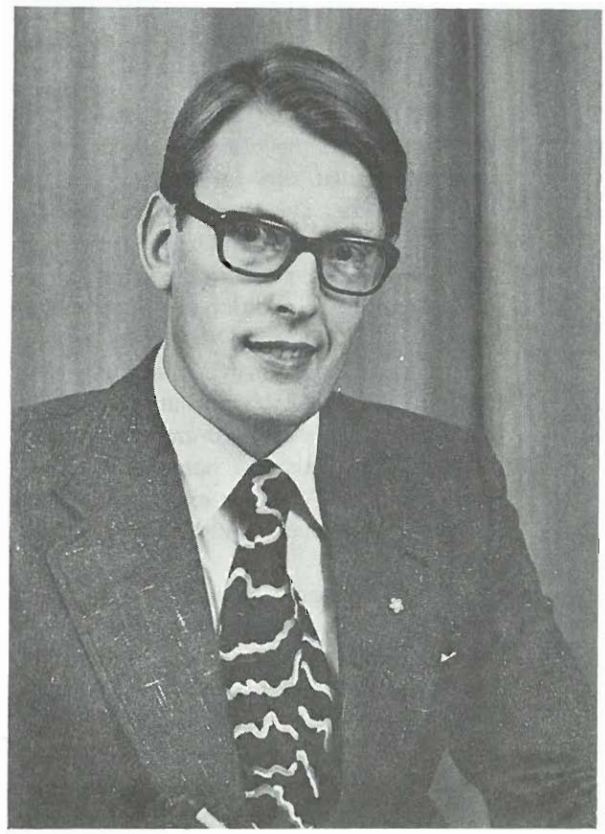
Finns in America - as viewed from Finland



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A presentation at the FINNFEST Bicentennial seminar, Hancock, Mich. July 30, 1976.

When I visited Hancock for the first time in January 1975, I got the feeling that I was not very far from the North Pole. In a single night, it snowed no less than about 12 inches, the schools had to close down, and I was a scared man when I boarded my plane to fly south in the snowstorm. The thought struck me that it must have taken a tough breed of men – and women – to settle and tame this territory. And I thought with a new respect about my grandfather, who had worked as a miner here in the Copper Country. Uppermost among the recollections of my short visit, however, are the kindness and hospitality of Dr. Jalkanen and his associates and the impression I gained of the tremendous wealth of research material on immigrant culture stored within the walls of Suomi College.

It was with great pleasure, therefore, that I returned to this seat of Finnish-American culture and learning – just as, in general, I am happy whenever I have a chance to visit among my compatriots living abroad.

The topic of my talk, "Finns in America as Viewed from Finland, "is a broad one and for that reason a difficult one. I shall only try to compose a general picture of Finnish immigration to the United States. In the latter part of my presentation, I shall deal with my topic mainly from the point of view of scholarly research.

FINNISH IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

A graph depicting the migratory movement from Finland during the past hundred years resembles a camel with two humps. The top of the first hump was reached at the turn of the century, and it represents mainly the wave of migration to the United States:, the second peak in the graph, forming the other hump, represents the high

tide of migration to Sweden after World War II. Both of the peak periods of migration, the earlier one to America and the later one to Sweden, involved nearly 400,000 souls who for one reason or another had decided to leave their ancestral homeland. Counting in addition the Finns migrating to other countries, Russia in particular, it may be estimated that roughly a million emigrants left Finland to settle in other lands between 1870 and the present. Some of the emigrants naturally returned sooner or later – as, for example, one out of every five who moved to the United States.

The migratory movement of Finns overseas to the United States took place mainly between 1865 and the outbreak of World War I. During this time, some 308,000 Finns made their homes in the United States, and simultaneously another 20,000 across the border on the Canadian side.

To be sure, Finns had found their way to the New World even earlier. Of the thousand or so members of the colony Sweden established in the Delaware valley in 1638–1656, nearly a half are estimated to have been Finns, some of them settlers from the forests of Värmland, some directly from Finland. Along with the British, the Dutch and the Swedes, the Finns were among the first white settlers in the territory destined to evolve into the United States of America. It is only fitting, therefore, that one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence should have been of Finnish descent.

