linear feet of 24 entities of materials about the cooperative movement. **All material in English unless otherwise noted.**

Materials covered in this finding aid consist of manuscript records as well as book publications, periodicals and newspapers regarding the Finnish American cooperative movement. In addition to the Finnish American experience in the coop movement, this finding aid covers the general cooperative movement in America in the context of Finnish American association within the broader American movement. Generally, the manuscript materials consist of individual membership in various cooperative ventures, but the bulk of published materials come from the Central Cooperative Exchange to 1929 and after that year, the Central Cooperative Wholesale.

In addition to these archival materials, there are also material culture artifacts and photographs in the Finnish American Historical Archive and Museum’s collections. Additionally, there are several oral history interviews that draw upon memories from Finnish American involvement in the cooperative movement. Some of these interviews have been transcribed, especially interviews from a 1970s oral history project conducted by Dr. Arthur Puotinen.

Box L-1 [Various Cooperative Groups]

- 1) Virginia Co-op Youth League – Minute Book [November 23, 1939 – April 16, 1942.]
- 2) Co-Operative Youth Leagues Range Section (Aini Franttila, Section Secretary) – Minutes of the first Co-operative Youth League Section meeting of the Mesabi Range Section / Minutes of later meetings [February 21, 1935 – April 21, 1937.]
- 3) Co-Operative Youth League Pamphlet “Education Thru Action” with Cover Letter [August 29, 1940.]
- 4) Virginia Youth Coop League [“Westab” Binder.] – Miscellaneous material [circa 1938.]
- 5) Balance Sheet – Ontonagon Valley Cooperative Creamery Association [December 31, 1960.]
- 6) Minutes Book – Ontonagon Coop Society, Board of Directors [March 6, 1941-April 25, 1952.] Hand-written Notes in Finnish
- 7) Minutes Book – Firesteel (Ontonagon County) Coop Club [May 12, 1936-June 6, 1938.] Hand-written Notes in Finnish
- 8) Miscellaneous “White” Co-Operative Material [1935 and late Fifties.]
- 9) Miscellaneous Administrative and Financial Material – Elanto Co-Operative and Virginia Co-Operative Soc. [late Fifties and early Sixties.]
- 10) [Signet Composition Book No. 1112.]: Hand-Written Minutes in Finnish [1931.]
- 11) [Compositions Book, Property of Rentola Co.]: Hand-Written Notebook in Finnish [1939 – 1950.]

Box L-2 [all financial material and minutes.]

- 1) [Quantity and Quality Composition Book.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [1935 – 1937.]
- 2) [The Wellworth Composition.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [1933 – 1934.]
- 3) [Jewel Composition Book.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [1934 – 1935.]
- 4) [Compositions.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [July 1930 – April 1933.]
- 5) [Sterling Record Book.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [April 1958 – May 1963.]
- 6) [Cash Book.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [September 1942 – May 1946.]
- 7) [Cash Book.]: Hand-Written Notes in Finnish [June 1946 – April 1948.]
- 8) Minute Book for Educational Committees in Finnish and English [Toivola.]: [May 11, 1948 – March 8, 1949.]
- 9) Minute Book for Educational Committees in Finnish and English [Toivola.]: [April 11, 1950 – September 9, 1951.]
- 10) Minute Book for Educational Committees in Finnish and English [Toivola.]: [October 1949 – March 14, 1950.]
- 11) Minute Book for Educational Committees in Finnish and English [Toivola.]: [October 11, 1951 – November 11, 1952.]
- 12) Minute Book for Educational Committees in Finnish and English [Toivola.]: [December 9, 1952 – August 17, 1954.]
- 13) Minute Book for Educational Committees in Finnish and English [Toivola.]: [September 11, 1956 – March 11, 1958.]
- 14) Toivola Co-Op Club Minute Book 9-12-63, in Finnish and English [The Spiral Theme Book.] [September 12, 1963 – July 8, 1964.]

- 15) [Cash.]: Toivola Co-Op Club, Minutes and Financial Records. [June 1, 1937 – January 5, 1941.]

Parcel L-3 [all financial material and minutes.]

- 1) Finances and minutes of the Northern Co-Op of Hancock, in Finnish and English [1946 – 1956.]

Parcel L-4 [all financial material and minutes.]

- 1) [Cash.] Finances and minutes of the Watton-Covington Co-op Creamery, in Finnish and English [December 26, 1941 – September 14, 1965.]
- 2) [Record.] Finances and minutes of the Watton-Covington Co-op Creamery, mostly in English with some Finnish [June 22, 1950 – February 14, 1966.]

