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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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"Maki, John", Finnish Folklore and Social Change in the Great Lakes Mining Region Oral History Collection, Finlandia University, Finnish American Historical Archive and Museum.

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I Okay, your name is Ida Erickson and your \_\_\_\_\_ name was  
\_\_\_\_\_ and you were born here in Ely

R

I You were a school teacher, where did you teach?

R I taught one year out in the country, two years in Finland<sup>7</sup>son, which  
is between Minneapolis and Duluth and 27 years in Ely,

I In the Ely school system. And you were my teacher when I was in the  
sixth grade, you were my history teacher, did you ever believe that  
I would end up being a historian?

R Yes,

I I remember that very well, and your parents names were what?

R My mother's name was Edna \_\_\_\_\_

I And what was her maiden name?

R \_\_\_\_\_ She had two names. She lived with  
the Sauvola's

I And she took that name.

R My father's name was John Edward

I Okay, wherein Finland did your parents come from?

R My father came from Tornio and my mother from a small place near  
Vaasa

I When I was at Suomi it was suggested that \_\_\_\_\_ was  
a relative with Finnish history, is that true?

R Yes.

I It was true, but have you ever tried to trace that at all?

R Oh yes, we have the family tree. It goes back to the 16th century and  
they were originally in the southeast part of Finland and then from  
there they somehow got up around Tornio.

I Was your father a ~~Lutherian?~~ Laestadia

R He's never said, he was religious but he never named any specific  
religion.

I When he lived in Ely of course he was a staunch Suomi Synod man?

R Yes.

I What was the year when he arrived here, approximately?

R About 1891, something like that. I was born in 1894 and he was here a few years before that.

Where did he come?

R Well he worked on the railroad across the country when it was first begun. Then he came to Ely and worked in the mines.

I He worked in the mines?

R Yes, at first.

I Then after that what did he do?

R Then he got into Finnish stock work and was there until he retired.

I Okay, what is the Finnish Stock Company? It's well known but was it a stock company?

R A stockholders company.

I It was a general store here in Ely.

R Yes they had clothing, a meat department and so on.

I There are a lot of fond memories connected to that store in my own life but I remember one thing I've never forgotten back in the days when my father was a minister here, my father was a minister, the stock company gave my father a ten percent discount on groceries and I'm sure that's one of the reasons we stayed alive.

R

I They were very very good to us

R They helped a lot of people and in those days especially people had big families. So many times sickness could come up and they would get behind in their store bills and they were always taken care of.

I So your father was hardly what they could call hardnosed?

R No, he had big family and he knew what it was.

I Would you characterize your father as a man of compassion then?

R He was willing to help anybody.

I He was willing to help anybody. He lived the church life then?

R Yet some of them would still do all kinds of mean things to him even though he helped them.

I I think at this point maybe we better say a few more things about your father before we move on. As I recallit he was certainly one of Ely's leading citizens not only his work in the Finnish ~~work~~ but I believe you mentioned he was in politics. STOCK

R

I What else was he involved in?

R Well during the war he helped and then he was chairman when the Finnish people were helping the people in Finland. He was the head man for Minnesota.

I He was also on the Draft Board, what about other organizations in Ely, he was a Temperence man of course.

R Oh yes, he used to go around giving Temperence speeches.

I Was he a Kalevan also?

R Yes.

I The Knights and Ladies in Ely is one of the largest and at one time was the largest Kaleva society in Minnesota, or in the whole world. He was an active Kalevan.

I Also in my research I found out that he was on the Suomi College Board at it's very beginning.

R Yes.

I Back in it's planning stages, when they were thinking of locating in Superior.

R I remember that

I You mentioned that you went to Suomi College also, how old were you when you went to Suomi College?

R Nine years old, I was there two years.

I That was in it's early days.

R It was quite early, in fact I think we were the first elementary group that went there. They just had grown up people before that.

I You were there when the first graduating class graduated from the seminary.

R Yes, we carried flowers to them

I Okay, we'll get back to that in a little bit, do you know why your father in particular left Finland, did he ever tell you the reasons?

