

## An Invitation to Celebrate Thirty-Five Years of FAHS

by Anita Smiley



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In the Finnish language, there's a word called *sisu*. That *sisu* is alive and well at the Finnish American Heritage Society (FAHS), housed at the Finnish Hall in Canterbury, Connecticut. This Hall has been home to several organizations since it was built in 1924-1925, the latest of which was the Sampo Society, but the building has always been known as the Finnish Hall.

In 1986-1987, the Sampo Society membership was dwindling, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for members to raise sufficient funds to maintain the structure and pay the town taxes. There was a local organization interested in purchasing

the building. It was at that point that a group of people with Finnish heritage stepped in to oppose the sale of the hall, a property that had been built by Finns and had always been owned by Finnish groups. These people displayed their *sisu* by chanting "you can't sell" outside while negotiations were going on inside. The Finnish negotiators ultimately succeeded in purchasing the hall, and founded the Finnish American Heritage Society.

At its inception, the following people were elected to serve as officers from April 1987 to April 1988:

President: Hannu Makipuro

Vice President: Burton Jernstrom

Secretary: Anita Smiley

Treasurer: Eila Makipuro

Membership Secretary: Aili Galasyn

Trustees: Helmi Sipila, Pearl Schneider, and Marja-Leena Huhta



Hall addition from the hill-photo by Anita Smiley

We were underway, starting as a fledgling organization in debt for the accumulated town taxes. With income from dues and a fundraiser, the payment was made. Not long after, the Finnish American Heritage Society applied for and received 501(c)3 status. Next was the complete gutting of the basement, thus clearing the way for a new kitchen and meeting room to be built with volunteer help. This was the beginning of many years of the Finnish way of volunteers working together, known as *talkoot*, which continues to this day at our Finnish Hall.

In 2022, it is with a great deal of pride that FAHS is celebrating its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and there is much to celebrate. These 35 years have seen the membership grow from the original 205 charter members to a high of 500 and to our present membership of over 300. Thanks to the many volunteers with untold amounts of

## An Invitation continued

energy, the monetary generosity of members, and the donation of time and talent in a myriad of ways, the Finnish Hall has undergone rejuvenation and a large addition and is bustling with activity.

Please help us celebrate 35 successful years of our Finnish American Heritage Society on Sunday, June 5, from noon to four. Included in this newsletter is further information about the event and a reservation form. **Please note that the deadline for reserving tickets is May 21.**

Mark your calendar and look for more information about this important event on our FAHS-CT website ([fahs-ct.org](http://fahs-ct.org)), on Facebook, and in emails to members. Better yet, if you are planning to attend our 35th Anniversary Celebration on June 5, please reserve your ticket now.

View photos from the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sNzUYDmpM8>



## FAHS Receives \$6,000 Grant

by Patti Folsom

Shortly after the Winter edition of the Finnish Connection went to press, the Collections Management Committee received word that FAHS was the recipient of a \$6,000 CT Cultural Fund Operating Support Grant through CT Humanities (CTH), the statewide, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). *The grant is administered by CT Humanities, with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) from the Connecticut State Legislature.*

**CT**humanities

FAHS was one of 624 organizations in Connecticut awarded CT Cultural Fund support totaling \$16M from CTH. These grants are part of \$30.7M of support allocated to arts, humanities, and cultural nonprofits through CTH over the next two years by the CT General Assembly and approved by Governor Ned Lamont. The grants will assist organizations as they recover from the pandemic and maintain and grow their ability to serve their community and the public.

FAHS has one of the largest collections of Finnish and Finnish American books, documents, photographs, and other artifacts on the East Coast. The Collections Management Committee plans to use the grant funds to catalog and share these items to potential researchers via the CT Collections online database. The Committee also plans to use a portion of the grant funds to staff and open the museum and archive to the public on a weekly basis beginning this Spring. Check the FAHS website and Facebook page for exact dates.

Visitors will be able to view a treasure trove of unique items in the museum, such as traditional costumes, birch bark handicrafts, wood carvings, kanteles (traditional Finnish stringed instruments), wall hangings, and woven linens. If you haven't toured our museum and archive or, if it's been several years since you've been to the museum, we hope to see you soon!

## Winter War Medals donated to FAHS

by Katrina Engblom Bousquet

The Collections Management Committee receives treasures donated to FAHS throughout the year and they are always intriguing. Once in a while, we receive a donation with a local connection. Recently the Collections Management Committee was happy to receive a collection of items from the children of Reino Tapani Vaananen. Leena Cacciapuoti of Brooklyn, CT and Esko Vaananen of Arizona were generous enough to donate a wonderful package containing their father's impressive collection of medals and documents from Finland's Winter War (1939-1945). Included are his Finnish passport, documents and commendations, some signed by General Mannerheim, and a vast collection of medals he earned in the various battles and campaigns.



