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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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SUBJECT: First Apostolic Lutheran History

SOURCE: Walerus Kero, December 4, 1975

COMMENTS:

INTERVIEWER: Michael M. Loukinen

- I: This is Mike Loukinen interviewing Walerus Kero, now living in Pelkie but toward the Alston area of Pelkie. It's December 4th, 1975, and we're going to be talking a bit about Walerus' own background and then we're going to focus as much as we can on Apostolic Church history in Pelkie as much as Walerus says he can remember. Where were you born?
- R: In Sweden.
- I: In Sweden?
- R: Yeah.
- I: Where in Sweden?
- R: Kolaolonbol, Sweden.
- I: And when did you come to America?
- R: 1914
- I: Why did you come to America?
- R: Well, I just happened to like to go, that's all.
- I: Un hum, and where did you go when you first came here? Where did you arrive?
- R: Hancock and then I worked for the Quincy Mine for a few years
- I: Can you tell me as much as you know about the history of the Apostolic movement in America...as you know. Just take it from wherever you want to start and gradually then move to Pelkie. We'll let you take the ball and go.

- R: They was over there in 1914 to 1930-31-32, they separate..._____ and _____ side. And in Pelkie they got more voting after they took that church...our side and Heideman's side we had more. But they don't care to go voting, they let that go. They don't care for church. They let that go...they don't go to vote. So, _____ took that church.
- I: Just before that time, I understand the church was built in 1918, the building.
- R: Yeah, they might be building that...I don't remember that. I'm... no it's not...it's not. I came 1919 and they kept the services in that old school.
- I: In the Pelkie School?
- R: Yeah, at little school that is by the railroad crossing there now.
- I: I see. When again did you come to Pelkie?
- R: In
- I: In
- R: Yeah
- I: Would people come from all around to go to Pelkie, from Alston...
- R: No, not Alston...from down at Pelkie. In Alston had another congregation.
- I: Ah, when did that congregation start?
- R: I don't know.
- I: When was the church build in Alston?
- R: Well, they never been built church here.
- I: Oh!
- R: No, they been renting some town halls and some old church, another language speaking people they have church in Alston. They rented that too. And I guess they own that now.
- I: I see. Okay, the First Apostolic Church owns the town hall now?
- R: Yeah
- I: When did they buy it?
- R: I don't know that. It's many years ago.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about the building of the church in Pelkie, I mean who worked on it, what it was like building it. Do you remember any of that?

R: Yeah, they build that church in Pelkie...oh, I mentioned that first one. I wasn't there building too, I was living here. They built there...there was (?) peoples.

I: This is the one on the north end of town.

R: Yeah, yeah!

I: It says 1918, on the corner stone.

R: Well, it's not right. There wasn't any church building when I came here. It came after.

I: Okay. Do you recall any of the people who built that?

R: Oh, there was someone...Toivo Heinonen..

I: Andrew (?)

R: Yeah, and Ira Putkala, Isaac Verhonen, and _____ might be there something too. There was lot of them old peoples...I can't remember all of them...Herman Neimisto and Jacob Koivonen. I can't remember them all.

I: That's pretty good. That's better than anyone else has been able to.

R: And Jacob Pelkola was in Pelkie that time...no, he came after, yeah.

I: Now this is talking about the church at the north end of town

R: Yeah

I: When would you say that church was completed and they started holding the first services? As you remember.

R: I don't can remember that.

I: Can you make a guess and say around what time?

R: I can't...it's about '20 and after I guess.

I: Oh, that late.

R: Yes.

I: Okay. Before then there were some lay preachers speaking around the area, as I understand it. Can you remember any of the names of any of the men who used to speak around Pelkie and around here?

