

## **Everyday reading cultures of Finnish immigrant communities**

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### **Abstract:**

The article is based on our fieldwork among Finnish immigrant communities in Australia, Canada and the United States. Reading was highly valued, and in addition to publications brought and sent from Finland, Finnish communities were active publishers of books, newspapers and documents and maintained libraries. Today many of these activities take place in different forms on the Internet, blogs, Facebook and other social media and websites. For many, Finnish books and other forms of print continue to be cherished artefacts, although they no longer understand Finnish.

In this article we focus on some specific issues we have encountered while studying the reading cultures of Finnish immigrant communities in North America and Australia. Our research material consists of interviews conducted among people of Finnish ancestry, life writings and other archival records as well as online and offline publications produced and maintained by these communities. We see that the study of immigrant reading cultures requires the applying of mixed methods: interviewing, the narrative analysis of various types of 'memory texts', participant observation, Internet and book ethnography and visual documentation. In immigrant communities fieldwork is often highly interactive, because the researcher is also expected to act as translator and interpreter of documents related to family and community history, which the members of the community themselves can no longer understand.

**Keywords:** Finnish immigration, immigrant communities, reading, ethnography, internet

In this article we focus on some distinctive features we have encountered studying the reading cultures of three generations of Finnish immigrant communities in North America and Australia. Although these Finnish immigrant communities resemble each other in many ways, they also differ in several important aspects. Migration from Finland to North America began earlier and was massive compared to migration to Australia. From the 1860s to 1920s, over 350,000 Finns immigrated to North America. After the United States restricted immigration in the 1920s, about 40,000 Finns headed for Canada and some 24,000 to Australia. It is estimated that in the United States there are now over 700,000 people with Finnish ancestry and about 30,000 people in Australia (Institute of Migration, Statistics). As a result, in the United States and Canada there are still local communities which can be defined as Finnish, whereas in Australia, where local Finnish communities have been scarcer than in North America all along, there are no close-knit communities left.

Reading was highly valued among Finnish immigrants, and in addition to publications brought and sent from Finland, Finnish communities maintained libraries and were active publishers of books, newspapers and documents. Today many of these activities take place in different forms on the Internet, blogs, Facebook and other social media and websites. Given this range of texts and activities we focus in this article on what can be considered to be an oral-literary tradition. The term *oral-literary tradition* emphasizes the interplay of orality and literacy (Salmi-Niklander 2002; 2004, 43–45), and therefore describes the nature of the materials used in this article as a whole. While many in the Finnish communities can no longer read or speak Finnish, they continue to cherish books and other print formats as artefacts. Digital tools, like Google Translate and photo book software, have proved important means for overcoming language barriers, providing access to the literary heritage of earlier generations and sharing it with others. Because our aim is to examine everyday reading and writing cultures, we cannot focus only on reading, but must also examine various other activities related to reading.

The article is based on our fieldwork among Finnish immigrant communities in Canada, the United States and Australia. Although we speak of Finnish communities, we acknowledge the fact that not all people of Finnish ancestry identify themselves as Finnish or as members of these communities (c.f. Brusa & Cola 2014, 110–111). Nonetheless those who did take part in our studies were more or less interested in their Finnish roots and were often in connection with other Finns or with Finnish societies and organisations. Our role as Finnish scholars was mainly greeted with satisfaction. We were expected to have a shared understanding of what is to be Finnish and also to appreciate Finnish culture.

We believe that the study of immigrant reading cultures requires the application of mixed methods: interviewing, the narrative analysis of various types of 'memory texts', as well as participant observation, Internet ethnography and visual documentation. Therefore, our research material consists of interviews conducted among people of Finnish ancestry, life writings and other archival records as well as online and offline publications produced and maintained by members of these communities. However, many of the issues we examine in this article were not dealt with in the actual interviews, but they came up during

our fieldwork. We were shown cherished books and visited Finnish halls and other heritage centres. In immigrant communities, fieldwork is often highly interactive, because the researcher is also expected to act as translator and interpreter of documents related to family and community history, which the members of the community themselves can no longer understand.

The authors' research has focused on different geographical locations and slightly different subjects. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has done long-term research on oral-literary traditions, especially hand-written newspapers in Finnish-Canadian and Finnish-American communities. Her case studies are two relatively small Finnish immigrant communities: the mining community of Timmins and South Porcupine in Northern Ontario, and the Finnish community of Rockport and Lanesville (a village in the city of Gloucester) on Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Anne Heimo has studied people of Finnish ancestry in Australia since 2011. At first, she was interested in memories of migration, but during her research process, began to also examine how the Finnish-Australians have explored and presented their own history. In addition to doing fieldwork mostly among first- and second-generation Finns living in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra, she has done a case study and explored the oral-literary tradition of early Finnish settlers in Australia.

Our theoretical and methodological background is related to oral history research and the study of self-educated writers and vernacular literacies, which has been revived in Finland and other Nordic countries during the past decade (see, e.g. Kuismin & Driscoll 2013; Edlund, Ashplant & Kuismin 2016). The Finnish language was developed into a literary language during the nineteenth century, and the research and collection of oral tradition have had a vital importance for the development of Finnish literature. Therefore, the interaction of oral and literary culture has been stronger than in countries with longer literary tradition. (See Laine & Salmi-Niklander 2018)

In Finland, oral history research has a vital connection with the study of vernacular literacy. Oral history research in Finland includes the use of both oral and written materials (see Heimo 2016a) and can therefore also be applied to the study of oral-literary tradition. We approach these research materials as *histories of the self*, which can all be used to '... reconstruct the past through the words and perspectives of individuals who lived through it', as Penny Summerfield has pointed out (Summerfield 2019, 4). Oral history methodology has also been applied to the study of everyday reading experiences and material and social aspects of reading. (Salmi-Niklander, Kaarninen & Hytönen 2018) These methodological orientations provide opportunities to place immigrant book culture into a wider historical context.

