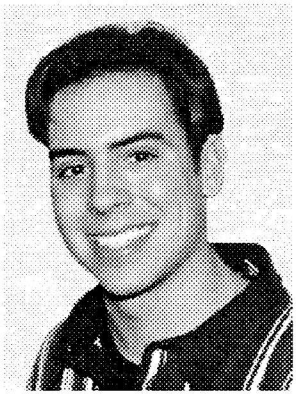
From Tuuri to Copper Cliff

Finnish settlement in Copper Cliff during the 1930's



Alli Hauta-aho was eight years old when she first heard the disturbing news. Her father, Einar, was in serious financial trouble. After co-signing a loan for a friend, the deal had gone bad. It soon became official: he had lost the family-owned bakery and bottling works. Until that point in 1930, the Hauta-aho family enjoyed an affluent lifestyle in Tuuri, Finland. This devastating about face in their finances would ultimately lead the family to a new life with a variety of challenges.

With a wife and five children to support, Einar faced the most difficult decision of his life. He told the family that he would be moving thousands of miles away to live with his older brother John, in the working-class mining town of Copper Cliff, Ontario, Canada, and would send for the family as soon as he could afford the cost of transportation. Alli (now Alice MacDonald) knew it would be a long time before she would see her father again. She also knew, however, that her father was a clever and adept businessman. She was confident that one way or another, her family would be back on its feet before long.

Her prediction proved to be accurate. Einar was one of many immigrants who soon found work in the mining and smelting industry of Copper Cliff. Although Canada was in the grips of the Great Depression, Copper Cliff had remained relatively unscathed due to the high demand for nickel on the world market. As a result, the residents of Copper Cliff enjoyed a decent standard of living. Aside from these economic advantages, the Finnish community in Copper Cliff was already well established. Since the first Finnish immigrant set foot on Copper Cliff land in 1885, this ethnic group had remained close knit, and consistently asserted itself as a strong presence. Various elements of old-country Finnish life had been proudly carried over from the homeland. The value of *sisu*, the belief in strong intestinal fortitude, was held in high regard among Finns. As well, Finnish theatre productions and the ever-popular *sauna*, helped to preserve Finnish heritage in Copper Cliff. In fact, it can be said that life in Copper Cliff in the 1920's and 1930's, was profoundly influenced by the old country beliefs of its Finnish immigrants. Their moral values, political views, and culture helped to shape the social fabric of this small, Northern Ontario community.

LIFE IN FINLAND

Upon hearing of her father's imminent departure, Alice pondered the idea of leaving her native country. Although it was certain that she would be living in Finland for at least a few more years, she knew that one day her family would be reunited in a country she knew little about. Because her family had always been happy in Finland, the idea of a move was unsettling. Alice spent most of her childhood in Tuuri, a small community of about 4000. She remembers it fondly:

> I remember living in Tuuri because it was so beautiful. It was a railroad town . . . I remember that because there was a little railroad station not far away from my home. There was a huge park near the railroad station that we used to play in. The weather there was very much like it is in Canada.[1]

Einar Hauta-aho left Finland in 1930. The rest of the family remained in Tuuri for one more year. The following year, Einar had saved enough money to send for Alice's mother Aino Elsa, along with the eldest sibling, Elmer, and the baby of the family, Pirkko. They joined him in Copper Cliff in 1931. Unfortunately, he did not have sufficient money to pay for all members of the family to make the trip across the Atlantic.

