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**FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT
LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978**

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Anna Isola
July 9, 1973

Anderson

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Born in Calumet 1901 - Parentage	1113-14	
Started Teaching in Elo	1115-16	
Problems in teaching English		
Teaching in Bear Lake	1118	
Amusement	1119	
Boarding houses	1121	
Finnish maids	1122	
The Tamarack Co-op		
Vertins' Store	1123	
Home remedies	1124-25	Wizard oil
Picnics	1126	

15 pp

One Side Audio Cassette

SUBJECT:

SOURCE: Mrs. Anna Isola

COMMENTS:

Interviewer: Wallace Anderson

The following interview is with Mrs. Anna Isola, 4316 Oak Street, Calumet, Michigan, made by Wally Anderson on 9 July, 1973 in her home.

I: Well, Mrs. Isola, we've been talking quite a bit here filling out this form and that, so let's get a little more background on you now. Where were you born?

R: I was born here in Calumet, Michigan.

I: And what year was that?

R:

I: And your parents, I think you said, were born in Finland.

R:

I: In any particular area of Finland or...?

R: In (???) *Alous Naasalanni Finland*

I: I'll have to have you spell that one because I can never do it
What years did your parents come from Finland?

R: My father came in 1888 and my mother came in 1900.

I: And do you know the particular reason why your parents left Finland to come to the United States?

R: Well, I think probably to better themselves by employment.

I: Was it...do you have any idea why...were they having trouble finding employment in Finland or had they had letters from this country describing the area?

R: Yes, my grandfather came here first to Baraga and I think he influenced my mother and father in that they came to this country shortly after that.

I: And your grandfather left his family in Finland.

R:

I: ...when he came over here and got work.

R: That's right.

I: He must have come a few years before your father

R:

I: And then did your parents come directly to Calumet?

R: My father came directly to Calumet and my mother came here twelve years later.

I: And do you know the reason why she came?

R: Well, to be with my father.

I: Oh, she already had known him from Finland.

R: Yes, oh yes, they had three children in Finland.

I: Oh...they were married in Finland.

R: Yes they got married in Finland

I: Oh well naturally she'd come over if she got the chance.

R: It took twelve years to gather up enough money to get the family.

I: Say, that's a long time.

R: That's a long time.

I: Twelve years?

R: Un huh...I had twin brothers and they were a year old when my father left Finland and they were thirteen when they saw each other again.

I: Now when your father came here, he went to work for the mining company?

R: Yes...for the mining company, yes.

I: And you were born in this country?

R: Yes.

I: And you went to school then through the Calumet school system?

R: That's right...graduated from the Calumet High School.

I: And then where did you go?

R: Marquette...to what was then the Marquette Normal School is the University now.

I: Yeah...did you go during the regular school year?

R: No, just to the summer term

I: To teach.

R: That's right...didn't need much education to teach in those days.

I: And then when you...if I remember right, you completed this normal school you got a third grade certificate or something like this?

R: That's right.

I: And then you could teach in the lower grades.

R: For one year.

I: For one year?

R: Then you had to renew that certificate.

I: Oh yeah

R: Take another examination then to get it

I: Yeah, I talked to another fellow who had done the same thing and finally I guess He just gave up and said, "I've got enough certificates going through" so he went and got his degree so he had to go back. Well, where did you start teaching then?

R: I started in a country school in Elo...it's farming country called Elo...it's near Tapiola.

I: And do you want to tell me a little bit about what the school was like?

R: Oh, that was really something.

I: What year was it?

R: That was in the fall of 1920. And my first school was the living room of Pastor ~~Pulunen~~ (?) home. *Kyllonen?* *Kilunen?*

I: His home?

R: The living room of his home and there were eighteen students there ranging from first grade up through the eighth.

I: That must have been an experience...huh?

R: That sure was.

I: Well, what kind of arrangements were made...did/they have a school house?

R: They didn't have a school house. The children were being brought to the Tapiola school, from what I remember, and in those days there

were no heated buses or any~~o~~ther vehicles to take the children, so the farmers rebelled against sending these children with open sleighs such a distance...it was a long distance and so they demanded that there be a school right there in that vicinity and so they...the school board contacted to use this pastors home for a school room and they brought the desks there and blackboards and everything like that.