- R No, I don't know why, he never mentioned what reason he had. He was the youngest of nine and many of his brothers became sea men and disappeared because we've never heard. His brother Matt do you remember him? He was a sailor of seven seas and landed back in Ely here. So I really don't know why he came.
- I I suppose for the usual reasons.
- R My mother might have come because her parents died and she and her brother were left so she might have come for that reason.
- I Okay, going back to your own personal history, this is a question that you might not be able to answer but what do you view as the biggest accomplishment in your life? Finishing an education, or would you say there were many?
- R Well I didn't get to finish what I really would have wanted to do
- I Which was what?
- R I loved languages and if I could have continued at the University I would have wanted not to teach languages especially but become a translator somewhere. But with so many children and my mother had twins and she had burned her hand I felt that I shouldn't go on, but stay at home. Then when one of the twins died and my mother got no better I cancelled all my program for the sophomore year.
- I In college?
- R Yes, so then I went to normal school for teacher's college.
- I Did you go to the University before that in Minnesota?
- R Yes, for one year.
- I I see.
- R Then when I couldn't go back I cancelled my second year at the University and enrolled the winter term at the Duluth Teacher's College. It wasn't called that then it was called Normal School then. So then I finished the teaching and went onto teaching.
- I I gather that teaching was very important in your life?
- R Oh yes.
- I And you view yourself as an educator primarily?
- R Making kids work.
- I Well let's see now, you did your elementary schooling in Ely is that right?
- R I taught before I came here for two years.
- I I'm sorry did you go to elementary and high school here in Ely?

- R It's funny because I had been in second grade when I went to Suomi College and I was gone two years and when I came back they said well you've been at a Finn School so you go to third grade. They weren't going to give me any credit for those two years. So I was in the third grade and I was there three weeks and Miss \_\_\_\_\_ was the head then and she said you don't belong here. So she pushed me to the sixth grade. I went from there on.
- I In the Ely School system. What kind of a system was it back in those days? Was it good schooling?
- R Oh yes, sometimes I think some of those older days were better. They were more profitable than they are today. Maybe I'm just so old fashioned, I don't know.
- I The Iron Range schools have always had good reputations.
- R Yes they have, because those kids have always made good of themselves.
- I They made a study of the kids, called the Education of the New Immigrant on the Iron Range and one of the things they found out of course was that the schools on the Iron Range were marvelous. Where did you learn to speak English?
- R In Ely.
- I At home or in school
- R At home. I could read and write in Finnish before I knew any English. When I went to school I sat there three weeks before they realized I didn't know anything.
- I I see, because you couldn't speak English then.
- R No, so they put me back to first grade. But then after you get with children outside it didn't take long.
- I Did you use much English at home in the early days?
- R No
- I But then later on for example I know that your step mother spoke English
- R
- I Because he was a merchant and had to learn it and pick it up on his own
- R
- I Do you know how much education your father had?
- R He didn't have too much, he went to school on the Swedish side. There he got the schooling that he had and that's where he was confirmed.

I Could he talk Swedish?

R Oh yes, he used to get Swedish newspapers for years after he came here.

I Is that right.

R Oh yes, he knew some Russian too and a little bit of German too

I He was remarkable, in many ways, he was kind of self-educated then?

R Yes, he was. He read, he certainly was a avid reader.

I What kinds of things did you read at home? What kinds of things did he read, I suppose he read most of the standard Finnish newspapers?

R Oh yes.

I Did he ever read the labor papers?

R No

I These were not considered the proper kinds of things to read?

R No

I Then he read books and so on.

R Oh yes, we still have them here

I I noticed them in your Library here. You said he was an avid reader

R Oh yes.

I You're step mother was too, I remember when I used to come over here she was always reading a book. What about the kinds of newspapers and books you read as a youth? What do you remember in particular?

R Oh all the things that were for children in those days

I Finn stuff mostly?

R Well Finn stuff mostly but then after you grew up you still talked it but you didn't get a chance to read too much of it.