*Leena, Irene & Esko Vaananen*

I recently spoke with Leena, a lifelong family friend, about her family's story. She told me of the hardships endured during this time in Finnish history by both those sent off to fight for the freedom of Finland and those left behind at home. While Reino was off fighting in the Winter War, her mother Irene was kicked off the family farm in Karelia as Russia overtook the region. With only the cow and what she could pack on it, Irene and yet-to-be-born Leena set off to live with Irene's parents some miles away. They were allowed back some time later, while Leena was a small child, only to be kicked off their farm once again a short time later. Leena recalls many years later going back to that farm with her mother and meeting the woman who lives there now. She vaguely remembered small details about the sleeping alcove and the massive stove.

After the war, Reino, Irene, Leena and Esko, along with Irene's mother, received sponsorship and were able to immigrate to Brooklyn, CT, via Ellis Island in 1948. They lived with relatives on Woodward Road for a while and were able to work and save enough to build a house on Fitzgerald Road, a short distance away. Reino worked as a painter, carpenter, chicken farmer, and at Electric Boat. In later years he worked as a butler and driver in the Catskills. Irene was a talented cook at The Golden Lamb Buttery and later in the Catskills. She worked hard to satisfy the constant demands of a young family, a small chicken farm, and a garden.

What a great tale to share in this newsletter, inspired by one generous donation from a local Finnish American family. Kiitos, Leena and Esko. These precious items are now kept in acid free containers in our archive room.





The last full week in February has been designated as Sauna Week and this year Finlandia Foundation National, along with local FFN member chapters, celebrated with an excellent variety of activities. FAHS members submitted stories and photographs depicting their love of sauna. Please enjoy them on Page 17 of this newsletter. The FFN website (<https://finlandiafoundation.org>) has a section devoted to Sauna Week, including informational talks from sauna experts such as Frank W. Eld (a familiar face to FinnFunn participants), and activities for kids. The FFN YouTube channel hosts videos of talks about "Facts and Fables about Sauna," "Sauna Wars" and "Sauna and Wellness." <https://youtube.com/c/FinlandiaFoundationNational>.

Did you know there are organizations specifically dedicated to the Finnish Sauna such as Sauna Times ([www.saunatimes.com](http://www.saunatimes.com)) and The North American Sauna Society ([www.saunasociety.org](http://www.saunasociety.org))?

Members present at the February FAHS Membership Meeting were asked to answer the following question: "What about your Finnish Heritage inspires you?" and the many participants noted that the sauna is a treasured part of their culture from a health, tradition and social perspective.



At ACME Finns, we have never been shy about talking about our sauna and how we built, maintained, or use it. If you want to read our sauna story, go to [www.acmefinns.com/sauna](http://www.acmefinns.com/sauna) for tons of sauna content. This year for sauna week, we share one of our favorite sauna accessories, the *vihta*, and how we adapted it from our Connecticut surroundings.

### What is a *vihta*?

We learned and used the *vihta* while visiting our family in Finland. In eastern regions of Finland, the *vihta* may be called "*vasta*" but for this writing, I will refer to it as *vihta*. For those who have never heard of a *vihta*, it is a kind of whisk made of birch branches used in a sauna to stimulate circulation by beating oneself (or your sauna mate) with it. The *vihta* also emits a pleasant fragrance to the bather, which I would describe as fresh and earthy.

You see, white or silver birch trees are plentiful in the lake regions of Finland. All these birch trees mean that birch branches are easily gathered to construct many *vihta* to be used in the sauna. These white birch versions are considered the *vihta* gold standard. While white birch can be found in Connecticut, they can't be found in our yard. So, 18 months ago, we planted six new white birch trees for future use in our *vihta*, but at this point they're just not big enough. What we do have is a bounty of black birch trees, which offer similar pliability and leaf size, but differ in fragrance compared to the white birch. The black birch fragrance is like that of licorice, which has its own ties to Finnish culture.

In the full article, we explain how we make our own *vihta* and a couple of methods for preserving them so we can use them in the middle of winter. You will also learn of the health benefits the *vihta* can provide and other trees and herbs that can be used in your next *vihta*. Finally, we share our *vihta* experiences from Finland and at home.

To read more the full *vihta* article, go to [acmefinns.com/vihta](http://acmefinns.com/vihta).

## Collections Management Committee

by Katrina Carlson Karlsson Engblom Bousquet

The FAHS Collections Management Committee has been meeting regularly at the hall, sifting through the shelves and boxes in our care. In doing so, we have discovered many hidden gems. One recent surprise was a very small green book (2"x1.5") at some point donated but not recorded. It was not a Bible, but a book designed to be carried in your pocket. It contains various short Bible passages, organized by month. (If anyone knows the proper word for this book, please let me know! Kiitos in advance.) The language it was written in might be Swedish, which makes sense, or it might be Norwegian and definitely not Finnish. The amazing part is this: Anita Smiley brought this book to my attention, and we noticed that my last name

(Engblom, not seen very often around here) was noted on the inside page. Not only that, on the same page another name was also noted, Ilma (?) Karlsson. This was a pretty cool discovery. During my first visit to Finland in 2005, we met up with a cousin, Margetta, on the west coast of Finland, where