- R: Oh, there was Heideman mostly...old Heideman.
- I: What kind of speaker and man was he? As you kind of shut your eyes...
- R: He was minister, right kind of minister. Goes to minister school in Finland...Old Heideman. And then there was old Jacob Koivola was there and Andrew Martinmaki.
- I: Andrew Martinmaki?
- R: Yeah.
- I: Where did Jacob Koivola come from?
- R: From Boston, close to St. Mary...or St. Mary, right there, close to Boston there. He was living there.
- I: Ah, Boston Location?
- R: Yeah.
- I: In around Hancock?
- R: Yeah, behind the Hancock there.
- I was thinking of Boston, Massachusettes. But he was from Finland also, right?
- R: Yeah.
- I: He would travel out here every now and then?
- R: Yeah, he was traveling here.
- I: Was that when the Mineral Range Railroad was here?
- R: Yeah, yeah railroad came to Pelkie, pass around here to Alston.
- Would he also go to Alston and Nisula?
- R: Sometime...not much Nisula; but sometime Alston.
- I: What kind of a man was he? A tall man, short man...do you remember him? Tell me a little about him.
- R: Oh, I can't say much. I remember him all right, but was just like farmer, he had a little farm in Atlantic Mine and then he prayed some time.
- I: Did you hear him speak?
- R: Yeah. I heard.

- I: Was he a good speaker?
- R: Oh sometimes was all right; but he went to (?)...(?)...for it was not anymore free Christian. He went to (?)
- I: Okay, can you tell me where he used to speak when he came here in what home, in what building...
- R: Oh, he'd speak in Pelkie at the school house...and in Alston.
- I: In the school building?
- R: Yeah, I guess so. That school building...I can't remember them all. It's too much.
- I: Okay, I know I'm stretching the limits of your memory. What about Andrew Martinmaki?
- R: Henry, not Andrew.
- I: Mitta?
- R: Henry Martinmaki, not Andrew.
- I: How do you spell that?
- R: You can spell that.
- I: H-e-n-d-r-u?
- R: Yeah.
- I: I've never heard that name before. Where was he from?
- R: He was living in Hancock first and then he was farming here in Alston, last part.
- I: Oh! Where was his farm? Here around the area?
- R: Oh, was in country there about two and a half miles from here.
- I: Close to Waisanen's?
- R: Who?
- I: Was his farm close to where the Waisanen Brothers are?
- R: Yeah, is south from Waisanen. You can see that place from Waisanen place.
- I: Okay.
- R: About a mile south.
- I: When did he come to Clay Country? Around?

R: Oh, I can't remember that.

I: Okay.

R: Might be about '20.

I: All right, and where would he speak?

R: He stayed with Heideman.

I: Would he speak in the larger church after it was built?

R: Oh yeah, all over...all over.

I: In people's homes?

R: All over...people's homes too and in church, Hancock, Calumet and all over there and Pelkie.

I: Was he a trained speaker or a lay?

R: Lay yeah

I: Did he have a dairy farm over here?

R: Yeah.

I: After the church was built in Pelkie in, we'll say, around 1920, and they started to hold services there, who used to speak there besides Arthur Heideman?

R: Oh, sometime Koivola, sometime Martinmaki

I: Ohho!

R: Yeah.

I: Did you ever hear...

R: There was some spiritual from Minnesota too who preached there Anybody who was traveling around here they preach at there.

I: Could you remember some names?

R: No...

I: Try hard!

R: It's too much to start to remember them

I: Evert Maatila?

R: Yeah, Maatila sometime, Isreal Hakal from New York Mills

I: How is his name spelled?

R: H-a-k-a-l, Hakal.

I: Okay, his first name?

R: Isreal.

I: Isreal?

R: Yeah.

I: He came all the way from New York Mills.

R: Yeah.

R: There were some others too, but I don't remember the names now

I: Maybe you can help me, when did Old Man Heideman...Arthur Leopold Heideman kind of stop speaking? I know that toward the latter years of his life his health started to go and his son Paul Heideman would take on the speaking. Can you tell me when he started to let Paul takeover the speaking?

R: I can't remember that year right.

I: Can you give me just a guess?

R: It's about...I guess started already '14, but then he was in Finland for awhile in '15 and '16 he started to speak.

I: Paul Heideman did.

R: Yeah.

I: But even before that time he would kind of go around with his father, huh?

R: Yeah, they was together so long his father died.

I: Do you remember the circumstances of Old Man Heideman's death? All I know was that he was on a fishing trip.

R: Yeah, he was on a fishing trip and the boat capsized, I guess. How it went, I don't know; but it started holding him up so he don't drown there. Then he got washed ashore someplace...I don't know where.

I: It was around Portage Entry.

R: Yeah, and then he got that part all right, but he got pneumonia and died.