### **Early Finnish migration to North America and Australia**

Mass migration to North America began in the 1860s. By 1924 nearly 400,000 Finns had immigrated to the United States (Kero 2014, 42–43). At this stage, immigration to Australia was all but non-existent. From 1901 to 1920, only 133 people emigrated to Australia from Finland, and some years, no Finns moved to Australia. It was only in the 1920s, when the

United States applied a restrictive quota, that Australia began to attract Finnish migrants. About two thousand Finns, mainly men, travelled to Australia. (Koivukangas 1986, 200; Institute of Migration, Statistics) In the United States, Finns were not considered to be as 'white' as Swedes or Norwegians (Kivisto & Leinonen 2014; Huhta 2017, 91–99), but in Australia the situation was the opposite. Due to the White Australia Policy, Finns and other Nordic and Baltic people were favoured over many other Europeans, especially those originating from Eastern or Southern Europe. To support migration from these countries, Australia created the Assisted Passage Scheme. This economic support resulted in a new wave of migration from Finland to Australia from the late 1950s until the early 1970s. (Jupp 2007, 11–12)

Many of those who left Finland at the turn of the twentieth century were active socialists who wanted to free themselves from czarist rule. In North America, this led to the radicalization of many Finnish communities and Finns became major figures in left-wing politics and trade unions and were known as the notorious 'Red Finns'. (See e.g. Kaunonen & Goings 2013, 49–51; Kostainen 2014, 131–135; Huhta 2017, 9) Despite a few attempts to become politically active, the Finns in Australia chose another path and took a non-party stance in the mid-1920s. Most of the Finns who migrated to Australia in the early years of the 20th century were labourers and farmers and were not politically active. They were more interested in finding work and earning money in the hope of returning home to Finland than getting politically organized. (Koivukangas 1986, 308–311)

### **Generations of Finnish immigrant book culture in North America**

Developing a book culture of their own is one survival strategy for immigrant groups in a new, multilingual and multicultural environment, to maintain their own language and culture and to integrate into the new country and new culture. The study of immigrant book culture is a new and emerging field. (See e.g. Dalbello 2016) However, we can presume that the basic goals of Finnish immigrant book culture have been shared by several immigrant groups, even though they have different cultural backgrounds and literacy practices. Firstly, the immigrants wanted to maintain their contacts with Finland, keep up their language and culture and transmit them to their children. Secondly, they needed to communicate with each other in distant immigrant communities. Thirdly, they wanted to reflect the immigrant experience.

In her research, Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has outlined the generations of Finnish immigrant book culture in North America. The primary Finnish settlers brought several forms of oral-literary traditions and practices of reading, writing and publishing with them to the new country. Since then, some 300 Finnish newspapers have been published in the United States. Many of these newspapers only survived for a short time and were not widely distributed. (Huhta 2017, 29–30)

About one-quarter of the Finnish-language newspapers were more or less affiliated to the socialist or labour movement. (Huhta 2017, 29–30) Hancock in Northern Michigan was the centre of Finnish publishing activity in North America, and the first Finnish

newspapers were published there from the 1870s. Local presses functioned in many other cities: e.g., Fitchburg, Massachusetts and Port Arthur, Ontario. Finnish publishing companies also published literary periodicals and books by Finnish-American authors. (Pilli 1982.)

However, a rich literary culture flourished outside the printed presses and publishing companies. This alternative book culture has been forgotten to a large extent, and a large portion of these materials have vanished. Among these alternative practices were hand-written newspapers, broadsheets [*arkkiveisut*] and songbooks. Hand-written newspapers were published by reading them out aloud at meetings and social gatherings. News about extraordinary events were mediated in the form of broadsheet ballads and printed and manuscript songbooks (Rantanen 2016; 2017). All these practices included both oral and written communication, since texts were written to be performed orally. These traditions and practices were known in Finland, but they gained new meanings in immigrant communities. Rather than being marginal phenomena, these oral-literary practices can be seen as innovative and hybrid genres, which completed the print culture in immigrant communities. These hybrid genres provided opportunities for the use of vernacular language forms and ‘Finglish’, a hybrid language with non-standard orthography and grammar, with English spellings in a Finnish manner, and expressions from Finnish dialects. (Virtaranta et al. 1993)

Hand-written newspapers were a common practice among Finnish-Canadian immigrants, who have called them ‘nyrkilehti’ [‘fist press’]. (Lindström-Best 1982; Salmi-Niklander 1997; 1998) The first Finnish-Canadian hand-written newspapers were edited by Finnish immigrants in Toronto and British Columbia at the beginning of the twentieth century. The editors had probably learned this practice in Finland, since hand-written newspapers were a common tradition in student societies and popular movements during the last few decades of the nineteenth century (Salmi-Niklander 2013a; 2013b).

*Ruoskija* [*The Flogger*] was a hand-written newspaper edited by the Finnish Socialist Society in the mining town of Timmins (Northern Ontario) between 1912 and 1917. This is the largest collection of its kind in Canada, comprising about 300 folio-sized pages. The materials are preserved in the collections of the Finnish Organization of Canada at the Archives of Canada in Ottawa. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander spent three months in Canada in 1993, exploring the archives in Ottawa and Toronto and undertaking interviews in Timmins and South Porcupine. (Salmi-Niklander 1997; 1998; 2002). In 2012, she discovered the huge archival collections from Rockport and, Massachusetts in Finnish-American Heritage Center at Hancock. There were 300 archival boxes including church records, minutes, and the archives of the local temperance societies. Especially significant are the archives of the temperance society *Walon Leimu* [Glow of Light], including a hand-written newspaper *Walotar* [*Lady of Light*] 1903–1925. This unique collection runs to 1200 pages edited between 1903 and 1925, making it one of the largest and the most complete preserved collections of hand-written newspapers in the Finnish language. The Cape Ann archives were transported to Hancock in 2009. Before that, most of them had been preserved in the basement of the St. Paul Lutheran Church in Lanesville or in private homes.