Finnish seamen represent the second migratory phase. During the 1800s, Finns serving on sailing ships now and then decided to stay ashore in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and other American ports. In 1855, during the Crimean War, a number of Finnish ships with their crews, in danger of being captured, sought haven in American ports. The California gold rush was still on in those days, during Finnish sailors and adventurers out West.

The tide of immigration to America did not start, however, properly speaking, until around 1864 as far as the Finns were concerned – and at that time it was among the Finnish settlers of the arctic Norwegian province of Finnmark who responded to the gravitational pull of the Michigan copper mines and the promise of free land held out by the Homestead Act signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. From Norway the tide of migration spread to the far North of Finland, the Tornio river valley and on down south. Around the beginning of the decade of the 1870s, the so-called "American fever" then took hold in the region of Etelä-Pohjanmaa (or southern Finnish Bothnia), where the parishes of Isokyrö and Mustasaari were the first to be infected. The migratory movement to the United States began to take on the nature of a mass shift of population in the 1880s, and the crest of the wave of migration was reached in 1902, when more than 23,000 Finnish citizens applied for a passport to move abroad. (As the diagram shows.) Emigration from Finland continued on a large scale till the outbreak of the First World War. When the United States government began to restrict the admission of immigrants into the country in 1921, the annual Finnish quota was cut down to about 600 admissions. In the 1920s, the migratory tide shifted in direction toward Canada and, to some extent, Australia. The Finnish immigrant population in the United States reached its peak in the early 1920s, when the number of Finns born in the Old Country was about 150,000 and the number of second-generation Finns amounted to some 200,000, which gives us a total of about 350,000.

In 1970 the number of Finns living in the United States was 203,826, of whom 45,499 were born in Finland. At present, there are probably less than 40,000 immigrants born in Finland in this country – and the majority of them are by now well on in years.

THE NATIVE REGIONS AND THE REASONS FOR EMIGRATING

(The map shows that) The emigrnts to America have been mainly natives of western Finland. Nearly one-half of them were born in the province of Vaasa and the next largest numbers in Turku-and-Pori province and Oulu province. The emigration to America was thus mostly a Bothnian phenomenon — that is, the migratory drain on the Finnish population was felt most heavily in the territory bordering on the Gulf of Bothnia.

The most important factors underlying the migratory process were economic and social. The point of departure was a surplus rural population relative to the opportunities for a livelihood. Tar distilling had been the mainstay of the economy in the Bothnian regions, in addition to the cultivation of grain crops, from the 17th to the 19th century. When the era of sailing ships began to draw to a close after the mid-1800s, the demand for tar declined. Ships turned to iron and steel — and men to wood. New sources of livelihood began to open up in other parts of Finland with the growth of industrial centers, but new industries were slower to take root in Bothnian soil.

Another factor contributing to intensification of the migratory process was the rapid increase in population that took place in the 19th century. Falling into economic decline, the Bothnian provinces, especially the rural sections, were no longer able to provide an adequate livelihood to all the inhabitants: the farms were small, timber was scarce and nearly every household was bursting at the seams with children. One of the chief motivating forces for migrating to America was a desire to earn enough money to reedeem the family farm or buy a house and a piece of land. Many an emigrant was bent on paying off his debts. And one clergyman has written that a certain member of his congregation up in Pohjanmaa took a boat to America to escape his nagging wife.

Toward the end of the 19th century, it became the thing to do to cross the Atlantic. People in the parish of Härmä used to say, in fact, that if you had not been to America you really did not measure up as a man.

The tide of migration to America was connected with the great transitional developments of the times in nearly all fields of human endeavor. The attraction above all was the high wage level in this country, which in certain occupations was as much as five times higher than in Finland. For another thing, it should be borne in mind that, although people speak of a 'mass migration,' the phenomenon was one of individuals moving from one continent to another — and there were as many reasons for migrating as there were emigrants.

The emigrants were people in their prime, around 20 years old, and over 60 per cent of them were men, the majority unmarried. Most of the emigrants were farming people — the children of farmers, tenant farmers, cottagers and so on. For these people, the prospects at home were anything but bright. One-third of the emigrants travelled on borrowed money, many on a ticket sent from America.

Although it was via northern Norway that the stream of emigration started to run, the main route later became the sea lane from the port of Hanko in southern Finland to England and from there to New York. In New York harbor, the immigrants were thoroughly examined on Ellis Island before being admitted into the country.