- I: Do you remember his funeral? Did you go to it?
- R: Yeah, I went to his funeral.
- I: Who spoke at his funeral?
- R: Oh, I don't remember much about that. Some Finland minister... Vessasrlanen I guess was there then that time.
- I: How is that spelled?
- R: It's hard for me to spell them. You'll have to spell them yourself.
- I: I know, but you try and if you make mistakes I'll try to correct them.
- R: That's V-e-s-s-a-s-r-l-a-n-e-n, Vessasrlanen, Robert
- I: Robert Vessasrlanen?
- R: Yeah, I don't know then who else was there
- I: Do you recall what was said at his funeral.
- R: Yeah, he was there in his funeral...as I remember.
- I: Was it very sad...did...
- R: I don't know that. I guess it was pretty sad.
- I: Was Paul Heideman any different than his father? Did he speak in the same way?
- R: Yeah, he speak the same way and keep it right there so long he was living; but he was about ten years the last part he don't remember hardly anything.
- I: For the last ten years of his life?
- R: Yeah.
- I: Do you recall when Old Man Heideman died?
- R: No, I can't. I can't remember.
- I: Well, who would Paul Heideman helping him speak? You know, who would speak during Paul Heideman's time?
- R: That...Walter ^{Torola} Terrila.
- I: Where was he from?

- R: He came from Finland to Canada and from Canada up to Calumet. He's there yet.
- I: And he would come and speak every now and then?
- R: Yeah, he's speaking there now, now yet.
- I: Ahm, can you tell me in kind of detail how the split finally came with _____ and Heideman, as you understand it?
- R: I know, but that's too much to start, see.
- I: It's too complicated?
- R: Yeah, yeah is too complicated.
- I: Well, can you do a little bit of that?
- R: Well, _____ went to self-rightness and that's why they went there. They started to...well their heavenly part for doing good, that's all. They figured it out for that way, self-rightness like Jews did in Jesus Christ's time.
- I: They felt that if they just kind of did good works, that that was enough?
- R: Yeah, that's more like.
- I: Well, did they think that it was not necessary to repent.
- R: Oh yeah, oh yeah! That self-rightness was more for their...I don't like to speak this. My English is too short for that.
- I: But I confess my own inadequacy...I do not know enough Finnish to be able to.
- R: Yeah, I don't...
- I: Would you like to explain it in Finnish and I have a friend or my father or someone could translate.
- R: No, I don't. That's too much. That's too much.
- I: But the problem is, if it's ever to be recorded in history, someone has to do it and you are one of the few people that...
- R: No...no, I'm not good enough for that now. That's too much...have to remember what's bygone, I can't do that now.
- I: Okay, well without going into the parts of the Bible where areas of disagreement, could you tell me what happened in Pelkie? You said there was, for awhile, two groups meeting in this church...as I understand it.

R: Now?

I: No, just before the split since maybe 1926 or '27...there was the Heideman group meeting at one time and then a Michaelson group meeting at another time.

R: Yeah, that _____, they took that church and then we built that another one, '31 and '32, in Pelkie.

I: Okay, did you know about when there were two groups meeting in that larger church when both the Heideman and Michaelson church started to meet as two separate groups then in that church? About what year?

R: I guess they split '31

I: Un huh.

R: Yeah, because our church was built in '31 and '32...have to be close there.

I: But weren't, for several years earlier than that, they were meeting at separate times in that church?

R: I don't know that.

I: Okay.

R: I don't know that.

I: All right, who helped build that church? What time of the year in '30 and '31 was it in the fall?

R: It was fall somewhere I guess.

I: Do you remember who worked on that? Who went to the Heideman side?

R: There was lot of them Christian who worked there.

I: Can you name some of the families who worked there?

R: There was Andy Wanttaja, Herman Niemisto and Isaac Paakola; Isaac Pirhonen, Kuivinen's...Bill Kuivinen was working there too and Waino Kuivinen; and Seppanen was working there.

I: What was his first name?

R: That's Isaac Seppanen.

I: Okay.

R: And Jacob Takalo was there.

I: Were you there?

R: I was there sometime helping too. I belongs to Alston that time.

I: Was Heinonen there?

R: Yeah, yeah!

I: What was his first name?

R: What was that...I can't remember.