- I: Man, (???) to feed them at lunch time and have the food right on the (???) and everything else.
- R: Yeah, well they brought their lunches...some of them had to walk quite a distance to get there.
- I: And you had all eight grades?
- R: All eight grades.
- I: How did this work out trying...?
- R: Well it wasn't easy. You had to combine classes, you know, put two grades together and teach them the same things and then the next few weeks teach the other, you know...it was quite a chore.
- T: Well, you know in one respect, probably this was an advantage to some of the students because they could listen to either the grades ahead of them and pick up ahead of time.
- R: And they sure listened.
- I: Yeah, they would almost have to
- R: You have to...you just couldn't keep them separate in one room.
- I: No way to do it
- R: No
- I: Were these basically all Finnish children from this one area?
- R: These were all Finnish children that were in that community. There were three schools in that community. I taught in this living room of this (???) home and then there was a school house oh about a mile or two away...just a one-room school house and there was another teacher there and then there was another school teacher about a mile or two in an opposite direction from where I went and she taught in an old home ...it was an old farm house.
- I: It had been converted into a school house
- R: Un huh...and she had a lot of children...eighteen or so. Then the following year they brought in a two-room school house from I think it was Pilgrim Location...they brought this school house to Elo, and then this had two rooms and then all these little schools were combined into that one school. There were over a hundred students in

those two rooms. So that was another

I: Did you have problems? Did you teach a second year then in that...

R: I taught second year in that school there that was brought in from Pilgrim Location and there were only two teachers there. One teacher had Kindergarten through third grade and I had from the fourth through the eighth.

I: Did you have any problems...I imagine you were teaching in English and you had all these Finnish students...did you have any problems?

R: Oh yes we had problems. The superintendent just insisted that we are not allowed to speak ~~English~~ out in the playground.

I: Finnish?

R: ...or Finnish out in the playground and oh you had a hard time to teach them to only talk English.

And were you allowed to use any Finnish at all in the class

R: Oh no.

I: Were there any difficulties?

R: No, because they all knew how to talk English, but speaking Finnish at home all the time it just came more natural to them to talk Finnish than to talk English. You know even their games...they played Finnish games.

I: What were some of their Finnish games...you know, this is kind of interesting.

R: Well, they were the same as English but you know they talked Finland while they were doing it. They say hide-and-seek they just talk Finnish when they were playing hide-and-seek or duck-on-the-rock or whatever they played, they just used the Finnish words.

I: Did they have any games at all that were just particularly Finnish in nature?

R: No, I don't think so. I don't remember any.

I: Well I'll tell you, one game I heard and I've never heard of this from any place else is where they had a pointed stick...each one had two sticks and each one would some how or other would throw one stick up in the air and try to hit it with the other stick into the middle of a circle or something...but I never heard of that any place else.

R: Oh...nobot this wasn't a Finnish game, but they used to make a little peg pointed on both ends and then we'd take a longer stick and try to hit the point of that teddy...they called it a teddy...and that they would try to hit the point so it would go into a certain spot or certain circle.

- I: Well, that's probably the same game that this fellow was telling me about.
- R: Un huh...just a little short stick pointed on both ends.
- I: It worked something on the order of tidley winks then. *tiddeley*
- R: Yes, that's right only in Tidley winks you use your finger instead of a stick.
- I: Yeah, and try to get it in
- R: That's right.
- I: Yeah, he was telling me and I couldn't understand what the heck kind of game it was.
- R: Yeah, they called it teddy...that wasn't a Finnish game though they called it teddy...there was an English name for it. We used to play that when I was a child right here.
- I: Yeah...when you taught in this school house then where did you go to teach?
- R: Then I came to Calumet and I taught...oh...down in Bear Lake in the Kuskala farm over there. We had a school house right the the yard and I taught there for five years.
- I: Well, did you go back and forth to Calumet?
- R: Oh yes...my father would bring me over there on horse and cutter on Monday morning in wintertime and come and get me on Friday night.
- I: Did you stay right there during the week?
- R: I stayed at the Kuskala home.
- I: How many students did you have there?
- R: Oh, I had anywhere from eighteen to twenty-four, mostly Kuskala children...they had a big family.
- I: Had their own private school.
- R: That's right...so that wasn't bad after I got^t to teach in Calumet, but when I was teaching in Elo, that was the difficulty of coming back and forth. In the wintertime we had to walk from Elo to Pelkie and catch the train there to come to Houghton, then we'd take a streetcar from Houghton to Calumet.
- I: You know that's so hard to picture for a person like myself who has come up here within the past ten years.
- R: That's right.

