

Finland-Swedes in Canada: Discovering Some Unknown Finnish Facts



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The Finland-Swedes in Canada have received very little interest amongst scholars, although some proposals for their study has been made in the past (Sillanpää, 1987). From the limited sources and literature available on Finland-Swedes in the United States, only a few pages have been devoted to considering this ethnolinguistic minority in Canada (Myhrman, 1972; Sandlund, 1981). This article presents some new findings which deal with research on the migration, settlement and ethnic relations of Finland-Swedes in Canada. In compiling data and information from a detailed survey of Finland-Swedes, interviews, archival sources, and contacts across the country, a number of new facts have emerged that will undoubtedly change some of the previously held beliefs on the presence of the Finnish immigrants. It is most surprising to note that in Canada, Finnish-speaking individuals have not shown interest in studying their Swedish-speaking compatriots. While the population size of the Finland-Swedes in Canada is small, the

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Finland-Swedes themselves, in turn, have shown little interest in documenting their own immigration history. Thus, it is hoped that the ongoing research will enable the two ethnolinguistic groups to recognize and appreciate one another to a greater degree, and some of the history of the early Finnish immigration – more specifically, Finland-Swedish immigration, will be documented and preserved.

Some early immigrants to Canada

A very limited amount of census data is available on Finland-Swedish immigration to Canada. Data on immigrants with a Finnish racial origin and a Swedish mother tongue was collected for the period 1921–1941, during which time Statistics Canada kept accurate records on racial origin and mother tongue (Table 1). Since 1941 data on racial origin and mother tongue was no longer asked. In examining this table, it is noted that the greatest increase of Finland-Swedes occurred during the 1920's, which was part of the second major wave of immigrants arriving from Finland.

An interesting discrepancy oc-

curs with the Statistics for 1941 between the number of individuals born in Finland and the number of individuals claiming Finnish racial origins. The 1941 Census records that while 2065/24387 (8.5%) Finnish born individuals listed their birthplace as Finland and Swedish as their mother tongue, only 1040/41683 (2.5%) individuals listed having Finnish racial origins and a Swedish mother tongue. Perhaps the difference in these values correlate to the desire of many individuals who wanted to cover up their origins due to the Second World War. Instead of claiming Finnish origins, they identified with a Swedish racial origin. Provincially, the period 1921–1941 shows the growth of the Finland-Swedes in British Columbia as well as Ontario, especially in the 1920's (Table 2).

Over the years, Census questions have changed, which makes it difficult to trace the Finland-Swedish population in Canada. While the recent 1991 Census provides the most recent figures of Finland-Swedes in the country, the 1941 Census does present data on the urban concentration of Finland-Swedes in Canada (Table 3).

Table 1. Finland-Swedes in Canada, 1921–1991

Finnish Racial Origin	Mother tongue			Total
	English	French	Finnish Swedish Other	
1921	470	0	14821 405 78	15774 ¹
1931	1393	27	34497 1825 365	38107 ¹
1941	3594	147	36542 1040 360	41683
1951	10795	183	30780 - ² 1987	43745
1961	16874	489	40301 - ² 1772	59436
1971	23625	305	33135 1125 ³ 1025	59215
1981	20155	130	----- 32030 ⁴ -----	52320
1991	-	-	28100 975 70140	99215

Sources: 1921–31 data from Mother tongue of population 10 years of age and over, by racial origin, 1931–1921. 1931 Census of Population, Vol. I, Table 48.

1941 data from 1941 Census, Vol. I, Table 47. Population by mother tongue, racial origin and sex, for Canada 1941.

1951 data from Vol. II, Table 48. Population by mother tongue, origin and sex for Canadian rural farm, rural non-farm and urban areas, 1951.

1961 data from Series 1.3 Population, Language by ethnic group, Bulletin 1. 3–10, Cat. No. 92–561, Vol. I – Part: 3.

1971 data from Cat. No. 92–735, Vol. I – Part: 4, Bulletin 1. 4–7, Table 21, Population by ethnic group showing a) mother tongue b) language most often spoken at home, c) official language and sex, Canada, 1971.

1981 data from Population by selected ethnic origins, mother tongue, and sex, showing official language, for Canada and provinces. Cat. No. 92–911, Table 4, 1981.

1991 data from unpublished Census material, custom cross-tabulations, 1995.

¹) Includes only Finnish population of 10 years of age and over. Total Finnish population for 1921 = 21494, 1931 = 43585, thus leaving some 5720 and 5478 under 10 year olds in the Finnish population during these census years.

²) Swedish mother tongue is included in the "other" category

³) Value found for "Scandinavian" languages – includes Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Icelandic.

⁴) All languages other than English or French are listed under the "other" category.

