



LEADING STAR LEDSTJÄRNAN

CX EST. 1906 La Palma, California December 2016 Number 4 www.orderofruneberg.org

Welcome Centenary of Finland's Independence in 2017!

Of course, as mentioned in the June issue, "Finland's big year is 2017."

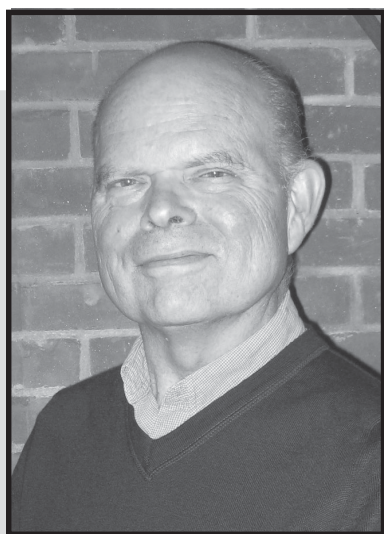
From the Home page of the website, <http://suomifinland100.fi/info/?lang=en>, created by the Finnish Prime Minister's Office:

Finland became an independent state on 6 December 1917. The newly born state was willed into being by the Finns after a long struggle. In spite of hard times, the Finnish people have for a hundred years engaged in the building of their country and making decisions together. Now the Finns are leading their country into a new century with courage and determination.

The centenary of Finland's independence in 2017 will be the most significant commemorative year for this generation of Finns. It will provide opportunities to better understand the past, experience the jubilee together, and set the course for Finland's future success."

If you have not already done so, you may sign up for the newsletter, "Finland 100 years." Sign-up is easy to do. From the Finlandia Foundation National (FFN) website: www.finlandiafoundation.org/finland-100/.

You may also select / view all 10 of the newsletters published to date at the following website: <http://suomifinland100.fi/info/?lang=en>



***Wishing our members
in Canada, Finland,
and USA a
Merry Christmas,
and for 2017,
a Happy New Year!***

The most recent newsletter was the June issue. – Some examples of topics covered in the June newsletter:

New Year's Eve and the party of the century!

Finland's centenary celebrations as an independent nation will be launched in Finland and elsewhere in the world on New Year's Eve on 31 December 2016. The day-long festivities in Helsinki will culminate in the party of the century to which everyone is invited. You will also have the opportunity to watch the event on TV. The celebration of the 100th anniversary of Finnish independence begins on New Year's Eve, Saturday, 31 December 2016. The party begins around noon near Helsinki's Töölönlahti Bay and culminates in the Party of the Century at Kansalaistori Square between 9:00 p.m. and 01:00 a.m. Expect an historical and unforgettable evening with a great programme in the heart of Finland's capital – even the main street, Mannerheimintie, will turn into

continued on page 2

WHAT'S INSIDE:



Genealogy Corner.....	4
Lodge News.....	6
Victor Gasstrom.....	11

Finland 100 in 2017

I hope you have read Stew Lyon's article about the Centenary of Finland. One event that is occurring in the United States is the Travelling Sauna. The sauna will travel around the U.S. from January 12 starting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and ending up in Washington, DC, on December 2. It stops in Los Angeles and San Francisco in March. It moves to Portland and Astoria, Oregon, in early April and then to Seattle at the end of April. The sauna will spend May, June, July, and part of August in the Midwest before heading east. It will go to New York in September and down to Atlanta in October. It will be in Florida in November before arriving in Washington, DC, in December.

If the sauna happens to travel nearby where you live, you should consider visiting it. For more information about the Travelling Sauna, visit <http://travellingsauna.com>.

—DH

Welcome Centenary of Finland's Independence in 2017!

continued from page 1

a dance floor! At midnight, with the magnificent fireworks show at Töölönlahti Bay, the 100th anniversary year of Finland's independence will officially begin. The dazzling display will take the spectators on a tour through Finland and its four seasons. The display will be visible throughout the event area. After the fireworks show, the party continues at Kansalaistori Square until 01:00.

Finland 100 cultural highlights abroad

Finland celebrates independence centenary in 2017. The celebrations also reach beyond Finland's borders: the big year is celebrated at least in 70 differ-

ent countries and on five different continents.