I Now the next category is employment and we've covered that quite well what were wages like in the Ely school system, were they good for women?

R Well when I went for the county and taught for the county,

I St. Louis county school system?

R Yes, and I got thirty-five dollars a month.

I Really

R And out of that I had to pay my board and room. Then I would try to send five dollars or so to my dad to help dad.

I Sure.

R With my first check do you know what I bought?

I What

R A 22 rifle.

I Were you a hunter?

R Yes, and I kept the family supplied with rabbits and partridge

I Is that right.

R On my way to school if I saw a rabbit or partridge I'd shoot it and then tie it up and pick it up on my way home from school.

I When you were my teacher, I never pictured you as a hunter.

R We were always on the lake and out in the woods.

I The St. Louis County School system, I learned about it yesterday and it was a very remarkable school system.

R Yes, it was.

I Do you know much about it in terms of whatkind of school system it was? I was told it was very much like a Danish Folk School that is the education was not only conceived in the classroom but education was with the whole family. Was your own local school system based onthe same motto?

R Well mine was just a small country school.

I Just an elementary school

R Yes

I Was it a well run system?

R Oh yes.

I You think very highly of this system?

R Oh yes.

I Who was the superintendent when you were teaching?

R Oh dear, I don't even remember.

I That was before Salmi's time of course?

R Oh yes. Mr. Barnes who was the principle here became the County Superintendent of Schools then.

I So wages were pretty low and I take it they weren't very high in Ely either.

R No. I was in Phillison for two years and I think I was getting \$60.00 or something like that. Then it was during the time of the Armastise when I came that fall then I got \$80.00 then I think they raised it and after a couple of years I got a \$120.00.

I A \$120.00

R Yes, just think how small. Even when I got through after 35 years of teaching my pay was only \$5,000 a year. Now they start out with \$7,000 with not any experience.

I Yes, that's right, now I'm quite interested in the labor history and in the project that Suomi College is doing and they are really interested in the 1915 Copper strike and herein the Iron Range the strike of 1907. Do you recall anything about the 1916 strike?

R No, I don't.

I You don't.

R I know it was hard living and that but I don't remember that it especially affected me.

I Now I'm quite interested in what the relations were with the socialist folk and the white folk or the church folk in local communities. What do you recall here in Ely?

R We weren't allowed to go there

I You weren't allowed to go there at all.

R No. I remember one time I was bridesmaid at a wedding and they went up there to dance and being the bridesmaid I felt I should go with them and ~~he called me up there~~ and I was grown up already.

I *I got called out for it*  
Who called you up?

R My father. But then the KN's and KL's used to show plays. They put on plays and they were wonderful. Some of the acting would be good for anyone today to see.

I Sure. Did you know any of the red's personally?

- R Oh I knew them but I was never close to them because they never came to church so we didn't get to know who they were.
- I So it was a different social circle entirely?
- R Oh yes
- I Was this true of most of the Synod families?
- R No, I don't think they had any church going people
- I In otherwords they were just two entirely different groups?
- R Yes.
- I Were they looked down upon by the church people?
- R Well, I don't know that they were looked down upon but we felt that they were losing alot. By just being like that and wanting nothing but good times and dancing.
- I Do you recall any indidents with your father, I would think he would have been an anti socialist group.
- R Oh yes. I recall when they had a parade for the IWW.
- I Oh yes
- R We'd watch them when they went in the parade and they'd hollar I won't work. There were no outbursts or anything but there was no communication between them.
- I Now one of the things I've learned in my research is when you think of Ely you think of a very stable town among the Finns and more of what you would call a white town than a red town. How do you suppose that Ely was less radical than other range towns? Have you ever thought about that? Was it do you suppose because Ely was at the end of the road or off the beaten path or something?
- R I don't know.
- I Do you think it might have been because the white leadership or conservative leadership was so strong?
- R I think so
- I I've had this impression. The most vivid memories of my youth are of the older people and they were terribly strong people and they were the real leaders. The red element in the community just couldn't standup to that kind of leadership.
- R That's right
- I Another factor were the churches were quite strong.