Alice's maternal grandmother, Sofia, who lived in nearby Alajarvi, accepted the task of caring for the remaining children, Violet, Alice and Gertie. Alice attributes many of her fondest memories of life in Finland to her year-long stay with her grandmother:

> Grandmother was the most wonderful person in the world. She was so caring. She had raised a big

family herself — her husband had died very young. Then, after they were raised and gone, we arrived there. She was starting all over again. I was so happy with grandmother, I didn't want to leave![2]

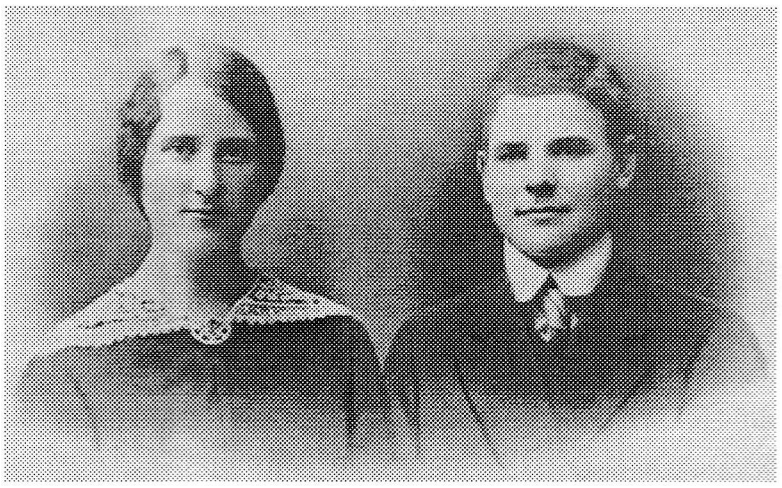
As seen through the eyes of a child, life in beautiful Finland was bliss. Finland in the 1920's and early 1930's, however, was characterized by contrasting elements: a picturesque landscape and a fragile political and economic climate. As Finnish-Canadian historian Varpu Lindstrom-Best writes, "the economic uncertainties, the rural over-population, the unemployment in the cities and the political instabilities were the main causes of mass emigration from Finland."[3] This can partly be attributed to the fact that Finland was a relatively young nation. Until 1917, Finland was considered an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia, bestowed with self-government and many freedoms. Once Nicholas II became the Tzar of Russia, however, restrictions were placed on many of the freedoms which Finland had enjoyed. The Finns quickly retaliated with a general strike and for the time being, forced the Tzar to relent. The Russo-Japanese war, which broke out in 1905, greatly drained Russia of its resources. As soon as Russia recovered, the Tzar renewed his efforts to exert control over Finland in a process known as "Russification."[4]

Political chaos in Russia weakened their strangle-hold on Finland, and the Finnish parliament took advantage. On 6 December 1917, Finland was declared an independent nation. This momentous occasion was a direct result of Finland's "cultural awakening" and a "rise of Finnish nationalism."[5] The euphoria that resulted did not last long. A bitter split took place between socialist Finns, who retained close ties with the newly created Soviet Socialist Republic, and conservative Finns. A hard-fought civil war, in which Einar Hauta-aho had fought on the conservative side, ensued. The conservatives emerged victorious, but irreparable damage had been done to the political and economic environment. This sparked a wave of Finnish immigration to North America by both conservative and socialist Finns alike.

LIFE IN COPPER CLIFF

After two years of separation the time had finally come for the Hauta-aho family to live together in Copper Cliff. Einar spelled out the plans for reuniting the rest of his family in numerous letters to Sofia, finally indicating that the tickets to Canada had been purchased. Arrangements were made for Violet, Alice and Gertie to stay at a relative's apartment in Helsinki where they awaited the departure of their ship. In early August of 1932, the girls, aged 12, 10 and 9, all waved tearful goodbyes to their beloved grandmother and rode a bus to the Finnish capital. One piece of news managed to brighten their spirits: a new baby sister, Hilkka, had been born on Copper Cliff and they would soon meet her for the first time.

