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Work, Family & Community Builders

Finnish Immigrant Women on the Homestead (1895-1945)

An abbreviated version of this article is published in Siirtolaisuus - Migration, 2/1998

Siirtolaisuusinstituutti – Migrationsinstitutet

Turku – Åbo 1998

http://www.migrationinstitute.fi

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> *"What happens on the growing edges of life is seldom written down at the time. It is lived from day to day in talk, in scraps of comment on the margin of someone else's manuscript, in words spoken on a street corner, or in cadences which lie well below the words that are spoken. Later it lives on, reshaped and reinterpreted, in the memories of those who were part of it and finally slips, like a child's leaf boat after a long journey down a stream, into the unrecognizing hands of one's spiritual descendants who do not know the source of the water-soaked treasures which have landed on the shores of their lives."* -- Margaret Mead, An Anthropologist at Work - The Writings of Ruth Benedict

Introduction

One of the dramatic changes in our country over the twentieth century has been the decline in the proportion of the population living and working on farms. At the turn of the century, almost half of the people in the United States lived on farms. In 1920, 30 per cent and by 1980, only about three per cent of the population were farm residents (Rosenfeld, 1985). In recognition of a vanishing way of life in rural America, I sought to capture the rich historical information, memories and experiences of one recent immigrant group to rural northeastern Minnesota, and document everyday life on Finnish American homesteads in the early twentieth century (Hanson-Stone, 1994). The lives of the these homesteaders and their families provide historical data on a way of life that no longer exists.

The Children of the Finnish Homesteads oral history research was conducted during the summer and fall of 1994. Five women and nine men of Finnish descent, raised on homesteads in the communities of Brimson (St. Louis County) and Toimi (Lake County), Minnesota were interviewed. This was an opportunity to record the voices of the children of the immigrants, now in their 70's and 80's, and to hear the stories of their childhood experiences, growing up on family homesteads.

In the interview, questions were asked about family background information, homestead descriptions, typical activities on the homestead by the season of the year, significance of the sauna; and lessons learned from everyday and community life. Four hundred pages of narrative transcript were produced and over 300 photographs were collected from the narrators for preservation in historical archives

I have focused on the lives and working experiences of Finnish immigrant women on the homesteads of Brimson-Toimi, Minnesota from 1900-1945. Research data from the five oral histories of second generation Finnish American women from Brimson-Toimi will illustrate the types of work Finnish immigrant women performed on the homestead and in the community. Historical background on Finnish immigration to the United States and northeastern Minnesota, early history of the Brimson-Toimi community, a general

description of a Finnish-American homestead and a conceptual framework with which to approach farm women and work is presented will also be reviewed.

Finnish Immigration to North America& Northeastern Minnesota

Over three hundred years ago the first Finnish immigrants came to North America and more than one hundred years ago the first Finnish settlers came to the upper midwestern States of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota (Wasastjerna, 1957). Finns immigrated to Minnesota in three concentrations. The first Finns settled in south central Minnesota in 1864. A second cluster of Finnish immigrants were in west central Minnesota by the 1870's. The third and largest influx of Finns from Finland and Michigan, to Duluth and northeastern Minnesota in the 1880's and 1890's.

Although some Finns moved from rural life to the rising industrial and commercial centers in Finland, many others left to seek their fortunes in America (Hoglund, 1960). Drawn by the prospect of work, many Finns found employment on the mines of the iron range and in the boreal forest of northern Minnesota. The port of Duluth at the western send of Lake Superior and the six adjoining counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Lake, and St. Louis contained 71.2% of the state's Finns by 1903 (Riippa, 1981: 303). Duluth was an important dispersal point for Finnish immigrants who traveled to Minnesota via the Great Lakes route from New York, Boston and Quebec, Canada (Kaups, 1975).

According to Reino Kero (1974) of the Institute of Migration, 301,767 Finns left their homeland for North America between 1864-1914. Of those 301, 767, thirty-five percent or 105,879 were women. However, emigration statistics have consistently understated the proportion of women in the Finnish American immigrant community. Consequently, most studies of Finnish immigrant experiences in the United States underestimate women's role and place in Finnish immigrant history (Ross, 1986: 42).

While emigration from rural Finland was heavily male dominated, the number of men and women emigrants leaving the urban areas of Finland were approximately equal. The emigrants were young men and women. Between 1910-1914, 80% of the Finnish immigrants were under the 30 years old. However, women emigrated at a younger age.

In the major years of immigration between 1910-1914, the number of females under 16 years of age was greater than the number of males in the same age category. The number of women immigrants between the ages of 16-20 was two-thirds the number of comparable men, and the number of women between the ages of 21-25 was half the number of men the same age (Kero, 1974; Ross, 1986: 42-43).

The last statistic pertinent to this study is the marital status of the young immigrants. According to the Institute of Migration (Kero, 1974), only 23.9% of the emigrants leaving Finland were married at the time. Seventy four percent were single and 1.5% were widows, widowers, divorced or unknown. The picture that emerges from these figures shows young Finnish immigrant women coming to the United States as single people, ready to work and build a life for themselves in the new land. Most of these women

eventually married, in many cases Finnish immigrant men, started families and built their homes in predominately Finnish American communities.

Finnish immigrants, upon arrival, found employment where they could. Finnish women worked as domestics, waitresses, cooks in boarding houses, hotel maids, nannies and factory workers. Some were employed as teachers in rural one and two room schools houses. Finnish men worked as railroad and dock workers, in sawmills and lumber camps, as fishermen, craftsmen (e.g., tinsmith, blacksmith, shoemakers, watchmakers, construction workers, miners and factory workers. Some were small business owners and shopkeepers.

For many Finns in Minnesota, working conditions were harsh and employment uncertain. Mining, for example, brought low wages, long hours, dangerous working conditions and periodic unemployment. Many Finnish mine workers were politically active and worked in the union movement. As a result, Finns were often "blackballed" from the mines and forced to seek employment elsewhere. Unsatisfactory working conditions and the lure of the land motivated many Finns to look to the rural countryside for their "haven in the woods." Approximately, one-fourth of the Finnish immigrant population settled on homesteads. Of these, the majority settled in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin (Hoglund, 1978).

Early History of Brimson-Toimi, Minnesota

Northeastern Minnesota remained Minnesota Territory until the State of Minnesota was formed in 1858. Europeans began to arrive in the region in 1854, after the United States government signed the *Treaty of LaPoint* with the Ojibwa Indians. In 1856, Lake and St. Louis Counties were formed. A railroad contract was signed in 1883 to build a railroad from Two Harbors to Tower, Minnesota. Settlers began moving into the Brimson and Toimi areas when the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad was completed in 1884. The Brimson train depot was also built in 1884. However, there were no settlers in the area in 1890, except along the railroad tracks.