Swedish names are more common. She gave us some astounding news. Apparently, a few generations ago, there were too many villagers with Carlson (this was the spelling she gave us) as a last name and it was confusing. An ancestor of ours (great-grandfather we are guessing) changed his surname to Engblom and from there on, his branch of descendants was known as the Engbloms. All this time, we had scoured news stories and other documents, searching for some connection with another Engblom, but we were "barking up the wrong birch tree"! We brought this news home to our father, Jacob Engblom. His parents (Arthur Engblom and Martha Jarvala had immigrated separately in the 1920s and met in Finntown, Brooklyn, NY.) This was not big news to him, and had never mentioned it to us. Ever. It seemed like significant news to us, as Americans. That is how you can most easily trace a family line. But later I learned that long ago Finnish families changed their surnames when they changed jobs, working at one farm and then another. Because of that surname system, the connection to a specific surname did not have the weight it might in other societies. So now, we have to determine this; are we Carlson or Karlsson? Still so many questions.



Keep  
in  
touch

We are missing current email addresses for many of our members. If you have not been receiving regular emails notifying you of meetings and events, please forward your email address to [correspondence@fahs-ct.org](mailto:correspondence@fahs-ct.org) or mail it to FAHS, Attn Membership Secretary, PO Box 252, Canterbury, CT 06331. If you don't use email, please let us know and send your telephone number to this same postal address so we can contact you.

## FAHS Coffee Social February 2022

by Irene Profetto

*Editorial note: With the lifting of the restrictions due to covid, FAHS is cautiously starting to meet in person again. A recent informal coffee social was held. This article is authored by a member who attended. The Newsletter Committee thanks Irene for her gracious offer to write about her experience.*

The casual morning coffee social at the Finn Hall on Wednesday, February 16, 2022, was fun for all who came. Although the attendance was small, the camaraderie was special. Everyone enjoyed a tasty cake\*\* prepared by Anita Smiley. and a Hall-baked pulla defrosted by our host, Stan Karro. (Kiitos.) As we sipped Finn coffee, we caught up on news and discussed future plans.

The group was happy to welcome several guests, including Lisa Joseph, who is working with the Collections Management Committee. And Qian Xie from Hope Valley, RI. He is a soccer coach at Scituate High School and is interested in Finnish Culture. He has borrowed books about the Kalevala and the Finnish Language. It was a pleasure to get to know these people who live interesting lives. We hope to see them again.

Everyone also enjoyed a presentation shown by Stan that emphasized the vital need for people to shut off and / or put away their cellphones when in social settings with family or friends (or at parties like wedding ceremonies, may I add). This talk gave everyone food for thought.

We hope there will be another casual coffee social time and hope that more of you will be able to attend.

\*\* From Anita Smiley: The cake I made was a *tiikerikakku* (translated tiger cake). It is a pound cake (pictured here).

<https://www.thespruceeats.com/finnish-tiger-cake-recipe-tiikerikkaku-2952685>



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### 2022 SMILEY GROUP FINLAND TOURS

*June 28-July 12, 2022 (15 days)*

*July 14-25, 2022 (12 days)*



Two Finland tours are planned for 2022, with a close watch kept on travel advisories. These twenty-fifth anniversary tours will travel through some of the most beautiful areas of Finland, beginning and ending in Helsinki. The 15-day tour continues deep into Lapland beyond the Arctic Circle.

For complete itinerary and pricing, contact Anita Smiley,  
[smileys.place@juno.com](mailto:smileys.place@juno.com)  
860-889-7820

## Challenges of a *Hernekeitto*/Pea Soup Challenge

by Minna Waters

On a cold, but sunny February day in Connecticut, a fearless few gathered in the Finn Hall for a *Hernekeitto* (pea-soup) challenge. Four brave chefs tested their recipes on a small but friendly crowd and all left with smiles on their faces and stomachs full of pea soup. Sledding was not an option for this bunch. As brave as they were, the icy conditions and small amounts of snow kept them indoors, consuming second, third, even fourth helpings of yummy, steamy, green pea soup.

Upon counting the votes, the winner of the *Hernekeitto*/Pea Soup Challenge was Mr. Saul Ahola with his "*Soupe Aux Pois*." This traditionally French-Canadian pea soup with a secret 'summer savory' seasoning and with a soothing blend of yellow and green peas infused with a large chunk of salt pork, won the day. Second place winner went to Ms. Katrina Bousquet who prepared a delicate, pureed soup with elegantly shredded cuts of ham. Third place winner was Mr. Stan Karro who presented a thick and hearty pea soup with an abundance of carrots. Honorable mention went to Ms. Minna Waters for her scrumptious crock-pot prepared soup.

We all look forward to next year's *Hernekeitto* Challenge and hope you will join the fun, too!



Stan Karro, Saula Ahola, Minna Waters and Katrina Bousquet  
Photo by Patti Folsom

## The Adventures of Peter Cottontail

by Nicole Loser

During March of 2020, the Rolling Ridge Players were one week away from their big annual theater performance when the world went on lockdown for the Coronavirus pandemic. Due to remote learning and quarantines, "New Clothes for the Emperor" became the play that never was and the school has not had a live performance since then.

