

Brian Narhi, Canada

I have always been interested in researching my Finnish ancestry, and this has been one of my hobbies since I was a teenager...so I have accumulated a lot of notes, papers, and books during the past 40 years. Unfortunately, I ended up annoying my parents and grandparents when I started on my research, because I had countless questions about their families and their ancestry, and they could only tell me names back to the time of their grandparents or great-grandparents (ca. 1820-1840.) My grandmother very suspiciously asked me “*why* do you need to know that?” and my father’s sarcastic comment was “well...are we related to Queen Christina of Sweden?” I thought to myself, “I’ll show you!”

I knew that there were much older records in Finland, but in the days before the internet and the digitization of records there were only three ways to obtain information: by writing a letter to the parish church, or by ordering microfilm from the Latter-Day Saints in Utah, or by hiring a professional genealogist. The first two methods were frustratingly slow, and to hire a professional genealogist was too expensive, so I did very little research for about the first 10 or 15 years. Now, thanks to HisKi, the FFHA, and the Digitaaliarkisto, I can easily do the work myself and I have researched many branches of my genealogy back to the mid-1500s and even earlier. My DNA tests show that my ancestors were primarily Finnish, but there is also some Swedish, German, and Sardinian as well.

My mother’s family most recently came from Ruovesi and Pälkäne, as well as from some of the nearby parishes (Orivesi, Luopioinen, and Kangasala.) My maternal grandmother’s ancestry includes Lars Kekkonen (born ca. 1500?) Many of my mother’s ancestors served in the Swedish army during the 17th and 18th centuries, and so they frequently moved from place to place. Then there is also the problem of their army name which was different from their birth name (eg., Josef Yrjönpoika Myry, 1706-1742, from Ruovesi who became Josef Rumor, rumpali, when he joined the army.) These families have therefore been much harder for me to research and the work on them continues.

My mother’s parents came to St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada in 1924 and 1927; partly seeking a better life, but also as a way to forget unpleasant memories. My grandfather had taken part in the civil war (kapina), which he seldom liked to talk about. My grandmother lost both her mother and her fiancé, who was an early pilot in the Finnish air force, in the same year (1926) so a fresh start in Canada appealed to her. My grandfather worked for many years as a polisher in a factory in St. Catharines called the “Welland Vale,” which manufactured saws, axes, and gardening tools. He also worked as a carpenter, and built his own house in 1941 which I still own. My grandmother had trained as a nurse, but she could not find work in that field because she could not speak English when she arrived in Canada. The only work available for her was domestic service (as a house maid---“piika paikka”), as well as being a farm labourer. She also found seasonal jobs in the local canning factories during the fall and winter months. The Niagara region in Ontario, Canada, has a long history as a fruit and vegetable growing area, and provided steady work for farm labourers. Times were very hard when the Great Depression started in 1929 but they managed to survive and always had food for the family. During the early 1940s, after the “Talvi Sota,” Finnish Canadians had to suffer the indignity of registering themselves with the government as “enemy aliens.”

My paternal ancestors, Närhi, were originally from Sääksmäki, but moved to Rautalampi where they lived at Närhisalo for about three centuries. They moved to Sumiainen and then to Äänekoski where my father Einar was born in 1927. Other branches of the family originated in Laukaa and nearby parishes

such as Suolahti, Sumiainen, Uurainen, and Jyväskylä. My grandfather Kosti Johannes (1903-1976) worked in the papermills in Finland; when he came to Canada with his family in 1929, he found work at the "metsäkämpä" cutting wood for the papermills. My grandmother had steady work there as a cook. My grandfather also worked in some of the mines around Sudbury, Ontario. When they moved to the Niagara area, he bought a 20 ha. farm where they raised a few cows and other livestock and grew a variety of crops. My grandfather also did carpentry work in St. Catharines before he suffered from a stroke which forced him to retire.

My paternal grandmother Rauha (Kankainen, 1902-1972) was born in Saarijärvi, but her ancestors were also from Laukaa and Rautalampi, as well as from Pielavesi.

I trace my Ylönen ancestry through my paternal grandmother. In her family the main lineage is as follows: Johan Ylönen (ca. 1470?); Johan Ylönen (ca. 1500-1555); Olof Ylönen (ca. 1530-1578); Lars Ylönen (ca. 1565-1603); Olof Ylönen (ca. 1585-1635); Henrik Ylönen (ca. 1620-1669); Olof Ylönen (1649-1723) and his wife Karin Paananen (1665-1717); Olof Ylönen (1685-1754) and his wife Kain Mattsdotter Tissari (1691-1766); Johan Ylönen (1733-1804) and his wife Walborg Kauppinen (1744-1807); Johan Ylönen (1764-1833) and his wife Anna Sigfredsdotter Pöndinen (1767-1837); Henrik Ylönen (1808-1862) and his wife, Sophia Ulrica Johansdotter (1814-1877); Wilhelmina Ylönen (1847-1932) and her husband, Johan Henriksson Cautto (1845-1915); Samuli Kankainen (1878-1924) and his wife, Hilma Maria Mäkinen (1882-1957) and finally my grandmother, Rauha Maria Kankainen (1902-1972.)

There is a second line of descent in my family that I can follow: Kirstin Pehrsdotter Ylönen (ca. 1679-1752) from Vieru, who was married Thomas Pöntinen (ca. 1680-1729); and also a third line, from Anna Larsdotter Ylönen (1684-1769) who was married to Lars Thomasson Kandain (ca. 1679-1759.)

I was born in St. Catharines, Ontario, in 1961. I studied at Brock University (BA 1984), and at the University of Toronto (M.A., 1987) where I started the PhD program but did not complete my thesis. I worked for the Ontario government for several years, and have been a staff member at Archaeological Services Inc. ("ASI") in Toronto since 2004. I still live on the land, near the shore of Lake Ontario, that my grandparents bought back in 1941.

I hope you find this brief story about part of my ancestry interesting!