In the USA and Canada, from FFN's July newsletter: "Finlandia Foundation National agrees that the 100th anniversary of Finland's independence is something to celebrate for its historical, cultural, and contemporary significance, and a chance to recognize and build awareness of Finnish America, as well. We are encouraged by the interest of FFN chapters and other organizations in planning Finland 100 events and activities across the U.S. Finlandia Foundation National will also host significant programs honoring the centennial."

I suggest going to the FFN website to see their Centenary



The Leading Star is published quarterly by the Order of Runeberg for its members and others interested in the Order at 7682 Tracy Lane, La Palma, California 90623-1501.

The Leading Star / Ledstjärnan

Editors: Dale and Mary Lou Hjort

Address all correspondence to:

Postmaster: Send changes of address to:

The Leading Star,
Attn: Dale & Mary Lou Hjort
7682 Tracy Lane
La Palma, CA 90623-1501
Telephone/Fax: 714-739-0932
Email: d.mlhjort@juno.com

Correspondents: Information received by the first Friday of the quarterly month or as noted will be included in that quarter's issue.

To correct our listing of your address, fill in the requested information in the form to the right and send your old mailing label to:

Dale & Mary Lou Hjort
7682 Tracy Lane
La Palma, CA 90623-1501

Name: _____

Street: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip _____

Lodge & Number: _____

Lecturers for Finland 100. <http://finlandiafoundation.org/centenary-lecturers/>

And from another page at the FNN's website:

<http://finlandiafoundation.org/finland-100/>

Finnish Ambassador to the United States, Her Excellency Kirsti Kauppi, and her staff at the Embassy in Washington, D.C., have been working with representatives of local Finnish-American organizations (including Finlandia Foundation represented by FNN President Ossi Rahkonen) to plan a series of events across the U.S., notably a traveling sauna that will visit at least a dozen locations throughout 2017.

Stew Lyons

New Haven Runeberg Lodge #205

Obituary

Runeberg Social Club (aka – Vancouver Lodge #124)

It is with sadness that we remember the passing of Ensi Mirjam Kronholm, long time member of our Vancouver Lodge.



Mia Kronholm was born in Kuusankoski, Finland, May 4th, 1921. She is predeceased by her husband Harry, son Kari and daughter Sari. She was very active in the Emmaus Lutheran

Church, Order of Runeberg, and the Finnish Canadian Rest Home Associations Women's Auxiliary.

Music was her passion and she enjoyed singing in many Choirs—Runeberg and Emmaus Choirs, Finland Conference Choir—touring with them, notably to Finland, Sweden, California, Florida and beyond.

Another travel adventure was her most memorable trip to Israel.

Until her passing, she remained in her own home, driving her car well into her 80s. She remained active in as many activities as she could, as long as she was able. In her younger years, she was an activist in many local causes, standing up for things that she felt strongly about. She had a very kind heart—always anxious to help those around her. We will miss her friendly manner and her faithful attendance at our meetings.

She leaves to mourn Seija, daughter-in-law (Jari, Mira), granddaughters Mari (Finland), Ari, Christina, and five great grandchildren as well as many friends and family in both Finland and Canada.



Publication Fund Report

December 2016

Reporting on September *Leading Star* costs

As with the March & June *Leading Star* 12-page issues, the September *Leading Star* 12-page issue costs were reduced compared to the previous 16 -page format.

Cost summary of the September 2016 issue of the *Leading Star*:

September *Leading Star* issue:

Editors' stipend:	\$200
Graphics:	\$360
LS postage:	\$188.83 (for 218 copies mailed)
Printing:	\$111.20
Total / issue:	\$860.03

Publication Fund Balances:

Balance reported in June 2016	\$3,968.16
Cost of September 2016 <i>Leading Star</i>	\$860.03
Current Balance, June 2016	\$3,108.13

Based on the above costs, it is estimated that the "last *Leading Star* issue," to be the June 2017 issue (same as previously projected).

Our *Leading Star* editors have suggested we may be at a point with a future issue of the paper that we go to 8 pages – depending on quantity of content submitted by our lodges. The plan is to look at each issue on a individual basis.

