

These Are My People

By Frances A. Harrington

Growing up, I had no interest in genealogy “stuff”. My dad’s parents died before I was born. I knew who my mom’s parents were. We visited them a couple of times as children, but mostly I remember them from the times they came to spend Christmas with us. I loved those two people, but I wasn’t interested in their past. I knew he was a teacher and she was a nurse. That was all I thought I needed to know. I never asked questions or heard stories about their early days.

In the later 1970s my older sister, Cheri, got interested in genealogy. I think, like many people, it was the TV mini-series “Roots” that got her going. This was before home computers and when you had to pay for long-distance phone calls, so the bulk of her information came from writing letters and hoping people wrote back. She was researching both our maternal and paternal lines. My mom was still alive, so she was able to get started using her memories and family contacts. My dad had passed away in 1974, but we still had two aunts and an uncle who she could contact for information from that side. Cheri worked, had a husband and had two children to raise, so genealogy wasn’t an all-consuming passion.

Fast forward to around 2005. Because of my job, I had to go to Cloquet, Minnesota, while working on a special project at one of our “sister” sites. We were told we’d be there for a week, maybe two. Cloquet is located in St. Louis County, Minnesota. Chisholm is a small town about an hour away. That’s where my grandparents lived and are buried. I have fond memories of that place from when I was a child. Duluth is about 20 minutes from Cloquet. That’s where my great-grandparents lived and were buried. I had a day off while I was there and had nothing to do. I remembered my sister’s genealogy “stuff” so I decided to visit the cemeteries and take pictures of the headstones for her records. I went first to the Chisholm Calvary Cemetery. There was no one there to help, so I had to go to the city hall to get information. All I got from them was a map with the approximate location of the graves. After finally finding the graves, I took the pictures and made a quick drive by my grandparent’s old house. Then it was off to the next cemetery, an hour and a half away. The sexton’s office for Park Hill Cemetery in Duluth is located right at the cemetery. The sexton there was very helpful. I told them Cheri was doing genealogy and I was there from Michigan to take pictures for her. They went into their “old books” and gave me what they could from them. Early cemetery books had much more information than they do now. They copied some information they thought would be helpful and sent me over to the grave site where I took my pictures.

After I returned home, I took everything I’d gotten over to show Cheri. While we were going over the pictures and extra information from Park Hill Cemetery, I started to get curious. Very curious! Most of these people I’d never heard of. Hilma died of the Spanish flu - who was Hilma? Who was Nora? Mary? Emil? Why was my mother’s infant sister, Doris, buried in Duluth and not in Chisholm with her parents? One of the copied papers from the sexton showed not only who was buried in this plot, but also the one next to it. Cheri said she recognized some of the names but weren’t sure who they were. I wondered, were they related too? Suddenly, this genealogy “stuff” started to interest me. I had to know more about these people and why would they come here from another country? Could they speak English? How’d they earn a living once they got here? My great-grandmother had how many kids? Cheri said my mom told her that our great-grandfather ran a little store. What? We grew up poor so I figured we came from poor people (except for my grandparents – I figured they couldn’t have been poor because they had nice things) but I assumed everybody else was like us. Now I’m not saying we were dirt poor, but my parents definitely struggled to keep a roof over our heads. Since Cheri was concentrating more on our paternal side and couldn’t answer all my questions, I offered to help her with our maternal side. She said it wasn’t going to be easy. Most of Cheri’s contacts (my mother’s cousins) had since died. Thank God she kept all their letters she had gotten back in the 70’s. My

mother died in 1997 so I wouldn't be able to ask her any questions. My mother's sister, aunt Ruth, now had Alzheimer's so she wouldn't be of any help either. Years ago, she too was researching our Finnish ancestors, but my uncle said that during one of their moves that research had gotten lost. I told Cheri I'd see what I could find using my computer. I love computers! She had been using a computer to do our Harrington side and all that information was in English. I was sure they had websites that could help find overseas records (and hopefully someone to translate them). She did have one record she'd gotten from Finland years ago, but at that time, you had to send money overseas and pay for the record and translation. So that's when she started concentrating more on the English-speaking side. I didn't care if it was going to be difficult. After all, it wasn't like I was going to become a "genealogist", I was just going to help. Little did I realize that that little bit of help would turn into my greatest hobby. I was soon bitten by the genealogy bug! I needed to know who I came from. Where? Why? When? How? I needed to know these people, my ancestors. The rest is history...their history. That is what this article is about...the history of MY people.

I'll begin with my great-grandfather August Johanson Kylmäla (whose name was changed to August K. Johnson, after coming to the U. S). I have the most information on this family because of the letters Cheri saved and some very kind people on the internet who helped non-Finnish speaking people find and translate Finnish Church records (for free!). I was also able to share in an Ancestry.com subscription, which helped me a great deal with the records from Duluth.