Both *Ruoskija* and *Walotar* are unique collections, because the writers openly reflect the immigrant experience and the often-rough everyday life in immigrant communities, using nonstandard language and ‘Finglish’. These texts are difficult to interpret and even more difficult to translate. These ‘newspapers’ rather resemble collective diaries or commonplace books, as each issue was most often published as a single copy. However, the titles, dates and names of the editors are given. Instead of being read individually by the members of the community, single issues were read out aloud at meetings and social evenings. (Salmi-Niklander 2017)

In addition to hand-written newspapers and widely-distributed printed immigrant papers, many immigrant communities had small local presses which published short-lived local newspapers. One example is ‘a spiritual periodical’, *Lanesvillen Sanomat* [*News from Lanesville*]. A single issue (No 6, 1891) has been preserved at the Finnish American Heritage Center.

Many Finnish self-taught poets and songwriters published and distributed their texts as broadsheets printed by local or self-made presses in immigrant communities. Probably the best-known of them was Eelu Kiviranta (1873–1953). He was born in a lodger family in Oulainen in North-Western Finland and moved to Northern Michigan in 1901. The family moved between different communities in Northern Michigan. Eelu obtained a hand press, printed small leaflets of his poems and distributed them in Finnish communities. This was a substantial source of income for the family, in addition to his farm and other occupations as a shoemaker, a masseur and traditional healer, a cupper. His hand press and a large collection of his poems have been preserved at the Finnish American Heritage Center. A collection of Eelu Kiviranta’s poems with English translations was subsequently published by his granddaughter Lillian Lehto (Kiviranta & Lehto 2010), who later discovered that Eelu Kiviranta had published broadsheets in Finland and re-adopted this practice on arriving in the immigrant community.

Temperance societies and socialist clubs established local libraries, which ordered books from Finland. The temperance society *Walon Leimu* in Rockport, Massachusetts, established its own library in 1891, and library records up to 1948 have been preserved. The society purchased many books from Finland, especially on Finnish history and fiction.

For the children of the first generation of immigrants, internal communication and integration to the new society became more important than maintaining Finnish heritage and contacts. Most of the children of Finnish immigrant families were schooled in English and lived in a multilingual environment, even if Finnish was their first language at home. Societies and local Finnish Lutheran congregations supported the reading and writing skills in Finnish in Sunday schools and confirmation classes.

In the second immigrant generation, the variety of genres and practices became narrower, and the activities focused on Finnish newspapers. Little by little, the Finnish newspapers and periodicals have changed to publishing in English, while maintaining their Finnish heritage and content, publishing material on Finnish culture and news from Finland. In Canada, the Finnish language survived longer, because the latest wave of immigrants

arrived in the 1950s. In Hancock, Michigan, Finnish language and heritage has been maintained by Finlandia University and the Finnish American Heritage Center.

### **Generations of Finnish book cultures in Australia**

The first Finnish settlement in Australia was founded at the turn of the twentieth century, when some 200 Finns migrated to Queensland, which was at the time actively recruiting migrants from Scandinavia. Queensland was in desperate need of a work force and ‘sturdy and hardworking Finn agriculturalists’ were especially welcomed. (*The Sydney Mail* 14.10.1899). Among these newcomers were Matti Kurikka and 78 of his followers. Kurikka’s intention was to establish a socialist utopia in Queensland. However, he failed in his plans, and only ten months after arrival, Kurikka continued his journey to Canada. (Niitemaa 1971, 164–177; Koivukangas 1986, 91–93)

Several of Kurikka’s followers decided to remain in Queensland and moved to Image Flats, Nambour, where a few Finnish families had begun to farm sugar cane a few years before. This small community was named Finbury and consisted of about 70 Finns of which half were children. In 1902 Kurikka’s supporters suggested that the community should have a society of its own and founded *Asiainedustusseura Erakko* [The Hermit Society for the Promotion of Affairs]. (Niitemaa 1971, 164–177; Koivukangas 1986, 93–95, 302–308) The main purpose of the society was to support the well-being of its members in various ways. The promotion of Finnish oral-literary culture was amongst the society’s priorities. The society had its own library, arranged social gatherings with poem readings and plays and published a hand-written newspaper *Orpo* [*Orphan*]. All the members of the society were invited to contribute to the newspaper and though the editors, who sometimes complained about the low quality of the original pieces, all texts were copied and published without editing in *Orpo*. Overall, 26 numbers and one special Christmas album, amounting to more than 400 hand-written pages, were published between 1902 and 1904. (Heimo 2016b)

The 1918 Finnish Civil War caused political tensions in the Finnish immigrant communities. In the early 1920s tens of former ‘Whites’ chose to migrate to Northern Queensland instead of North America, where many Finnish-Americans were sympathetic to the ‘Reds’. Most of these men were single, came from the rural area of Ostrobothnia in Finland and planned to work on sugar cane farms for a few years in order to save money to buy their own farm in Finland (Koivukangas 1986, 118–125). A few of these immigrants ended up staying in Australia and one of them in particular, Nestori Karhula, played a central role in depoliticising Finnish societies and organisations in Australia. (Koivukangas 1986, 310)

The next significant Finnish community was established in the remote mining town of Mt. Isa. The first Finns arrived there in the 1920s and in the town’s heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, over a thousand Finns lived there. (Häkkinen 2005, 19–21) The largest cities, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide as well as Canberra, have also attracted Finns by the hundreds, but because many of those who migrated to Australia in the 1950s to 1970s were unskilled workers, many of them moved around the country looking for work where ever it

could be found. This meant that though Finnish societies were established all around the country, and especially in the cities and larger towns, Finnish communities never became as numerous as they did in North America.