Table 2. Swedish mother tongue and Finnish racial origin by province, 1921–1941

Province	1921	1931	1941
P.E.I.	0	0	0
Nova Scotia	1	7	7
New Brunswick	1	4	5
Quebec	0	105	93
Ontario	134	799	759
Manitoba	23	50	28
Saskatchewan	51	69	63
Alberta	76	83	62
British Columbia	119	1350	1016
Yukon	-	16	27
N.W.T.	-	2	5
Total	405	2485	2065

Source: 1931 data for Swedish mother tongue, born in Finland – Vol. IV, Table 81; 1941 data for Swedish mother tongue, born in Finland – Vol. II, Table 35, Population by official language, mother tongue and birthplace for Canada and provinces (Table 35) and cities over 30,000 (Table 36)

Table 3. 1941 data for Swedish mother tongue, born in Finland – and 1991 Finnish ethnicity with Swedish mother tongue

City	1941	1991
Vancouver	270	340
Toronto	87	175
Hamilton	86	30
Montreal	47	20
Winnipeg	18	20
St.Catherines	16	10
Sudbury	14	-
Windsor	14	-
Victoria	11	25
Ottawa	9	15
Fort William	8	-
Calgary	7	30
Kitchener	-	20
Edmonton	4	10
Regina	-	10
Saskatoon	-	10
Thunder Bay	-	10

Source: 1941 Census, Vol. II, Population by official language, mother tongue and birthplace for Canadian cities over 30,000 (table 36); Unpublished 1991 Census data.

Finland-Swedes on the West Coast

From literature on Finnish immigration to Canada, some changes will need to be made in regard to the earliest known settlers. In British Columbia, the earliest Finnish settlers were believed to have been Finns who moved to North Wellington in 1885 from the United States to take up coal mining (Rinta, 1996). However, one of the very first Finland-Swedes on the West Coast arrived five years earlier. Work by Myrman (1974), and accounts from the Victoria Daily Colonist (Nov.25,1951), notes that Viktor Jakob Holmlund, later Captain Victor Jacobson (1852–1949) of Pedersöre, Finland, arrived in Victoria in 1880. Jacobson aban-

done the brig "City of Quebec" he was sailing with, and eventually found his fortune as a seal hunter along the West Coast. He was married, raised a large family, and even helped bring his mother, 70-year old Mrs. Holmlund (1826–1922) from Finland in 1896 to live with the growing family in Victoria. Jacobson owned a number of schooners and the sternwheeler "Distributor", which was made into a "second home".

One of the first Finn-Swedes to settle in Vancouver was Sea Captain Knut Alfred Grönlund (1871–1930). Grönlund was born in Kristinastad, and was one of the earliest Finland-Swedes to join the Swedish Society Svea. According to its membership records, Grönlund arrived in Vancouver in 1886 (Swedish Society Svea Records).

Another early Finland-Swede from Kristinastad was Emil Peterson (1870–1937), who arrived in Vancouver in 1888 (Rauanheimo, 1930; Howard, 1970; Myhrman, 1972). For a number of years, Peterson was employed as an engineer on the tugs of the harbour, but moved on to become a courthouse and immigration office interpreter. For years, he was an active member in the Vancouver Pioneer Association, and joined the Swedish Augustana Lutheran Church of Vancouver in 1929, where the church records show that Peterson arrived in "America" in 1887 (Vancouver Augustana L.C. Records, 1995).

Some of the early Finland-Swedes in Vancouver helped found the First Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, organized in 1903. In 1909, Finland-Swedes

established their own congregation in New Westminster, named the Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was supported by many Swedish-speaking Finns. In comparison, the Finnish-speaking immigrants established congregations in the Vancouver area much later, during the 1920's (Raivio, 1975).

Finland-Swedes in the Prairies

Some of the earliest Finland-Swedes in Alberta have been also found in church records. William Carlson of Närpes (b. 1869) arrived Alberta in 1887, while Erik Johanson of Nykarleby (b. 1865) arrived in 1898. The remaining Johanson family arrived in 1900. Carlson and the Johanson's all lived in the well known Swedish settlement area near Wetaskiwin in the early 1900's (Bethlehem L. C. Records, Wetaskiwin, Alberta; Palmer, 1972).

A number of immigrants from Finland as well as Sweden established settlement colonies on the Prairies. These include New Finland (founded in 1888) and the New Stockholm (founded in 1885) settlements in southeastern Saskatchewan. It is interesting to note that amongst the New Finland colony, no Finland-Swedes settled in the area (Mattson-Schelstraete, 1982). Correspondence with a number of area residents indicate that among the Finns in New Finland, no Finland-Swedes were present (Birt, 1996; Knutilla, 1996; Luhtala, 1995; Mäki, 1995; Denet, 1995; Sask. Prov. Archives). Although many arrived from the Österbotten area of Finland, none arrived

from the coastal areas where the Finland-Swedes are found.