I So the Red's were very much on the losing end in this community.

R I don't really remember any of the great men who were at the <sup>head</sup> ~~end~~ of their work.

I Neither do I, I don't remember any prominent socialists. Tell me something about the Depression and what sort of things stand out in your mind from the Depression days? The conditions and how did people get along and how many mines were running if you can remember? Did they get any work?

R Well they had work but their wages were cut and they had to give up lots of things.

I Nobody starved in Ely?

R Well I don't know that anybody starved but they didn't eat very fancy.

I I suppose alot of the Finns went out and shined deer in the woods.

R Well you can't blame them, they weren't doing it just for the fun of it, they needed the food.

I They had to put food on the table

R Yes, it isn't like what they do now

I So in a sense it was just? Was there WPA in those days?

R You mean goverment things?

R Yes.

R I don't know, they fixed streets and things like that

I Yes, that was typical. The other thing that was prominent in Ely in the Depression days was the CCC Camp.

R Oh yes, they were all around, they planted trees and fixed roads so that was good.

I In a sense they opened up the boundary lines here in Ely.

R You bet they did.

I What has happened to Ely economically over the years? When I lived in Ely, the mines were busily running, and there were alot of tourists and this was known as the playground of the nation. What happened to Ely after the war period mostly?

R It was pretty bad until they opened up the Reserve.

I Did it close all the mines?

R Well one by one.

I The last one running was Pioneer.

R Yes, and Chandler was the first one.

I Chandler was run by a private company for a while and then it shut down. Then they opened up Babbōt, now what is Babbōtt?

R That is the place where they crush the taconite rock so that it can be made into pellets and the dirt and impurities are taken out to that it's 67% iron when they are through.

I So Babbōtt in a sense saved it economically.

R Oh, it did if it hadn't been for that I don't know what we would have done.

I Is there hope here in Ely for the nickel and copper industry to develop?

R Well they're talking about it.

I It will help with the employment.

R It will help some people but more and more people are coming and they don't eat or sleep in the motels they have their own.

I Right, they have their own campers.

R It's only the sporting goods and some of the restaurants that get helped.

I If you wanted to visualize Ely ten years from now, what would you visualize it to be? A sleepy town or a town that still manages to go on, in other words do you think there is still going to be growth here in ten years?

R I don't know. Well there won't be as much lumber until they start planting what they've taken out.

I They closed some of the areas to lumbering now.

R Just so they don't ruin all the land. Sometimes I think they've advertised so much that they're ruining it.

I Now you believe it's been ruined because there are too many people

R Yes, and alot of them come and they aren't careful with what they do

I I've seen places where I used to camp when I was a kid and the campsites are just worn out. I would be very much in favor of making reservations. Would you agree with that?

R They're talking about that

R It would help the area and I suppose people would get the idea if you have to reserve it it must be worth looking at.

I Okay let's move on to some different questions, political questions, being a historian no doubt you've been interested in politics, did you ever run for public office yourself?

R

I No, okay, you're dad ran for what?

R Well he ran for County Commissioner

I He didn't win that job though?

R No. Then he was on the city council. Then of course he was on the Board during the war.

I Would you say he was a responsible for community life?

R Oh yes.

I Running a good community and so on. Has Ely been a pretty well run Community? Basically is Ely pretty free of political corruption.

R No, it is not free from corruption.

I Do you think maybe if they had a few more Finns running the town they could do a little bit better?

R People today just seem to be thinking of getting a little more money and they don't care how they get it. I'm very disappointed innot only Ely but the whole country.

I Right. Now here is one of these loaded questions and if you don't want to answer it you don't have to because it's so obvious. Did the Depression of the thirties change your political affiliation at all?

R

I You remained the same political affiliation. Who ran Ely let's say back in the 30's and 40's. Did the Finns run it together with the Slovenian groups?

R No, years ago, Finns and Slovenians were all separated, they didn't have anything to do with each other. So it was just certain people, like a mine captain or a lawyer who ran it. I think most of the Finnish people would help because they were pretty careful about things likethat. I think the Finns stayed more in the background.