Upon arriving in Helsinki, they were informed that they had missed their scheduled sailing, and would not be able to cross the Atlantic for another week. The three girls stayed with relatives at a farm outside the city until the next sailing. Because communication links were poor, there was no way of notifying their anxious family in Canada about the delay. Every day for a full week, Einar and Aino faithfully travelled to the train station in Copper Cliff hoping to meet the girls, only to leave the station disappointed and worried. One can imagine the heartache these parents must have experienced, unable to track the whereabouts of their children as they travelled across the ocean. Finally, Violet, Alice and Gertie boarded the Swedish ocean liner *Gripsholm* bound for New York City. Alice describes the experience of boarding the

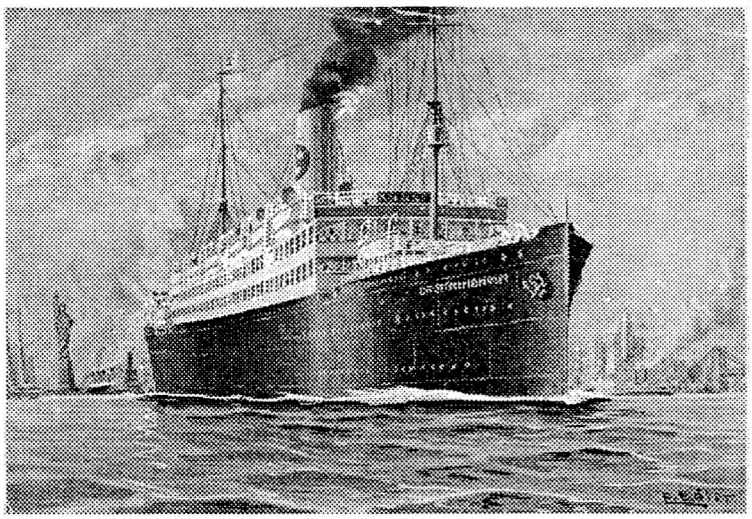


Aino and Einar Hauta-aho shortly after their engagement in 1917.

boat as "terrifying,"[6] though not as terrifying as their arrival in New York:

> Once we got off the boat, we sat there crying. There we were, three little girls sitting on our suitcases, crying because we were so alone and afraid. I didn't know what was going on and we couldn't ask because we didn't speak English![7]

Luckily, a Finnish couple who had been on the *Gripsholm* helped them board the train that would lead them to Toronto where they would make connections to Copper Cliff. The bewildered children spent a day with the strangers at their home in Toronto before they boarded the train to Copper Cliff. Upon arriving, the conductor of the train, for reasons still unknown, notified a concerned Einar that once again the girls were not on the train. Luckily, a family friend, Jack Franssi, caught a glimpse of the wide-eyed girls through the train window. They managed to stop the train as it was departing for points West. Jack snatched them from the departing train and brought them to their overjoyed father.



This is taken from a postcard marked with the following: "SVENSKA AMERIKA LINIEN, GOTEBORG - DIREKT - NEW YORK, OCH CANADA (ISACSON - GBG)."
James titled this illustration "The sight of New York City was terrifying for 11 year-old Alice and her sisters."

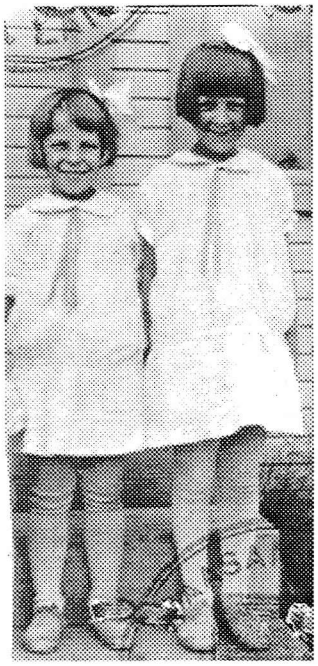
The joy of their reunion was offset somewhat by their first impressions of their new town. Alice's first impression of Copper Cliff was not uncommon among Finns: "We were disappointed when we saw Copper Cliff. They had those board sidewalks and no trees — everything was so barren because of the smoke stacks."[8] Copper Cliff was once described as having backyards "as bare as a billiard table before the green baize is glued on."[9]

The arrival at the Copper Cliff train station had been early in the morning. Unfortunately, they had little time for a reunion with the family. Incredibly, the girls had just enough time to greet their mother and siblings when they were whisked off for their first day of school. As unbelievable as this may seem, such actions are consistent with the Finns' strong sense of duty. Duty is just one dimension of a characteristic Finns refer to as *sisu*.