Immigrant newspapers offer their readers an important means of keeping up with happenings in their old home country, but also of connecting with their fellow countrymen in their new home country. However, compared to North America, the situation was quite different in Australia, where only two Finnish-language newspapers have been published. The *Suomi-Newspaper-Suomi-lehti* was established by the Finnish seamen's mission in Melbourne in 1926. *Finlandia News* was established in 1977 in Brisbane as an alternative for the *Suomi-Newspaper-Suomi-lehti*, which was considered too conservative, but was shut down in 2004. Today the *Suomi-Newspaper-Suomi-lehti* continues to be published and is one of the oldest Finnish language newspapers published outside Finland. The newspaper resembles *Orpo* in many ways. It is a collective enterprise of the Finnish community scattered around Australia. Like *Orpo* it consists of news, letters, prose, poems, humorous stories, debates and critiques, most of which are written by members of the community and only a few by the editor-in-chief, and like *Orpo* it also re-publishes news from other sources.

The *Suomi-Newspaper-Suomi-lehti* has been and still is especially significant for many Finnish immigrants living around Australia, and especially those first-generation Finns, who have maintained strong Finnish language skills or those who never gained sufficient language skills in English (Korhonen 2017, 40–41; see also Koivukangas 1986, 287–289; Baron 2000, 4–6; Lammervo 2009, 12–13, 19). Because many of the first-generation never became fluent in English, they often chose to work and socialize only with other Finns, which resulted in rather tight-knit Finnish communities (Baron 2000, 10–11), although they did not necessarily have daily face-to-face contacts with each other. Senja Baron (2000) even cites one of her interviewees in the title of her study on post-war Finnish immigrants in Melbourne: 'The only thing that spoke English was the radio'. Because so many of the first-generation were reluctant to speak English, Finnish societies, Finnish halls and the Finnish church have meant a great deal to them. The societies and the vicarages maintained libraries and organized a range of events from dances to poetry readings, humorous plays and especially sports. (Baron 2000, 12) Today most of these halls and vicarages no longer exist, because the second generation no longer need them in the same way their parents did.

Migrating to the other side of the world inspired Finns to write about their experiences. Nearly all these memoirs by first-generation Finnish immigrants were written in Finnish and directed to the Finnish community and family members in Australia and Finland. However, in her study of a hundred or so Finnish-Australian authors, Marja-Liisa Punta-Saastamoinen (2010, 283–284) states that Finnish-Australian literacy has aroused little interest, and only a few of the authors are even known to the wider community of Finnish readers in Australia. In recent decades, an increasing number of second and third generation Finnish-Australians have begun to make known the experiences of individual



Finns and the Finnish community as a whole to the descendants of Finnish immigrants and the wider Australian audience, and for this reason have begun to publish in English.



Kyllikki and Paavo Mantylä's 'home altar' consists of a display of family photos, books and memorabilia from Finland. (Photo: Anne Heimo)

Migration history and the experiences of immigrants have been widely displayed in Australian museums since the 1980s. (Wilton 2009; Henrich 2013) However, the memories of Finnish migrants are missing from these exhibitions. Nor has the Finnish community itself actively promoted its culture and heritage for the wider public in Australia. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the community is quite small and well-integrated and therefore does not attract much attention in Australian society. Secondly, Finnish organisations have been keener to engage in sports and recreational activities than to exhibit their culture. (Baron 2000, 8) When asked about this, many Finns explained to Anne Heimo, that they are too timid and too modest.

### **'Book ethnography' - two case studies**

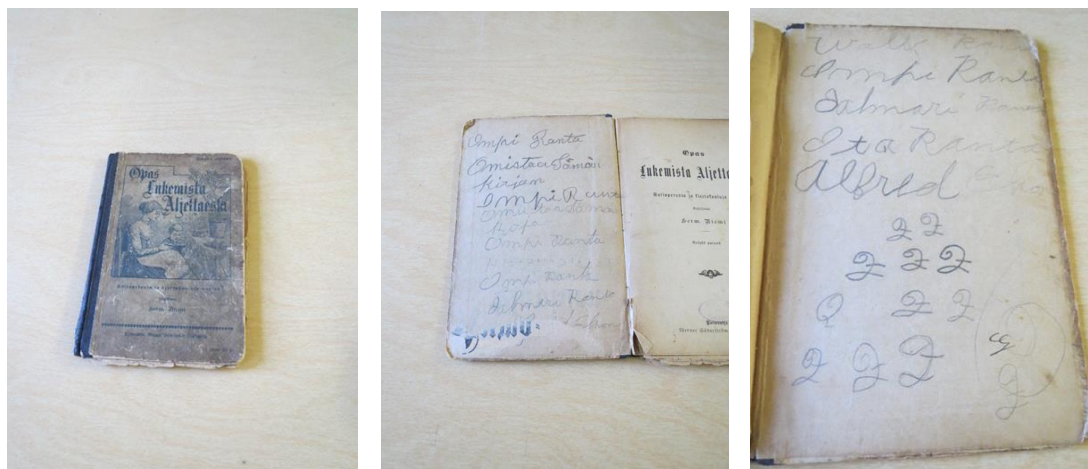
For the third generation of Finnish immigrants, Finnish books and other forms of print are a part of cultural and material heritage. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander developed the methodology of 'book ethnography' during her fieldwork in Rockport and Lanesville 2013–2016. 'Book ethnography' means documentation of personal, family and community heritage attached to books and other printed or manuscript materials. The heritage aspect makes 'book ethnography' distinct from 'media ethnography', which is targeted at everyday uses of media (see, e.g. Cola & Brusa 2014, 115–117). The term 'book' can include a range of printed or manuscript publications or documents, which carry individual memories and family and community history.