With the coming of the railroads in 1883, immigration to the area began with the arrival of explorers, trappers, lumberman and homestead seekers. Many men and women left their homelands to seek their fortunes in the United States. People had to be young and healthy to survive life in the wilderness of Brimson-Toimi. Many men left their wives and children in the homeland, filed for homesteads and built their small log cabins. Some sent for their families, while others forgot their wives and married other women in the new land. Men, sometimes, married "mail order brides." Many couples in the area raised large families and poverty was common.

The Brimson-Toimi area consists of three townships, Ault (established in circa 1906), Bassett (established in 1913), and Fairbanks (established in 1919). Two hundred people were counted in the 1900 census of Ault Township. The countries represented in the 1900 census were Russia, Norway, Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Wales, Italy, Germany, Scotland, Denmark and England.

Eighteen farms were listed along with occupations recorded as shipping clerks, wash women, ice cream maker, peddlers, day laborers, grocery men, lumber cruisers, teachers, small factory owner, candy maker, lumbermen and dealers, servants, pine explorers, grocery store clerks, dress maker, plumber, hotel bell boy, small parts factory owner, fireman, restaurant cashier, waiters, plasterers and an electrician. There were no Finnish people listed in the 1900 Ault Township census (The Brimson-Toimi, Legacy, 1995). However, Finnish immigrants began to arrive in the area shortly thereafter.

Early schools, post offices, cooperatives, and community halls were built in the time period from 1908-1913. The community continued to grow. By 1920, the census of Fairbanks Township in St. Louis County recorded a population of 324. Finnish settlers listed their occupations as farming and logging, while those living adjacent to the railroads were reported as store manager, cook, hotel keeper, stationary engineer, sawmill operators, fireman, bookkeepers, section laborers, lumber company manager, stenographer, servant, millwright, telegraph operator, contractor, camp cooks, teamsters and cooperative store manager. The Basset Township population increased from 73 in the 1910 census to a population of 235 people in 1920 census with farming, logging and work in the saw mills given as occupations (Brimson-Toimi Legacy, 1995).

Most Finnish settlers came to the Brimson-Toimi area to work homesteads and make a living as best they could. Brimson, in St. Louis County, was settled by immigrants slightly earlier (1900) than Toimi in Lake County. Toimi's population increased sharply in 1907-08, when many mine workers from the iron range either left or were forced to leave their jobs after the 1907 strike. They moved, with their families to the Toimi area, to farm homesteads ranging in size from 40-160 acres (Brimson Toimi Legacy, 1995).

Back to the Land

The reasons given for the Finns immigrating to the United States were similar to those of other immigrant groups. Precarious economic and political conditions in Finland forced many to leave and look for a better life in the "new land." However, once in the United States, the search for a better life did not end. Frustrated with low wages, lay-offs, and unfair labor practices; the idea of owning land became a symbol of prosperity, freedom and independence (Alanen, 1981; Engle, 1977; Hoglund, 1978; Kolehmainen, 1950).

Some 61,000 Finns had departed for the "new world" prior to 1893, with approximately 270,000 persons or 82% of the total, emigrating from Finland between 1893 and the onset of World War I in Europe (Kero, 1974). By the time the majority of Finns arrived, however, prime agricultural land in the Midwest was gone. What was left was marginal cut over lands of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan (Alanen, 1981: 77).

In the years 1896-1900, the United States government opened up the land in northeastern Minnesota to homesteaders. By 1920, over half the Finnish population in St. Louis County settled on homesteads. Minnesota, alone, had 4,700 Finnish farms, most of which were adjacent to the Vermilion and Mesabi iron ranges in St. Louis County (Engle, 1977). This was an opportunity for the Finnish immigrants and their families to create a new life on their own land.

Edith Eudora Kohl (1986: 47-48) expressed what the opening of public land meant to the immigrants, "European theories might influence the East from time to time, but there was always a means of escape for the man or woman oppressed by labor conditions, by tendencies to establish class distinctions. Public Land! On the land men must face primitive conditions as best they could, but they were independent because the land was their own, their earnings their own." This sentiment was shared by many of the Finnish immigrants who were from the landless, working class of Finland. "Oma tupa, oma lupa," is a Finnish proverb exemplifying the desire to own one's own land. Translated, it means, "when one has his own place, he is his own boss" (Engle, 1977: 49).

Homesteading did give Finnish immigrants more independence and economic security. They could own homes and produce economic resources; pulpwood, game, fish, garden produce, eggs, farm animals and diary products. Produce from the homestead was often supplemented by earnings from "cottage industries," domestic service, small business ownership, part-time or seasonal wages from work in the forests, lumber camps, on the railroads, or in general maintenance and construction jobs. Occasionally, music, drama and the arts provided income for immigrant family members.

The Finnish American Homestead

As was common with all immigrant groups, many of the Finnish immigrants to the United States had family members or knew friends who were already established in Minnesota and helped the new arrivals in their transition to life in the new land. Once the decision was made to homestead, buildings had to be built, fields cleared and animals procured.

The development of a Finnish homestead occurred slowly but usually followed a similar pattern. Temporary shelter was built, or families stayed with neighbors and kinfolk, while work began on clearing small fields and building a larger house and barn. Even with steady work by several family members, it was seldom possible to develop more than two acres of land per year. The typical Finnish farmer cleared a little more than eight acres during the first five years of pioneering (Alanen, 1981; & Alanen & Tishler, 1980).

The Finnish immigrant homesteaders were skilled in woodworking which they learned in the rural areas of Finland. Each settler, with family and friends, constructed what buildings were needed, using the age-old skills of chopping and hewing. The typical Finnish homestead had the following buildings: house, sauna, cattle barn, hay barns, and root cellar. The traditional use of a separate field hay storage building was brought to the United States along with the log bath house called a sauna (Karni & Levin, 1972; & Koop, 1988-89). .

As farms progressed, and prospered, additional buildings were added to the homestead complex. A multiple supply of individual buildings, built for separate functions, was a tradition also brought from Finland. Finnish immigrants farmers used free standing summer kitchens, blacksmith shops, small storage or warehouses (an *aitta)*, horse barns, chicken coops, woodsheds, granaries, grain drying building (a *riihi*), pig pens,

sheep sheds, milk houses, workshops, machine sheds and pump houses (Alanen & Tishler, 1980; Alanen, 1981; Koop, 1988-89).The buildings were constructed from trees indigenous to the area. Pine was the most common wood used, e.g., tamarack, spruce and balsam logs. Popple and cedar logs were also used for building.

Finnish immigrant farmers knew the farming techniques needed to survive in the short growing season and thin rocky soils typical of the Brimson-Toimi area. Subsistence farming was a way of life that had gone on for centuries in Finland. Finnish folk building form, arrangement and farming practices were etched in the memories of the immigrants as they worked at "proving up" their homestead claims by erecting small houses and clearing land for cultivation (Alanen, 1981; Karni & Levin, 1972; Kaups, M, 1981; & Koop, 1988-89).