SETTLEMENTS IN AMERICA

After their arrival in the New World, the first task facing the immigrants was finding a job. Work was available to the men in the great mines of America, the lumber camps, the factories and railroad construction projects. The homes of wealthy Americans offered employment to women, and Finnish servant girls were in considerable

demand because of their good reputation.

The Finnish settlements became concentrated mainly in three states with names starting with the letter 'M': Michigan, Massachusetts and Minnesota.

The distribution of Finnish-born immigrants by states in 1920 was as follows:

Michigan	30,100
Minnesota	29,100
Massachusetts	14,570
New York	12,500
Washington	11,900
California	7,050
Ohio	6,410
Wisconsin	6,760
Oregon	6,000

In the southern states there have been only very few Finns. In his well-known book "We Who Built America," Carl Wittke noted that, although at first the Finnish immigrants were forced to look for work in copper and iron mines, in stone quarries and factories, or as lumberjacks – a line of work for which they were prepared by experience back in the Old Country –, the ultimate goal of almost every Finn was to own a farm and become an independent producer It was thus that the Finnish farming communities were created, especially in the Middle West.

Finns have worked mostly in the hardest occupations in factories, mines, the building trade and agriculture and forestry. Over the years, the economic status of the immigrants improved. Many of them became independent enterprisers, especially after learning the language of the land. Employers in the United States, as in other countries, learned to regard the Finns in general as good and reliable workers. One immigrant has related that back in the good old days – or, more correctly stated, in lean times of economic slumps – employers were in the habit of picking out of the lines of job applicants men wearing trousers of coarse woolen cloth, leather boots curled upward at the tips and a fur hat. Greenhorns from Finland fresh off the boat had the reputation of being hard workers – after all, they were in a hurry to get a nestegg started.

Thousands of American Finns participated the Hancock FINNFEST in July 28 – August 1, 76.

FINNISH–AMERICAN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The immigrants' first years often found them on the move, seeking ever better economic opportunities. As they settled down gradually, Finnish communities came into existence and this laid the foundation for organized cultural activity.

At the very early stage of immigration, *religious activity* gained momentum. It was in Hancock, in 1867, that the Finns first entered the fold of an organized congregation, in which they joined ranks with Swedes and Norwegians. The first Finnish clergyman, the Reverend A.E. Backman, arrived to tend to the spiritual needs of his countrymen in 1876, or exactly 100 years ago. The so-called 'Laestadian' religious movement had quite a strong following:, after all, many of the earliest immigrants hailed from the far North of Norway and Finnish Lapland, where the movement had a powerful grip on churchgoers. Congregations were gradually formed in different parts of the country, and in 1890 the Lutheran congregations pooled their resources to found the Suomi-Synod, or the American-Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Other church organizations were also established, including the 'Kansalliskirkko' or 'National Church. 'At the turn of the century, there were some 100 Finnish church congregations in the U.S.A. as well as a few in Canada. In 1916 the three principal Lutheran church organizations (Apostolis-Luterilainen Kirkkokunta, Suomi-Synodi and Kansalliskirkko) boasted 245 local congregations and some 33,500 members. Suomi-Opisto, or Suomi College, was founded in 1896 in Hancock to train ministers for the church. Also independent congregations managed to gain something of a following among the Finnish Americans, especially in the eastern states.

It was in response to an obviously felt need that *temperance societies* began to be formed in Finnish-American communities in the 1880s. The last decade of the century found these societies at their peak. In 1908 there were 200 Finnish-American temperance societies with a total membership of 11,200. After the turn of the century, the labor movement had begun, however, to undermine the strength of the temperance movement. Even so, many temperance societies have survived to this day.

The *working-class movement* began to spread among the Finnish immigrant population in the last decade of the 19th century. The first *socialistic* labor organizations sprang into existence in the final years of the last century and in 1906 banded together to form the Suomalainen Sosialistijärjestö, or Finnish Socialist Organization, and join the American Socialist Party. By 1913 the organization could boast 260 locals and a total membership of 12,651. Besides activities in the political and social sphere, the workers' associations staged plays, promoted literary pursuits, sponsored sports and so on. The Finnish–American labor movement was torn apart in 1914, when the supporters of the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW, parted company with the Socialists. Another split took place at the beginning of the decade of the 1920s, when a large number of Socialists joined the Communist Party.