- I: Well, really after World War II when I was here, but the changes that have taken place in this area.
- R: Oh yes...cars couldn't travel then in the wintertime at all...the roads weren't plowed but before the snow came we would take a street-car...one of the teachers was from Calumet...the other teacher was from Calumet too, so we took a streetcar from here to Hancock...or Houghton rather and then a school car...the superintendent saw that we got to Pelkie with the school car...the district owned the car I guess...but in the wintertime it was difficult. We'd come home for Christmas with the train and then we'd go back after the Christmas holidays and then we'd have to stay there all winter until after the snow melted.
- I: It's a lot different today.
- R: I should say. Another thing was the food problem. There was no store and we either had to get our...either had to bring it from home or get it from Pelkie. Pelkie had a store and that was a long distance. I think if ^{not} I'm right, it's four miles from Elo to Pelkie and then if we could/walk there on a Saturday our groceries or if the mailman didn't...forgot to give the mailman or list...he used to bring our groceries if we gave him a list and the money...well sometimes we just forgot to give it to him, well we lived on raw potatoes and butter for a day or two...and soda crackers. Oh, it was...we didn't mind, we were young. Was quite a lark.
- I: What did they do for amusement then?
- R: Well, in the summertime all the young people in the community would gather at the corner...they called it the (???) corner and there they would play old Finnish games. Someone would play a mouth organ and we'd do different reels and well, different circle games, you know; but in the wintertime all you did was stay at home or if the weather was nice enough we'd go and visit a neighbor and visit some of the pupils homes. But time seemed to go...we did a lot of reading; but that was another difficulty there because there were no electric lights...you had to fill that oil lamp with oil and light the lamp and do the best we could.
- I: I suppose you had to put in a stock of reading material for the winter
- R: Oh yes, and then we did get periodicals.
- I: Oh yeah, through the mail.
- R: But they did have a church and we established a Sunday School there and we had quite a few Sunday School pupils. There was a church there but they didn't have a Sunday School, so we established a Sunday School. So, it was all worth it in the end, I'm sure.
- I: It's just hard to picture the different styles and how you could teach when you try to compare it with today and the system today.

- R: Yes, and now for instance, we/would have to gather up all our own work for the beginners like for kindergarden and first grade and second grade and now they have workbooks that take care of all of that; but we had to get that all ready ourselves; so a lot of our time in the evenings went to getting together material for those grades. Something to amuse them while the older people were being taught their things.
- I: Oh yeah, because I imagine little kids like that they get pretty restless.
- R: Oh yes...had to find something for them to do.
- I: Did you utilize some of the older students in taking care of the younger ones?
- R: Once in awhile you could do that...you could do that with an exceptionally bright student why we would have her help with something for the kindergarten and first graders. And then in the mornings when you'd walk to school the house we stayed at was oh at least a mile and there were no plows yet early in the morning and we had to be going plowing through the fields through the snow to get to the school house every morning.
- I: And ski?
- R: No, didn't ski...I have never skied very much...didn't ski...didn't have skis or snowshoes. I had snowshoes later, but not at that time.
- I: Well, how many years did you teach at Bear Lake then.
- Five years
- Five years?
- R: Un huh and I taught altogether seven years altogether. I was married the fall of that year I went to teach that last year.
- I: And you moved to Calumet then.
- R: Yes, well we lived here all the while.
- Yeah, that's quite a way to teach.
- R: Oh, we had a few difficulties and we had fun
- I: Did you have different groups of Finnish and other ethnic groups as students or were they basically mostly all Finnish?
- R: They were all Finnish...even in that two-room school house where we had...I think there was a hundred and fourteen children, everyone of them was Finnish. There were no other people living in Elo...it was all Finnish farm country.
- I: How did the different ethnic groups get along here in Calumet? I know there's quite a mixture up here...there's Italians and...

- R: Well, we've never had any trouble...the youngsters here used to play together and we never had any trouble with the ethnic groups...not in my generation. I understand that before my time they had a little trouble, but...
- I: Well, I guess some of the miners and things once they got back up above ground and would start to celebrate a little bit they'd have some problems in talking with some of these people.
- R: But like my folks, they had the boarding house and they all worked in the mines, the boarders; but my folks were very strict. They used to have to get up Sunday morning and go to church regardless of how late they were up on Saturday night. My father was very strict that way.
- I: I think that was quite common up here...the boarding house. Many people had...
- R: They had to...there was so many single men came from Finland to work in the mines so they had to have the boarding houses to house them and feed them.
- I: Well, that was good in many respects. At least they had...they met people immediately from their own backgrounds. They didn't have that lonesome period because they were over here by themselves...they couldn't understand the language...
- R: That's right...and my folks were very outgoing, you know, they made friends easy with these men and they liked to stay here. We would have had a lot more than we could handle sometimes.
- I: Well did your dad operate a small farm at the same time?
- R: At the same...well not at that time...not while we had boarders, but later on when the boarders...mother gave up keeping boarders then we got involved in farming. We always raised our own potatoes and even grain and we always had cows and we'd sell milk.
- I: Anything to make a dollar...anyway you could do it.
- R: That's right.
- I: We were talking before and you mentioned the fact that this used to be a place where the Finnish maids congregated.
- R:
- I: Is there any special thing that you can remember about this?
- R: No, I was quite young yet...I don't remember exactly, but they used to tell their stories and there was a lot of laughing going on.
- I: You think maybe one of the reasons they congregated here/^{was}because there were a lot of boarders?
- R: No, by that time we didn't have the boarders.
- I: Oh, didn't have them anymore.