Creating a homestead in the wilderness of Brimson-Toimi was a back-breaking and, often, hazardous task. Before crops could be planted or hay cut, stumps left behind by the logging companies had to be removed, swamps drained, fields cleared of rocks and boulders, farm buildings constructed, and farm animals procured. All family members old enough to work - men, women and children - did their share. Once the land was cleared, the poor quality soil and the short growing season limited the choice of crops that farmers could plant. The potato became the major cash crop of the cut over farms, supplemented with hay, rye, oats and wheat (Alenan, 1981; Hanson-Stone, 1994).

Finnish Immigrant Farm Women

> *"She bore thirteen children, ten growing to adulthood; for forty years she was the region's only midwife, making 103 safe deliveries. When her husband worked at distant logging camps, she took charge of the farm; she hitched the horse, plowed and harrowed, sowed seed by hand from a dishpan; she milked the cows and nursed the ailing stock. She tanned hides and made footwear, spun wool and knitted garments. She hauled food supplies from the nearest store, a round-trip journey requiring three days. She kept the farmhouse in repair, raised the chimney, and found the time to help the neighbors; once she rescued a child from a 28-foot well. She felt no sense of being a heroine, wrote a reporter, but because she had versatile ability and unquenchable energy, she lived up to the standards of that day. These people had to work hard, do those things, or go under."* -- John Kolehmainen, The Finns in America

Finnsare credited with settling land that most Americans thought impossible to farm (Alanen, 1981; Engle, 1977; Kolehmainen, 1950). Finnish immigrants took remote, rocky, cut over land filled with stumps and old trees, and turned it into sustainable farmland (Engle, 1977: 51). As with all new settlers, the Finns struggled to increase their cash income. Often menfolk returned to work in the mines and forests while their wives and children managed the farms (Hoglund: 51).

One of the strongest forces in making homesteading a success was the Finnish immigrant farm woman. As evident in the above description, she was the one who held things together in the home and community while her husband was in the mine, forest or field,

and it was she, with her wide range of skills who made survival in the wilderness possible (Engle, 1977: 53). The Finnish farm wife was a significant partner in the management and operation of the farm, the raising of the children, and the building of the Finnish American farm community.

Conceptual Framework

> *" . . . it is impossible seriously to conduct studies of Finnish American women outsidethe context of the whole Finnish American immigrant community, or to consider Finnish immigrant history without the inclusion of the womenandtheir particular experiences." -- Carl Ross,* Women Who Dared, *1986*

Few people live alone in rural societies. Agricultural production is a collective endeavor, with the agricultural household as the most common unit of production and consumption (Cloud, 1988). Almost all farm families include a husband and a wife who, both, of whom provide farm labor. (The unit generally includes children). The challenge in the study of women's work on the farm is that the workplace cannot be separated from the family. Farm women perform work that represents their roles as mother, wife, farmer, manager, friend, and community member. Boundaries between "work" and "family" become artificial and one is forced to analyze the links between the two (Rosenfeld, 1985). When we analyze the work of farm women, we must do so in the context of the family and the community in which they live.

The research findings from the Toimi community is analyzed usng Rachel Ann Rosenfeld's definition of work. According to Rosenfeld, the common understanding of work as a job held outside the home for pay does not adequately describe the more complex and interdependent nature of women's work on the family farm or homestead. To account for the interconnectedness between the types of women's work on the farm, Rosenfeld (1985: 5) defines work more broadly. ". . . work is serious effort resulting in some product or service. It can be done for pay (such as wage or salary) but at times receives no remuneration. It can be done in the home or outside it."

This expanded definition of farm women's work includes four types of work, along the dimensions of outside the home or inside the home; and, whether women receive direct pay or no direct pay for their work (see figure 1.1). In this conceptual framework, work can be performed outside the home for pay or for no pay, and work can be performed inside the home for pay or for no direct pay for services or products rendered

Figure 1.1. *Types of Work*

	Direct pay	**No direct pay**
Outside home(stead)	*Wage work*	*Volunteer work*
In home	*In-home business*	*Housework, childcare*

This expanded definition of work can be applied to the study of Finnish immigrant farm women. Examples of paid work outside of the home are midwifery, undertaking, cupping (i.e., bloodletting), massage, domestic service, peeling pulpwood, clerking at the cooperative store and teaching. Paid work inside the home included selling eggs and cream, sewing services, taking in boarders, peeling and selling pulpwood from the homestead and midwifery.

Unpaid work outside of the home encompasses a vast number of volunteer and community activities in which the immigrant woman were involved. Examples of community work includes women’s clubs, public schools, churches, the cooperative auxiliary groups, band, choir, and drama clubs. However, unpaid work in the home occupied much more of the Finnish immigrant women’s time. These activities included child care, food preparation, gardening, tending and milking cows, making soap, knitting and sewing clothing, and providing medical services to the family. These women and the thousands of other farm women in the United States, past and present, have contributed significantly to the management and labor necessary to effectively operate a family farm.

Scope of the Research

The historical data obtained through the oral history research furthers rural immigration history through documentation and preservation of the culture, traditions and heritage of the Finnish immigrant women and their families, homesteading in northeastern Minnesota. The interview questions focused on family descriptions, including demographics of first and second generation Finnish-Americans, homestead descriptions including the buildings, construction materials, layout of the land, and farming implements and practices, activities of everyday life by the seasons of the year, significance of the sauna, community activities and organizations including schools, church, economic and political institutions, social clubs, and, additional information on family life and "lessons learned" from everyday life.

The oral history interviews were transcribed and placed in the archives of the Iron Range Research and Interpretive Center in Chisholm, Minnesota. In addition, photographs lent from the narrators were duplicated and reproduced into black and white slides which are also part of the archival materials. Finnish immigration research, social history of Finnish women immigrants, agricultural and women’s work on the farm, ethnic and cultural studies, community histories, autobiographies, memoirs, plays, videos, poems, short stories and personal interviews provided additional historical information on Finnish "homestead" culture and rural immigration history.

Research Findings

Research findings are presented in the following order. A description of project narrators is given including demographic information, motivations for settling on a homestead in Brimson-Toimi, work performed by their Finnish immigrant parents prior to settling on the homestead, a more expanded discussion of women's work after settling on the homestead, including work performed on the homestead for pay and not-for-pay, and work performed in the community for pay and on a voluntary basis.

These findings are brought to life through the accounts of their daughters who were born in the United States. The section concludes with "lessons learned" by the narrators as they reflected upon their lives, growing up on a homestead in the 1920´s and 1930's.