I: There were quite a few carpenters there, right?

R: Yeah, Heinonen was carpenter

I: And also Sandelin?

R: Sandelin was not there.

I:

R: No, that time...he joined that church after. They's all died...all died out. Only I'm living.

I: Of those original ones

R: Yeah.

I: That's why I'm here talking to you

R: Yeah.

I: Can you tell me stories about building that? About the spirit of the people while they were building that; about what the women did to help out and things like that. Where you got the lumber... where you got the land...for the history?

R: Oh, they got...Emil Kemppainen and Andrew Kemppainen got some timber land in outside there and they going to cut that logs down and then Bill Kuivinen started to sawing them for the lumber and other peoples hauled them logs to that sawmill. Then they hauled them lumbers to that certain place.

I: Were the women there?

R: Oh yeah, women was in church...not in the woods. (Chuckle)

I: Were they helping build?

R: No...no women, only made coffee and like that

I: Is there anything else you can remember about that that you'd care

to say?

- R: Oh, there was Art Marttila was that time he helped and August Pelto helped, Emil's father. Edward Pelto went to _____ He was not help.
- I: I've heard that that was such a painful time that some families would even kind of split up.
- R: Yeah, sure..
- I: That some families
- R: Sure, it was like (?), he was with Heideman and (?) went with _____.
- I: Who helped Heideman speak after the split? Let's say in 1932, was that also Torola?
- R: Yeah, Torola came to help him and Old Heideman don't speak, this new church was dead before that.
- I: And anyone after Torola?
- R: No, there was all them speaker was just from here and come over there and speak there.
- I: Can you mention a few names?
- R: Oh, it's too much. It's too much to start to remember them all. There was Nelson from Big Lake, (???), and some Finland minister they was coming here...they were here.
- I: As you understand it today, what do you think are the basic differences between _____ and Heideman First Apostolic, today.
- R: Well, same way when they started to open, is same way now even. Yeah, they went self-rightness right straight.
- I: You could see that happening way back then.
- R: Yeah, they stay there.
- I: When did you start speaking?
- R: Oh about '35.
- I: Well, you've been speaking about forty years yourself then.
- R: Yeah.
- I: That's longer than I've even been alive.
- R: Yeah (chuckle)

- I: I'm only thirty years old. How did you come to speak? Where was it?
- R: Down to Pelkie; but I'm not speaking much.
- I: Anymore?
- R: No, not much...not much.
- I: Who called you to speak?
- R: Congregation..
- I: Can you tell me about that day?
- R: No, no I can't...no I can't. In God's Kingdom nobody going to speak there is congregation don't call that.
- I: Yeah, I know that; but I just thought you might be able to remember how you felt that day when they called you. Did you know they were going to call you that day?
- R: No, they was telling that long time, all the time. They wanted me to go and speak; but I keep against. I don't like it...but then I have to start.
- I: Do you remember who the Elders were who wanted you to speak? Do you remember their names?
- R: Well, there was Pulki, Jokipii, Isaac Pirhonen, Herman Niemisto Isaac Paakola...there was all them...
- I: What was this Pulki's first name? Can you remember?
- R: I guess that was Jacob
- I: Jacob...and so Pelkie was the first time you ever spoke. How did you feel that first day?
- R: Oh, don't ask them kind.
- I: Okay.
- R: Don't ask them kind.
- I: Okay.
- R: I don't like to speak for that...for myself.
- I: Okay.
- R: Yeah.
- I: I understand. So, how often did you hold services in the new church in the beginning in 1931 and '32.

- R: Oh, I can't remember that. I can't remember that.
- I: Was it every Sunday at first?
- R: No...no, sometime I was helping Heideman and Torola and like that.
- I: Would they alternate, like Heideman one Sunday and Torola the next Sunday.
- R: Yeah, that way it was and Tulki from Ishpeming came there then later part.
- I: When did he come?
- R: I can't remember that.
- I: How do you spell his name?
- R: Tulki, you can spell that yourself.
- I: T-u-l-k-i?
- R: Yeah.
- I: Okay, I just want to be sure.
- R: He's in Detroit now.
- I: Can you remember about what year? Even if not exactly...
- R: No...no, I don't. I don't remember them.
- Stop in tape
- I: When did this occur? Was it a couple years ago?
- R: Yeah, about three years ago I guess
- I: 1972?
- R: Yeah, two or three I guess...yes, in three.
- I: Can you tell me how that came to pass?
- R: Well, don't care very much to say what is sin. He went too soft... lenient.
- I: With regard to certain things like....
- R: Yeah.
- I: What were these things that he was lenient on as you remember?