I It's too bad because the Finnish people as far as I can see are real bright people.

- R Now it's almost all Slovenian.
- I It's a Slovenian town now. This is true of most of the Iron Range today.
- R The Finnish are backward they don't want to shove in.
- I The big names in the olden days was Charlie Trezone, do you remember much about him?
- R ~~No~~ Oh yes.
- I Was he a pretty good man, a just man?
- R Yes, he was, he was good. He was good to even Finns and other, he was good. I think they used to call him Black Jack..
- I Yes, I've heard the term. The next category is social life and I'm interested to find out how the different nationality groups how they got along. Just give me kind of a sketch on how the different groups got along in the olden days and how they get along today.
- R Well today they're getting along better as far as some organizations are concerned for example, even our Catholic groups and our Finn groups get together with the world wideprayer day. But in the old days everyone stayed to their own group. I think many of the Catholics are changing some of their views.
- I Yes, very much.
- R Yes, very much, in fact now some of the Catholic pastors are working with the Finns.
- I When you were a kid growing up here in Ely did you get along with the other nationalities, Finnkids get along with the Slovenian kids?
- R Well I remember when I used to go to school there were a couple of cousin jacks we used to call them and they'd throw rocks at us and everything else and call us dirty Finlanders. I'd come home crying and tell my mother that they called me a dirty Finlander and she'd say don't care what they call you and I'd say I don't care but it hurts when you get hit with a rock. There was a lot of class distinction.
- I Okay here's a cousinjack, Finn distinction what about the Finns and Slovenians? Did they call them Slovenians?
- R No, they used to call them \_\_\_\_\_
- I Yes that's the word I use now and was it a putdown word?
- R No, I don't think so, we just thought of it as a nationality.
- I Did Finn kids lookdown upon Slovenian kids?

R Oh yes, and they looked the same way towards us.

I I see, so it worked the same way. Okay, now moving toward the forties and fifties, how did you as a teacher regard Slovenian kids?

R It made no difference to me, kids were there to learn and I didn't care what they were.

I You were there to teach and that was it.

R Yes. I found out that lots of things we found out about them were not right

I You mean prejudices that you picked up along the way and weren't right

R Oh yes.

I Your teaching experience tended to make you more open minded toward the different nationality groups.

R Yes, and the contact with their parents. I had a couple sad experiences with parents who tried to say because I was Finnish and Luthern that I was doing the school a great injustice by teaching to his kids. I was even called before the superintendent.

I I think I'm a more tolerant person from living on the Iron Range because there are so many different nationalities. We manage to get along pretty well together.

R It did Ely alot of good to have to go through that. Except that it gave them too much power. If they think they can get the job they'll take it. I think the Finnish people are still kind of withdrawn.

I Oh yes. What about mixed marriages in Ely, has this been a problem?

R Oh yes. But that's changing.

I In other words if a Finn kid narries a Slovenian it's no longer a stigma.

R I'd feel bad if they married a Catholic just the same.

I You'd still feel bad.

R And they sometimes wouldn't even marry them in the Catholic church unless they turned.

I Do you know if anybody has ever done a study on inter-marriage in Ely?

R I don't know.

I There seems to be alot.

R Oh yes, there's an awful lot of it.

I Why were there so many saloons in Ely?

R Why are there still?

I Well yes, there's just as many now as there were when I was a kid.

R Well it's a shame when this friend comes to see me and they drive up Sheraton all the bars there are.

I Well I suppose it was a gathering place and watering place for the lumberjacks. Do you think the Finns had any special kind of a drinking problem?

R Oh some of them did, you bet they did.

I My cousin is a doctor and he said the real number one problem in Ely is the Alcohol problem.

R I would say so too.

I Do you remember alot of fights?

R Oh yes, in the early days.

I They used knives and things like that

R Well I don't know if they threw knives but they fought alot.

I Did the Finns get a bad name because of that?

R Oh sure, so did the Slovenians

I I see so the Slovenians fought too then?