The Rolling Ridge players are very excited to get back to the stage this year for "The Adventures of Peter Cottontail," based on the stories by Thornton W. Burgess. Taking place in the Green Meadow and Green Forest, Peter Rabbit continues to thwart the attacks of Reddy Fox and his Granny, all while managing his own personal existential crisis concerning his name and identity. The creatures of the meadow and forest unite to assist their friend find himself and keep him alive! "Save him, save him" they all cheer! Our animals (big, small, stinky, and prickly) help emphasize the importance of teamwork as they work together to try and save Peter.

The Rolling Ridge Players are proud to perform at the Finnish American Heritage Society Hall and stage; (Please see photos on page 13).

This year's performance, held on March 17<sup>th</sup>, had a bake sale to benefit Nutmeg Acres Wildlife Rehabilitation, a local service dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife. <https://www.nutmegacreswildlife.com/>

## Kalevala Day Celebration 2022 With Kasha Breau and the Wild Notes

by Saul Ahola

More than fifty FAHS members gathered at the Finnish Hall in Canterbury on March 6 to enjoy a potluck lunch celebrating new members who had joined in the past two years. There was a feeling of camaraderie and of palpable relief from two years of separation from friends and isolation. The meal was followed by a brief membership meeting and then a wonderful program by Kasha Breau and the Wild Notes, celebrating the February 28 Finnish holiday--Kalevala Day: A Day of Finnish Culture.

Kasha and her band celebrated Kalevala Day virtually in 2021 but this year's program was live, and alive. It was the first musical program performed on the Finn Hall stage since 2019 and also the first since the historic stage was dedicated to Mark and Hannu Makipuro in August 2021. And that's fitting since it was Hannu who first invited Kasha to play her kantele at FAHS in 1991. Kasha and Bob Breau have been FAHS members for many years and have participated in many Kalevala celebrations.



The musical program began with Kasha playing a solo on her five-string kantele. She played the hauntingly beautiful "*Vaka Vanha Väinämöinen*" (Wise Old Väinämöinen) and was then joined by Mickey Koth on flute and John Kalinowski on accordion. There were toes tapping as the trio, now with Kasha on her 38-string kantele and Mickey now on violin went on to play *polkkas*, a *schattische* or two, a *mazurka* and even "Lullaby" by Sibelius, the only piece the maestro composed for kantele and violin.

The musical performance was followed by a video of Peter O'Leary reading two verses from his Kalevala-inspired book-length poem "The Sampo." Unfortunately, the video was not able to be shown in its entirety during the meeting. However, the complete video is now posted on the "Finnish American Heritage Society—Canterbury CT" YouTube channel and should not be missed. See feature article on Page 10 of this issue.

The celebratory day ended on a high note when the band let loose and entertained the cleanup crew with music so lively and exciting that Matti and Marsha Huhta couldn't resist dancing despite the commotion.

The meeting and musical program were broadcast on hybrid Zoom but to the dismay and disappointment of the dozen Zoomers, they could not indulge in the scrumptious potluck served earlier.



**Spotlight on New Member, Lisa Joseph**  
by Patti Folsom

Lisa Joseph is not only one of our newest members but has the distinction of living the closest to the Finnish Hall. Lisa lives less than a mile away on South Canterbury Road in Canterbury. She and her husband, David, twin sons Donovan and Nathan (16), and daughter Adele (13), have lived in Canterbury for the past ten years. Lisa grew up in Killingly and graduated from the University of Hartford with a degree in Art History. She has spent most of her working career as a museum curator and educator.

Lisa began volunteering with the Collections Management Committee in the Fall of 2021 at the recommendation of fellow committee member Kaz Kozlowski. It soon became apparent to committee members that Lisa's prior experience at both the Prudence Crandall Museum and the Mystic Seaport Museum would be an advantage as we pursued our goal of making the FAHS museum and archive more accessible to the surrounding communities—both online and through updated displays.

When FAHS received notification that we were the recipient of a CT Cultural Fund Operating Support Grant, the Collections Management Committee was able to utilize grant funds to contract with Lisa to work as a consultant. She will now direct the work of cataloging our collection of museum artifacts for the CT Collections online database. She will also assist with the promotion and staffing of the opening of our museum and archive to the public one day a week.

While brainstorming for another grant, Lisa provided the following unique perspective as a local resident:

*"The Finnish American Heritage Society has amazing and beautiful art, handicrafts, native dress, and cultural artifacts that NEED to be seen. FAHS has oral histories given by Finnish-CT residents; unique stories of Connecticut that need to be made available to the public. FAHS has space to provide hands-on crafts activities for students and families, space to share food-ways, and a hall that can provide musical enrichment to visitors, all this and a MUSEUM. Who knows this? The answer is: Not enough people! The Finnish-American people in Canterbury have a gold mine of beautiful and culturally significant items to share with the rest of us, and they want to... This amazing museum has always been here, ready for the people of Connecticut to enjoy. This beautiful little museum is just in need of a makeover! And it needs to be SHARED.*

*Some of the things that are needed for this to become a reality: Regular visiting hours...*

*Time and elbow grease...Publicity...Ideas...A steady, not necessarily large, influx of cash  
...and Passion."*

Thank you for bringing your innovative ideas to FAHS, Lisa. We are grateful for your passion and your dedication to our goal of bringing more visitors and, ultimately, new members to FAHS.