Box L-5 [Central Co-Operative Exchange and Northern States' Co-operative League.]

[Unless otherwise noted, documents in Box L-5 are Central Co-Operative Exchange material.]

- 1) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1925. [In Finnish.]
- 2) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1926. [In Finnish.]
- 3) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1927. [In Finnish.]
- 4) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1928. [In Finnish.]
- 5) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1929. [In Finnish.]
- 6) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1930. [In Finnish.]
- 7) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1931. [In Finnish.]
- 8) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1932. [In Finnish.]
- 9) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja [Year Book.] 1933. [In Finnish.]
- 10) 1933 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 11) 1934 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 12) 1935 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 13) 1936 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 14) 1937 Year Book. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 15) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1938. [In Finnish.]
- 16) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1939. [In Finnish.]
- 17) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1940. [In Finnish.]
- 18) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1941. [In Finnish.]
- 19) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1942. [In Finnish.]
- 20) Keskusosuuskunnan (Cooperative Central Exchange). Vuosikirja 1943. [In Finnish.]
- 21) 1944 Yearbook. (Vuosikirja). Central Co-Operative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 22) 1945 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 23) 1946 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 24) 1947 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 25) 1949 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 26) 1951 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 27) 1952 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
- 28) 1954 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.

- 29) 1955 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
 - 30) 1956 Yearbook. Central Cooperative Wholesale. Superior, Wisconsin.
 - 31) 1957 Yearbook. Central Cooperatives, Inc. Superior, Wisconsin.
 - 32) 1958 Yearbook. Central Cooperatives, Inc. Superior, Wisconsin.
 - 33) 1959 Year Book. Central Cooperatives, Inc. Superior, Wisconsin.
-

- 34) Northern States' Co-operative League – Third Year Book 1927.
 - 35) Northern States' Co-operative League – Second Year Book 1926.
 - 36) Northern States' Co-operative League – [First.] Year Book 1925.
-

- 37) Da: 1 [folder.]
 - Financial and Operating Statements, in Finnish and, in later years, English [1919 – 1960.]
- 38) Ob: 1 [folder.]
 - Pamphlets detailing the history of the CCE / CCW issued in the following years or periods: 1932; 1935; 1937; 1942; 1949; the mid-Fifties.
 - Leaflets and advertisements
 - “*and into the future.*” Pamphlet. 1942.
- 39) Db: 1 [folder.]
 - Erick Kendall – Speech at the Michigan Finnish Historical Association Festival – Three Lakes, Michigan [July 22, 1962]. In Finnish.
- 40) Od: 1 [folder.]
 - Christmas Card from Central Co-Operative Exchange to Co-Operators, with photograph and poem. [Date unknown. Probably late Twenties.]
- 41) Da: 2 [folder.]
 - Tiliselostus*. Financial information. Leaflet. In Finnish. [1936 – 1937.]
- 42) Ca: 1 [folder.]
 - *Pöytäkirja*. Co-operative finance, governance, and electoral information. Pamphlet. In Finnish. [1919.]
 - *Pöytäkirja*. Co-operative finance, governance, and electoral information. Pamphlet. In Finnish. [1923.]
 - *Pöytäkirja*. Co-operative finance, governance, and electoral information. Pamphlet. In Finnish. [1924.]
- 43) Ca: 2 [folder.]
 - Pöytäkirja*. Co-operative finance, governance, and electoral information. Leaflet.

In Finnish. [1921.]

44) Oc: 1 [folder.]

-*Meidän Jokapäiväinen Leipämme*. Co-operative propaganda. Pamphlet. In Finnish. [Date unknown. Probably late Teens / early Twenties.] [Two copies.]

45) *Ihminen ei elä ainoastaan leivästä*, by Kalle Rissanen. Co-operative propaganda. Pamphlet. In Finnish. [1925.] [Two copies.]

46) *The Co-operative Pyramid Builder Magazine*. Magazine of the CCE. Vols. I through VI. [July 1926 – June 1931.]

-An English-language monthly. Tremendously rich resource, with advertisements, articles, advice columns, and above all, excellent coverage of the CCE / Communist Party of the United States crisis of 1929 – 1931.

48) Individual issues of *The Co-operative Pyramid Builder Magazine*, near-complete collection, 1926 - 1931. **[Stored separately, in green box immediately adjacent to Box L-5 marked “Pyramid Builder.”]**

49) Compiled Year Books of the CCE / CCI in Three Vols. [1933 – 1942.] [1943 – 1951.] [1952 – 1959.]