In the Stockholm settlement, even though correspondence with people such as Ferdy Baglo (1995) – an authority on the Swedish Augustana Synod congregations, who also had his first pastoral appointment at the Stockholm Lutheran Church states that no Finland-Swedes lived in Stockholm, two Finland-Swedes were discovered in the records of the Evangelical Covenant Church. These include the names Hendrickson, (b. 1840) along with the names of Hustin and Tuokla (b. 1851) and both arriving in Saskatchewan in 1895. No further information on these individuals is found (Halliwell & Persson, 1959).

A third group settlement was formed in western Manitoba, north of Brandon. This was the Scandinavia Colony, and was established in 1886. A year earlier, in 1885, a number of people from Northern Europe were looking for a place to settle, and with the help of the federal government, were offered townships in the Erickson, Manitoba area. In 1893–94, a two Finland-Swedish families also emigrated to the region. According to records, the Köping family had their roots in the Österbotten area (west coast) of Finland. Erik Köping (born 1849) and his wife Wilhelmina (born 1852), both were born in Petalax, Finland. At least two of their children were also born in Finland, son Reinhold in 1875, and daughter Matilda in 1882. A second family involves the Eric Nystrom family who settled in the Scandinavia Colony in 1894. The Nystrom's were from Vörå

and Mustasaari, Finland. Descendants of both families still reside in the area (Bethlehem L. C. Records; Centennial History of the Rural Municipality of Clanwilliam and Village of Erickson, 1984).

In Winnipeg, some of the earliest records of Finnish immigrants indicates the arrival of Finns after 1905 (VanCleaf, 1952). New data indicates that the first Finnish immigrants in the Manitoba capital arrived in 1903, when Johan Larson Tjainen and Sofia Wilhelmina Tjainen (nee. Hjukisön) joined the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Augustana Synod). East of Winnipeg, the Thunberg family from Wöråfors, Finland arrived in Whitemouth, Ontario (today Manitoba) in 1892. The family moved to Winnipeg in 1911 and also joined the Swedish congregation (Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church Records, Winnipeg, 1995). Technically, the borders of Manitoba and Ontario were not in place until 1912, and thus areas of present-day eastern and western Manitoba were part of either Ontario or the Northwest Territories.

Finland-Swedes in Eastern Canada

Finnish immigration, including the Finland-Swedes in Thunder Bay have been well documented, and the earliest Finland-Swedes to settle in the Lakehead region arrived in the 1880's. This included Andrew Johnson of Närpes (1877–1905) and Gabriel Erickson who also came to

work on the construction of the Grand Trunk Railway (Myhrman, 1972). Others followed in the 1890's, but the immigration of Finland-Swedes to the region did not increase dramatically until the turn of the Century.

The first Finland-Swedish congregation was established in 1906, with the founding of the St. Ansgarius Mission of the St. John's Anglican Church of Port Arthur. The minister chosen to develop the mission was Knute S. Totterman of Ingå, Finland (b. 1873), a charismatic young Finland-Swede who was ordained in the United States. Totterman planned on building a church which he was able to raise money for. However, the project was too ambitious for the small congregation, and as their numbers declined, his work was barred for lack of funds. After these difficulties and set-backs, Totterman left Port Arthur in 1908, leaving a congregation with debts, an unfinished church edifice, and no congregation. The mission dissolved in 1909. Nothing is known of Totterman after his departure (Barr, 1992). Over the three year life-span of this small congregation, a number of Finland-Swedes and others joined.

Interestingly, the Totterman name appears among the membership roll of the St. Ansgarius Swedish Church as Olga Lovisa Totterman, also from Ingå, Finland (b. 1871), as the wife of Gustaf Vilhelm Lindström of Karis, Finland (b. 1859). Given the birthplace and date, the two Totterman's may have been related. No other information on this connection, however, has been

found (St. Ansgarius Swedish Church Records). The church building was sold to a Norwegian congregation in 1912, and is currently in private hands.

The arrival of the Rev. Totterman in 1906 also caused Swedish-speaking Lutherans at St. John's to apply for their own minister through the Swedish Augustana Synod located at Rock Island, Illinois. Pastor Sjögren arrived in July, 1907, and found enough Lutherans to form a congregation in each town. Fort William completed construction of the Zion church in 1909, and in Port Arthur, the Immanuel Lutheran Church was erected in 1912 (Barr, 1992).

Although a few Finland-Swedes still participate in the Zion Lutheran Church in Fort William, the Immanuel Lutheran Church has always been the stronghold of Finland-Swedes. Earliest members of this congregation included Ida Danielson of Finnström, Åland Islands (b. 1877), who joined the congregation in 1906, followed by others (Immanuel L. C. Records). The Immanuel Lutheran Church has over the years remained an "ethnically exclusive church", and caters to the Finland-Swedish community (Boegh, 1991). It is unfortunate that little of this congregation is known amongst the Finnish-speaking residents of Thunder Bay, nor has the congregation been recognized in literature of Thunder Bay Finns and their religious activities (Metsäranta, 1989; Raivio, 1975, 1979).