*Lisa Joseph cataloging archive materials*  
Photo by Patti Folsom

## Peter O'Leary's Reading from his Poem "The Sampo" now on FAHS YouTube Channel

by Saul Ahola

Bet you didn't know there is a FAHS YouTube Channel. Here's your chance to [Google "Finnish American Heritage Society, Canterbury CT— "YouTube"](#) and enjoy Peter O'Leary's video with readings from his book-length poem "The Sampo," which he recently recorded specifically for our 2022 Kalevala Day Program at the request of Bob and Kasha Breau. Professor O'Leary's book-length poem was published in 2016; and while it was inspired by the stories about the mythical Sampo in the Kalevala, it was not composed in the rhythm of Elias Lönnrot's Finnish language epic nor in the English translations of the original poem. Rather O'Leary's poem takes the events described in those verses of the Kalevala and presents them as poetic images that to me are more easily visualized than in the usual language of the Kalevala. I've always struggled a bit to understand those verses that I've read in English translations. I think you will also find it easier to visualize the happenings in O'Leary's telling, and I'll bet after listening to his rendition you'll want to read the entire poem.

The video is about 36 minutes long and divided into three equal sections. In the first section Professor O'Leary talks about his Finnish heritage and his visit to the National Museum of Finland where the Gallen-Kallela frescoes in the vaulted dome, depicting the mythical events of the Kalevala, inspired him to write the poem. The second part of the video is a reading from the first section of his poem where the hero Ilmarinen is seduced by the wicked Louhi, with the promise of her daughter, to forge The Sampo, a mythical magical artifact that

would bring good fortune to its holder. In the third part of the video, the poet reads how the wizard Väinämöinen and his band pry the Sampo from Louhi's underground vault and try to take it back home from Pohjola, the north country.



***Ilmarinen Forges the Sampo*** by Berndt Godenhjelm  
19<sup>th</sup> century Finnish artist

So, what is the Sampo? It's hard to visualize it in Lönnrot's epic. You may not understand just what it is after Peter O'Leary's reading, but I think you will be able to imagine it a little better after hearing and reading his fantastic images.

Here is the link to Mr. O'Leary's presentation: <https://youtu.be/0zPyMoMqagA>

## 2022 Finnish American Heritage Society Board of Directors

The FAHS Annual Meeting was held on Sunday, January 9, 2022 via Zoom. The nominating committee, Trustee Sean Tate and members Patti Folsom and Rita Kelley, presented a slate of officers to be voted on by the membership. Since there were no nominations from the floor, a motion was made, seconded and passed authorizing President Steven Bousquet to cast one vote to elect the slate of 2022 officers as presented.

It can be challenging to find volunteers to serve on the Board, as any of the nominating committee members from this year or past will tell you. While many members graciously and enthusiastically assist with projects and events at the Hall, being a Board Member can be seen as a larger commitment. This year, in an effort to give opportunity to those members interested in the Board who are not within driving distance of Canterbury, Ellen Levonius Buffington returned to the Board as Co-Correspondence Secretary. Ellen grew up in Canterbury and returned as an adult for 15 years; she currently divides her time between Colorado and Florida.

Another innovative step was to engage FAHS youth members in Board activities; and to ensure local availability, the Co-Correspondence secretary is Erika Waters, daughter of Vice President Minna Waters and Recording Secretary, Aaron Waters. Erika and Ellen have divided their duties, based mostly on location. Both Erika and Ellen are excited for the opportunity to fine-tune this arrangement and appreciate the willingness of the Nominating Committee, the Board, and the Membership to consider creative solutions.

The 2022 FAHS Board of Directors are:

President: Steven Bousquet, Vice President: Minna Waters, Treasurer: Jobina Miller, Recording Secretary: Aaron Waters, Co-Correspondence Secretaries: Erika Waters and Ellen Buffington, Membership Secretary: Steven Coupe, Trustees: (2<sup>nd</sup> year) – Arlene Baril, Stan Karro, and Sean Tate and reelected for a 2-year term: Saul Ahola and Susan Coupe.

### PLEASE JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF CELIA UTZ BENNETT



**A LIFE SO BEAUTIFULLY LIVED  
DESERVES TO BE BEAUTIFULLY REMEMBERED**

**WE WILL BE GATHERING TO SHARE OUR FAVORITE MEMORIES  
OF A LIFE SO DEEPLY MISSED  
SATURDAY MAY 14, 2022 AT 12:30 P.M.**

**FOLLOWED BY A RECEPTION  
AT THE FINNISH AMERICAN HALL  
76 NORTH CANTERBURY ROAD (RT 169), CANTERBURY, CT.**

**KINDLY RSVP BY MAY 1, 2022 (860-412-9811)**

## **"All the world's a stage..." - William Shakespeare from *As You Like It***

by June Leiss

When I look at the stage at the FAHS Hall, so many memories race through my mind. (If those stage curtains could talk...) Nanni (Nancy) Mari (Harju) Lassila in particular comes to my mind.