50) *Co-Operative Pyramid Builder Newspaper* [distinct from the Magazine]. In Finnish and English: 1945, 1948, 1950. **[Stored separately, with newspapers.]**

Box L-6 [Women’s Cooperative Guild, Nashwauk, Minnesota.]

1) Ca: 1 [folder.]

-Handwritten minutes of meetings of Women’s Cooperative Guild, Nashwauk, Minnesota. In Finnish. [December 15, 1933 – October 3, 1935.]

2) Ca: 2 [folder.]

-Handwritten minutes of meetings. In English. [Ca. 1934.]

3) Ea: 1, Ea: 2, Eb: 1, Eb: 2 [folders.]

-Bulletins sent by the Northern States’ Women’s Co-operative Guild. [1932.] [1934, in Finnish.]

-Poetry about Rochdale co-operation. In Finnish.

-Typed by-laws of the Nashwauk Finnish Socialist Workers’ Association. In Finnish. In English. [1931.]

-Ephemera.

- 3) Ga: 1 [folder.]
-Ephemera. [1922 – early Thirties.]
- 4) Ga: 2 [folder.]
-Financial ephemera. [1910 – 1920s.]
- 5) Gb: 1 [folder.]
-Financial ephemera. [ca. 1917.]
- 6) Ua: 1 (i.) [folder.]
-Theatrical plays, in Finnish. [1927.]
- 7) Ua: 1 (ii.) [folder.]
-Theatrical plays, in Finnish. [1927.]
- 8) U-: 1 [folder.] and all material in the bottom of the box
-Theatrical plays, in Finnish. [various dates; some of Finnish-American origin, others published in Finland.]

Box L-7 [Virginia Co-operative Society, Virginia, Minnesota.]

- 1) Da: 1 [folder.]
-Articles of Incorporation and By-laws, in Finnish and in English. Pamphlet. [2 copies.] [As amended October 1936.]
- 2) Ga: 1 [folder.]
-Financial statements in Finnish and in English. [1940, 1941, 1942.]
- 3) Oa: 1 [folder.]
-*Consumers' Cooperation [A National Magazine for Cooperative Leaders.]*. [October – November, 1942.].

-*The Story of Virginia Co-operative Society [Through 30 Years of Progress.]*. Pamphlet. [1939.]

-*Christian Monthly*. [Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Book Concern.] [Two issues: one from 1956, one from 1957.]

Box L-8 [Notes of Dr. A.K.E. Holmio on "All" Co-Operative Societies in Michigan.]

- Excellent resource for those interested in the history of particular co-ops. Detailed, alphabetized briefs on every co-operative known to Holmio. One brief in Finnish and one brief in English per each record. Financial information, names of founding members, and short overviews of each co-op's history.
- Press clippings in Finnish and English are also enclosed in some of the files.

Parcel L-9 [Northern States Cooperative Youth League Documents, 1939 – 1942.]

-Very rich social history documents, all in English. Flyers for the Youth League's contests, questionnaires about the Youth League's educational activities, flyers for dances, comminques from the Youth League's leadership to its chapters. A short history of the Youth League, and introductory material for new members. Finally, there are very revelatory sets of "sample questions" for the Youth League's numerous discussion groups.

Parcel L-10 ["Michigan Cooperative Odds and Ends".]

- 1) Financial ephemera.
- 2) By-Laws of Copper Country Cheese Co-Operative, Inc. [Dollar Bay, Michigan.] [Amended 1950.]
- 3) Very brief memoir / statement of Roger Tyyska about the Finnish-American co-operative movement. [Written 2006.]

Boxes L-11a-L11e: Pelkie Cooperative Society, Inc.

-A near-complete financial and documentary history of the cooperative. Additionally, a large ledger spanning the period 1953 – 1967. The collection spans five boxes. Of most interest to researchers will be the material in L-5e, which is a report on the state of the cooperative from the Sixties and Seventies. Much of the rest of the material is financial. See the attached Manuscript Carton description page for more detail.

Parcel L-12- [4Cs Coop Club Minute Book.]

-Central Cooperative Wholesale issued minute book for the Copper Country Coop Club (4Cs Coop) group, ca. 1948.

Box L-13 Marked "Assorted Cooperative Pamphlets."

-Cooperative material of lesser documentary value, with the exception of a CCE pamphlet for children entitled *Here's How to Tell the Co-Op Story*. Much of the rest of the material is financial in nature, the great bulk of it in Finnish.