- R: No by that time we didn't have the boarders.
- I: These girl came directly from Finland?
- R: Yes, and they worked in the homes of the well-to-do people in town.. the mining captains and doctors and in the hospitals...there used to be a hospital right here in Tamarack...a big hospital and some of them worked there in the kitchen, laundry...they didn't have far to go to come here to spend their free time.
- I: and Thursday was their day off.
- R: Thursday was the maids day off. I think it still is for people who have maids. There aren't very many maids anymore, I don't think.
- I: No...you don't ever hear of any.
- R: Probably in the city, but I don't know...they have their colored maids in some of the cities down south; but you don't hear about them here anymore. It's hard to get anybody to help.
- I: Well, I can imagine what it must have been getting a bunch of those girls talking Finnish around here. There must have been a lot of racket.
- R: There sure was.
- R: Yeah, by the time I graduated from high school, they were gone, you know, they didn't stay here.
- I: Well, they must have been here the period before the strike.
- R: Yeah, oh yes.
- I: ...when things were booming
- R: Things were booming.
- I: In fact, Calumet must have been quite a town at that time
Oh, we had a big population at one time here.
- I: From the descriptions, you know, that you read about, the main street of Calumet was all theaters.
Oh we had four five theaters in Calumet.
- I: With all the name people
- R: Yeah, and we used to have a large grocery store right here at the end of this block...they did a million dollar business a year.
- I: What was the name of that?
- R: The Tamarack Co-op.

- I: A Co-op store?
- R: Yeah, Tamarack Co-operative...and in those days they used to deliver groceries and every morning oh you'd see probably a dozen teams of horses going out just loaded with big loads of merchandise.
- I: Were they a Finnish Co-op or...?
- R: No, it was...I think it was mostly Cousin Jack...English. I don't think they ever employed a Finnish clerk even in that store
- I: All Cousin Jack.
- R: All Cousin Jack or you know some other nationalities, you know, but no Finnish people. I never seen a Finnish clerk in there and oh they disbanded...oh, my son was about a year old so it isn't too many years ago...well thirty-five - thirty-six years ago when they closed up. They had everything there...was a four-story building. They had groceries on the first floor and they had anything from groceries to furniture. Something like Vertin's is now, but Vertin's don't have groceries. They used to years ago.
- I: Vertin's did?
- R: Oh yes, they had a grocery department down in the basement
- I: In that same building they're in?
- R: In that same building.
- I: I didn't know that.
- R: Oh yes, they had groceries down in the first floor...down in the basement
- I: How many years ago was that?
- R: Oh that's many years ago...I couldn't tell you. A long time ago I shopped down there when I was a kid.
- I: Well then Vertin's have been up in this country quite a long time, haven't they.
- R: Yes...Old Mr. Vertin he's...he's (^{John Vertin's}???) for his father...he's the one that started that.
- I: Unintelligible...of the big stores, I think all the...
- R: Yes, there aren't any...that's the only big store that's left here in Calumet. There used to be quite a few...(???) in Laurium, that was where the Quality Market is now...that was a big department store including groceries.
- I: I imagine even shopping back in those days was quite a bit different huh? You didn't have any refrigerators.