Project Narrators

In 1994, five women, second generation Finnish-Americans whose parents settled homesteads in Brimson-Toimi, were interviewed in the oral history research project. The women interviewed were between the ages of 70 and 78. All but one of the narrators were retired at the time of the interviews. One seventy year old woman still works as the part-time postmistress in Brimson. The remaining narrators were a retired forest service worker, teacher, nurse, and office worker. Of the five female narrators, three survive today. Very sadly, since the interviews two women have passed away, one in October 1995 and the second in April 1996.

Of the five narrators, one woman lived in Brimson, one on a lake about ten miles from Toimi, one in Duluth and Two Harbors, Minnesota, respectively, and the fifth retired in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The three women who retired in other communities continue to own property in the Brimson-Toimi area and visit often.

The five narrators were married. Three women married second-generation Finnish American men from the Brimson-Tiomi community. One narrator married a local man who was not Finnish and the fifth narrator married a non-Finnish man from another state. One was a widow at the time of the interview. Three of the five women bore children, with a fourth adopting children. The fifth narrator had no children.

The five women interviewed attended grade school in the Brimson-Toimi community through the eighth grade. Students in St. Louis County attended high school in Duluth, Minnesota. Students in Lake County, typically, attended high school in Two Harbors, Minnesota. The students lived with a family in town, sometimes doing housework in exchange for room and board. Two of the five women received college degrees. One in teaching and the other a nursing degree. Two narrators attended a technical school in Duluth, studying business and commercial art, respectively. The fifth narrator graduated from grade school but further formal education on her part is unknown.

Finnish Immigrant Women & Their Families Represented in the Study

Six families were represented in the study of Finnish immigrant women. These included five sets of immigrant parents, and one set of maternal grandparents. Each narrator's family is described, along with dates of immigration and settlement in the Brimson-Toimi community, and the types of work performed by Finnish immigrant fathers and mothers, if known, prior to and after acquisition of the homestead.

Amanda (Manda*)*

Amanda was the second of six children born in her family. Her father was born in Pyhajarvi, Finland and emigrated to Minnesota in 1910. He courted his wife through the mail and paid her ticket to Brimson, Minnesota in 1914. She came from Rautu, Finland and married shortly after her arrival in Brimson.

Amanda's father homesteaded and worked in logging camps. He was also a carpenter and an expert in building with logs. The six children born to Amanda's family in Brimson are Uno, born in 1915; Amanda, born in 1916; Sheila (Bertha), born in 1919; Irene (Siiri Irene), born in 1922; Tauno, born in 1923; and, Sylvia, born in 1926.

Clara

Clara's parents met in Brimson and were married in 1920. Clara's mother came to the United States via Canada in 1909, accompanied by two older sisters. Her mother and sisters were born in Tampere, Finland. The mother and aunts worked as domestics and cooks before getting married. Clara's mother met her first husband and were married in 1914. He owned a homestead in Brimson which he used as a hunting retreat while working as a lithographer in Chicago. In search of employment, the young couple moved to Astoria, Oregon and had two children, Cora, born in 1916 and Tauno, born 1917. Her husband died in 1918 in the flu epidemic.

Clara's mother, then, left her oldest daughter with relatives in Oregon and returned with her son to their homestead in Brimson. She remarried in 1920. Her second husband came to the United States from Urais Vaasanlaani, Finland in 1909 and was employed at a local sawmill at the time of their marriage. She and her second husband had two children, Lillian born in 1922 and Clara in 1924. The family lived on the 160 acre homestead in Brimson, Fairbanks Township. Clara's father also drove a school bus for School #55 where Clara and her siblings attended grade school.

Eleanore (Vienna Eleanore)

Eleanore was the youngestof seven children. Her father emigrated in the early 1900'sand returnedto Finland for his wife and two children between 1906 and 1908. The immigrant family left Iisalmi, Finland for Toimi, Minnesota and their 160 acre homestead. Mary (1904) and Arvid (1905) were born in Finland. The remaining children

where born in Toimi: Wayne (1909); Arne **(**1911**)**; Lempi (1913); Olavi (1914); and, Vienna Eleanore (1916).

Eleanore's father homesteaded and ran logging camps. Eleanore's mother died in 1921. In 1926, Eleanore's father married a local widow who also had seven children. There were fourteen children when the families were combined. Eleanore's step mother cooked for lumberjacks working in her husband's lumber camps.

Jennie

Jennie's mother and maternal grandmother, emigrated from Parkano, Finland in 1920 and 1921, to join her maternal grandfather who settled in Brimson in 1905. Jennie's grandparents had been separated by geography for sixteen years. During this time, her grandmother worked in Finland in a lemon drink bottling factory and was a seamstress, sewing by hand for people in the community. Her grandparents had two more children after their reunion in Brimson, Eugene born in 1922 and Eino in 1925. Jennie's uncles were the same age as she and her sister. They were playmates growing up in Brimson.

Jennie's father arrived in 1913 from Kankaanpaa, Finland and settled in Aurora, Minnesota on the iron range. Her father worked odd jobs as a miner, logger and railroad worker. He came to Brimson in 1921 to visit neighbors and met Jennie's mother during his stay. They were married in 1923. Three children were born to the family. Jennie was born in 1924, a brother, who died at birth, in 1925, and a sister, Helmi, born in 1926. After renting various houses in the village of Brimson, Jennie's family settled on a homestead in 1936, located across the Cloquet River from her grandparents homestead in Brimson, Ault Township.

Tynne

Tynne's father emigrated from Jyvaskylla, Finland to the United States in 1901. Tynne's mother emigrated in 1902 from her home in Oulu, Finland. Her parents met in Hibbing, Minnesota and were married in c. 1907. Tynne's father worked in the mines on the iron range. After their marriage, her parents lived in Virginia, Minnesota and operated a boarding house.

In 1916, the family moved to Toimi, Minnesota, Bassett Township, where they raised ten children. Six children were born prior to their move to the homestead: Leo (1908); Gertrude (1910); Helga (1912); Eino (1914); Helen (1915); and, Tynne (1916); and, four children were born in Toimi: Helia (1918); Arnold (1920); Clifford (1922); and, John (1928). Tynne was the sixth child born two weeks before the family moved to the country. Tynne's father worked in logging camps during the winter months as a teamster. Her mother handled the farm chores and attended to the children.

Moving to the Homestead

The Finnish immigrant mothers, in this study, made their way to the Brimson-Toimi area of Minnesota through New York, Michigan, Massachusetts, Illinois and Canada. The immigrant women and their families lived on homesteads ranging in size from 40 to 160 acres. Some of the families sold off parcels of their land over time. Other families, moving into the area, bought smaller acreage from homesteaders who had come before.

Many Finnish immigrants moved to the rural homesteads to escape the regimentation, poor wages, fluctuating labor demands, unhealthy conditions and dangers in the mines on the Vermilion and Mesabi iron ranges in northeastern Minnesota. Such may have been the case with Tynne's father who was a mine worker in the Eveleth and Virginia, Minnesota mines before moving to Toimi. Her parents were also operating a boarding house in Virginia when they decided to move to the country in 1916. A smaller number of Finns took up life as backwood farmers after mining company officials blacklisted them for their actual or perceived labor militancy.