- R: Anything...anything what is this world is coming and taking Christianity with them so they won't stay and study there. He let go some place and in Finland they took him and told him... "But where you are going now," and asked, "If you'd like to confess them and ask forgiveness." But no, he don't...so he went off.
- I: Oh, he went to Finland? Around this time?
- R: Yeah, he went there.
- I: Where did he go in Finland?
- R: In
- I: In Olu, is that where the Elders are?
- R: Yeah, there is some. There's all over them Elders there.
- I: Oh, they're not in any one spot in Finland.
- R: No.
- I: Can you name some of the Elders today?
- R: No, I don't like to remember them.
- I: Okay
- R: No
- I: Okay...so he came back from Finland and the congregation found out that he refused to confess for these things.
- R: Yeah, that's right. That's right only we don't go with him anymore
- I: Was another minister involved? Bietiestu?
- R: Bietiestu came back. He asked forgiveness after he was in lots of things too like Torola is now; but he came back and asked forgiveness. But he is not preaching anymore.
- I: He is older man now or...?
- R: No, is not older, about fifty little over.
- I: Well he was from Ishpeming, right?
- R: Yeah
- I: During this time before this more recent split in '71 and '72, he was lenient like Torola?

- R: Yeah, he was...he was...he started to go with Torola first but then he speak out there and asked forgiveness.
- I: And now he is in the American...or the Laestadian?
- R: Yeah, he is Laestadians but he don't speak...preach anymore, no
- I: What's the name of your church now? I think Emil told me it was the Laestadian Congregation...
- R: Yeah
- I: But there are more than just this one here in Pelkie, right?
- R: Yeah, there is all over the country. All over the country where is Christian there is Laestadian Congregation too.
- I: Oh, so this happened throughout the United States?
- R: Yeah, all through the United States, yeah.
- I: Did it happen in Finland too?
- R: Yeah, it happened there too; but there's no...but there's no follower in Finland.
- I: Ah, so they didn't have a split there.
- R: No...no, they don't split there. Only here!
- I: So the Torola followers that used to go to the Pelkie Church, now go to L'Anse is it?
- R: L'Anse and Handock.
- I: Hancock?
- R: Yeah
- I: Is there anything else you can add about this?
- R: No, there's nothing else. There's nothing else.
- I: Do you feel we covered it fairly well?
- R: Yeah.
- Stop in tape
- R: They don't remember back that; but now that Pelkie Church that _____ took, that's all down. There's no one anymore.
- I: There's still a _____ in Tapiola though, right.

R: Yeah, Tapiola

I: And...

R: ...and Alston, but not in Pelkie. That is out altogether. They even sold that church.

I: So that's what happened finally.

R:

I: What do you think the future of Laestadian Congregation is in the world that we live now as you seem to see it after being a speaker for forty years and being roughly eighty years old.

R: That's only place where peoples get to heaven. All them that is going off from life Christianity they's dead one. No matter where they is and no matter who they is, they's dead one. So pick they pull themself out from life Christianity, they's dead one.

I: What about the _____ in Calumet? They call themselves _____

R: Yeah, I know that place. They started there in north where I been borning and I know them peoples namely who started that.

I: Takkinen?

R: Huh?

I: Takkinen?

R: no:

I: Oh, you mean in the old country?

R: Yeah old country.

I: Yeah, I know that too. Do you feel there are in...going the wrong way?

R: Yeah, sure! Sure they is going wrong way. That was same way self-rightness where they landed like _____

I: When you say self-rightness, you mean self-rightousness?

R: Yeah.

I: Sort of thinking that they can judge others? Is that what you think?

R: No .no, they.

I: I don't understand the way you use that word. I'm sorry.

R: They believe when we do this and do that, we get to heaven. That's altogether wrong. I can't explain this like I like, so it's better that I shut my mouth.

I: Okay, you could do better in Finnish...no doubt.

R: Yeah

I: Okay.