

Eero Sorila

The Fishing Village of Finn Slough, Vancouver, Canada

Siirtolaisuusinstituutti – Migrationsinstitutet

Turku - Åbo 2003

<http://www.migrationinstitute.fi>

The Fishing Village of Finn Slough, Vancouver, Canada

In the year 1892, Mr. Mikko Hihnala who had become known as Mike Jacobson, took a leave of absence from an Astoria coal mine, in the state of Washington and visited Canada for the first time. The lush green meadows of Lulu Island presented a favourable contrast against the black coal mines. Jacobson was saying to himself: "I have never seen anything like this and I want to raise my family here." Indeed he and several others did raise their families in this area of Lulu Island, and after a while, one of the main roads in that area was given the name of Finn Road, which is still in use today.



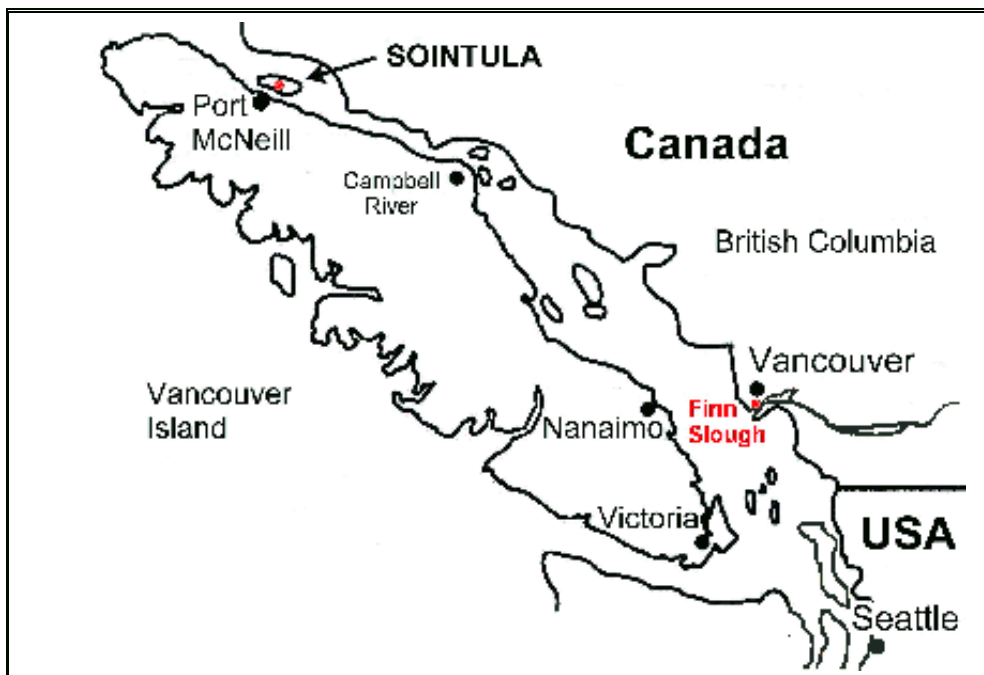
The founder of Finn Slough, Mikko Hihnala (later Mike Jacobson, 1850-1930) was born in Lahdensuu, Himanka, Finland. His wife Eva Jacobson (nee Annanolli, 1864-1954) was born in Tomujoki, Himanka, Finland. *Copy photo: Eero Sorila.*

The initial task of this miner who became a fisherman, was to build a scowhouse near the end of No. 4 Road, which was to shelter his first fishing boat while the backroom under the same roof was used for living quarters. Practicality dictated the outcome, hence the lack of architectural design. Red cedar posts were used, on which the structure stood. Mud was packed tightly around the posts, to prevent air interaction with the wood. It is due to this ingenuity of mud sealing by the early pioneers like Jacobson, that the posts outlive the structure, to provide valuable information for historical archaeologists in locating human settlements. Now that Jacobson had his scowhouse and a fishing boat powered by one sail, life seemed promising in Canada.