Others had a simple desire to own their own land and raise their children in the country, even if one's claim was no larger than 40-80 acres in size. Amanda's family seems to fit this category. Her father was a bachelor, homesteading in Brimson when he decided to marry and raise a family.

> *"Well, Dad of course came because America was supposed to be so wonderful! And when he had been here a couple of years, my mother wrote a letter for my Dad's brother. I guess he didn't write so well. So Mother wrote the letter and at the end of the letter she said, "Greetings from me too" and signed it with her name. So immediately, my Dad, although they knew of each other in Finland already, immediately Dad wanted her to come over here. He eventually ended up sending her a ticket to come to America."*

Eleanore's father and Jennie's maternal grandfather had also come to the United States and settled on homesteads in Brimson-Toimibefore sending for their families. Eleanore's father came to Toimi in c.1906 and sent for his wife and two children in c. 1908. Jennie's grandfather immigrated to Brimson inc. 1905, however,he did not send for his wife and daughter until 1920 & 1921. His daughter arrived a year earlier than his wife because his wife had been injured in a bottling factory accident in Finland and could not leave until her arm had healed.The reason for the long period of separation is unknown.

There were also groups of Finns who moved to the backwoods in hopes of maintaining a more viable ethnic and religious identity, separate from the other immigrant groups (Alanen, 1981; & Koop, 1988-89). And, finally there were Finnish immigrants who simply had no choice but to move to the land. Such was the case for Clara's mother. Her husband had died in 1918 and she was left with two small children. She decided to leave her daughter with a sister in the state of Washington and move with her young son to the homestead in Brimson as is expressed by Clara:

> *"Mother, with her young son , Tuano, moved back to the two-room cabin in the wooded homestead at Fairbanks. She left her oldest daughter, Cora, with her aunt in Seattle. But Auntie Hilda came with her. Life in the north woods was tru-*

> *ly pioneering. But with the help of neighbors and emotional and material support from her sisters, she had a cow and a few chickens and life went on, as difficult as it was.*

I'm sure there must have been a great deal of satisfaction. I'm sure there were many tears shed, too. I remember my mother telling us of terrifying hours in the dark, living alone with her son, in the two-room cabin, protectively hugging the two year old boy as wolves howled around the cabin. At night she locked the door and hid for hours."

Once settled on the homestead, the familiesfound it necessary to earn income from a variety of sources to make "ends meet." In each of the narrator's cases, the father worked off of the homestead to supplement income from products produced or raised on the homestead. For example, Jennie's father worked in logging camps and for the railroad. Tynne's father drove a team of horses for a logging camp during the winter months. Clara's father worked for the railroad, a local sawmill and drove a school bus. Amanda and Eleanore's fathers logged on their own land for extra income. Eleanore's father also ran a tavern and started a cooperative store on his property.

The Finnish immigrant families in this study seemed to have had ample food on the table, even though money was scarce. When asked what she thought the advantages were to growing up on a homestead, Eleanore responded with, *"God! We ate plenty! We were fed good always."* Clara spoke of hot meals in the winter:

> *"And I guess when our chores were done then we'd have a hearty meal. Always a big meal. There'd always be meat and potatoes and vegetables. Grandma always had dessert too. I always say 'Grandma,' because that's what we call her now, but I mean my mother."*

Tynne talked about always eating a hot breakfast:

> *"Filia, oh, that was a very common breakfast in the morning and I still like it. They would have seed for it from a bowl of yogurt from the day before and they would put in the bottom of each dish and then fill it with milk. That was whole milk. . . . she had one whole shelf with full bowls of filia. . . Another common breakfast was oatmeal."*

Typical crops raised in the fields and gardens of the homesteads of Brimson-Toimi included hay, oats, potatoes, rutabagas, turnips, carrots, beets, peas, cabbages, tomatoes, spinach and rhubarb (Hanson-Stone, 1994).

Berries were picked to supplement the garden produce. June berries, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and cranberries grew wild in the woods and swamps. Berries were canned or made into sauce and stored in the root cellars for year round consumption. Each narrator spoke of berry picking as a family and community affair, in some cases.

Jennie spoke of the pleasure of berry picking if the bugs weren't too bad:

> *"Berry-picking, . . . during the thirties . . . the bushes were just loaded! We didn't have the forests like we do now . . . the berries were so abundant."*

Amanda talked about blueberry picking in the summer:

> *" . . . around the Fourth of July, they started haying and berry picking about the same time. We picked blueberries from early morning til evening. We did the picking and my dad and my brother would carry them, big 5-gallon cans or milk pails . . . they'd keep carrying them all day long. And it was fun, . . . they were in the hills, it was so pretty and they didn't have any elder brush. It was all open, from one hill to the other. The crickets were chirping. It was such a nice sound."*

Clara remembers the best time to pick berries was in the summer and fall:

> *". . . during the summer would be the raspberries which would grow along the railroad track. The strawberries which would be out in the fields, and we had to go early enough so we didn't trample the hay or they'd be mad at us. And we picked chokecherries and which were made into jelly, and jam. . . highbush cranberries were made into cranberry sauce and cranberry jelly."*

> *"In the fall is the time we picked the blueberries. When the blueberries were, I think this was the highlight of our fall season, because it always meant a family picnic. Auntie Hilda and Uncle Charlie were always included. And the food was carried out and baskets of blueberries were carried back."*

Along with fruits and berries, the forests also provided nuts, fish and game for the immigrant tables. Deer, moose, bear, rabbit and partridge were hunted for meat. Fresh fish was also eaten and smoked, pickled, canned or salted for the winter months (Hanson-Stone, 1994).

Mothers, fathers, children, aunts, uncles, cousins and neighborsworked togetherto provide food, shelter, income and leisure activities within the Finnish American community. The following section focuses on the work of Finnish immigrant farm wo-menand their specific contributions to the family, the homestead and the community.

Women's Work

Whenasked of the types of work their mothers performed on the homesteads. Responses such as these were typical. Amanda said that her mother did everything on the farm:

> *"Well, she did the cooking, cleaning, baking. She baked all the time. She always baked her own bread which was so good, and um, of course, us kids tried to help but I don't think we were much help! We did the best we could, . . ., and then she did help out in the fields too. Come to think of it, when my dad was hay-ing, she'd be out there too."*

Finnish immigrant women on the homesteads performed paid work outside of the home to supplement the family income. "Women . . . acted as midwives, as practical physicians,

and as 'helpers in emergencies.' They sat up with sick neighbors, took care of the children of mothers who were incapacitated, and laid out the dead. In communities where schools were unavailable, the task of teaching the children to read and write also often fell on the women" (Neidle, 1975: 94). Serviceswere providedfor a fee, however, many times the services were bartered for services or goods the recipient or recipient's family could provide in return.