kept it cool

- R: No you had to shop in quantity or you...and you brought it down in basement, I guess...~~(???)~~ down in the basement.
- I: So you had to go to the store a lot more often.
- R: Oh yes. Well, the order taker used to come and take the orders and the teamster used to deliver them. You didn't have to go out for them They'd come several times a week to bring you groceries. And then they were marked in a book, you know, and then at the end of the month it was added up and you paid for it.
- I: You paid your monthly grocery bill. Well, at least you knew how much you spent for groceries which is more than you do today.
- R: That's right. Yeah, it was quite different alright.
- I: Can you remember any of the home remedies or anything like this that were used by your parents?
- R: Well, I'll tell you what we had for a toothache is Wizard Oil.
- I: Wizard Oil?
- R: Wizard Oil.
- I: Was that a.
- R: It was a patent..
- I: ...a patent medicine?
- R: Patent medicine...I don't think you'd see it anymore. And Wizard Oil was for oh any kind of rheumatic pain or something...Wizard Oil. And for colds you had Foley's Honey and Tar. Oh it was plain lemon with honey...lemon juice and honey.
- I: Oh I can remember when I was a kid that I got mustard plasters.
- R: Oh yes.
- I: I know that was a common one.
- R: That's right
- I: For colds or bronchial troubles...I had bronchial troubles as a kid and I always ended up with mustard plasters.
- R: Oh...we didn't have mustard plasters...we had Wizard Oil.
- I: How about some of the other remedies that were used that were made at home? Do you remember?
- R: Well, the only thing that I remember is a weed that Mother took from the field on the farm and steeped it in boiling water and used it for

arthritis. I don't know what the plant is, but now that they talk so much about marijuana I kind of think maybe it was a marijuana plant.

I: Well, I don't know if it could be that or not.

R: Might have been something else. She claimed she cured her arthritis with that poltice that she made out of that plant.

I: How about this one for curing headaches?

R: Oh, that was a funny one. Oh you'd mash up a raw potato and you'd put it in a cloth and then pour a little bit of cold vinegar on it and hold that against your forehead for headache cure.

I: Did it work?

R: Well, I don't know...maybe it was all in the mind.

I: 'Cause that's where the headache was. Well, what did they mostly do for amusement back when you were a kid?

R: Well, when I was a kid we just used to play out here in the corner underneath the streetlight.

I: Well, how about some of the older people though.

R: Well I don't know, they used to...well I remember...I have an older brother who used to belong to an athletic society. They used to meet in the old Finnish Hall building on Eighth Street and it was an athletic society and they did their...whatever they did...their athletics and that in that building. But then there was the church and they sang in the choir...my older brother did...used to sing in the choir all the time. And you never went to shows. That was against Mother's and Dad's religion to go to a show. We didn't do much except at home we sang and played the organ...we had an organ in those days and Mother was a great one for singing. She used to like to sing.

I: How about picnics?

R: Well in those days you couldn't get very far when you didn't have a car. It was a big event for us to go to the lakeshore once a year in the horse and buggy and take a picnic basket along. But I remember when I was a little girl and the Copper Range Railroad was still running to Keweenaw, we used to take the train and go for picnic in *Lacoda Belle* (???)...mostly in (???) because that's where the train used to go. But that was only...probably an annual...semi-annual affair or something like that. It wasn't very often.

I: I was talking to a fellow last Saturday...he was involved with a lot of these bands and that and he said that they used to have band concerts and invite all the people and these bands would play at the various picnics held by different organizations...would hold different picnics and people came to that. And he said that at

different holidays they would parade up and down and there were quite a large number of bands and people would...these were all well attended.

- R: Yes, well there used to be a Tamarack park over here...I think it was owned by the Tamarack Mining Company or C & H Mining Company, and they used to have picnics there...the regular parades used to go past here and enter the park. They used to have big festivities there. There used to be a pavillion there for dancing.
- I: And where was that...right off the end of Oak Street right here?
- R: No, back of the County Warehouse over there...yes, in back of the County Warehouse. It's partly still there but it hasn't been used for many years. It was quite a popular place at one time. Oh, and another thing we used to...one thing we used to do is take the streetcar to the Electric Park. Did you know about the Electric Park?
- I: I've heard of it.
- R: Yes, it was kind of an amusement park...take this...between here and Hancock and we used to take the streetcar from Calumet.
- I: Well, what kind of things did they have there?
- R: Well they...for children they had merry-go-rounds and swings and you could buy...they had a concession there where you could buy sweets and pop and things like that.
- I: Did they have roller coasters and that?
- R: No...no
- I: It wasn't that big.
- R: No, it wasn't that big, no.
- I: Was there a picnic grounds?
- R: Picnic grounds...they had tables there and you could bring your picnic basket...your lunch there and also they used to take the Calumet school children there by grades. They used to hire a special streetcar and take a couple grades at a time for their spring picnic just before school closed. Yes, I'd been there several times when I was in the grades. The teacher used to come...the teacher used to come with us.
- I: There's quite a difference in the country now, huh?
- R: Oh, I should say so. You can get anywhere so easily with a car.
- End of tape.