A blooming chokecherry tree in summer wind adorns the farmhouse in Finland, where Mikko Hihnala was born in 1850 and then left to America at age 20. This classic rural home could have accommodated about 12 scouhouses, the one room type where Mike Jacobson started raising his family in Finn Slough. The writer of this article had the opportunity of visiting the Himanka home which is still in excellent condition. *Photo: Eero Sorila.*

Mike Jacobson was one of the first to raise a family in the Finn Slough Community and by the 1930s he had four adult sons: Henry, Tom, Jack and Richard who were all commercial fishermen.



I met Henry Jacobson while doing research on Finn Slough at the University of British Columbia in 1984. Henry Jacobson had been a Richmond resident for 96 years when he passed away in his Finn Road home in 1990.



The eldest son of Mike Jacobson, Henry was born in 1894 and lived in the Finn Slough area until his death at age 96. Regardless of the hard times in Finn Slough there was always time for a good laugh as expressed by Henry Jacobson after his 90th birthday. *Photo: Eero Sorila.*

The entire Jacobson clan was endowed with diligence, bridging four generations of successful fishermen. Henry's father, Mike Jacobson, was one of the very first Finnish fishermen to fish the Fraser River before the turn of the century. Many immigrants from his native village Himanka, Finland joined Mike in Richmond and became fishermen. Thus the fishing village of Finn Slough located at No. 4 and Dyke Road, was born.

Without the Jacobsons, Richmond would not have Finn Road, nor some of the very best fishermen on the West Coast.

Jack Jacobson, the son of Mikko, remembers that his best one day catch was over 1,000 sockeye salmon. At the time, in 1939, the price was one dollar per fish. Considering the inflation factor, the earnings for that day would be about \$2,600 (1999 dollars). The largest fish he ever caught was a 200 lb. halibut, measuring seven feet in length, 32 inches in width and one foot in thickness.



A proud Finn Slough family photographed in the 1920's. Henry Jacobson with his wife Lina and their three children, from left: Walter, Eva and Antti, who stands on his mother's lap. *Copy photo: Eero Sorila.*

Henry Jacobson started fishing with his father at age 12 and soon after continued independently. He lifted anchor at age 70, ending a fishing career of over half a century. At that time his diligence did not subside but rather it took new form. Henry would dedicate the next 26 years to gardening and farming his Finn Road acreage. His potato field, garden and home reflected the endeavours of a man who was diligent, efficient and orderly.



Fishing is still connected with Finn Slough. The typical 1930's wooden fish boat Caballero is that of Antti Jacobson, a third generation Finn Slough fisherman, son of Henry Jacobson. *Photo: Eero Sorila.*



Finn Slough seen from the side of the Lulu Island. The house in front has been built on a ferry and transported here from another place of Slough. - *Photo: Ron Ericson 1999.*



Finn Slough scouhouses are reminders of the past, the type of dwellings in which Mike Jacobson and many of his followers raised their families. *Photo: Eero Sorila.*



The only "draw bridge" in Richmond. When a new bridge was needed between Gilmour Island and the North bank of Finn Slough, the Anglo British Fishing Company donated all the required lumber. The fishermen gave their skills and labour voluntarily for the common cause. When a fisherman wants to take his boat through the "draw bridge" he simply draws four planks out, takes his boat through, and replaces the planks. The bridge was so well constructed in the 1940's that it is still in use today. *Photo: Jouni Korkiasaari.*



Eero Sorila was born in Finland (1944) and immigrated to Canada with his family at the age of 12. He is a U.B.C. graduate in history and has combined his extensive world travel with photography and writing. His newspaper and magazine articles have been published in English, French, Japanese, Romanian and the Finnish languages. *Photo: Jouni Korkiasaari.*

More info: Finn Slough Heritage & Wetland Society <http://www.finnslough.com/>