Thus, the page count would be 8 or 12 depending on what has been submitted. I agree with the editors

Fund Report submitted by
Stew Lyons

Genealogy Corner

Reflections from our visit to Iron Mountain in 1972

It has been the perception that immigrants most of the time chose professions such as construction workers, carpenters, farmers, and forestry workers. During our vacation trip in 1972 we received a deeper impression of America and its treasures, which were in the bowels of the earth. Without knowing it, we passed the ore fields and mining towns, which told us that America was and is a rich country. We visited the old unused mine in Iron Mountain, with an entrance barely bigger than a regular threshing house door. We were dressed in heavy protective suits and rode on a narrow-gauge railway carriage. With a constant drip of the waters inside the



June Pelo
A Dedicated Genealogist

mine, it was easy to imagine the first emigrant's world

We went back to the 1800s when the men from the mines broke the ore by hand for over 87 years. The mining town grew into a city. They were tough times, but the hardest time was always inside the mine. The mining company tested which people could endure the most demanding work. The Italians were considered the strongest. But they could be difficult to manage, if they had to do their utmost. The Scandinavians were the most resilient. If they sought work they could expect to get it.

Already in the 1880s, Swede-Finns began to populate the area and emigration increased. But the conditions in the mine were unbearable. The workers succumbed to pneumonia and suffered from lung sickness. We have heard how the emigrants came home from America with miners lung. They were skinny and pale, they coughed a lot, until death ended their lives.

Disturbances or strikes broke out against the long working day. They had worked 12–14 hours per shift. Mining companies' representatives were shocked and threatened with guns and several were killed. They also formed the first union, but could not compete with the powerful mining companies that started dismissing all Scandinavians. They were now on the "outside" and they lived from day to day. Alcohol had been consumed in large quantities.

From our open railway carriage we saw the mine as a large egg shell, with an opening in the middle. It was impossible to estimate dis-

tances. Up there we saw a statue, which is 3.5 meters high, but looked like a small plaster doll.

Our train journey in the old mine lasted a little over an hour, but that hour left the lasting memory of the first emigrants slave labor and what they experienced. The younger generation took the lessons of the older and began to work elsewhere than in the mine, even in other industries that grew up. Some of the older people bought land and moved to work in small industry such as in the old country.

The northern Michigan's Upper Peninsula as it is often called, is largely between Lake Michigan to the south and Lake Superior to the north and is bordered to the west by Wisconsin. Natural resources are good, especially the big forests and the abundant iron ore which gave dividends. Our countrymen's numbers were particularly high during the first two decades of the 1900s.

The Medical Relief Society, "Sons of Finland", was organized in 1905. During 25 years, it paid \$10,675 in medical assistance and \$5,400 in funeral expenses.

Efforts were made several times to achieve a temperance society, including our compatriots in Iron Mountain, but strangely these efforts did not lead to lasting results. Some compatriots joined the Swedish Lutheran congregation in Iron Mountain.

After the 2-km-long route inside the dark and damp mine, it was a relief to see the daylight. When you looked back at the dark mine gallery, one could visualize the endless number of workers who worked there. Although it was 100 years ago since the mine was closed, there was a strong perception of a fierce struggle for existence.

Beside the mine was a museum. Like the rest of the group, we visited this. There were the helmets with candles inserted. There were rock drills and heavy ham-

mers, which would be swung all day long, and every kind of mining equipment. Such items were used in the mine.

The memory of Iron Mountain has often come to mind. We wanted to hear more about it, and then five years ago Finnish television showed a film from that area. It told us what happened and about the Finns' terrible struggle for existence. We knew well the place that began scrolling on the screen. The river, the high bridge and the valley below. A beautiful area where we stayed until the following day.

Hilding Widjeskog
from *Emigrantvägar*,
by Hilding Widjeskog
and Ole Granholm

English translation by
June Pelo





LODGE NEWS



Members & friends of Lodge # 205
Join us for our
Annual Fall Walk & Potluck Dinner
Saturday, October 15, 2016

Info.:

Meet to walk:

2 PM at Hammonasset State Park in Madison, CT
Meet in the parking lot on right, just after the entrance booths
(sign "to camping area").