A typical form of organization among the Finns in America is *cooperation*. Especially during World War I and the 1920s, the cooperative movement spread rapidly. Its ideas were eagerly accepted by farmers in particular. The cooperative movement is one field of activity in which Finns have been trail blazers on a broad front in the United States.

I should also like to call attention to the organizations known as *Kalevan Ritarit* (the Knights of Kaleva) and *Kalevan Naiset* (the Ladies of Kaleva), which, tracing their inception back to 1898, have aspired to preserve the Finnish heritage and promote Finnish culture.

Finnish-American literature will be dealt with separately here, so I will leave

this subject alone. On the other hand, I feel I should pay tribute to the great and very valuable contribution the *Finnish-American press* has made to the immigrant community. A hundred years have passed since a high-school graduate from Finland named A.J. Muikku brought out the first Finnish-American newspaper in Hancock. It was followed by a profusion of other journals in the Finnish language, and it is said that by the end of the century there were more Finnish newspapers being published in America than in Finland itself. Many of these were, it is true, short-lived, and at present there are only a very few Finnish-American newspapers still struggling to stay alive.

During the course of the past several decades, the Finnish-American immigrant culture has undergone changes. The first-generation immigrants in general spoke their mother tongue for the most part:, their children were bilingual; and the third generation speaks mostly English. Along with this development, the English language began to take the place of Finnish in organizational activity, as in, for example, the spheres of the church and the cooperative movement. The old immigrant culture has been preserved best in such traditional Finnish strongholds as Hancock, Fitchburg and, more recently, especially the twin towns of Lake Worth and Lantana, down in Florida. The second and third generations of Finnish Americans deserve credit for in many cases upholding the institutions set up by their elders born in Finland.

It is an indisputable fact that the era of Finnish-American immigrant culture is beginning to be over – at least in the form it exhibited at the end of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th century. This raises the question: how can the history of the immigrants be preserved for future generations? Accordingly, I should like to consider in the concluding part of my paper, first, the attitude of Finland toward the Finnish Americans and, second, the matter of how we might work together to promote research into the phenomenon of immigration and the Finnish-American culture.

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FINNISH AMERICANS AND FINLAND

When toward the end of the 19th century the migratory movement to the United States began to take on the character of a mass migration, the Finnish authorities took notice of the population drain and tried to take measures to restrain and prevent the exodus. This was done by having the provincial governors issue warning circulars, preachers deliver admonishing sermons and newspapers articles and editorials containing appropriate messages, etc. Only after the favorable effects of emigration, especially in the economic sphere, began to be perceived – did the negative attitude take a more understanding turn. Following the achievement of Finnish independence, efforts were made to establish better relations with the emigrants. These efforts were placed on a systematic basis in the 1920s. Founded in 1927, the Suomi-Seura (Suomi Society), under the direction of its long-time executive secretary Dr. Rafael Engelberg, did much to strengthen the ties between the emigrant Finns and their former homeland. In paricular, visits back to the Old Country became popular among the emigrants. The celebrations attending the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Delaware colony in 1638 likewise served to reinforce Finnish-American ties with Finland, thanks to the participation of a high-level delegation from the Old Country. The emotional distress suffered on both sides of the ocean during World War II, especially during the Finnish Winter War, resulted in the building across the Atlantic of a bridge of affinity. Finland also began to hold the Finnish-Americans in higher esteem than ever. What made a particularly deep impression was the flood of gift parcels sent to war-torn Finland; these

"American packages," as they were called, hold a prominent place among the childhood memories of Finns of my own generation.

The attitude of official Finland as well as the Finnish man in the street since the war and right now, too, can be aptly summed up by the adjectives "warm, open and objective." The arrival in Hancock the President of the Republic of Finland is a concrete and conspicuous proof of the sincere esteem in which the Finnish government holds the Finnish Americans and their progeny.

