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**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)*

**F.F.S.C.G.L.M.R. DIGITIZATION PROJECT 2010-2011**

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

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Arvid Alanen  
April, 1975

Elma Ranta

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## SUBJECT

SOURCE: ARVID ALANEN, APRIL 1975  
ISHPEMING, MICHIGAN

## COMMENTS:

Interviewer: Elma Ranta

R: My name is Arvid Michael Alanen Alanen. I was born in Ishpeming, Michigan on January 26, 1897. I come from the Finnish parentage; my father and mother are native of Finland and they were living in *ALEVAHA* ~~Galvala Laasaland~~, Finland of the time of their departure. My *Vaasa* father came here first in the year 1887. He was a poor servant at one of the farmers in Finland and that same farmer had a son who had left for America and he was very prosperous. He lived in Rolla, North Dakota at that time. He was kind enough and friendly enough with my father, that he sent my father money enough to buy a ticket to get to this country, U.S.A. My father received the ticket, but the custom in Finland at that time was that a servant was tied to the land for one whole year and it was a binding contract. My father realized the situation, so he went to the farmer, his father, and asked him if he could sever his relations and his service to the farm because he has a received a ticket for America. The farmer refused him flat although my father said that that is the only time and the only chance I ever had of getting to this country that was spoken of so much. So he finally decided that he was going to go even though the farmer did not allow him to go. He went to *Vaasa* from Laaita which was about fifty miles away, and at the harbor he met the policeman, chief of police, and asked him for advice because he felt that he was kind of illegally going and leaving Finland at that time. The officer advised him not to buy the ticket at a ticket office, but just as the boat was leaving, jump on the boat and buy his ticket on the boat because there's a chance that your former friend, the farmer, will most likely be at the harbor to stop you. My father acted according to this advise and he jumped on the boat just as it was leaving and there was his former boss the farmer hailing and hollaring that "You are not allowed to go!" And, of course, they had no control over the boat as it was leaving the harbor. But my father had bought a bottle of whiskey at the time, he was a young man around twenty, twenty-one, and he waved it at the farmer and said, "Goodby old friend, I'll see you sometime in the future." He arrived in New York harbor about three-four weeks later and from there he made his way up to Copper Harbor

at the point of the Keweenaw Peninsula where some old friends and Finnish man was a foreman. And the foreman gave a temporary to him, but times were rather hard and the copper market was rather tight at the time. So, he spent a few months up in Copper Harbor and he got his brother to come to this country at the same...up to Copper Harbor. But since they could not get work at Copper Harbor the following year, he came farther south to Houghton. At Houghton he tried to get some work at the Copper mines, but failed. So, he and his brother went east from Houghton out in the woods and built a log shack and bached a whole winter in that log shack. They got enough flour and sugar and other necessary groceries to while away the winter months. Nearby was a French farmer family and they had the farmer's wife make bread to take care of their needs. The farmer also had a nice daughter, and the daughter became intensely interested in these fellows; but finally in the spring, my father decided that he's leaving back for Finland. He bought a ticket in Houghton to Ishpeming because he had a good friend from Laahtia who was living here in Ishpeming whose name was Matt Jacksie. He went to Matt Jacksie and Matt told him..."Don't go to Finland yet, because there's a good demand for labor in Ishpeming." He went to one of the mine offices and right away he got a job and he worked that summer and he did not go to Finland and he stayed in the U.S.A until he died here about sixty-seven years after.

He was friendly with my mother who was also in Laahia and sent her a ticket and she came to this country in 1890. They were married here in Ishpeming and were married for sixty-one years. They had six children of which I am the only one remaining. My father was married to my mother whose maiden name was Maria Moucarri. They were married on a Saturday night and, of course, in those days it was customary to have a party and also some liquor and drinks. They were married in the house where our present Mayor, David Houley, was born. On the night of the marriage, they brought in... my uncle brought in a couple of kegs of beer and my mother was strictly opposed to drinking at the wedding. So, she secretly slipped outside and took the plug off the beer barrels and emptied the beer into the yard. My uncle was more of a stubborn nature and was not so friendly with this incident, so he said, "We can fix that!" And he went down and got a few more kegs of beer and that's the way they celebrated. And the following night, they went and lived in the house that I still own and started their life together. They had six boarders the following night and...in a four room house. The boarders lived upstairs and she provided the meals for them. That took place back in about 1890. But it was a time when Grover Cleveland was our president and times were kind of hard and the mines closed down and there was not much work around. So, he moved to the outskirts of town of Ishpeming and had a little plot of land of about five acres and done a little farming and peddled milk to the people in town to survive the following year. I have had our family consisted of five boys...no girls. I am the youngest member of our family. All the rest are already dead. My older brother went fishing quite often at the age of seven in the neighboring