FYI: This walk is on level trails.

We will be exploring the new trail recently built.

Note that there is no charge for admission in mid-October.

1:45 PM at Robert & Tuula Berke's if dropping-off food

4 PM at Robert & Tuula Berke's if not walking,
& coming for the dinner.

Hosts: Robert & Tuula Berke –

at their home: 8 Vincent Ct Clinton, CT 06413

map to 8 Vincent Ct Clinton, CT 06413 –

not far from Hammonasset Park

The Berke's home is at the end of Vincent Ct –
the middle driveway of 3 driveways in cul-de-sac.

If the driveway is full, park in the cul-de-sac.

Please RSVP (by phone or email) by Thursday, Oct. 13th

Phone (M): 203-415-9830

Phone (H): 860-669-7404

email: tuulaberke@sbcglobal.net

Please bring an appetizer, main dish, side dish,
salad or dessert to share.

Check back here for updates.



*L-R: Sirpa & Leena - enjoying our
Lodge event*

Lodge #205 New Haven, Connecticut

*Roy & Marjatta enjoying coffee &
conversation*





LODGE NEWS



*On the trail at Hammonasset State Park, Madison, CT
L-R: Marjatta, Tuula, Sirpa, Kirsti. Photo by Inke*



View from trail overlooking salt marsh & toward Long Island Sound. Photo by Inke



*View from trail overlooking salt marsh and looking toward Long Island Sound. Trees on right displaying Fall colors.
Photo by Inke*

L-R: Klas, Tuula, Stew, Lise, Peter



Annual Fall Walk & Potluck Dinner



L-R: Tuula, Leena, and Marjatta enjoying conversation and the delicious potluck dinner entrees.



*The
desserts!*

Robert & Inke out on the deck overlooking the beautiful yard



L-R: Kaarina, Tuula, & Dottie

L-R: Klas, Dottie, Stew, Peter
All enjoying the many delicious
potluck dinner entrees



L-R: Lise, Roy, Dottie & Stew Business meeting in progress

By Markus Ahlskog

I am grateful for the chance to present to the readership of the *Leading Star* the fascinating case of Viktor Gåsström (1885–1969), an immigrant in the USA in his formative years. Viktor had an unusually strong conviction in the cause of socialism, which combined with his talent and energy led him and his family to very exceptional back-and-forth migrations across the so called Iron Curtain that divided the West and the Soviet block, in times when this was impossible for ordinary people.

In his old age, Viktor wrote for a left leaning newspaper in Finland (*Ny Tid*) a short autobiographical article about his life, which sketches the both dramatic and tragic events and turns in his life. These events are undoubtedly true, but certainly Viktor is not giving us the whole truth. Nevertheless, that tale forms the basis of this article also, as other sources only come with piecewise information. I will, however, try to maintain a critical eye.

Viktor emigrated to the USA in 1906 from Nedervetil in Finland, a Swedish speaking-rural county close to the northwestern coast, where emigration was particularly strong. Viktor settled in New York close to his brother, and earned his living as a carpenter. Besides this, he schooled himself and participated vigorously in society life among immigrant circles. And most crucially, he also became attracted by the socialist movement of his day.

I will return to this American phase in Viktor's life later. The revolutionary events in Russia caused Viktor with wife and two children to move back to Nedervetil shortly before Finnish Independence was declared. Soon followed a short but intensive Civil War between "Whites" and "Reds", the latter aiming for a socialist society. Viktor, experienced but still young and thus in his prime years, became immediately the leading Red activ-

ist in Nedervetil, which as the front lines formed, was far behind in "white" territory. Viktor gives us many details of the dramatic events during the Civil War in his autobiography. He was arrested three times and was very close to having been executed. He was saved by relatives who were on the White side.