Box Containing Archival Volumes 334.1 [Northern States Cooperative League / The Cooperative League, Twenties, Thirties, and 1950.]

- Very rich documents: articles, advertisements, news, etc.
- Yearbooks: 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1930, 1932, 1936, 1939, 1950

Parcel 920.009 Kau [The Memoirs of Martin Kaurala.] [Written 1990.]

-Spectacular document. Clearly and poetically written, with thoughts on lumber work, co-operatives, alcoholism, the activity of the Ku Klux Klan in the Upper Peninsula, socialism, and other salient topics. A jewel of the collection.

Folder 920.009 Kau 3 [The Mass Co-Operative Company, written 1993.]

-Except for Kaurala's *The Mass Co-Operative Company*, the other contents of this folder are unrelated to the co-operative movement.

-*The Mass Co-Operative Company*: A valuable, if somewhat brief and euphemistic, overview of the history of a “red” co-operative in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Box Marked “Cooperative Magazines”

-Tremendously rich documents. A social history of what became the “white” co-operative movement in the Upper Midwest; these, however, are national magazines.

- 1) *Cooperation* [The official organ of the Co-Operative League of America.]
 - 1920: December
 - 1924: December
 - 1926: May
 - 1929: January, December
 - 1930: June, July, August, September, November, December
 - 1931: February, July
 - 1932: July?, November
 - 1933: January, February, March, April, September
 - 1934: February, March, May, June, July, August, September, November, December
- 2) *Consumers Cooperation* [National journal of the Consumers’ Cooperative Movement, for “cooperative leaders”.]
 - 1935: January
 - 1936: December
 - 1937: May
- 3) *Co-Op Magazine* [National Co-operatives, Inc.; successor to *Consumers Cooperation*.]
 - 1946: May
 - 1947: January
- 4) *Cooperative Youth Bulletins* [1939 – 1942.]
- 5) *Northern States’ Women’s Cooperative Guild Bulletins* [1932 – 1933.]
 - Most in Finnish.

Box Marked 334 UNI – 335 LAS [United Cooperative Farmers, Inc. and Miscellaneous Material from Cooperatives in Finland.] [Also: Small Work Peoples Trading Company pamphlet, 1920 and IWW, Finnish-language pamphlet, 1922.]

-A few publications of “white” or Socialist Party-affiliated Finnish co-operatives in Massachusetts.

- 30th Anniversary Year Book of United Co-Operative Society of Maynard, Mass. [1937.]
- 25th Anniversary of United Cooperative Farmers, Inc. [1953.]
- 30th Anniversary of United Cooperative Farmers, Inc. [1958.]

-UCF By-laws, as amended 1957.

-*Virginia Work Peoples Trading Company*. In Finnish. [1920.]

-*Helppotajuista Talousoppia*. In Finnish. [IWW / Workers Soc. Publishing Co., 1922.]

Box Marked 334 MIL – 334 TRE [Inventory to the Records of the Central Cooperative Wholesale of the Immigration History Research Center] [Assorted Co-Operative Pamphlets and Reports.] [English-language, analytical, comprehensive history of the CCE, written 1977.]

Two boxes.

-*Co-Operatives and Peace* [late Thirties.]

-*Co-Op. Park on “Beautiful Brule”* [1931.]

-*Co-Op Community Fair* [September 1934.]

-*Origins and Legacies: The History of a Cooperative Movement* [Scoop Collective’s 1977 history of the CCE. Excellent resource.]

-Federal reports on cooperative enterprise: 1917, 1934, 1936.

- Inventory to the Records of the Central Cooperative Wholesale of the Immigration History Research Center.

-334 MIL – 334 TRE CONT.: assorted pamphlets from Finnish-American cooperatives in New York City, Michigan, Massachusetts, etc. Some material from Finland, as well.

Box Marked “White Co-Ops, Mostly non-Michigan / Minnesota / Wisconsin” [334 ALA/3 – 334 MAI/2]

-Material from Finnish-American cooperatives in Brooklyn, New York [1901 – Twenties.]

-Co-op training manuals

-*Can We Establish a Consumer Society?* Lecture delivered in Madison, Wisconsin, 1935.

-*Cooperative Health Associations* [New York City, 1937.]

-Other pamphlets, largely of lesser documentary value, excepting George Halonen’s book-length Finnish-language treatise on co-operation, and an English-language volume on the “fundamentals of co-operation.”