Nancy was born in 1900 in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the daughter of Helena and William Harju. When Nancy was little, her parents briefly went back to Veteli, Finland, but returned to Fitchburg when Nancy was six. She always remembered her first day of school when her teacher introduced her: "This little girl came from Finland where people live in igloos." After that, Nancy was not fond of her.

Growing up in Fitchburg, she was introduced to the stage by many active Finn families. At a very young age, Nancy knew she wanted to be an actress. She traveled to New York City in her late teens and was active in the 125th Street Finnish Hall in Harlem. She was cast as a housemaid in a Broadway play. But much to her dismay, her father fetched her back home. She worked at the *Raivaaja*, a Finnish-language newspaper in Fitchburg. Although she still performed locally, her heart longed for 125th Street.

She eventually moved to Manhattan. When she was working in a jewelry store, she was invited to direct plays at the Jersey City Finn Hall. Here she met the "love of her life" - Onni Lassila. He was tall, had a deep voice, and had a good head of hair. And so, they married.



*Onni's 1933 portrait of Nanni*

After the 1929 disaster struck, they lost their jobs. Onni's Uncle, Emil Rautio, urged them to move to Plainfield, Connecticut. Onni worked at the United Farmer Co-op where he drove a grain truck. The local Finns organized a barn raising and built a chicken coop and sauna for their new neighbors. The Lassilas joined the Canterbury Finn Hall in the mid-1930s. One can imagine how pleased Nancy was to see the stage pictured as a Finnish forest with shades of green and white birch trees.

During the early days, in addition to the plays, Nancy and Onni joined numerous fundraisers like sewing circles, skits, and Finnish costume dancing. These profits were sent directly to Finland to support the 1939-1940 Winter War against the Soviet Union.

Nancy directed plays that included adults and children. The musical *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was challenging. My sister, Ruth Rautio, the pianist, had a difficult time teaching us kids to sing. Cast members included Laila (Maki) Hietala, Aili (Hakkila) Galasyn, her younger brother Eero Hakkila, and the Johnson children. I remember one of the verses I sang as twelve-year-old Snow White: "Someday my prince will come..." Freddie Engnan was the handsome prince.

In 1958 Nancy had a great desire to direct a Finnish play called *Sorrentossa*. However, she was unable to locate a script. Then, the Quincy Finns came to her rescue when Axel Nielson sent Nancy the play.

## “All The World’s a Stage” continued

Pleased, Nancy filled her cast which included Ellen (Inkeri) Slonski as a pianist, daughter Laurel Ann (Lassila) Angus, Hannu Makipuro, Aatos Autio, and Tapani Vaananen. Toivo Eronen, a seasoned actor and accordion player, portrayed an artist. Nancy was confident with her choices. Little did she know that a director’s worst fear would occur on her stage. Toivo froze, mouth wide open, and said nothing. Silence. Meanwhile, Hannu standing behind the curtain, pounded his forehead and muttered, “What is the matter with him?”

Nancy groaned, “Oh my God. Oh my God.”

Toivo’s wife, Helmi, was furious. The cast was disappointed, but they forgave him the next day. And by the way, Helmi never asked for a divorce.

So ends my story of Nancy Lassila. After her husband, Onni, passed away, she moved to Michigan and lived near her family- Laurel and Chuck, and her granddaughters, Hester and Kate Angus. She joined the Central Park Players in Grand Haven, Michigan, when she was seventy-five.

Even in her seventies, Nancy found a stage.



### The Adventures of Peter Cottontail



Cottontail stage on the left; players on the right  
Photos by Nicole Loser

**ARE YOU AN AMAZONSMILE MEMBER??** If so, you can help the Finnish American Heritage Society of Canterbury, CT, with AmazonSmile. Your online shopping through AmazonSmile can benefit our organization with your one-time match. Amazon will direct .5% of your qualifying AmazonSmile purchases to the Finnish American Heritage Society of Canterbury, CT.

Simply sign up at: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/95-6098250>

Once you have signed up, every Amazon purchase you make helps FAHS.  
Please tell your friends and family, too.

# Money matters

## *Suurella arvostuksella, kiitos paljon*

(With great appreciation, thank you so much)

by Ellen Buffington and Erika Waters, Co-Corresponding Secretaries

In the first two months of 2022, the Finnish American Heritage Society received donations from twenty individuals and grants from three organizations. The CT Humanities Grant is highlighted in the article from Patti Folsom in this issue. Where do people who made these donations come from? In January and February, the answer is the following states: Connecticut, South Carolina, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, Michigan, Vermont and North Carolina.

Donations to the Archives, Museum and Library:

- Leena Cacciapuoti and Esko Vaananen: vast collection of their uncle's Winter War Medals and documents. (Detailed in this issue)
- Grace Kotilainen: Finnish language books and a woman's regional dress.
- Robert Guttay: collection of Finnish books.
- Martha Grondahl: a sauna robe.

Thank you to the following people for their combined generous and appreciated donations of: nearly \$870 to the General Fund; \$105.00 to the Scholarship Fund. In addition, two grants totaling \$500 from the Blackbaud Giving Fund and the Adirondack Foundation.