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK, PARTICULARLY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

A major basis of the cultural exchange and research between Finland and the United States has been the so-called Asla-Fulbright program, in the framework of which during the past quarter of a century over 2.200 young Finns have received scholarships to study in the United States. Correspondingly, the Fulbright-Hays program has enabled some 500 young Americns to study in Finland on scholarships. The continuity of the cultural exchange is secured by an agreement signed in the summer of 1975 by President Kekkonen and President Ford whereby Finland will pay the 2,800,000 balance of its 1919 debt to the United States into a special fund, the yield in interest of which will be spent in perpetuity on the cultural exchange program.

Another example of the favorable trend is the visiting professorship established in Helsinki University beginning in the fall term of 1976 in American culture. Helsinki University is paying half the costs of this professorship and the United States the other half. It will open up new opportunities to, for example, Finnish-American scholars and research scientists.

The starting point in the Finnish stand toward the Finns in America is recognition of the fact that our compatriots on this side of the Atlantic likewise represent Finnish culture, the history and traditions of which should be systematically preserved without delay for posterity – before it is too late. This should not happen, as perhaps used to be the case, too much in an emotional, sentimental spirit and from perhaps too one-sidedly a Finnish point of view. The Finnish-Americans and their contribution to the growth of the U.S.A. and their culture ought to be viewed expressly as part of American society and its developmental process. This by no means need, however, mean that the Finnish point of view should be overlooked.

Quite a lot of Finnish-American history has been salvaged and recorded in recent decades. It is not my intention to catalogue for you the many worthy researchers and significant studies published. On the other hand, I should like to call attention to evident gaps and oversights.

The first thing that needs to be done is to collect the material still in existence. For example: since many documents and other papers relating to old societies and organizations have been lost or destroyed, facts about them might still be recovevered from the columns of old newspapers, which it would be worth searching for and microfilming so that the original material would not wear out in the hands of researchers. Also the last chance to interview many of the old immigrants is close at hand.

In the following, I shall list certain research targets:

1 – More histories by states would be required, along with really deep-probing local histories of Finnish communities on the lines of, for instance, Docent Ulf Bejbom's study of the Swedish community in Chicago. Such Finnish-American centers of population deserving scholarly attention could be Hancock, of course, New York Mills, Fitchburg and even New York City. Also the Finnish settlements in the mining areas of, for instance, Michigan and Montana would be interesting objects of study.

2 – A research target related to the foregoing would involve the adaptation of Finnish immigarations to their new surroundings and, in particular, their internal modility in the search for work during the initial stage of adjustment.

3 – A systematic study of the Finnish-American press, along with a separate study of the editors and an assessment of their importance.

4 – A general and systematic study of ecclesiastical conditions and the clergy.

5 – A history of the Finnish-American temperance movement is still to be written – whereas the labor and cooperative movements have received more attention from researchers. I hope, that Dr. Michael Karni conld start work on the temperance movement.

– Studies should also be made of other organized activities, like, for instance, those of the Knights and the Ladies of Kaleva, music festivals, stage performances, and so on.

– Finnish-American literature, poetry and songs, mostly on the comic order of so-called "kupletit," might provide material even for a doctoral dissertation.

– I would also like to see some Finnish-American or Finnish research scholar accept the challenge of doing an overall history of the Finns in the United States in the light of present knowledge, documentary material and methodology.

These are only some examples of the research targets I should like to see the present generation of Finnish-American scholars in particular, participate in tackling. Men like John I. Kolehmainen, A. William Hoglund, Douglas Ollila, Jr., Jon Saari, Melvin Holli, Michael Karni and Arthur Puotinen, to cite a few prominent names, carry the responsibility of showing a good example to their juniors and encouraging those among them, in particular, who know Finnish to delve into Finnish-American history. I have noticed that this is already happening. – especially at the University of Minnesota.

It would be important that the descendants of Finnish immigrants who understand the language of their forebears put this knowledge to practical use in research work. I hope and trust that these U.S.A. Bicentennial celebrations might help in this direction. The most important thing is to pass on to the descendants of Finnish immigrants in the fourth and fifth generations scholarly sources of information about their ancestry.

THE GREAT IMMIGRANT NOVEL

I have often wondered when a truly great literary work will appear about the Finnish immigrants in the United States, Canada, Sweden or some other overseas country, a work surpassing the scope of the routine novel, a work built on the monumental lines of, for example, Väinö Linna's "Unknown Soldier," a work comparable to Vilhelm Moberg's world-famous trilogy on Swedish emigrants who settled in Minnesota in the 1850s – the most widely read novel in Swedish literature. Moderg based his novel very faithfully on historical facts and worked on the book from 1948 to 1959. As the Finnish migratory movement lagged some twenty years behind the Swedish, I think it would soon be high time for a major novel about Finnish immigrants in America to come out. But who is going to be the man to write it?