The Finland-Swedes appeared in the 1920's in Toronto, and al-

though arriving later in Toronto compared to other Finnish immigrants, a number of interesting facts emerge from the Finland-Swedish population which have remained uncovered until now.

Finland-Swedish newspapers, hockey players and inventors.

From research on ethnic newspapers at the Institute of Migration and the National Archives of Canada, the existence of a Finland-Swedish newspaper published in Toronto was discovered, which has not been recognized amongst Finnish historians. The newspaper "Canada Svensken" was established in 1961 by Thorwald Wiik, a Finland-Swede born in Finland in 1915, and immigrating to Canada in 1928 at the age of 13 (MHSO-SWE-4257-W11). Initially published semi-monthly, the paper later became a monthly publication. As this paper was provided free of charge to Finland-Swedes and others interested in a Swedish language newspaper in the Toronto area, it depended almost totally on advertisements derived from businesses and private enterprise. After a lengthy struggle to keep the paper in operation without government assistance, the paper folded in 1978 after 17 years of publication (National Archives of Canada).

Amongst the many sports that have attracted athletes, hockey as a Canadian sport has received much attention in both Canada as well as Finland. While Finnish hockey fans are very keen in knowing about their countrymen



Pentti Lund was one of the first Finnish hockey players in Canada. (Photocollection of Institute of Migration).

in the National Hockey League, it is interesting that very few are aware of the impact and involvement Finland-Swedes have had in the area of Canada's national sport.

Finns are all aware of present NHL stars such as Jari Kurri, Esa Tikkanen, Teemu Selänne, and many others dating back to the Calder Trophy winner of 1949 Pentti Lund of the New York Rangers. However, very few are

aware of Ray Timgren, who is the first Finn, more specifically Finland-Swede, to win a Stanley Cup. Two in fact!

Ray Timgren was born in 1929 some two years after his parents had immigrated from Terjärv in Österbotten, to Windsor, Ontario. Timgren began his hockey career early, playing with junior hockey clubs, moving up the ranks to the Toronto Marlboros, when he was signed to a contract with the

Toronto Maple Leafs in December 1948. Playing in his first year with the Leafs he was part of the 1949 Stanley Cup winning team that included Bill Barilko, Max Bentley, Turk Broda, Ted Kennedy, and Howie Meeker. A second Stanley Cup was won in 1951 (Timgren, 1996; Myhrman, 1972).

Another Finland-Swede who has been involved in professional hockey is Henry Åkervall. Born in Port Arthur, Åkervall has Finn-Swede roots in Övermark and Sundom. Åkervall was the captain of the Canadian Olympic Hockey team which participated at the 1964 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France. In the late-1960's, he briefly coached the Tampere Tappara hockey team in Finland (Åkervall, 1996).

Some Toronto area residents, beginning as early as 1913 with the establishment of a coffee importing business, became entrepreneurs. Among the Finland-Swedes best known in the area is Erhard J. Alm of Kronoby (1904–1984) who invented the tire changer and various vulcanizing equipment used in service stations worldwide (Racinsky, 1996; Myhrman, 1972).

After years of experimentation and partial successes, the revolutionary tire vulcanizer was invented in 1957, and sold over 10,000 machines in forty countries in just a few years. By the early 1960's, Vulcan Equipment was employing over 100 people, many of them Finland-Swedes. The Vulcanizer line went on to truck and large earthmover machines, tire spreaders and soon equipment for conveyor belt re-

pair. In 1962, the Vulcanizer business branched off to include a Belt Vulcanizer plant under the name Shaw-Almex in Parry Sound, Ontario, while the main operation of tire vulcanizing and large machinery moved to the United States much later. Many other inventions were developed such as a line of jacks and hoists, a tire spreader, and finally a dredge pump and block laying machines. The entire vulcanizing industry is still owned by members of the family.

Conclusions

The above material is a brief look at the Finland-Swedish immigration and immigrant activities in Canada. While some Finland-Swedes in the Osterbotten area may have heard of names such as Timgren and Alm through the daily newspaper *Vasabladet*, the majority of the country's Finnish-speaking majority is oblivious to these names along with their accomplishments. The early settlement history of the people of Finland in Canada will need much work, when the forgotten ethnolinguistic minority of Finland-Swedes is included in the analysis of a cohesive and complete picture of Finnish immigration to Canada. It is hoped that the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns will be able to change the words of A. B. Alcott which appear to exemplify much of the knowledge held by the two groups of one another: *"To be ignorant of one's ignorance is the malady of the ignorant."*

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