Several midwives served the Brimson-Toimi community. Each seemed to have a geographical area they represented. It was a common practice for the midwife to deliver the baby in the mother's home. However, babies were also delivered in the midwife's home if the expectant mother could reach her in time. Clara told of how she and her sister *"came into the world:"*

"Sister Lillian and I were born in Brimson. In fact, I was delivered by a midwife in Brimson. All the kids were in those days, but I was just a tiny little tyke. I think I weighed about four pounds, so I spent my first two weeks of my life in my mother's warming oven in her kitchen range."

There was one case where the "professional" midwife was not involved in a birth. Amanda served as her youngest sister's midwife. Her mother coached her through the birthing process.

> *". . . there were midwives up until Sylvia, and I was Sylvia's midwife. I had to help. They called the doctor and the doctor didn't get there in time so I had to help. I'll never forget that - I was nine years old. When the doctor arrived there, he just looked - looked it over and said 'Everything's fine' and left!"*

Another health care service provided by women (and some men) was that of "cupping" or blood letting. The cupper would travel from homestead to homestead performing blood letting in the sauna. They would use a special little knife that punctured small holes in the skin, usually on the back of the shoulders. Then they would use a hollowed out cow horn to suck out the blood. The older generations in Finland claimed that if they weren't feeling well, bloodletting would relieve them.

Jennie told of an old woman who cupped, mainly first generation immigrants:

> *". . . I remember a story my father told me . . . when he was a young man, . . . before he was married, when he was up on the Range. He said that he started aching so, he ached from his head to his foot. It was like . . . a nerve ache or a toothache, all over his whole body. . . He said he even considered suicide because it hurt him so much. So, anyway, someone told him . . . there was an elderly women and she was a "kuppari" from Finland. . . Dad went, got over there, and she did this cupping on him and drew out that blood, and he said to his old age he never had any rheumatism or any aching - and he didn't either - it's amazing!"*

Other examples of women's paid work off the homestead are playing musical instruments for local dances or providing domestic service to a family with children on a

neighboring homestead. Finnish immigrant farm women also worked as cooks in their family operated logging camps, or peeled cut pulpwood to raise extra cash.

Some paid work outside the home could also have been paid work performed in the home. Such examples are midwifery, cupping and massage. Practitioners could perform their work in either their own homes (or saunas) or at the homes of their neighbors (i.e., customers). Other "cottage industries" of the Finnish immigrant women on the homestead included dressmaking, rag rug making, taking in boarders, laundry services, and selling cream, eggs, and garden produce such as potatoes with profits going to the household.

Clara's family milked fourteen cows and raised chickens. Her mother raised money by selling cream and eggs to the cooperative store:

> *". . . that was our main income. . . the cream check was a very important part of our income. It always took care of the week's groceries. . .. Selling eggs to the neighbors, oh, we also took eggs to the Farmer's Store."*

Amanda's mother milked five cows, twice a day, on their homestead and also sold cream to the Farmer's Store:

> *"Mother was responsible to milk the cows and separated the cream. . . . Well they had the separator machine and a stack of little plates like that and we had to wash those individual plates. . . . We separated once a day."*

Potatoes were the main cash crop. Each family homestead raised acres of potatoes to feed the family, on occasion the cows, and to sell the surplus to the Farmer's Store or other potato buyers of the time. Spring was the time to prepare the fields for potato planting. The entire family helped with the planting. Eleanore spoke of her family's potato fields:

> *". . . we had about 200 feet long (rows in the potato fields, and potatoes were big, nice potatoes. Oh, they were beautiful potatoes, but then Father sold a lot of potatoes to the market you know. . . . there was about seven of us planting potatoes. Didn't take long to plant potatoes, each one had a row."*

Neighboring has long been the basis of farm communities. It was informal social life that gave institutions in farm communities their meaning and created the fabric of daily living. Social neighborhoods, patterns of interaction, and the unwritten customs that were their foundations developed the sense of dependability, stability, and security that were the basis of resource sharing and economic exchange. Women were the primary organizers of this social world (Neth, 1988: 339).

The informal exchanges and social interactions of rural neighbors were the heart of the farm community and the source of women's influence on community life. Farm neighboring integrated the work, trade, and social lives of farm people. Farm people exchanged work, traded produce, and gave favors and gifts to neighbors (Neth, 1988: 340). These informational exchanges and bartering situations were also part of the Brimson-Toimi community. Haying, butchering, veterinarian services, construction, well digging

and harvesting are all examples by which community members helped their neighbors in exchange for assistance on their homesteads.

Clara spoke of a "sawing bee" that her family would host in the spring:

> *". . . during the winter my dad would cut next winter's firewood . . . and he'd haul it into a huge pile with the horse and dray. It was hauled in full length, tree length, and then it would be cut into 18-inch pieces which would fit both into the kitchen range and into the heating stove. But this was done in the sawing bee - all the neighbors would come over and help. One of our neighbors had a gas engine, driven saw. . . then, Grandma would have a great big meal and then they'd cut three or four hours and throw it into a pile and let it sit there all summer to dry. . . Whenever there was a bee, she'd have a great big meal, and then she'd always have berry pies, always covered with whipped cream."*

Unpaid work in the Brimson-Toimi community also included participation in community activities and organizations such as the public school, the women's cooperative auxiliary, the acting guild, community choir, ladies sewing club, and cooking, baking and serving food for community gatherings at the local Finn hall. Women organized the primary social events that created a sense of community (Neth, 1977: 340).

There were three meeting halls in the Brimson-Toimi area that served as centers for community events. The halls were host to dance bands, orchestras, choirs, holiday and school celebrations, and plays presented by the local and regional community groups. Irja Beckman (1979: 58), in her memoirs of immigrating to and growing up in Brimson wrote of a woman who volunteered:

> *"For a celebration of any kind, everyone did his best to make it the success it usually turned out to be. I recall one little lady, a motherly soul, who walked four and a half miles carrying cream and fresh rolls as her donation to the cause and serving as coffee cook besides, a job she never turned down. She appeared to be in her element, hovering around that hot cookstove."*

One example of a women's organization active in the Brimson-Toimi community in the 1930's is the Brimson Women's Cooperative Guild. The Guild was organized April 14, 1930. It functioned in the rural communities of Toimi, Brimson and Fairbanks in Lake and St. Louis Counties (Nurmi, 1939). The Guild disbanded in the early 1960's.