The Finnish community on Cape Ann was established in the 1880s, when Finnish immigrants were recruited to work in the stone quarries. Compared to many other Finnish communities in North America, Rockport and Lanesville have been relatively stable and well-preserved. In Timmins and South Porcupine, as in many other immigrant communities, the local history is affected by strikes, strong political controversies and a large presence of unmarried men, 'pätsärikänki' ['bachelor gang']. (Salmi-Niklander 1997; 1998; 2002). The Finnish immigrant men in Rockport and Lanesville could meet young Finnish women working in Boston and other nearby bigger cities, get married and raise families. Most Finnish families stayed in the region after the granite quarries were suddenly closed in 1929, and they closely networked with each other through intermarriage. The members of the Finnish community saw their heritage as being of considerable value, which is one reason why the archival sources have been well-preserved. Even though during the first decades of the twentieth century there were strong political controversies between the socialists and factions of the temperance movement within the Finnish community, they did not split the community in the same way as they did in many other Finnish communities in North America. In the meetings with members of Finnish immigrant families, Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has provided information on the archival sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many people participating in these meetings have recognized their family members in the early manuscript sources. This indicates that Rockport and Lanesville have been relatively stable immigrant communities, and most Finnish families have stayed in the region for more than 100 years.

For many of the third-generation American-Finns in Rockport and Lanesville, Finnish was the first and only language before school age, but now they hardly remember the nursery rhymes they learnt from their grandparents. Books that their parents or grandparents brought or received from Finland are valued as material objects, and their illustrations and inscriptions are more important than the actual content, which members of the third generation often cannot understand. 'Book ethnography' places the Finnish researcher in the role of an interpreter. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has translated letters, titles and inscriptions into English for people with Finnish family background at several social events. These experiences have promoted to the first pilot studies on 'book ethnography'. These two case studies highlight reading cultures of different immigrant generations and how the heritage of these reading cultures has been preserved and maintained.

The following two case studies of 'book ethnography' were documented during Kirsti Salmi-Niklander's latest visit to Rockport and Lanesville in May 2016. The first case study is related with a simple and worn-out primary reader for children in home-education and ambulatory schools, printed in Finland in 1899 and been in the possession of the immigrant Ranta family in Rockport. Elana Brink (née Pistemaa), who is Kirsti Salmi-Niklander's main contact person in Rockport, had found this book at the annual yard sale of St Paul Lutheran Church and recognized in the inscriptions that it belonged to the Ranta family. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander was permitted to document this book while it was returned to the Ranta family,

and later (2017) Robert Ranta sent detailed information about the inscriptions and their relationship to family members.



Finnish primary reader which belongs to the Ranta family. (Photos: Kirsti Salmi-Niklander 10.5.2016)

**Inscriptions on the front and back cover of the primary reader. [Information on the people given by Robert Ranta.]**

**Inside front cover:**

- Impi Ranta [b. Rockport 1907, d. 1917] omistaa tämän kirjan [owns this book]
- Jalmari Ranta [b. Rockport 1909]
- Alfred [b. Rockport 1902]

**Inside back cover:**

- Walle Ranta [Father, moved to Rockport 1897 from Alavus, Finland, with his wife Ida Raiski Ranta and children Elias, Ida Mary and Hilda]
- Impi Ranta [b. Rockport 1907, d. 1917]
- Jalmari Ranta [Hjalmar, b. Rockport 1909]
- Ita [Ida Mary] Ranta [b. 1890 in Alavus, Finland]
- Alfred [b. Rockport 1902]

Finnish primary readers and textbooks were important for families in Finnish language teaching, especially as home teaching was quite common in Finland until the nineteenth century. The church tested the basic reading skills before young people could pass the confirmation school test, but primary schools were established in the countryside towards the end of the nineteenth century, becoming compulsory in 1921. Most Finnish immigrants had therefore learned their basic reading and writing skills at home or in the so-called ambulatory schools, which were set up in larger farmhouses or vicarages for a few weeks at a time (Laine & Salmi-Niklander 2017). Comparing the family historical data and the bibliographical information it is evident that the book had been sent to the Ranta family (or