The Gåsström family moved to the Soviet Union in 1933, among many other American Finns, who in the era of the Great Depression were lured into this adventure. It is a little remarkable in the Gåsström's case, as Viktor was by then 48 years old and with a family of four children, 10 to 19 years old. As is well known, this emigration occurred just as the worst Stalin-era persecutions were about to unfold, and ended in prison camp and eventually death to many emigrants. The Gåsström's, however, escaped that fate. One factor might be that Viktor seems to have taken the initiative to quickly become intimate with Russian culture and by relocating soon to Moscow, away from other Finns who would soon disappear to the Soviet prison camps. We can probably here see one example of the exceptional capabilities of Viktor in dealing with difficult circumstances. In Moscow, Viktor tells us, he worked on the construction of the Pavilion for the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition during the years 1935–1937, which today still is a major amusement park and site for trade shows. Though we have a very limited base of certain facts, it seems that on the eve of the Soviet-German war in 1941, the Gåsström families were doing well under the circumstances. The war, however, meant evacuation for Viktor and his wife, during which she perished.

Viktor's children were by now grown up, and all four, 2 older brothers and 2 younger sisters, were recruited to the Red Army. The younger brother, Elis, was dropped deep into Finland as a so called "desant", which is a word derived from Russian for parachutist, and means a non-uniformed spy or saboteur. A compara-

tive case for an American readership could be that of the German soldiers wearing US Army uniforms, who during the Ardennes offensive penetrated the US front lines in special missions. Those captured were executed, as wearing uniforms of the opposing army meant forfeiting the rulings of the Geneva Conventions for conduct in warfare. This was also the fate of Elis Gåsström, who was captured by the Finnish police forces in 1942, wearing civilian clothes. His case is relatively well documented in Finnish WW II literature. The other Gåsström siblings survived the war.

After the war Viktor together with his oldest son Runar moved back to Finland, a very rare event, since in those times the Soviet Union was a very tightly closed society from the Western point of view. One assumption, since both eventually again returned to the Soviet Union, could be that they were rather closely associated, so to speak, with certain Soviet governmental agencies. But here I must just state that we do not have facts, and Viktor is silent on this point.

From now on Runar is perhaps the most significant person in the Gåsström family. Having just before the war obtained a physics degree from Moscow University, he joined the Physics Department of the University of Helsinki and worked mainly on the emerging use of radio-isotopes in medicine. While it is standard practice in modern hospitals, in the pioneering years there was much need for physicists in establishing the scientific-technical basis of the craft. Runar certainly was productive in his work, but for reasons unknown, he was unpopular in some circles. One persistent rumour claims that he would have been assisting when the prominent Italian physicist Bruno Pontecorvo defected to

the Soviet Union from Helsinki in 1950. Runar left Finland in 1954 for a researcher position in Holland, and after this was for a brief period assigned to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, Austria. He moved back with his family to the Soviet Union in 1960, and took a Research Director position in the Siberian city Novosibirsk, where large facilities for scientific research were being constructed, perhaps a little like the Texan universities arose from empty plains to world class institutions with oil money.

Viktor also returned to the Soviet Union, to Runar's family, in the early 60s, when he was already approaching the age of 80. He passed away in 1969 and is buried in Novosibirsk. Runar soon after moved to Kaliningrad at the Baltic Sea, where he passed away in 1999 as a retired professor of physics. The last of Viktor's children passed away in 2012. He has grandchildren in both Russia and Finland.

Let us return to the beginning of these events, which unfolded in the USA, and take a closer look at them. It may sound strange, that someone from what many Americans see as quasi-socialist Europe, moves to the USA, and once there becomes a convinced socialist. But in fact, socialist movements were vigorous and growing in turn of the century America, though they never came even close to obtaining the same level of electoral support as in many western European countries. The mother tongue of Viktor was Swedish, but he was also fluent in Finnish, and is likely to have quite quickly gained fluency in English as well. This means that in New York he could have been active in Finnish socialist circles as well as in the Swedish/Scandinavian. Viktor says himself that he was a member of the Finnish Socialist Club of New York, and was along in founding in 1910 the Scandinavian Socialist Club (or Society) of New York. Moreover, he writes that the club grew to have over 100 members, and that it

rented localities at Proctor's Theatre on 125th Street. This building was demolished in the 1980s. Important reading for Viktor was the "Svenska Socialisten", which was a leading socialist Swedish language newspaper among Scandinavian immigrants in the USA. The paper was published from Chicago, which was another hub for Scandinavian immigrants with socialist convictions. It is likely that Viktor spent some time here, since he writes that in Chicago he took evening courses at an "International School of Architecture."

