

# Swedish Finns in the World Today

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Based on remarks presented at the Symposium on Swedish Finns in Western Canada, organized on September 30, 2007, by the Vancouver Chapter of the Canadian Friends of Finland.

The table Expatriate Finns gives an idea of how many persons aware of their roots in Finland now reside abroad in major areas of the world today. The Finnish Expatriate Parliament, as well as many Finnish officials, often refer to the total number of 1.35 million. Note that the vast majority of these live in North America and Sweden, and only about 100,000 in other areas.

It is difficult to obtain factual data for the number of these Finns that have their roots in Swedish speaking Finland. My educated estimates are as follows (rough percentages of total Finns in parenthesis):

Sweden	100,000	20 %
USA	80,000	15 %
Canada	10,000	10 %
Other World	10,000	10 %
Total	200,000	15 %

The total population of Finland today is about 5.2 million. 300,000 of these claim to be Swedish Finns (Swedish as first or school language), and close to 100,000 are recent immigrants from other countries. Thus about 4.8 million are Finnish speaking Finns. It is interesting to note that while there

are 300,000 Swedish Finns living in Finland, the number abroad is 200,000, or a ratio of 2/3. At the same time there are 1,150,000 Finn-Finns abroad, which corresponds to only 25% of those 4,800,000 living in Finland.

The population in the USA is counted and characterized by the US Census held at ten year intervals. Since way back it had provided information on a person's birth place, and the birthplace of the immigrant's parents. Information on the number of first and second generation Finnish-Americans is thus available. I have plotted these data on my Figure Persons Claiming Finnish Ancestry in United States - By Generations. In the US Census 1980, the question of the parent's birth country was dropped, and replaced by a broader question "What is the person's ancestry of ethnic origin? This change has been a blessing, since we now

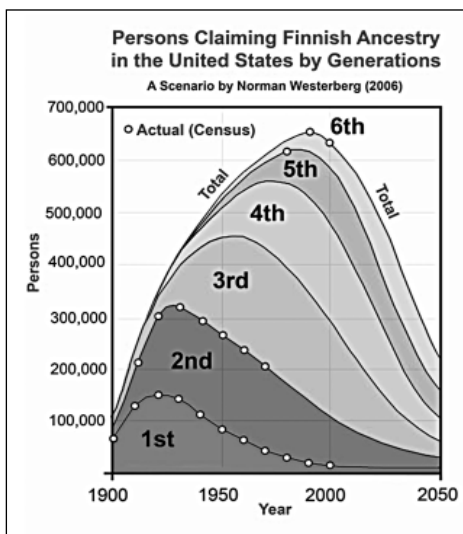
know much more about Finnish Americans. The US Census provides a wealth of information ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). As seen in the Figure, the total number of persons in the USA is claiming Finnish ancestry peaked in year 1990 at 660,000. In the census 2000 the number had been reduced about 5% to 620,000. It is expected to follow a future downward trend, typical for all ethnic groups with very limited numbers of new immigrants. I have summarized my migration research since 1995 in an article "A Profile of Nordic Americans" published in the Nordic Heritage Museum Historical Journal, Volume 2/Number 1 (Winter 2000/Seattle).

The Canadian caucus is taken every five years. The website of Statistics Canada provides summary data free, but detail reports have to be ordered and paid for. Dr. Mika Roinila, in his doctoral

## Expatriate Finns

Region	Immigrants Settling		Finns Abroad in 2000			Total
	1860-1944	1945-2000	1st Gen'n	2nd Gen'n	3rd+ Gen'n	
Sweden	40,000	400,000	205,000	230,000	90,000	525,000
Other Europe	50,000	80,000	50,000	20,000	5,000	75,000
United States	240,000	20,000	20,000	100,000	500,000	620,000
Canada	55,000	20,000	20,000	30,000	50,000	100,000
Other World	5,000	30,000	15,000	10,000	5,000	30,000
Total	390,000	550,000	310,000	390,000	650,000	1,350,000

Compiled by Norman Westerberg (2002), partly based on data by Jouni Korkiasaari (Institute of Migration, Turku 1998).



thesis "Finland Swedes in Canada – Migration, settlement and ethnic relations" (2000/Institute of Migration, Turku) provides excellent information. However, it is again difficult to obtain information about Swedish Finns and, percentage of all with Finland roots. Before WWII, the question "Born in Finland with Swedish origin" resulted in 12%. After WWII the question was stated "Immigrants with Swedish mother tongue and Finn ethnicity", and now the average percentage of those responding was only 3–5 % of the total.

Swedish government reports seem to only provide information on residents' birth country. But special studies have provided information on immigrants' mother tongues, and also data on their children (the second generation), which support the above rounded numbers. Finns migrated to Sweden in masses in the 1960s and 1970s. They have a large number of local organizations, one in each city with significant "Finnish" population. These organizations are part of strong central

organizations. Finlandssvenska riksförbundet i Sverige, short FRIS, is the umbrella for Swedish Finns in Sweden.

In the following, I will attempt to illustrate by examples the many activities that are on-going in many places to strengthen and support Swedish Finnish individuals, organizations and communities worldwide. The history of emigrants from Finland to America has been documented in several doctoral

theses in the 1970s by researchers at Turku University, associated with the Migration Institute in Turku (prominent by Reino Kero and Keijo Virtanen). More recently the Institute's Director Olavi Koivukangas and Sr. Researcher Jouni Korkiasaari have published many reports with relevant and interesting data. The latter currently leading a study, which based on about 4,000 responses by Finnish-Americans and Canadian Americans to a recent comprehensive survey, followed up by hundreds of interviews, will soon result in book on Finns in North America. I have been invited to contribute material for some of the chapters.