School provided the girls with a more favourable impression of Copper Cliff. Children from a variety of ethnic groups were welcoming to the newcomers. Alice describes the teachers as "excellent," adding that they were very understanding of the children who did not speak English.[10] Other Finnish girls were thrilled to make their acquaintance, and did their best to ease their transition to Canadian life.

These children serve as an accurate representation of the town of Copper Cliff as a whole — close knit and ethnically diverse. Ukrainians lived near the Finnish area of Balsam street, while the Italian district was known as the "uptown" of Copper Cliff. There were also pronounced Polish and Irish districts within the town. Copper Cliff was closely tied to the nearby city of Sudbury, widely considered to be a "destination city"[11] during the 1930's. Copper Cliff had reaped many of the economic benefits of its association with the rapidly-developing city. Because of the growing demand for nickel, Sudbury offered much opportunity for employment. The demand for unskilled labour increased, and consequently, the population of the Sudbury region increased by 73.95 per cent during the 1930's, a growth rate approximately three times larger than any other city in Canada.[12] Sudbury had gone through some difficult times throughout the Depression years—the International Nickel Company (INCO) radically curtailed both construction and mining operations in 1931 and 1932 resulting in many layoffs and bankruptcies. As historian Carl Wallace writes, however, "Sudbury was the first city in Canada to emerge from the Depression."[13]

No history of Copper Cliff would be complete without reference to the region's major industrial corporation, the International Nickel Company, which had an impact on nearly every aspect of life within this town. In 1883, large deposits of nickel were found



Alice and Violet Hauta-aho. They appear in the other half of photo below. On this photo you can see the stamps used on their passports.

during the construction of the CPR rail lines. The Canadian Copper Company soon took control of the territory and merged with the Orford Copper Company to form INCO early in the new century. When Einar Hauta-aho arrived in Canada, he was able to find a job at the Copper Cliff operation without much effort. His brother John (his senior by 23 years) was already well established in Copper Cliff and managed to find employment for his sibling. Einar soon made the adjustment to wearing work clothes for the first time in his life. Throughout his years at INCO, Einar adjusted to blue-collar work well, yet never achieved a promotion. According to Alice, "for him, it was just a job. There was just no room for him to advance."[14] Fortunately, his involvement in the Finnish Historical Society, theatre, and church activities left him fulfilled. His real estate dealings provided additional income, which left him in an excellent position to take an early retirement in 1958.

Finnish immigration to Canada peaked in 1927, when 5167 settled in Canada.[15] This trend diminished greatly by the time Einar Hauta-aho immigrated in 1930, when only 2811 settled in Canada.[16] With high promise of employment at INCO, immigrants from a variety of countries flocked to the Sudbury region in droves. The ideal of a Canadian "promised land" was impressed upon these people — this "land of opportunity" offered a degree of hope at a time of worldwide economic chaos. With the whole family together for the first time in two years, Einar Hauta-aho looked to the future with great optimism, with hopes of rebuilding the standard of living they had so abruptly lost in Finland.

FINNISH MORAL VALUES

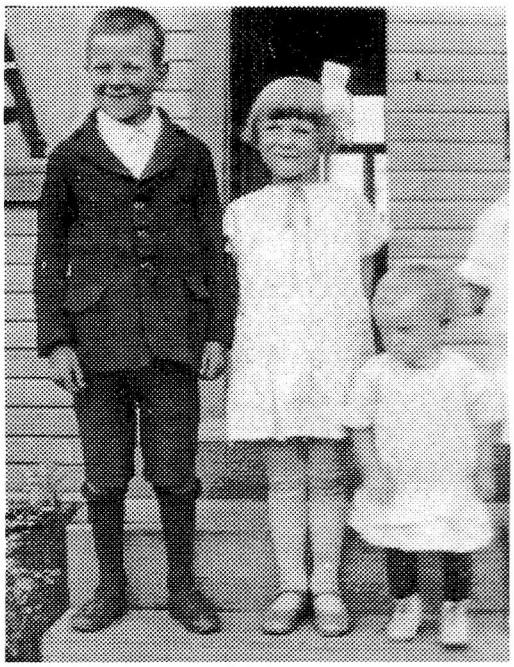
> The Finnish people in Canada represent a high type of citizen. Capable, industrious, noted for their cleanliness and frugal habits, they are making a large contribution to the building of this new nation.[17]