R Oh yes.

I They were sort of in the same boat then.

R Oh yes.

I What did you and your friends do for a good time when you were a kid?

R In the winter before the snow came we used to skate then we'd ski all over. We were all over the lake.

I Cross country skiing?

R Yes.

I Did you spend alot of time at the cabin in the summer?

R Oh yes

- I Fond memories of my youth were going to the cabin and the sauna on the shore, is that still there?
- R Yes it's still there.
- I What about in the Finnish families the Finnish folk dances, was that allowed?
- R Well dancing was against my mother's ideals
- I I see, so you just didn't dance.
- R No. My father didn't care about it either but my mother was very much against it.
- I Of course your family was a Temperance family
- R Oh yes. When Reverend Onias was here he used to have regular experiment classes in alcoholism.
- I He actually sponsored alcohol education.
- R I should say so, every week.
- I That's remarkable. Okay tell me about some of the big events in Ely when you were growing up, like the 4th of July and so on?
- R Well everything used to be at Sandy Point. Church picnics, Temperance picnics.
- I Sandy Point is \_\_\_\_\_
- R es.
- I Oh yes, I've been to Sandy Point.
- R And now you wouldn't know it
- I Yes, because the road has been moved.
- R Yes and everything is changed so, you couldn't hold a picnic there. Everyone would have picnics there, the Slovians too.
- I The picnic was a big event in Ely?
- R Oh yes.
- I What would you do on Juhannus \_\_\_\_\_?
- R The same thing.
- I Have bonfires and that?
- R

- I Okay now let's move on the category of medicine, I assume in Ely there was fairly adequate medical care?
- R Yes. Parker and Sutherland were some of the doctors here
- I These were fairly good doctors for that day?
- R Oh yes.
- I Do you recall the incident when you had the one tonsil pulled and what happened then?
- R I nearly bled to death because they let me walk right straight home from the hospital right straight to our house.
- I Then the doctor came over and saved your life?
- R Yes
- I They didn't know much better in those days, a tonsil operation was considered then like pulling a tooth and it was much more serious of course.
- R Right.
- I Now one of the very colorful characters in the Ely life and in the life of the Finnish socialists was Doctor Tundar who had a hospital here in Ely. Tell me what you know about him?
- R Well I had the other tonsil taken out by him and he gave me chloroform.
- I Which was the more advanced procedure?
- R I don't know whether you'd callit advanced or not. But he was a good doctor and I really felt he knew his business because he looked long and far ahead.
- I For example?
- R Because he said one day he said people are going to be able to live with pills. I suppose he meant vitamin pills. Also he believed that solar heat would come one day. I heard that when he left here he went to Chism and he did heat a house by sunlight.
- I It could very well be. Was he respected by the people in Ely?
- R Well the ones I knew did, but some of the others thought he was a crackpot when he talked about the future that way.
- Do you recall your father's attitude toward him or did he ever say anything about him?
- R He had nothing against him. My mother was operated there and I was. Did he do the operation?

R

I I see, so he was really a competent surgeon.

R I thought he was.

I Now the fact that at one time he was a socialist adevocator doesn't bother you?

R

I

R Because he was doing his job.

I He wasn't adgetating then?

R

I Did he adgetate at all about socialism when he was here in practice?

R Not that I know of, of course I was just a kid, so I didn't know.

I The conclusion that I've come to is he just gave it up and became a lukewarm part of the movement. So this phase was a very short one although it was a very important one in Finnish history.

R

I What sort of benefits were provided for mining families and miners before the unions became strong. Did they have any kind of welfare plan here in Ely?

R The only thing that I remember is they paid the hospital and they could get all the medical attention. Every man who worked at the mine gave so much out of there paycheck.

I It was kind of a medical plan then

R Oh yes. They were very reasonable too

I Very reasonable.

R Oh yes, and when you had an operation they didn't count every pill, a dollar for this pill and a dollar for that pill, they took the whole thing at one time and everything was in one.

I So you feel the mining company was acting quite responsibly with the men.

