

TIEDOTUKSIA

Working Commission on the History of Women, Reunion of Sisters Conference, Kuopio, Finland, August 26-30,

Presented by
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As Dr. V. Rama Murthy, Vice President of the University of Minnesota, stated in the opening ceremonies on Friday, throughout history - and in all cultures - women have failed to receive their fair due. The roles of women as mothers, daughters and builders of society obviously need rethinking and new valuations. The view is not totally pessimistic. In the last decade, some new, vigorous and exiting works on women's history have been published in Finland, United States and Canada.

Our working commission started with "oral tradition as a means of understanding women's folklore" by Marsha Pentti from Suomi College and Aili Nenola from the University of Turku. In folklore and historical research, oral testimony is becoming a more and more important method. It was pointed out by archivists and scholars that in many archives in Finland and North America, there are numerous collections of data containing interviews that have not been sufficiently used.

In the afternoon, we made a tour to the Kuopio outdoor museum to see how the

homes in Kuopio looked like in the 18th and 19th centuries. There Yvonne Hiipakka Lockwood of Michigan State University gave a slide presentation about the significance of the ragrug in Finnish American homes.

On Thursday, the working commission started with Gary London's paper on the eighteenth century concept of universal equality in order to gain a philosophical perspective. Then Irma Sulkunen of the University of Helsinki spoke about Miina Sillanpää, a servant girl and cabinet minister. Veli-Pekka Isomäki of the South Ostrobothnian Museum, Seinäjoki, presented his pilot project on Finnish servant girls in America, which placed especial stress on the problems of material and methods. Susan Lewis of the University of Oregon offered an anthropological view of Finnish immigrant women in the American industrial environment, as presented by the canneries of Astoria, Oregon, where sometimes half the workers were Finns. From the Canadian side of the border, Linda Kealey, from the University of New Foundland, presented a

paper on women's activities in the Canadian Finnish socialist movement before 1920 - Sanna Kannasto, the dynamic socialist leader, was put in the Canadian context. The last paper was read by Juhani Piilonen, University of Helsinki, on the contribution of women in the "Red Finland" of 1918. We found this topic most interesting, as it provided much new information about women as soldiers, prisoners and victims of the war. There were two female members in the Red cabinet; Hilja Pärssinen and Anna Karhinen. After the victory of the White Army, Karhinen went to the U.S.A. and later to the Soviet Union, where she disappeared during the Stalin era.

Conclusions of the working commission:

1. Sources and research material

It was emphasized that in the archives of Finland and North America, there is plenty of material, such as e.g., personal letters and interviews, that can be used in research. There is an obvious need for information about the whereabouts of these materials. We need study guides, such as the one Prof. William A. Hoglund is working on concerning Finnish immigrants, and ethnic material. These study guides should be prepared in such a fashion that information on women might be easily found. This information could also be distributed in journals and newsletters.

2. Research, ready and in progress

There is an obvious need for a Bibliography of Studies on Women. There should be a clearing house or two to work on such a bibliography; e.g., the co-operation of the University Library of Helsinki and the University of Minnesota in collaboration with a Canadian library could be an alternative.

3. Need for a multidisciplinary approach

It was pointed out that in women's studies,

the traditional historiography is not enough. There should be a multidisciplinary approach to the problems involved. We should encourage joint studies involving people specializing in history, social sciences, folklore, ethnography, languages, arts and crafts, etc. - as well as, if possible, on a co-operative basis in collaboration with scholars from various countries and cultures. Studies on women amount to really a major challenge, covering, as they must, all the aspects of human life.

4. Call for theoretical research

The studies on women should not just be confined to descriptive observations and life stories: they should be bolstered by a theoretical approach and framework. The studies should be problem-orientated with adequate methodologies. New feminist theories would be especially welcome.

5. Focus on women in general

After the three reunion of sisters conferences, we now know more about public women in politics, as leaders, and their influence; but we must remember that they are exceptions. Most women, both in Finland and North America, have worked hard and sacrificed their lives for their husbands and children. In future studies, we should focus more on women in general in very realistic terms.

6. More scholars with a non-Finnish background

It would be important to have researchers of other than a Finnish origin becoming interested in the study of the woman in Finland and North America. This would help us avoid "inner motives" - like "sauna and sisu". In our working commission, we had a good example, Linda Kealey, from the strong Canadian delegation.

7. Future prospects and co-operation

There are good studies in progress on the history of women in Finland and in North America. Immigration history will continue to be a major concern - but by no means the only one. There are preliminary plans to stage the FINN FORUM IV in Minneapolis in the fall of 1989. The theme could be "2nd and 3rd generation". If so, studies on women should be included in the agenda. In other disciplines, there will also be international conferences, including, of course women studies. We have come a long way since the First Finn Forum held in Duluth in 1974!

In the future, there will obviously be a need for an international network of a more

or less permanent working commission. The major responsibility lies with the institutions and organizations already existing, i.e., the major research centers and archives in Finland and North America. The forms of collaboration should be discussed in the conclusions of this conference and in later meetings.

Final remark:

The lively discussions in our history working commission engaged in by both men and women, historians and folklorists, scholars and archivists, enhanced our knowledge of women as builders of society. We thank the organizers for this privilege to work - literally speaking - HAND IN HAND.

"The New Sweden Colony In America: 17th Century Scandinavian Pioneers and Their Legacy"

Conference at the University of Delaware
March 3-5, 1988

New Sweden, the first permanent European settlement in the Delaware River Valley, was established in 1638. Although the colony was conquered by the Dutch in 1655, the Swedish and Finnish settlers remained in America and contributed to the log cabin and other important technological innovations to American life. The conference

will include sessions on Swedish-Indian relations, Swedish colonial policy, the life and culture of the Swedish and Finnish settlers and the long term effects of the colonial venture!

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