This assessment of Finnish people was written as the foreword to a book by Finnish United Church Reverent A.I. Heinonen, in 1930. Much literature of the day confirmed that this was the prevalent view of the moral integrity of Finns in Canada. "Some of the best miners, most progressive farmers and finest citizens" was how the *Sudbury Star* described Finnish immigrants of the day.[18] Despite being one of the smaller ethnic groups in the Sudbury district, Finns were a visible presence — a visiting reporter from National Geographic found many "boisterous" Finns within the community.[19] This impression of rowdiness aside, it was not long before Finns had earned a reputation for industry and honesty.[20]

One of the most important elements of Finnish culture was the belief in *sisu*. *Sisu* refers to the strong will of the Finns to live as free and independent people, and strong intestinal fortitude — in the vernacular, "guts." The origin of this word can be traced to the "Russification" era. It is a commonly held belief in Finland that without this fundamental belief in freedom, their country would have become a communist satellite. For example, during a trip to Finland in 1979, Alice recalls a discussion of Finnish culture with relatives:

> "My aunt said that the only reason that Finland survived at all was because of *sisu*. I believe that — they had to have it. They struggled with the Russians, being a small country. They had overcome so much."[21]

Many also cite the belief in *sisu* as a reason why "rural Finns have been among the slowest of all the ethnic groups to learn to speak English and to apply for Canadian citizenship."[22] Their fear was that assimilation would lead to a loss of cultural heritage. This, of course, had its historical roots in their battle against the hated "Russification" of Finland.[23] — old fears



Elmer, Gertie and Pirkko Hauta-aho. This photo was taken outside their home in Turri c1930. These photos are the very one's used on their passports.

die hard. Within the Finnish community, Finnish heritage almost always took precedence over other elements of Canadian culture. Alice remembers that her mother, Aino, spoke Finnish almost all of the time. This was not for lack of knowledge; years later, Alice's husband Robert once conceded that he had an extensive conversation with Aino in English during which she displayed only a slight Finnish accent. In public, however, she spoke nothing but Finn. Another Finnish immigrant, Nelma Sillanpaa, recalled a similar situation:

> "Father always made me speak Finnish at home, and for which I have always been glad . . . Dad spoke English well, but mother had an accent and was shy about it."[24]

Einar Hauta-aho immigrated to a continent he had never visited, moved in with a brother he had never met, and began a job which he had never held. Yet it was not long before he had undertaken several successful business ventures and had become involved in a number of Finnish cultural institutions, including the Finnish Historical Society. Aino faced the difficult task of raising a young family in a country she was not accustomed to. It would likely be argued by Copper Cliff Finns that the key to this family's accomplishments was the undying Finnish community spirit, collective consciousness, and a great deal of *sisu*.

Alice (Hauta-aho) MacDonald in 1996

FINNISH POLITICAL BELIEFS

In speaking of the collective spirit of the Finnish community, Alice is quick to point out that "the Finnish community was very tightly knit, except for those people that were considered to be communists."[25] A small but visible minority of Finns fell into the category of "Red Finns." Within Finnish social circles, a predominant criterion was used to determine whether or not one was communist: their participation in church. Anyone who was not attending church regularly was considered to be "Red." Alice now concedes that "a lot of those people weren't even communists. Some people just didn't go to church — that doesn't mean they were communists, but we considered them to be."[26] Although her father was anti-communist, politics were rarely discussed around the house. Little attempt was ever made to explain anything about communists. "My dad just didn't agree with them at all;" says Alice, "we were scared of communists because we didn't understand them. My dad had fought against the communists in the civil war and had seen many of his close friends killed. It was painful for him to talk about it."[27]