mine pits for fish...and they were very dangerous. My father warned my brother Edward not to go fishing, but he still went and on one of these trips he drowned in the open mine pit that evolve around the City of Ishpeming. Then, I had another brother named Arnie who went to work with a mining company at the age of twenty-one at the Lakeshaft Mine in Ishpeming. It was customary in those days that the mines would stop working on Christmas Eve at three o'clock. My brother worked three months at this mine and he was accidentally killed by careless miners that didn't follow instructions. In underground mining, it is customary that on upper levels the ore is changed from one shoot to another by a small tram car. My brother was doing just that work with his partner and they were tramping from one shoot to another and it so happened that a group ...a gang of miners were working just immediately above this drift that my brother and his partner were working on. And my brother went up in the morning and told this group of miners not to blast when they leave because that blast will come through and they will get caught in the back of the drift. And the captain of the mine went up and warned these miners that be sure and let these young boys down below know where they were gonna blast so they wouldn't get caught in the drift. But it so happened that when they were coming out with their last load of ore, the blast came through and it immediately killed my brother. His partner went scott free and he went into service in the first world war and went through some of the hardest fighting in France and never got injured or hurt. It just shows how our lives are directed by some power beyond our control.

Myself, I graduated out of Ishpeming High School in the year 1916. I was salutatorian of our class and I took part in the commencement exercises. Later I worked on the LS & I Ore Dock at Marquette at the beginning of the first world war and there was a big demand for ore and working on the section crew I was shifted to Marquette to work on the LS & I Dock. It was late fall, awfully cold and our job was to steam out the pockets because the ore was wet and it was freezing and hard to unload into the boats. After I got through working here I went with the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company working here in Ishpeming in the spring in an open pit. I had worked there for several weeks when the captain came over and told me that they want to see me at the Cleveland Cliffs Engineering Department on the following Monday. I went over there on the following Monday and the Chief of Engineers, Mr. James Jopeley, greeted me and told me that he has a job for me as a draftsman with the Engineering Department. I was taken around, introduced to all the engineers which numbered about twenty and there were five geological engineers there also. I worked there for several years and enjoyed it very much. They were a very congenial and educated group and helpful to me. I was a shy timid person but I got along fairly well. But I felt that in order to get ahead faster, I should have a college education and I decided to go to college. I went to the University of Illinois and took up engineering there. I spent two and a half

years there and in my Junior year, I had really overworked and had a bad nervous breakdown, so I had to stop schooling and went back home. The following fall, I went back to the University but I seemed to have trouble and I felt probably I was not getting enough exercise so I started wrestling and I ruptured myself and I got a strangulated hernia from...which forced me to quit school again. I did not go back anymore to the University because the symptoms of my trouble seemed to come on me when I went back into that environment. Later...a few years later...I transferred my credits to Northern State Teachers' College as it was called at that time, is now Northern University. I graduated out of that inside of one year and got a job teaching physics and mathematics at the Suomi College. I taught at Suomi College for two years. Prior to teaching at Suomi College I got a job on a special geological survey in Calumet. I was recommended for this job by Mr. Ed Derby, Chief Geologist for the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company. I worked up there for several years. We had the whole Copper Country surveyed. It was conducted by the Calumet & Hecla Mining Company and all the information of all the mining companies, engineering and geological, was open to us. My boss was a professor from Harvard University named Lucius Gratton. He was a consulting geologist and had jobs all over the world. The other persons on the survey was a Chief Geologist of the Calumet & Hecla, a professor from the Michigan Tech and a man named Broderick who was with the United States Geological Survey. It was very interesting work. I made most of the maps of that survey and I was independent. I could work as I pleased and I had much good experience there in this line of work. But I was determined that I would get my degree in engineering at the University which later I did not attend. I could have remained with this group of geologists and engineers because they had different jobs in different parts of the world; but later I left there and finished my education at Northern State Teachers College.

varying

I have had ~~very~~ experiences here in Ishpeming and I have spent most of my life here in the past thirty or forty years.