The Brimson Women's Cooperative Guild membership was always active in community projects and cultural activities. The Guild organized summer youth camps, were in charge of youth programs in general, promoted the cooperative movement with fair booths and other projects, and served as a contact between homemakers and the Central Cooperative Wholesale commodity program (Riippa, 1992). Examples of the Brimson Women's Cooperative Guild's community involvement include plays presented in the Finnish Language, a craft and bake sale combined with an "old time" basket social, box lunches prepared by the members and sold to the highest bidders, and New Year's Eve dances where the old Finnish custom of melting tin for those who wanted their futures revealed by the shape of the molten tin after it was plunged into cold water (Brimson-Toimi Legacy, 1994).

The Guild membership varied from 14 and 24 women throughout its tenure. The primary goal of the Guild was to nurture the cooperative movement and its concepts as they related to the consumer. Meetings were held monthly in the homes of its members. A lunch was always served by the hostess at the conclusion of the meetings. District meetings in Virginia were attended by delegates from the group (Brimson-Toimi Legacy, 1994).

Clearly, the outstanding contribution of American women from every religious and ethnic group has been as community builders, those who have assessed the needs of their localities for services, raised funds for institutions, and served as volunteers for these organizations (Pleck, 1983: 52).

The farm was, both, home and a place of business for the Finnish immigrant farm woman. She did the housework, provided child care and performed farm tasks. They worked long hours as a result of the combination of home and farm tasks. Long work days, performing much work for no direct pay, was a major issue for the Finnish farm woman (Sachs, 1985).

Unpaid work in the home occupied the majority of the Finnish immigrant woman's time. Examples of unpaid work in the home include child care, cooking, baking, cleaning, sewing, mending, knitting, canning and preserving food, animal husbandry, health care, gardening, rock picking, building rock fences, and haying. Theodore Blegen (1955) sums up the unpaid work activities of pioneer women:

> *"The farmer worked hard, but his wife worked even harder. She did the housework, cared for the children, prepared the meals, helped to care for the cattle, pigs, sheep and chickens; milked the cows, churned the butter, did thecanning in summer and fall, prepared cheese, carded and spun the wool [they brought their spinning wheels and looms], wove cloth, dyed it with homemade dyes, knitted and sewed clothing, mended mittens and socks. On occasion she pitched in and helped to rake hay and bind the grain after it had been cut. . . . She bore children year after year; she cared for the sick when her home was struck by disease."*

The Finnish women in this research project spoke to the majority of their mother's unpaid work in the home. Housecleaning was a weekly event, often with the mother and children working together. Spring cleaning was a major event. Clara said that her mother*".. . always did a major house-cleaning in the spring."* Jennie remembers her mother and grandmother *". . . getting busy and wallpaper the kitchen and the livingroom, to get it all fresh and nice after the smoky winters!"* Making and washing clothes took up a great deal of the Finnish immigrant farm woman's time. *"Hand-me-downs"* and remade cloths were common. Clara spoke of getting new clothes and shoes in the fall when schools started.

> *"We got busy at Auntie Hilda's, standing there while she made us new clothes. 'Cause I got many hand-me-downs, I was the smallest, and my sister had probably worn most of the clothes, but Auntie always added a little piece of lace or a pocket or something around so they always looked new, or probably did a tint job or a dye job, something special."*

Jennie and her sister Pearl received new and hand-me-down clothing from an aunt in Philadelphia who worked.

> *"Mother would make over a lot of the clothes that they would send us, and she'd make them over into clothes for us that would fit, and she would also get a piece of material and then do some sewing from scratch. She wouldn't even need a pattern, she would just kind of size it up and sew . . . She had a Singer sewing machine, a treadle machine and that's what I learned to sew on. I'd make up all the doll's clothes."*

The Finnish immigrant farm women knit all the woolen socks, hats, scarves, sweaters and sometimes underwear for the family. Amanda remembers her mother knitting in the evening.

> *"I don't remember her doing it in the daytime. She was so busy during the day." Tynne said that her mother was knitting all the time. She ". . . knitted and in those days money was scare, so when she got her skeins of yarn they were very precious and she knitted all our socks. We had to wear wool socks to school of course, so she knitted for the whole family. In fact, one time she even knitted a complete pants for my Dad. . . he loved them because they were so warm. . . She did a lot of knitting, in fact she was always knitting . . . I have her knitting needles,. . . they're very thin needles . . . hers are just bent over from all the knitting."*

Aside from sewing and knitting clothing, the women were also responsible for keeping them clean. Laundry was done in several places on the homestead: in the kitchen, the summer kitchen, the sauna, outside and even by a river or lake. Tynne remembers helping her mother with the laundry:

> *". . . I do remember summer washing clothes. The wringer would be outside, and the tubs would be on both sides and we used to have to take turns sitting at her feet with a broom, with a little switch or something to switch off the flies off her legs. . . She was washing clothes, rubbing on the rubbing board, standing and rubbing on the rubbing board."*

Eleanore called this method of doing laundry as "knuckle washing."

> *". . . before machines came into existence, they were using knuckle-washing with your hands. . . Why, you rubbed your knuckles against a scrub-board . . . and that wringer on the side, that thing where you have a tub her and a tub here and rinse, and there was always somebody turning that crank. . . to get that wash through that wringer. . ."*

Amanda remembers helping her mother do laundry at the river when she was a teenager. She had a fire pit on the riverbank and would heat water from the river to wash her clothes, if she didn't do it in the house.

> *"We had these big tubs. This was if she didn't do it at the river, big tubs, and she'd pour the water in the boiler on the stove and then, the sheets. I remember*

> *her boiling the sheets in lye . . . it was sterile. But, then, in the summer she used to take the clothes to the river and we used to wash them there. And likewise she used to put the boiler on, build a fire there on the ground."*

Growing, picking, butchering, harvesting, preserving, canning, baking and preparing food was a major task for the Finnish immigrant farm woman. Food was simple but tasty and plentiful according to the narrators. Jennie recalls her mother making head cheese in November when cattle were butchered.

> *"That was delicious! They also made that blood sausage which we really weren't too wild about. . . But the head cheese was really good. . . the meat was usually quick cut into chunks and then put in two quart jars and canned for the winter. Or ground up and made into meatballs and those were canned. So there were ready meals."*

Berries were canned by the quarts. Amanda remembered that her mother canned hundreds and hundreds of quarts of berries. Clara spoke of gardening and berry picking.

> *"We tended the garden, we berried, sometimes by the tub fulls! My Mom would preserve them all! And we'd often wonder, 'Grandma, why so much! We can't eat these!' But you'd never know what next year brings. Because we were always vulnerable to late frosts and a dry season. So she was always looking ahead."*

The Finnish immigrant farm women in the study were all reported to be wonderful bakers (Hanson-Stone, 1994). Some women baked on Saturdays. Other women with larger families might have baked every second day. Jennie remembered her Grandmother baking bread at her homestead in the summer,

> *". . . the long, hot summers we had during the Depression years and my grandmother had a kitchen that was off the living room and she used to bake bread in the summertime. She had a large wood stove and then she'd start the bread dough in the afternoon and bake it at night because it was cooler at night to bake than during the hot July weather. I'd get up sometimes at night to get a drink of water and here would be my grandmother sitting in her chair by the stove and she would be nodding and have her head down and her bread would be baking. She'd be waiting til it gets done."*

The last unpaid work on the homestead addressed in this discussion is the care, feeding and milking of cows which was the Finnish immigrant farm woman's responsibility. Her husband or sons would help with fetching water and feeding the cows, and on occasion would help with the milking. However, the cows were the woman's domain.