Alice's feelings about communism were typical of many people in the Finnish community of Copper Cliff. The fear of communism stemmed from the Finnish civil war in 1918. When the loyal, or "White Finns" emerged victorious from the war, many communist Finns opted to emigrate to Canada. In Sudbury, a group of communist Finns created the Finnish Organization of Canada (F.O.C.), which established an affiliation with the left-wing Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada in October of 1923. The F.O.C. published a newspaper, *Vapaus* (Freedom), which soon became the main vehicle for communist literature for both the F.O.C. and F.S.O.C.[28] The Liberty Hall was constructed in Sudbury by these organizations in 1920 for their members. Eventually, however, even the communist organizations were marred by internal strife. The extreme and moderate factions split in the early 1930's.

On the other end of the political spectrum were the conservative-minded Loyal Finns in Canada. This group reflected the opinions of the majority of Finns in Copper Cliff. Created in 1931 as a response to an increasing fear of the communist thought perpetuated in *Vapaus*, this organization was responsible for the construction of the popular Sampo Hall in Sudbury which still stands today. Much tension developed between the F.O.C and the Loyal Finns in Canada throughout the 1930's. Loyal Finns felt that the "Red Finns" reflected poorly on the entire Finnish community because of the widespread fear of communism within INCO. It was rumoured among Finns that INCO discriminated against Finns for fear that they may be communist. This was partially due to the fact that the trade union movement was already well-established in Finland and had a distinct affiliation with the "left." Finnish United Church minister A.I. Heinonen's comments accurately depict the widespread hatred and fear of communists during the 1930's:

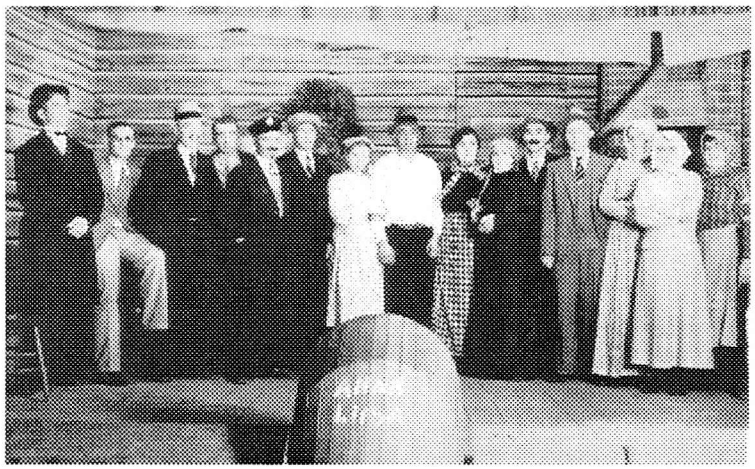
> A labourer of Finnish nationality was formerly regarded as preferable to others . . . but now the objection is made that they are tainted with [communism] . . . In certain places . . . they think that all Finns are Bolsheviks . . . Thus all Finnish immigrants suffer because some are communists.[29]

Throughout the Depression, communist and socialist organizations emerged across

Canada as a response to massive unemployment and the increasing divisions between classes. In Sudbury, however, communism was particularly hated and feared. Communist affiliations with trade unions were commonplace during this time period, yet because Sudbury was the least unionized city in Canada during the 1930's, communists were especially polarized within the community. Mayor Peter Fenton (1930-1932) aggressively opposed communist agitators, once declaring an "anti-communist week" and creating an emergency police squad of veterans to fight off the "Red outbreak."[30] Sudbury's local newspaper, the *Sudbury Star*, had strong anti-communist sentiments — in 1929, the newspaper was successfully sued by a married couple who it claimed was communist. These are other factors which led to suspicion and paranoia of some Finns in the 1930's.