A real "gold mine" of information is the book published in Swedish by Professor Anders Myhrman in Helsinki in 1972. It is entitled "Finlandssvenskar i Amerika". It describes in detail the lives of the Swedish Finn immigrants and their organizations in every corner of North America. It describes how the International Order of Runeberg (IOR) was founded in

1920 by merging two existing Swedish Finn organizations. By 1930 the combined membership in a large number of Lodges was 8,500. The numbers are shrinking, with its aging members. But the still existing lodges are providing very valuable service to the members, still numbering over 600 today. The current President of the IOR Grand Lodge is energetic Annabelle Kergan, residing in Vancouver, BC. The publication of IOR is named 'Leading Star - Ledstjärnan'.

I would like to especially mention the superb doctor's thesis by Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch at Åbo Akademi in 2003 (published by Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, like Anders Myhrman's earlier work). The title of her dissertation is "American Plus – Etnisk identitet hos finlandssvenska ättlingar i Nordamerika". It includes an extensive English summary. Her introduction of the concept 'American Plus' is brilliant. She heard many of the older descendants of Swedish speaking Finns, that she interviewed, telling that they really by now were good Americans, but that knowing about those roots in Finland was something extra special - made them feel American Plus.

The weekly newspaper Norden celebrated its 110th anniversary with a grand gala dinner in Fairfield, CT on October 21, 2006. Its name had been changed in 1935 from Finska Amerikanaren. About in 1910 the number of subscribers had peaked at 6,000, now it is only a small fraction of it. Guest speaker was Ulla-Maj Wideroos from Finland, at the time Deputy Minister of Finance. Also speaking was

Christoffer Grönholm, Executive Director of Svenska folkskolans vänner (SFV), and 125 year old organization in Finland. He told the one hundred plus participants that the Norden is the most Swedish Finn newspaper in the world today. No newspaper in Finland devotes as much space to the four 'Swedish Finn' provinces in Finland as Norden: one page each for Åland, Aboland, Nyland and Österbotten. This is one of the reasons that SFV provides financial support to Norden. Its content is still mostly in Swedish, with Erik Hermans as Editor. I recommend it as very good reading. At the dinner, interesting results from a special Norden readership opinion survey were reported by researcher Kjell Herberts from Åbo Akademi. Two hundred of the current 300 subscribers had responded to his questionnaire. I should add that SFV has a very interesting quarterly publication named Svenskybygden for its members. I recommend membership in SFV, to show our support for an organization that is very supportive of many Swedish Finn activities also abroad. I had the honor to be the speaker at SFV's annual meeting in Helsinki in 2004, and chose the subject 'Finlandssvenskhet i dagens Amerika'.

A major event was the founding of the Swedish Finn Historical Society (SFHS) in 1991. It has grown to a membership of about 700, including many in Scandinavia, and its archives and office in Seattle have continuously expanded. It produces a popular journal named 'The Quarterly', highlighting the history of Swedish Finn individuals, families, organizations and communities in

both North America and places in Finland where their roots are. The SFHS mission is: 'To gather and preserve the emigration history of Finns across the world, to connect Swedish Finns to their roots in Finland and to celebrate our cultural heritage. The vision is to document every Swedish Finn emigrant, to fund a permanent home for SFHS archived materials in perpetuity, to keep Finland aware of Swedish Finn emigrants, and much more. Become a member of SFHS! Strong leaders are President Dick Erickson and Past Pres. Syrene Forsman.

In August 1997 the Finnish Expatriate Parliament (FEP) was founded in Helsinki as a cooperative forum, where Finns living around the world come together and decide collectively on issues that they deem important to them. Finland Society (Suomi-Seura) in Helsinki serves as the Secretariat for FEP. Finland related organizations registered with FEP may send representatives and initiatives to its ordinary sessions held with 2-3 year intervals. The first Session was held in November 1998, and the 5th session in September 2007. About 200-250 representatives have attended the sessions, which each have dealt with some 100 initiatives, resulting in 60-80 resolutions to be presented to the Prime Minister of Finland for distribution to the government organizations concerned. The Speaker of the FEP is the Chairman of the Board for Finland Society, currently Mr. Pertti Paasio. There are eight Vice Speakers, seven of which represent regions of the world, and the eighth representing Swedish Finns in the World. I have had the privi-

lege to serve as Vice Speaker for the region USA & Latin America 1998-2002 and 2005-2007, with Marja Snyder serving 2002-2005. Marita Cauthen from Massachusetts now serves in that capacity.

Serving as Vice Speakers for 'Swedish Finns in the World', has been Carl-Gustav Store and Barbro Allardt-Ljunggren, with Hanna Lindell elected to this position in September 2007 (with Johannes Helander from Seattle as Alternate). All have been active in FRIS. To support the FEP activities in this wide region, a "working group" with representatives from US based IOR and SFHS and several Sweden based organizations has been formed, with a part-time project secretary. An internet based network keeps in touch with individual Swedish Finns, residing in areas without any ethnic organization. This network is recognized as a FEP organization. Svenska Kulturfonden in Finland has provided financial support for the project.

Finally, since parliamentary elections in April 2007 and appointment of a new Government, Finland has a Minister of Migration. She is Astrid Thors, who thus is the first Minister for all Finnish Expatriates. She was a member of the European Parliament 1996-2004, and is a member of the Parliament of Finland since 2004. Minister Thors gave an uplifting speech to the participants of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament assembled in Helsinki for its 5th Session in September 2007.