R Yes, they were. What would have happened to those families with so many children, what would they have done? They wouldn't have been able to live.

I Do you recall severe health problems amont the people here in Ely, for example, do you recall sylicosis among the miners?

R Oh yes

I There was alot of it

R Yes, and many many suffered and died as a result of it.

I What about other medical problems in Ely, was tuberculosis common?

R Yes.

I What else, the flu common?

R Oh yes, especially that one time during the war?

I Yes, between 17~~n~~ and 18

R

I In the early days were midwives common?

R Oh yes, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ was one

I Who?

R Mr. Leino's mother.

I That's right, up on Finn hill. She used to work with Doctor Parker and he actually asked her to assist.

R That's right.

I So there was midwivery during them days?

R Oh yes.

I Did you use home remedies at home?

R Yes, my mother always used to keep tar and he had it in one of those heavy crockery crocks and he kept it on the stove and that was our cough medicine.

I That was your cough medicine, they used tar for a thousand different things.

R Oh yes.

I I'm also interested in the church life because I'm very much a part of the church life in Ely because my father was a pastor here and your family as we said before was Suomi Synod. Do you know much about the early history of this congregation. Your father had a very active role in the development of this congregation in it's early days, do you know the story?

R No, I don't know the details only that one day when that other separated.

I You remember the story when the people's church separated from the original church.

R Yes.

I That was back in about 1903 or very early.

R Yes, very early.

I That other church just went it's own way then.

R Yes, they became \_\_\_\_\_

I Did you know the people at all yourself or the issues involved?

R I don't know.

I The big issue was the Suomi Synod

R I guess they didn't want to be under the rule, they wanted to have something to say themselves.

I And your father along with other Ely leaders wanted to remain staunchly Suomi Synod.

R Yes.

Do you know why?

R I think they felt it's policies and ideals were what they believed.

I What kind of a congregation was the local Suomi Synod congregation? For example tell me something about early days and early ministers, you mentioned Reverend Oinas who was well known in Suomi Synod circles.

R Well at first we didn't have a church, they kept the church. So we always rented from the Swedish church. For many many years we had all our services, our confirmations and everything in the Swedish church until quite recently.

I When did they acquire the socalled \_\_\_\_\_?  
Did they build the basement.

R They build the basement first.

I That was in the twenties

R Then when father was here we put the top on it.

I That was considered to be one of the better pieces of architecture in northern Minnesota.

R Well they said it had to be like a church in Finland

R That's why the high stairs and that.

I Kind of gothic architecture and that sort of thing.

R Yes.

I Those days were very hard and I remember the congregation very well, it was sort of a model congregation because the people worked so very hard for it.

R That's right.

I I remember the Guild Group that was greatly active in raising funds for the church.

R Do you know how a group of us helped? During berry season we picked berries. I bet we picked 50 or 60 bushels of berries and then turned that money over to the church. Another thing that made alot of money was pasties.

I My father used to tell me stories about that when they sold them to the miners.

R Oh yes, when they came up for their meal. I guess they still do that no I guess they quit. The Methodist church has been doing that but they don't take them down to the mine anymore. We used to sell sewing and make quilts and that.

I Of course you were heart and soul in that and your sisters were and many were committed to the church. In many ways, the Ely congregation was a very strong congregation. I always grew up with the idea that Finns are all very very religious which isn't true of course. Tell me about the crucial period in Ely church life. The period from Finnish to English, did you have squabbles about that?

R Well I know how we had our Sunday School in English. We always had it in Finnish and Andrew Saari was the leader. Well the young kids coming up couldn't understand Finn anymore. He'd be talking Finn and they didn't know what he was saying. He didn't want to quit so finally he decided to quit and they had a hard time finding someone to take over so they asked me. I was very hesitant about taking it so finally I said if you'll let me give the opening and closing in English I'll take it. So they did and it stayed that way from then on.

I When was that? In the thirties?

R Oh golly it was so long ago, I don't remember. Then the classes started to turn to English except for those who wanted to continue in Finn. But it got less and less and finally none.