Lynne Simpanen; Allen & Mary Sue Seppa; Jeffery & Carolyn Otto; Leila & Richard Judd; Laurel Angus; Sean Tate; Woods & Pearl McCahill; Rene Osterlund; Herbert & Nancy Burnham; Helvi Karro Larson; Eileen Fritz; Ann Gruenberg; Capt. Aaron and Minna Waters and Sandra & Saul Ahola.

NOTE: Our all-volunteer team works hard to process and respond to anyone donating to FAHS in a timely manner. We apologize for any unavoidable delays. To contact the Secretary, [correspondence@fahs-ct.org](mailto:correspondence@fahs-ct.org).

## **\$ What Do Your Dues Do \$**

by Jobina Miller and Ellen Buffington

Did you know that almost half of FAHS operating income is from your membership dues? This income from dues supports not only the cost of operating (gas, electricity, heating oil) and maintaining (for example, replacing the water heater and the basement windows) the Finnish Hall in Canterbury. Dues also support the free events for members (such as culinary events and celebrating a variety of Finnish Holidays) along with the cost of printing and mailing the quarterly newsletter. The Collections Management Committee regularly highlights donations to the Archive and Museum, the climate control is part of the electric bill for the Hall. Please see new member, Lisa Joseph's quote re: this treasure in this issue. To complete our annual operational income, FAHS traditionally hosts a variety of fundraising events, which have been significantly limited due to the recent international pandemic. We hope to host more successful fund-raising events in 2022.

If you are able, please consider making a donation, which is separate from your annual dues, to help maintain our Finn Hall and its rich cultural history for you, our members, as well as the community.

## Recent Happenings around The Hall

### Hall Maintenance:

The Board has re-established a Maintenance Subcommittee to recommend priorities for Hall maintenance projects. Members are: Steve Bousquet, Steve Coupe, Saul Ahola, Stan Karro and Matti Huhta.

The Membership approved \$2,500 at a recent meeting for replacement of the current water heater with an on-demand propane hot water heater. Matti Huhta is coordinating with the plumber to complete the installation, which is scheduled by March 20<sup>th</sup>.

Replacement basement windows: quotes were received and Matti Huhta has ordered the windows.

Front Door Canopy update - Woodstock builders will graciously donate labor for this project. FAHS will cover the cost of materials. Construction will begin when Woodstock Builders can schedule it, not later than June 1<sup>st</sup>.

### Kitchen

Annual well water test results came back this month and all is good.

Northeast District Dept of Health issued an annual 2022 Food Service Permit for the Hall's culinary events.

### Other

The Board has established a FAHS Bylaw review committee: Ellen Buffington, Chairperson; and members Patti Folsom, Stan Karro and Minna Waters. We have learned many lessons with the covid pandemic to incorporate into the new bylaws. We welcome additional members. If interested, please contact Ellen at 970-576-8360 or [ellenmbuffington@gmail.com](mailto:ellenmbuffington@gmail.com).

### News Flash: Museum Makeover Grant

Just as we were going to press, the Collections Management Committee received word that FAHS was one of 15 cultural heritage organizations to receive a 2022 Museum Makeover grant. FAHS will receive two free site visits from a team of museum curators and will also receive up to \$3,000 to help cover the costs of redesigning museum exhibits.

Museum Makeover is a program of Conservation ConneCTion and is supported through a partnership with the Connecticut League of History Organizations and funded by a grant from the CT Cultural Fund.

Letter to the Editor of the Finnish Connections Newsletter:

*I was so pleased to read Steve Coupe's article on the newly-decorated metal poles in the kitchen/basement. In the early years, children would swing around and around on those poles. Kiitos, Erika. Our kitchen now has its own character. - June Leiss*

## Writers Workshop Held

Per a participant: "The Writer's Workshop with Susan Cloutier was excellent!"

A new name was chosen for the group: "Writer's Circle" and Susan is excited to announce that another session is scheduled. This workshop is in person and writers will be provided with legal pads or they can use their own computers. Attendees may bring photographs or personal items which can be used for writing prompts.

Please contact Susan at [susanhinz413@gmail.com](mailto:susanhinz413@gmail.com) for details or questions.

**Next session is scheduled for Thursday, April 21 from 6:00-8:00 p.m.**

**The Hall will provide pizza.**



Sue Coupe and Katrina Bousquet  
March 10<sup>th</sup> session  
Photo by Susan Cloutier



Susan Cloutier with Katrina Bousquet on March 12<sup>th</sup>  
Photo by Patti Folsom

## Member News & Milestones

### Congratulations – Onnea

Marja Leena Huhta celebrated her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 23

Reetta Oja observed her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 26

### Get Well Wishes – Pikaista Paranemista

Ann Gruenberg of Hampton, CT, and Scholarship Committee Chair, for continuing rehabilitation.

## Submitting Member News & Milestones

If you would like to have any "well wishes, condolences, or congratulations" included in our upcoming newsletter, please email [minna.waters@gmail.com](mailto:minna.waters@gmail.com) by June 10, 2022.