At the more joyous evening gatherings of the Scandinavian Socialist Club, Viktor played the piano and met the immigrant Jenny Wilen from Helsinki. They married in 1913 at the Finnish Seamen's Church. At that point it would certainly have seemed absurd to them that their common journey, after having parented 4 children, would end in harsh conditions in Siberia in 1942, upon the death of Jenny, as refugees from Moscow fleeing the German Army. Their first child, Runar, was born in 1914. Elis, also mentioned above, was born in Chicago in 1916.

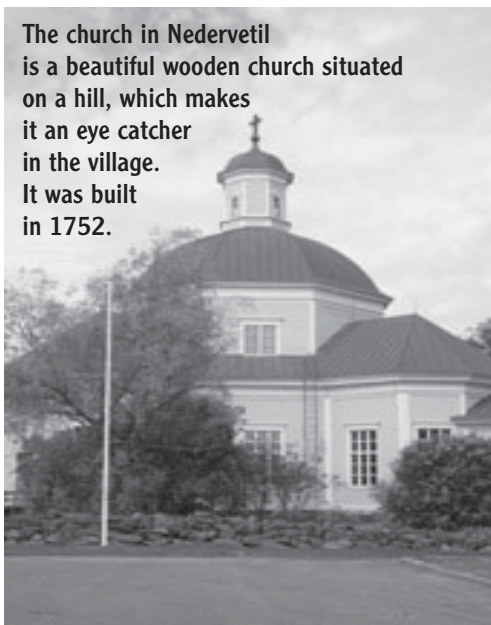
The socialist October Revolution in Russia, led by Lenin, took place on November 7, 1917. A little less known is that it was preceded

the same year by the so called February Revolution that toppled the Czar from power. A lesser consequence was that it prompted Viktor to move with family back to Finland. Viktor tells that the new government in Russia offered such immigrants from the Russian empire (of which Finland was still part of), who were active followers of the socialist movement, a free journey back to their homeland. Viktor writes that he discussed the proposition with a "Russian doctor", who predicted that a second revolution would take place and that Viktor should pick up on the chance to return. Viktor did so, and thus left the USA to pursue a socialist dream, that probably realized itself in a nastier form than he expected.

The early years of Viktor in the USA are the root cause for the Gåsström family saga, since it is clear that it was there that Viktor became a convinced socialist, and that this led to all that followed. Viktor was throughout his life a very outspoken and vivid personality and had lots of spare energy to put into society activities. Therefore it is likely that traces of Viktor's activity can be found in archives and perhaps in letters from the pre-WWI era in New York and Chicago. It is also very conceivable that the life path of Viktor has crossed with many persons, whose descendants today do genealogical research on these people. Especially, it is my hope that this article would be read by someone who happens to know in detail what Finnish and Scandinavian socialist activities there were in the New York and Chicago areas in the period before and around World War I. But anyone who has information relevant to the still a little mysterious topic of Viktor Gåsström is encouraged to get in touch with the author.

Editor's Note: If you have any information you would like to share with Markus, send it to your editors. Our addresses are on page 2 of this issue. We will forward it to Markus.

The church in Nedervetil is a beautiful wooden church situated on a hill, which makes it an eye catcher in the village. It was built in 1752.




THE LEADING STAR


Dale & Mary Lou Hjort
7682 Tracy Lane
La Palma, CA 90623-1501




Address Service Requested



*To all Runeberg members both
past and present:
Vancouver's Runeberg Social
Club (formerly Runeberg Lodge
#124 – Vancouver BC)
Wishes one and all a*
**VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY AND
PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!**



**God Jul, Hauskaa Joulua
and Merry Christmas to
all of our friends from the
members of
New Haven Lodge.**



**We wish everyone a very
Merry Christmas
and a most
Happy and Joyous New Year!**
Dale and Mary Lou Hjort

**To the *Leading Star*
The crew at the *Finnish American
Reporter* wishes you a
*Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year.***

**Hauskaa Joulua
Jim & Dave**

