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California Dreaming – Finns in California from the Gold Rush to Silicon Valley

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This article discusses a cultural heritage preservation project concerning the archival processing and research of the archive of a California Finnish community. While working as a visiting scholar at University of California, Berkeley February–June 2019 at Bancroft Library archive, I conducted archival research and processing of an archival collection named the United Kaleva Brothers & Sisters (UFKB&S) Lodge No. 21 records. The records were acquired from the Finnish Hall in Berkeley, California, by the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley, during the spring of 2018. The UFKB&S Lodge 21 records revealed important and unique documentation concerning the Finnish American community in Berkeley, California, and Oregon. The documents are comprised of minutes from meetings at various lodges in several cities in California, member lists, photos, contracts, accounts, and documents detailing the activities organized by the members of the lodges.

The Golden State

The UFKB&S Lodge 21 records complement what is already known about Finnish immigrants in the United States. Finnish immigrant history in California and on the West Coast of the United States is not as well known or researched as Finnish immigrant

history in other parts of the country. Lesser numbers of Finns migrated to the West Coast of the United States, which might explain why there are less archival resources and research available on the topic. The West Coast Finns are often mentioned in research literature in the statistics, but as far as I know the subject has not been systematically researched before, and especially, the material of the UFKB&S Lodge No. 21 has never been available for research until now. The Lodge 21 documents give insight into the activities and the impact of Finns in San Francisco and other parts of California over a hundred-year time frame, beginning with the establishment of Lodge 21 in the late 1910s and continuing to this day. The materials provide unique perspectives on Finnish history through the lens of Finnish Californians and on the history of the United States in general as well.

The first Finns on the West Coast of the United States were likely sailors who decided to settle in the fertile agricultural areas near the coast or perhaps even hoped to find gold during the Gold Rush in the mid-1800s. Some Finns made their fortune in California, like the Sea Captain Gusrave Niebaum, who acquired an estate in Napa Valley in 1879 and founded the Inglenook Winery, current-

Picture 1. Grand Lodge Convention, Winlock 1948.



ly known as the Rubicon Estate Winery and owned by the famous film director Francis Ford Coppola. Occupations, other than sailing, available to Finnish men on the Pacific coast were fishing and logging, especially of the awesome redwood forests. Finnish women started settling in California later for purposes of marriage and to work as maids. The occupations engaged in by Finns thus differ from those of Finns in other parts of the U.S., with mining being, for example, traditional for Finnish men in the Midwest. Besides the sunny weather of the Golden State, the area differs from other Finnish settlements because of the extraordinarily multicultural nature of the area. California was part of Mexico until 1848, and the area was quite sparsely populated until many different immigrant groups like the Chinese and Europeans settled in the area thereafter, making it the most populated state in the U.S. today.

The UFKB&S Lodge 21 records

Wuonna 1900, marraskuun 17 p. pidettiin kokous san Franciscossa joilloin San Franciscon Weljeyseura ja Astorian Weljeyseura liitettiin yhdeksi seuraksi. Tälle yhdistykselle annettiin nimi "Yhdistyneet Suomalaiset Weljeyseurat Yli Maailman". Myöskin oli tarkoituksena, että perustaa uusia Majoja kaikille paikkakunnille missä suomalaisia asustaa; eikä ainoastaan uusia, vaan että nekin seurat jotka owat toimineet yksityisinä, liittyivät tähän yhdistykseen ja rupeaisivat toimimaan yhtenä waikuttawana Weljeyseurana. Heti sen jälkeen, kun seurat olivat yhdistyneet, rupesi jäsenluku huomattavasti kasvamaan, sillä kansalaiset tulivat huomaa-

maan, että yhdistyksellä on hyvä tarkoitus. Esim. sairauden tai muun tapaturman sattuessa ottawat Majat huolen toistensa sairasta ja hoitawat heitä weljellisellä rakkaudella, kuin myöskin suorittawat kipurahan eli sen suurusten kuin sen Majan säännöt määrää, johon sairastava jäsen kuuluu. (Correspondence, minutes and accounting of the first Finnish Brotherhood Lodge, 1903, Scrapbook 1, UFKB&S Records.)