I It was finally discontinued.

R Right

I During whose time did the fully English services start?

R See I wasn't teaching then and I really don't remember.

I When English work started really getting strong in the early thirties did you find you had a big fight on your hands in the local church.

R Well I didn't but some of the Finnish people did and they were really upset when the Swedish people started coming over and we said why don't you run the show like they are. Some of them said it's no use we don't have a church anymore.

I Now you mentioned when the Swedish people came over, what was that incident? The group left the Swedish Luthern Church and joined here?

R

I And they had a conflict over a local minister?

R Yes. Something was wrong of course, I was gone then and didn't get in on that.

I see, you were gone.

R Yes

I Okay and they became very active in the congregation then?

R Oh yes. They still are.

I Very staunch members of the church.

R Yes, and again the Finnish people said oh well we can't do anything. Some of them have been very good and willing to help but some of them still hold it against the Swedish people.

I Because they are Swedish.

R Not because they are Swedish but because they are Finnish.

I What ministers stand out in your mind, you always had a resident pastor here of course, what ministers stand out in your mind that you might want to mention? Was Oinas a very strong person a good pastor?

R To me they were all good.

I In your family the clergy were respected.

R In our family if anything was said my parents always said respect the minister.

I What kind of a man was \_\_\_\_\_

R Again I wasn't here when he was here

I I see.

- R I didn't know. I was gone for eleven and a half years. Then I was away teaching.
- I Right. It's pretty obvious that your family was very interested in the church yet they were interested in other groups so it was kind of a broad interest.
- R Then we used to have a \_\_\_\_\_ where we got together and read Finnish articles and stories.
- I What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean in English?
- R It means to get together and read in Finnish.
- I Was it like a literary society?
- R Yes, we used to read Finnish things and translate some things from English to Finnish and read them in Finnish. We used to read books in Finnish and study some of the great men.
- I What ideals did the Kaleva instill in your life let's say personally?
- R Well I don't think it changed my life except I got to know about Kaleva more.
- I Did it teach you a greater appreciation of your Finnish heritage?
- R Yes, and I think locally we learned alot and made us realize how much Finland meant to the world.
- I Now as I understand you I would say you are fully Americanized because of your teaching but yet I would say you are a good Finn too.
- R Oh I like Finn. For the last two years I've taught a class in beginning Finn.  
In Finnish.
- R Yes.
- I You're proud to be a Finn obviously?
- R Oh yes.
- I Now you mentioned Suomi College, tell me a little bit about your experiences at Suomi College? What was life like at Suomi College?
- R Well it was another home there, we were taken care of and given our meals. I enjoyed those two years very much.
- I They were good years?
- R

I Did you have good teaching?

R Oh yes.

I Who do you remember?

R Can't understand the names given on the tape.

I Was John Kiiskila there when you were there?

R

I What about J. K. Nikander, what do you recall about Nikander?

R Well I stayed with them for one year and he always kept going, if somebody tried to say it's no use doing that he'd say oh yes there is. He was very firm and didn't want to give up the idea that Suomi wasn't good.

I He of course is the real founder of Suomi College and the real guts of Suomi College and the real guts of Suomi Synod.

R I don't know how he got so much done.

I I don't either, he must have worked 50 hours a day. Was he a dynamic man? Or was he kind of quiet?

R I don't think he was forward but he stuck to what he believed, you couldn't sway him back and forth. Of course I was so young that I really couldn't say that much.

I You can't make judgments like that.

R No but I liked him.

Your program of study was kind of elementary then.

R Yes, we had arithmetic, and history, a Finnish history and Finnish geography.

I The Finnish language?

R Yes, the Finnish language.

R We had church and every morning we had to go to prayers.

It's obvious to me you had a very positive experience there.

R If I could have gone back there after I had that tonsil operation I would have finished the equivalent of the eighth grade when I was 14

I For goodness sake

R Because we were taught more like adults than we were kids.

I What do the rest of your brothers and sisters do?

R You mean the ones who are living now?

I Yes.