FINNISH CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN COPPER CLIFF

The Finnish people contributed significantly to the cultural fabric of Copper Cliff. Alice remembers her father as an avid musician. In Finland, he had enjoyed classical training on both the violin and the piano. He would often take out his violin and play for the children and household guests. Shortly after arriving in Copper Cliff, he extended his talents into the community. He became involved with many dramatic productions which took place at the local church. Other Finnish theatre productions frequently took place at the "halls." These plays were so popular that up until the end of World War II, most of the large Finnish centres in Canada supported full-time stage directors.[31] Copper Cliff is also noted for forming the first Finnish choir in Canada. It is clear that Einar was not alone in his cultural interests. The Finnish community was well known for its cultural activities within Copper Cliff and beyond.



Einar is third from the viewers left in this photo. He as active in Finnish theatre in Copper Cliff. This play was titled "Anna Liisa."

Perhaps the best known cultural influence of the Finnish community was the *sauna* — the steambath. Alice says very matter-of-factly, "in Finland, everyone had a *sauna*. My grandmother even had one."[32] In Copper Cliff, Alice says, "people couldn't have their own sauna because they were renting company (INCO) houses. But the town had a *sauna* where the men would go. My father would go to the *sauna* weekly." The popularity of the *sauna* among Finns is consistent with the emphasis Finns placed on cleanliness. Its importance in the social community must not be underestimated. It has been rumoured that the Finnish Cabinet would often conduct important meetings in the *sauna*![33] The steambath has become widely popular throughout Canadian Society. Canadians can thank Finns for this soothing and relaxing activity.

Sporting activities were also highly regarded within the Finnish community. Sports, such as skiing, gymnastics, and track and field were strongly supported and developed by Finns in Copper Cliff and Sudbury. O.W. Saarinen writes that "no other ethnic group in Canada has done more for amateur athletics."[34]

Many athletic associations were extensions of the Finnish political groups. Both the Loyal Finns and the F.O.C., as well as the left-wing Young People's Society, were active in local athletics.

About the author

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James resides in Sudbruy, Ontario, when not attending school. ☆

NOTES

[1]MacDonald, Alice. *Oral Interview of October 12, 1996.*
[2]Ibid.
[3]Lindstrom-Best, Varpu. *The Finns in Canada*, 1985: p. 5.
[4]Puntila, L.A. *The Political History of Finland*, 1966: p. 69-94.
[5]Lindstrom-Best, *Finns in Canada*, p. 5.
[6]MacDonald, Alice. *Oral Interview of October 12, 1996.*

CONCLUSION

At the age of 19, Alice Hauta-aho married Robert MacDonald in 1940 and moved to Levack, Ontario. Eventually, she settled in Sudbury, close to her employment as a sales clerk at Kresge's in the downtown area. Her brother and sisters settled in various places in the Sudbury region; one sibling later moved to Winnipeg. After years of hard labour at INCO, Einar retired to his farm property in nearby Azilda. Einar's astute business sense paid off in his new homeland. He had many sagacious real estate dealings. His business successes coupled with his INCO pension left him quite comfortable in his retirement. Aino was well known within the community for her lush flower gardens which she proudly maintained in her front yard. Aino passed away in 1960, her husband in 1962. Their original house on Balsam Street in Copper Cliff still stands today.

Alice remembers her childhood in Copper Cliff with great fondness. Clearly her family had some help along the way: a supportive older brother who assisted Einar for the first few months in Canada, kind relatives in Finland who were always eager to offer help, and a father with a strong sense of duty and work ethic who provided them with a good source of income. But the importance of the Finnish community as a whole should not be understated. This close-knit ethnic group also acted as a support mechanism for the Hauta-aho family and other Finnish immigrants. They promoted themselves within the town of Copper Cliff and shared their cultural heritage with the citizens of this small northern community. They set an example for others to emulate and ultimately earned community-wide respect that has continued to this day. Hard working, fastidious, a strong sense of duty, loyalty and unquestionable honesty: this is the legacy left by the early Finnish immigrants. Alice is justifiably proud of the contribution made by those early Finnish Canadians.