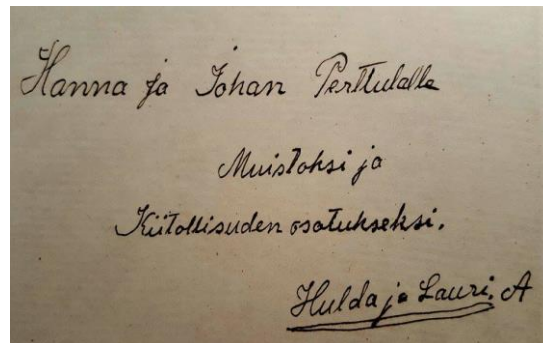
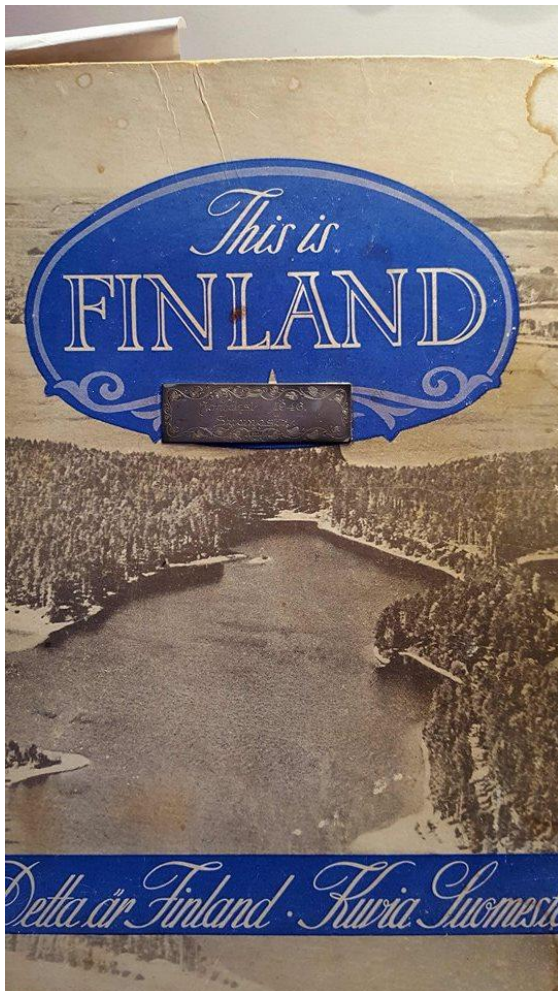
transported with some other immigrants) as it was printed in 1899, and the family had migrated to the United States two years earlier.

The second example of ‘book ethnography’ is based on the discussions with Elana Brink, and in an interview in May 2016. In the interview, Kirsti Salmi-Niklander and Elana Brink go through some books which Finnish relatives had sent to her family and which she had enthusiastically read as a child: to such an extent that some of these books are now well worn and some pages are missing. The book collection includes a sauna guide in Finnish from 1944, and three copies of the annual illustrated volume *Suomi Kuvina* [Finland in Pictures, published from 1945 to 1947]. The copy of *Suomi Kuvina* 1945 had been sent by Finnish relatives, and Elana Brink read it as a child so intensely that it was one of those showing much wear. Two other copies she had got from her neighbour and her husband, who had found them at the Book Barn of Rockport Transfer Station and at the attic of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Lanesville. This indicates that many copies of this book had circulated among the Finns on Cape Ann. Contents of these editions were similar, but they were updated each year. To her surprise, Elana Brink found a photograph of her maternal cousin, Miss Irja Alho in both of these editions, after she had been elected Miss Finland in 1945.



Irja Alho, Miss Finland 1945, pictured in the illustrated volume *Suomi Kuvina* 1946.  
(Photo: Kirsti Salmi-Niklander 11.5.2016)

One of the illustrated volumes on Finland *This is Finland – Detta är Finland – Suomi kuvina* (1946, new editions 1947–1948) was specially dedicated to Finnish friends in North America and Scandinavia as an expression of gratitude. Elana Brink’s grandparents Hanna and Johan Perttula received also this book from their Finnish relatives.



The illustrated volume *This is Finland* was sent to Elana Brink’s grandparents Hanna and Johan Perttula in Christmas 1946 by their Finnish relatives Hulda and Lauri Alho. The book has an engraved silver inset on the cover, and an inscription ‘as a memory and as an expression of gratitude’. (Photos: Elana Brink)

The most memorable Finnish book for Elana Brink is an illustrated volume on the Finnish Winter War 1939–1940. This book was also sent to her family by their Finnish relatives. One of the photographs still positively affects her, and epitomizes for her the term ‘sisu’ (guts and determination) and the Finnish mentality:

A Finnish woman with her hair tied up in a bun, and with a sharp chin, smoking a pipe, she is bent over the ruins of her burnt house looking for nails. Every time I see it, it breaks my heart. To me it’s *sisu*, but it makes me cry.



Photographs in the illustrated volume *Ratkaisun vuodet* (1942).  
(Photo: Kirsti Salmi-Niklander 11.5.2016)

This book had also been read so intensely that the title page has vanished. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander discovered the original title during a bibliographical search. *Ratkaisun vuodet. Kuvakertomus Suomen ratkaisun päivistä* [The Decisive Years. An illustrated story of the decisive days of Finland] edited by Pekka Kyytinen, was published in 1942, when the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union (1941–1944) was going on. The photographs had subtitles in Finnish, Swedish and English, so the book had been intended both for Finnish and international readers.

Finnish-Americans provided support to Finland during the Winter War. Hundreds of Finnish expatriates from Canada and the United States participated in the Winter War as volunteers, and former president Herbert Hoover founded the Finnish Relief Fund, which raised about \$2.5 million to support Finland with foodstuffs. (Citino 2014; The Great Humanitarian, Herbert Hoover's Food Relief Efforts, Finland) 'Support packages' were produced in local Finnish communities. In Rockport and Lanesville, ladies knitted blue-and-white mittens especially suitable for firing a gun. An example of these has been preserved in Fred Peterson's family heritage collection in Rockport.