The UFKB&S consisted of lodges located in various cities in California and in the state of Oregon, and even in Canada. According to Berkeley Lodge No. 21 correspondence, there seems to have been at least 34 lodges on the West Coast of the United States. The United Finnish Kaleva Brothers and Sisters was established in the year 1900 by the San Francisco Finnish Brotherhood and the Astoria Finnish Brotherhood when the two brotherhoods merged into a single organization, originally called "Yhdistyneet Suomalaiset Weljeyseurat Yli Maailman" (United Finnish Brotherhoods across the World). The organization encouraged people of Finnish origin or background to found new lodges in "all the areas where Finns live", and the already existing independent lodges were called upon to join under one united brotherhood. Its aim was to assist immigrants of Finnish background and their descendants on the West Coast of North America, especially during times of need, sickness, or sorrow. Especially early in the organization's history, the community's support and the organization's services, like health care and mortuary services, provided the Finns with the types of social security they needed. The Finnish social network and

different clubs, and entertainment, such as the Berkeley theatre group, Berkeley Lodge's choir, and "The West Coast Singers" as well as the Lodge's Kaleva Ski Club, constituted important activities provided by the Lodge.

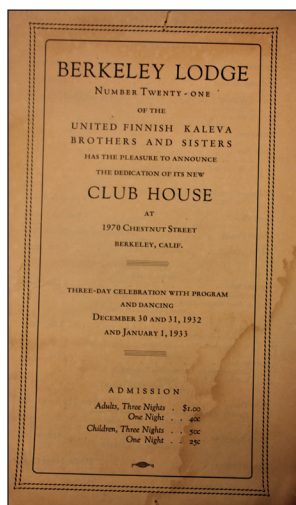
The San Francisco Brotherhood, or later Lodge No. 1, was founded in 1882. The earliest documents in the UFKB&S Lodge No. 21 records are the San Francisco Lodge No. 1 meeting minutes as well as its correspondence with the other lodges rapidly being organized around California. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, much of the Finnish population of San Francisco moved to the Berkeley and Oakland area; thus, the "Finntown" near San Francisco's Embarcadero district, which was destroyed at the time, relocated to Berkeley. The Finnish settlers preferred to live close to one another in towns, and those areas came to be called Finntowns. The Berkeley Finntown was located around the intersection of University Avenue and San Pablo Avenue, which included a Lutheran church, saunas, and other buildings and landmarks built by Finns. Thus, as well as being an intriguing piece of Finnish immigration history, the Lodge No. 21 records also reveal a part of Berkeley's local history, since the contributions of the Finns influenced developments in the city of Berkeley, California, from early on. The Finns, for example, funded a successful co-operative store chain, which still has its echoes in the co-operative movement active in the San Francisco area today. The Finns were active and notable in the city's administration and local politics as well — on the left and the right as well as centrist politics.

There was a strong divide between the socialist Finns and the more conservative UFKB&S Finns. The schism led to a separation of

the Finnish population in Berkeley, and two separate halls came to exist in Berkeley — the more conservative Finnish Brotherhood Hall and the workers' "Red Hall." Thus, not much of the Berkeley Finns socialist activities are recorded in the UFKB&S records. The Red Hall still exists in Berkeley, but it seems it is no longer run by Finns. Nevertheless, it would be very interesting to inquire as to whether they still have records stored concerning the left-wing Finns. Also, the Berkeley Finnish co-operative movement was very influential and researching the cooperative movement in more depth might provide insights into understanding "Red" and "White" interests better.

The era from the 1920s until the 1950s seems to have been the golden age of the Finnish community in Berkeley — in the 1920s, 648 Finnish-born residents lived in Berkeley, while around 7,000 lived in California altogether. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, the membership numbers of the UFKB&S as well as Berkeley Lodge membership seemed to drop. A crisis ensued, caused by the absence of younger members, perhaps due to younger generations becoming more assimilated into the mainstream culture of the United States. At the same time, globalization and mainstream Western culture also affected and changed the culture and economy in Finland and the cultural differences between Finland and the United States lessened as Finland developed rapidly both economically and technologically in the latter 20th century. The Berkeley Lodge reacted to this change of dropping membership numbers by opening its doors more and more not only to people affiliated with Finland, but to anyone wanting to participate in creating the local community in Berkeley. Today, the Finnish Hall in Berkeley rents out space for several different activities, mostly though for cultural and political events.

Since the 1980s the southern part of San Francisco Bay Area, stretching from the city of San Francisco to the south of the of San Jose, has become to be known as Silicon Valley, one of the most significant centers in the world for new economy meaning high technology, social media and innovation. The area is also known for its prestigious universities: Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley, as well as University of California, San Francisco. As telecommunication and information technology became an important industry in Finland in the 1990s and famous for Nokia, Silicon Valley become an attractive destination for Finnish skilled professionals on the fields of information and telecommunication as well in academia looking to develop themselves professionally and their career. Because of their freedom to move eas-



Picture 2. Berkeley Lodge No. 21 Club House at 1970 Chestnut Street in Berkeley, founded in 1932, as is testified to by this pamphlet advertising the celebration program for the dedication of the new club house. The UFKB&S records were acquired from the basement of the Club House in question.

ily geographically and though virtual worlds the nature of migration, for the privileged, has changed as they have become increasingly less dependent and more detached from locations. Thus, for them moving to another country might not be as drastic or permanent a move as it was for the Finns at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.