The idea is not a new one.

I have noticed that the Finnish-American journalist Esa Arra expressed a similar idea in 1962. He has even estimated what sort of person might succeed in this great task, as follows:

> "This task can be accomplished only by a writer who does not merely look with his eyes and hear with his ears but who possesses the broad capacity of an ample spirit to understand internally those who in their early youth set forth on their journey from a totally different Finland from the Finland we know

today, leaving behind backwoods conditions that can scarcely be found anywhere any more. The writer must understand those in whose minds burned at bottom the romantic America fever and who lived their lives in quite unique conditions.

Arra figured, furthermore, that some gifted writer from Finland might be capable of this after spending a couple of years in the company of Finnish immigrants of an older generation in the United States.

I propose that consideration be given to the possibility of arranging a competition in honor of the Bicentennial, an immigrant novel competition arranged as a joint Finnish-American-Finnish project. The financial resources required might even, with luck, come uot of whatever funds are left over from the Bicentennial celebrarions. I believe that on the part of Finland the Institute of Migration, at least, would be prepared to collaborate in the implementation of such a project.

The opportunities for the expansion of cultural relations between Finnish Americans and their former homeland are great. Examples of the results already achieved are the joint efforts that have been made in collecting material – the work done by the Institute of General History of Turku University in this field being particularly noteworthy – and the publication produced jointly by the Institute of Migration and the University of Minnesota out of the documentary material of the Duluth Conference of 1974. The volume published in Finland to salute the American Bicentennial is the latest example of collaboration among Finnish and Finnish–American scholars. I believe that, as I see it, the successful title given this work, "Old Friends – Strong Ties", characterizes the relations between the United States and Finland and will continue to do so in the future. Under this heading come the Finns of America in particular, for they are the oldest, strongest and most valuable bond in the friendship and collaboration between the peoples of Finland and the United States.

Artikkelin alkuosa on yleiskatsaus suomalaisesta siirtolaisuudesta Yhdysvaltoihin ja siirtolaisten ja entisen kotimaan välisistä suhteista. Loppuosa käsittelee siirtolaistutkimuksen näköaloja. Lähtökohtana on ajatus, että amerikansuomalaisen kulttuurin ja historian säilyttäminen on siirtolaisten ja entisen kotimaan yhteinen tehtävä. Ensimmäiseksi olisi kerättävä se materiaali, joka vielä on jäljellä. Sopivia tutkimuskohteita olisivat esimerkiksi seuraavat:

- tärkeimpien suomalaiskeskusten ja osavaltioiden paikallishistoriat, joita ei vielä ole kirjoitettu
- suomalaisten sopeutuminen, erityisesti siirtolaisuuden alkuvaiheissa
- amerikansuomalainen lehdistö ja toimittajat
- kirkollinen toiminta
- raittiusliike
- Kalevan Ritarit ja Naiset
- amerikansuomalainen kirjallisuus, runous, laulut jne.

Olisi myös toivottavaa, että joku tutkija voisi kirjoittaa kokonaisesityksen Yhdysvaltain suomalaisista nykyisen materiaalin ja tietämyksen perusteella. Amerikansuomalaisilla tutkijoilla, alkaen professoreista John I. Kolehmainen ja A. William Hoglund, on vastuu ohjata suomenkieltä taitavia nuoria tutkijoita näihin aiheisiin, jotta jopa neljännen ja viidennen polven amerikansuomalaiset saisivat tieteelliseen tutkimukseen perustuvaa tietoa suomalaisesta syntyperästään.

Lopuksi artikkelissa viitataan ruotsalaisen kirjailijan Vilhelm Mobergin suureen siirtolaisromaaniin ja todetaan, että olisi jo aika kirjoittaa korkealuokkainen kaunokirjallinen teos suomalaisesta siirtolaisuudesta. Mikäli varoja olisi käytettävissä, aiheesta voitaisiin julistaa kirjoituskilpailu.