Milking, feeding and watering the cows, and separating the cream from the milk and washing the cream separator with all its different pieces were included the farm woman's milking chores. Jennie recalled that her grandmother "loved her cows." The children also helped mother with these activities, and were often sent out to find the cows and bring them back to the barn for milking. Tynne recalled that she had to go get the cows in the summertime,

> *"we used to have to go get the cows and then when fall came the cows couldn't be left out then so we didn't have to go out every evening to find the cows. The cows could wander all over. There was no pasture or anything, and the only way you knew where the cows were was the bells that they had on their necks."*

Clara spoke of her mother and father coming in from the barn with buckets of warm milk. Their cream separator was in the pantry. We'd put the milk

> *"into the separator and get skim milk out of one side and heavy cream out of the other side, which was the kind they used for making butter. Oh we had cream on everything we ate! And all the milk you could drink. And buttermilk, which we learned to love, with the little curdles of butter still in the buttermilk. But I do remember h ow I hated to wash the cream separator! You had to wash every part. Take it apart, wash every part, warm baking-soda water and then you scalded it in boiling hot water. This was done daily."*

A major chore in the summer for all the members of the family was haying. Several narrators remembered their mothers cutting, racking, stacking hay in the fields. This, in addition, to cooking for the haying crews which often included relatives and friends. Amanda and Jennie told stories of racking hay what seemed like all summer long. Jennie recalled that they racked the hay

> *"when Dad would cut the hay, we would rake it with hand rakes. They were wooden, handmade rakes and whenever they'd break off the rake, the teeth could be replaced. He'd just make a new one out of wood. They were very light weight."*

Tynne said that she and other family members would

> *"have to follow the mower when the hay was very thick and clear it off for the next round when the mover came around again, and then, when it dried, we had to go and use the rake and rake around every rock pile and next to every fence where the horse drawn hay rack couldn't get through. Then after it dried, we had to pile up the hay so that it was protected from the rain for the night. The next morning, we'd come and spread the hay from the little stacks that we had made. The fun part was hauling the hay in because we made a game of it. We would be there with the rakes and the boys would do the pitching onto the hayrack and then somebody would be on the hayrack to stamp it down so more hay would fit. Then it was hauled to the hayloft where we would have to stamp it down again."*

Lessons Learned from Everyday and Community Life

The female narrators, through their life stories, told more than the history of the Finnish homesteaders way of life, they gave us an opportunity to relive a fascinating part of Minnesota's social and cultural history. They talked about how difficult life on the homesteads could be. They spoke of hard work and few material possessions. Many women paid dearly for the chance to live on their own land, and bring up their children on

those remote farms. Lonely, fearful, and tired, young women became old long before their time (Engle, 1997: 54).

Jennie spoke of her mother’s loneliness when her husband was away at the logging camp during the winter and she was left home with her two daughters. Jennie had found an old letter her mother wrote to her mother (Jennie’s grandmother) when they lived in Brimson, only two miles apart. It was

> *". . . a rather sad letter. It almost made me cry because Dad was working at a lumber camp somewhere in the area but he couldn’t come home except on weekends. He was evidently far enough away and Mother is out here with two little kids. No automobiles in those days, and for us, anyway, and she had to carry water from the lake. We lived by a little lake. She had a cow . . . and there was snow like you wouldn’t believe in those days - cold. She was so lonely and sad. She wrote to my Grandma that we might just as well be separated by an ocean, that "I am so lonely, I don’t see anyone, I don’t hear from anyone." She couldn’t even get to see her mother and her mother lived only two miles away. And it was so sad, it just made me cry when I read that letter."*

However, they were quick to include comments about the strength of the family, the pride in the community, and the joys and challenges of growing up in the country. Two narrators spoke of the advantages and disadvantages of growing up as they did. Tynne spoke of the isolation and self-sufficiency immigrant womenexperienced on the homestead,

> *"We definitely had a very isolated kind of living there. I wish we had the opportunity to have more books to read. The advantages, I suppose, you learn to be independent, you learn to be self-sufficient, and you learn to get along with whoever you associated with. You learned you economize, definitely. . . It made you a stronger person, anyway. You developed your own character."*

Clara commented on the value of growing up in the out-of-doors and being part of a close-knit community,

> *"I would say it was something I would never exchange, never give up. It taught me so many things that I feel, probably, living in the city I would never have learned. I’ve learned to appreciate nature. I’ve learned to live with nature, respect nature. I´ve learned how important it is to be part of a community. And work - just togetherness."*

Conclusion

This oral history project was conducted to document and preserve the rich historical information, knowledge and experiences that second generation Finnish-Americans possess about rural immigration to the United States and everyday life on a "backwoods farm" in northeastern Minnesota in the early 1900’s. In particular, we have documented

the contributions Finnish immigrant farm women made to the family farm and the emotional, social, economic and political framework of the Finnish American farm communities.

We were given descriptions of immigrant families and motivations for coming to America. We were also given descriptions of the work women performed on the homestead, in the community, for pay and for no direct pay. Narrators spoke of childhood memories of work and play in everyday life and the importance of "togetherness" experienced in the communities through the schools, voluntary associations and the Finn halls. They also spoke of the valuable lessons learned as a result of their life experiences in a Finnish American farm community.

Through this oral history research, the Finnish immigrant women's work and life experiences were preserved for current and future generations. This information is available to students, educators, teachers, fellow historians, ethnographers, humanities scholars, social scientists and the general public through the archival holdings and interlibrary loan networks of the Iron Range Research Center in Chisholm, Minnesota and the Lake County Historical Society in Two Harbors, Minnesota.

The recognition and study of women's work, on and off the farm, for pay and on a voluntary basis, continues to be of great importance in immigration, women's, agricultural and social history research. The documentation of Finnish American farm women's work provides primary information for researchers to use in their future studies on farm women and work. The close study of a small group of Finnish immigrant women and their work adds to the growing literature on rural women and work in America.

John Kolehmainen (1950), an early Finnish cultural studies scholar, expresses his concern that we not forget the contributions and hard work of the Finnish immigrant farm woman. "Let no one underestimate the significance of the Finnish farm wife. In truth, the wilderness would not have been tamed without the pioneerwoman, workingon an 8-hour schedule: 8 hours in the morning, 8 hours in the afternoon and evening."

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An abbreviated version of this article is published in Siirtolaisuus - Migration, 2/1998

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