Appraisal and accessioning of the archival materials 2018

Fortunately, Kaj Rekola from the Finnish Hall took notice of the old records housed in the basement of the Finnish Hall in Berkeley and invited Associate Professor Ismo Söderling from the Migration Institute of Finland to appraise the materials. During the spring of 2017, he visited the Finnish Hall in Berkeley and the records were recognized for their historical value; it was decided that action should be taken to preserve the materials. Thus, an archival student was invited to process the records. As an ethnology student specialized in records management and archives, I was qualified for the position and the Migration Institute of Finland funded a short field trip for me to visit Berkeley during the spring of 2018. During my field work in Berkeley, I verified that the records were indeed valuable and in need of urgent rehousing and conservation. The most important resource for my work during my time in Berkeley was having access to the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, with the aid of Doctor Lotta Weckström, a Finnish lecturer in UC Berkeley's Scandinavian Department. The Bancroft Library was interested in the materials from the Finnish Hall, and we negotiated with two curators of the Bancroft Library, Theresa Salazar (from the Western Americana Collection) and Lara Michels (Head of Manuscript Processing) that the Finnish Hall's materials would become a part of the Western Americana Collection. The Western Americana Collection contains the largest and most diverse group of research materials within the Bancroft Library collection on local history concerning with the social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural development of the western part of the United States. Hence, the appraised archival materials were donated to the Bancroft Library's Western Americana Collection by the Berkeley Lodge No. 21 and rehoused in the Bancroft Library.

Visiting scholar at Bancroft Library archive

The Bancroft Library invited me to return for further processing of the materials. The re-



Picture 3. The UFKB&S Lodge No. 21 records were housed in the basement of the Finnish Hall in Berkeley where the records were in a very poor condition due to moisture damage and pests. In the picture the records are in the condition Associate professor Ismo Söderling found them as he visited the Finnish Hall in Berkeley during the spring of 2017 and appraised the materials.



Picture 4. The Sather Tower "The Campanile" a famous bell tower at the UC Berkeley campus opposite to the Bancroft Library entrance.



Picture 5. I was working as a visiting scholar at Bancroft Library archive during the spring of 2019. In the picture I am processing the over-sized section of the documents that mostly contains old Finnish American newspapers. I often used gloves while processing this collection, but I forgot to wear them for the picture.

search plan for my second visit to UC Berkeley, created with together Theresa Salazar and Lara Michels, involved archival processing, arranging, and describing the records as well as creating a bilingual finding aid that facilitates access to the data through providing metadata on the documents, index, and content notes with a short history of the UFK-B&S. It was agreed that the metadata should be available in English as well as in Finnish since the original material is partly in Finnish and partly in English. I followed the typical steps and methods used in professional archival arrangement and description when executing the project with the assistance of Lara Michels.

Thanks to receiving support from the Finlandia Foundation, the University of Turku, the Migration Institute of Finland, the UC Berkeley Scandinavian Department, and the Bancroft Library, I was able to carry out a high-level archival cultural heritage preservation and research project.

Next steps

A few lodges around California are still active, but their future looks uncertain. Thus, collecting and researching the archival sources and oral histories of the Finnish Californians should be done now or otherwise their stories might be lost. The Bancroft Library archive was unable to house the notable library collection of the Berkeley Lodge in its entirety, as archives rarely do; nevertheless, it would be a pity if it would remain uncatalogued and become lost.

I have been offered an internship concerning archival work and research at the Finnish Heritage Center in Michigan under the instruction of the archivist, Joanna Chopp. I expect to be working in the Historical Archive division of the Finnish American Heritage Center. The archive houses the largest collection of Finnish North American materials in the world. The work experience I will acquire and research I will conduct at the Finnish American Heritage Center will deepen my understanding of Finnish archival and cultural heritage in the United States and American archival practices. I hope to write more on the topic of Finnish American cultural heritage and archives. While working in Michigan, I also hope to visit Berkeley.

In the 1970s, Berkeley became a significant bastion of activism, progressive politics, and counterculture. I am intrigued to study how the Finns in the area viewed the surprising transformation of the formerly restrained university town into a focal point for the whole country and even famous worldwide, with protests at the University of Berkeley campus, the hippie movement, and anti-Vietnam war sentiment all coalescing there. The best way to bring to life such archive materials would be to interview the Finns of the region who lived during the era. I desire to make a field trip to California during my internship in Michigan, with the purpose of interviewing California Finns, and I would like to write an article or even a book based on the interviews. In the future, I wish to study further the Finnish American archives, especially those of the Pacific Coast.