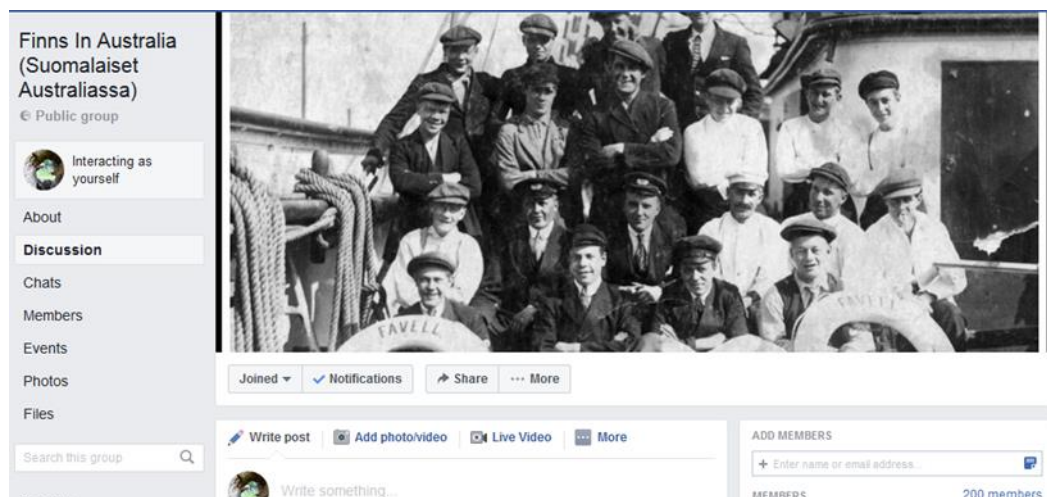


Blue-and-white mittens were knitted by women in Rockport and Lanesville to support the Finnish army during the Winter War. These mittens are included in Fred Petersons' family heritage collection. (Photo: Kirsti Salmi-Niklander 30.10.2014)

These examples of 'book ethnography' reveal that the exchange of books between Finland and immigrant communities in Canada and the United States remained an important way of keeping up family ties for several decades and for at least three generations. The Second World War, especially the Winter War 1939–1940 revitalized family ties and the immigrant families' interest in Finland. This resulted in the readership of illustrated volumes with English subtitles on the war experiences and Finnish post-war life in immigrant communities.

### **Contemporary online everyday reading and writing cultures**

During the last two decades, digital technology has revolutionized the reading and writing cultures of migrants. Printed publications like books and newspapers continue to be important for immigrants and the older generation, but the impact of digital technology, and especially the Internet, must be examined if we want to have a wider understanding of contemporary reading and writing cultures. During her fieldwork, Anne Heimo noticed that many Finnish-born elderly interviewees daily checked the weather conditions of their former hometown 'kompuutterilla' ['on the computer'], even if they otherwise had little interest in current-day Finland or the computer. Those with more advanced IT skills used the Internet and social media primarily to connect with family members and friends, but also to search for their roots and to celebrate their heritage. For her studies on everyday memory-making and history-making practises Anne Heimo (see e.g. 2017) has followed several Facebook groups of Finnish immigrants and people with Finnish ancestry in Australia and the United States. While in the United States, there are numerous local and transnational groups dedicated to the history and the heritage of Finnish-Americans, it is only recently in Australia that an online group been created for this purpose.



Finns in Australia (Suomalaiset Australiassa) created in January 2018 is one of the first Facebook groups for people with Finnish ancestry in Australia. (*Screenshot: Anne Heimo 1.1.2019*)

At the same time, these sites are important for the sharing of information. People post documents, letters and other items in languages they no longer understand and ask others to help them to translate these. Simultaneously, knowledge about history and culture is shared. People are advised where to find more information and what books about the topic they might find interesting. In 2015 one of the admins of one of these Facebook groups advised where to find more information about Finns in the United States:

A good resource for digitized books is the HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://www.hathitrust.org/>. Do a search on Finnish-Americans and you will find gems. One in particular is *Who's Who among Finnish-Americans*; a biographical directory of persons of Finnish descent who have made noteworthy contributions to the pattern of American life, published in 1949. Another gem is *Americanization of the Finnish people in Houghton County, Michigan* / by Clemens Niemi, published in 1921. Many, many others.

The Internet offers novel tools to overcome language barriers. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has noted the popularity of Google Translate among Finnish-Americans: the bilingual Facebook updates make it possible to follow the Finnish discussions and update forgotten language skills. Many third-generation Finnish immigrants remember by heart some Finnish songs or rhymes they have learned from their grandparents as children, and with Google it is possible to trace the original sources for these orally-transmitted texts.

The advantages and disadvantages of using Google Translate are also discussed in Facebook groups. In January 2017 one user posted: 'If I don't find a recipe for what I want to make in my Finnish cook book, I simply go to Google type in Fin or English, always get what I'm looking for. I then post it or write the recipe in to my book to leave for my children to

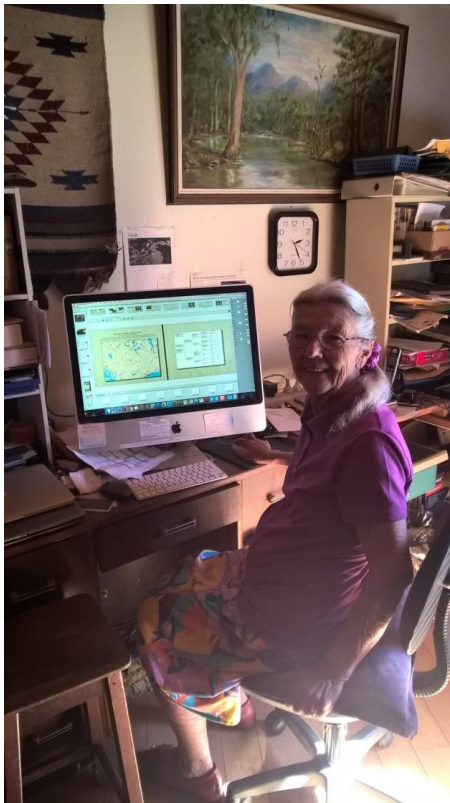


have. I love Google!' (Facebook, Finnish Cooking & Culture) In another Facebook group one user commented to an inquiry concerning alternatives to Google translator:

I use Google Language Tools (typing the text is tedious) but when the translation looks goofy, I pull out a Finnish-English dictionary. Given the roots of the words I can usually determine the meaning by context.