Please put "News and Milestones" in the subject line. *Paljon Kiitoksia/Many Thanks, Minna.*



### Tirva Sauna Reflections by Nelly Fyke

After a relaxing sauna, if you are hungry place *Sininen Lenkki* aka "best sausage" in an aluminum bag and set it on the still hot rocks. Let it cook. When done, go to the porch, enjoy a cold *Lapin Kulta* or *Lonkero* and of course your *makkara* and the river view.



*Finally! All the cousins in the family sauna. Photo by Jobina Miller*

### Barrel Sauna Project

by Ellen Buffington

Don and I are just thrilled to have completed a barrel sauna with the help of our son, Carl Simon Buffington. I never thought I would enjoy anything but the traditional wood-fired Sunday night sauna of my Canterbury childhood, and I was mistaken. This is a wonderful sauna that heats up quickly and a small amount of water produces delightful *löyly*. Our whole family, including the grandsons, enjoy taking sauna and jumping in the winter snow of the Colorado mountains.



### SAUNA SAYINGS

In the sauna, one must conduct oneself as one would in church  
All people are created equal, but nowhere more so than in a sauna  
Every sauna has its own soul  
A person without sauna is like a body without a soul  
A house without a sauna is not a home  
A sauna without a vihta is like a meal without salt  
Sauna is a poor man's pharmacy  
If liquor, tar and sauna do not help, the illness is fatal

# FINNISH - AMERICAN HERITAGE SOCIETY

## 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



*FAHS Museum & Library*

### Afternoon Program:

Social time & music with  
Phil Palonen's Jazz Trio

Mathew's Catering Lunch

Entertaining historical program

Sunday, June 5, 2022 ■ Noon – Four O'clock ■ \$35/pp  
Finnish Hall ■ 76 North Canterbury Road (Rte 169)  
■ Canterbury, CT 06331 ■

Cut here. . . . .

**Advance reservations only.** Deadline to RSVP: **May 21, 2022.** Reserved tickets at the door the day of the event.

Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is a check payable to FAHS for \$\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ tickets. (\$35/pp) I am a Charter Member ☐

Please consider making an additional donation (especially if unable to attend) \$\_\_\_\_\_ (Kiitos)

I cannot attend but would like to share the following message at the celebration: May use additional paper.

Return this reservation, with check payable to FAHS,

By **MAY 21, 2022** to:

FAHS 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
Attention Minna Waters, Vice President  
P.O. Box 252  
Canterbury, CT 06331





## Finnish American Heritage Society

PRESORT  
MARKETING MAIL  
US POSTAGE PAID  
WILLIMANTIC CT  
PERMIT NO 37

is a non-profit organization established in 1987 to preserve and promote Finnish-American heritage. Membership is open to all who are interested in the purpose of the organization.

**Mailing address:** P.O. Box 252, Canterbury, CT 06331

**Street address:** Finnish Hall, 76 North Canterbury Road, Canterbury

**Phone Number:** (860) 546-6671 **Email address:** [info@fahs-ct.org](mailto:info@fahs-ct.org)

**World Wide Web address:** [www.fahs-ct.org](http://www.fahs-ct.org)

**YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com> and search for Finnish American Heritage Society, Canterbury

**On Facebook at:** [www.facebook.com/fahscanterburyct](http://www.facebook.com/fahscanterburyct)

### FINNISH CONNECTION

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#### FAHS NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Collection of materials and proofreading: Kay Gruder, Patti Folsom, Anita Smiley, Jackie Hargula, Ellen Buffington and Linda Kuja  
Members' News and Milestones: Minna Waters

### Welcome New Members!

**Lisa Joseph**, Canterbury, CT  
(see "Spotlight" article  
in this Newsletter)

New Members are **ALWAYS** welcome!  
Membership coupon is enclosed.

President	Steven Bousquet	860-608-8366
Vice President	Minna Waters	251-454-1614
Treasurer	Jobina Miller	860-377-0789
Secretary	Aaron Waters	251-454-2494
Co-Correspondence	Ellen Buffington	970-576-8360
	Erika Waters	251-635-2714
Membership	Steve Coupe	401-568-6614

### Coming Events at a Glance

April 2	Pancake Breakfast 8:00 a.m.
April 7	Membership Meeting 7:00 p.m. Coffee social 6:00 p.m.
April 21	Writers' Circle 6:00 p.m.
April 28	Board Meeting (Zoom) 7:00 p.m.
May 1	<i>Vappu Munkki ja Sima</i> 12 noon (May Day donut and summer drink) Membership Meeting 1:00 p.m.
May 15	Informal Coffee Social 10:00 a.m.
May 21	Chicken BBQ Take Out 4:00 p.m.
May 26	Board Meeting (Zoom) 7:00 p.m.
June 5	<b>35<sup>th</sup> FAHS Anniversary Celebration</b> 12noon to 4:00 p.m.
June 10	Newsletter article deadline
June 18	Membership Meeting 7:00 p.m. <i>Juhannus</i> Celebration 5:00 p.m.
June 30	Scholarship Application deadline
June 30	Board Meeting (Zoom) 7:00 p.m.

Go to [fahs-ct.org](http://fahs-ct.org) for updated calendar.