Sometimes when I could not determine the meaning of an entry, e.g., in my grandmother's Bible, I guessed at the subject by reverse search of English to Finnish. That got me the results I needed.

It's even harder to decipher old style fonts where the letters don't look like ours ... lots of reverse guessing and hours of pertinacity. Then I also incorporate online translations and Swedish sources.



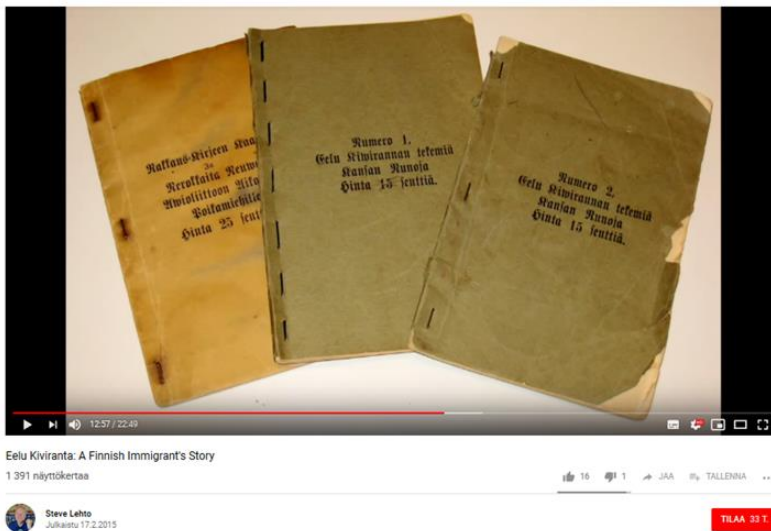
Both Esma Rigby's parents were Finnish. After publishing two books about the history of Finns in Australia, she now finds pleasure in publishing family histories using photo book software. (*Photos: Anne Heimo*)

Another novelty favoured by many immigrants interested in their family history is the use of photo book software. Many have found these to be an easy and cheap way to compile family stories with family photos, images of memorabilia and personal documents, like letters or family recipes into books.

These examples show the wide range of books from self-compiled books to family cookbooks and the Bible, websites, social media sites, online databases and digital tools that people have at hand today. These not only make the language of their forefathers accessible, they also help them to continue keeping the book culture of Finnish immigrants alive even when they no longer speak Finnish.

## Conclusions

The death of the Finnish culture, including Finnish book culture, among Finnish immigrant communities has been predicted for decades in Australia and for nearly for a century in North America. Many have believed that the loss of language will be the final straw. However, time has proved these predictions to be premature. Our case studies show that language is not necessarily needed to keep immigrant culture or even immigrant book culture alive. In North America, Finnish immigrant communities have actively preserved their cultural heritage, even though only a few immigrants of the third and fourth generations have maintained or revitalized Finnish language skills. In Australia, the situation is somewhat different. Finnish heritage is mainly preserved in the private sphere among family and friends and at times at gatherings of the Finnish community. Contrary to expectations, the internet has not destroyed local immigrant cultures, but has provided new means for the preservation and sharing of heritage. Today, immigrant communities are not necessarily based on locality and face-to-face connections. On the Internet people with a similar ethnic or genealogical background can connect with each other even when they live far from each other.



Today YouTube can be used to promote Finnish immigrant heritage. Steve Lehto has published a YouTube-video to promote his great-grandfather's, Eelu Kiviranta's, life and poems. (*Screenshot: Anne Heimo 1.1.2019*)

In our article we have shown how multi-dimensional immigrant book culture is, and its close connections with orality and materiality. Family and community oral histories are preserved in manuscript and printed texts, scrapbooks, notebooks and genealogical records. Now these publications can be archived and shared on the Internet. Books are not important for people only because of their content, but they are also important memorabilia. They inspire oral histories about family history and the local community. Ethnologist Anna Kajander (2018) has discussed the material aspects of books and reading, based on the writings of Finnish people participating in the life writing call 'My life as a reader'. (Kajander 2018, 40) In immigrant communities, Finnish books are material objects, which create and maintain emotional ties with Finnish culture both for the immigrants and to the future generations. Inscriptions and stories attached to books make them unique and irreplaceable objects. Many third-generation immigrants are worried about the preservation of this family heritage by the next generation.

In our article we have presented some of the challenges concerning the study of the multifaceted field of immigrant book cultures. Immigrant book cultures are ever-evolving and multi-sited, and therefore demand the use of mixed-methods. Individual researchers can document only parts of this widespread and rich phenomenon, but the problem of how this complex field can be documented as a whole is yet to be solved.

### **Biographical Notes:**

Anne Heimo is acting professor of Folklore Studies at the School of History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Turku. She is specialized in oral history research and everyday history and memory making practices and activities. She has done research among Finnish immigrant communities in Australia. Recently she has focused on how social media is used by people of Finnish ancestry to represent their history and cherish their immigrant heritage. Contact: [anheimo@utu.fi](mailto:anheimo@utu.fi).

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander is University Lecturer in Folklore Studies at Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki. She has published, supervised doctoral students and led research projects in the fields of oral history research, working-class culture and immigrant culture. Her long-term research has focused on hand-written newspapers as an alternative medium in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland and in Finnish immigrant communities in North America. Contact: [Kirsti.salmi-niklander@helsinki.fi](mailto:Kirsti.salmi-niklander@helsinki.fi).

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