August was born in Simo, Finland, in 1849 to Johan Erikson Kylmäla and Greta Johansdr Posti. Simo is up north and close to the Swedish boarder. His parents had 13 children. Six of them died before the age of 7. His parents were poor farmers. Like many farmers at the time, they were probably tenant farmers. In 1875, August married Anna Whilhelmina Andersdr Pallari. Their son Edward was born that same year. Three years later their second son, Johan, was born. He died of whooping-cough 4 months later. Like his father, August went into farming to provide for his family. He wanted better.

Finland was a poor country at the time. It was over-populated and had gone through a famine in the 1860s that took decades to recover from. By 1880, jobs were scarce and farmers didn't make much money either. The iron ore mines in Michigan were still sending recruiters to Scandinavian countries because they were in need of workers, especially those who could handle the frigid cold Michigan winters. They would offer to pay the man's passage (and sometimes that of their families) if they agreed to sign a contract to work in the mines for a specified amount of time, to repay the cost of their passage, which was usually, one to two years. Many Finns had already gone to Michigan during and after the Civil War to replace men who went to fight or died or were too disabled to continue in the mines after the war. The Finns were a tight-knit group of people and were eager to help their compatriots when they came to Michigan. They operated rooming houses, had their own general stores, churches, mutual aid societies, meal services for the workers, newspapers, saunas, and saloons. They helped newcomers learn English and even had their own lending library. Education was extremely important to these Finns. Most weren't able to get much of an education back home because they couldn't afford it. Many were only taught to read so they could read scripture but not to write. In 1870, the Finns even started their own University in Northern Michigan.

In 1880, August, Anna, and Edward came to Hancock, Houghton County, Michigan. In Hancock, August started his employment in the Quincey Mines. One year after their arrival, at the age of 31, Anna died. This left August to raise his young son on his own.

Olga Caroline Frank was born in Yltonio, Finland in 1859 to Alekander Annanpoika Frank and Maria Greta Johansdr Kauma. She was also one of 13 children. Five of those children died before the age of 4. Her father, Alekander was the village tailor. Tailors were considered tradesmen and were better off than the average citizen. Yltonio is located on the Swedish/Finnish boarder divided by the Tornio River.

In 1880, Olga's fiancé left Finland to work in the mines in Hancock, Michigan, also. (We were never able to verify the name of this man, only that his last name was possibly Lakappa.) Olga gave birth to their son, Emil, in Finland in 1881. Since they weren't married at the time, the church records didn't record the father's name. Within weeks of Emil's birth, Olga and her infant son made the journey to Hancock. The couple was to be married soon after she arrived. The marriage never took place because Mr. Lakappa died in a mining accident soon after Olga and Emil arrived.

So here they were, August with a young son and no wife, and Olga with an infant son and no husband. Neither one had any other family living in the U. S. at that time. Thank goodness the Finns are so community minded. These community organizations helped both these single parents and through some community events, they met. They married in 1882 becoming Mr. & Mrs. August K. Johnson (I haven't been able to find the exact marriage date or place. The 1882 date is from the 1900 US Census). Whether it was a marriage of convenience or they fell in love before the marriage is not known.

After working 2 years in Hancock, August had enough of working in the mines. After saving as much money as they could, they moved to Duluth, Minnesota. At this time, Duluth was not the thriving young city it had once been. The city's major financier went bankrupt. Many businesses closed for lack of money. They had even let their city charter lapse. Because of the city's financial difficulties, many had moved away, leaving their homes and many boarding houses empty. August and Olga moved into one of these empty boarding houses, eventually owning it. It was located on Lake Superior, just opposite the shipping docks and canals. For many years it was one of the poorest areas in Duluth called "no man's land". Some immigrants came to this area to be fisherman or work as laborers to repair the canals and docks. I think, August tried his hand at all of them. As the city again started to grow, laborers were needed for the new grain mills, the booming lumber industry, and the iron ore mines. These laborers needed places to live. It wasn't long before August started renting the upper rooms to other Finnish immigrants until they could afford a place of their own. Some of these immigrants were family members who wanted to live "the good life". The area started to be called Finntown. The Johnson's lived at 324 St. Croix Avenue on the first floor. In addition to renting the upper rooms, they operated a small store where Olga sold the bake goods and candy she made. They also operated a sauna (the Finns love their saunas!). St. Croix Avenue became packed with rooming houses. Along with those rooming houses came a lot of out-houses. The out-houses attracted like mice and rats. St. Croix Avenue was once nicknamed "rat avenue". By the 1900 Census 36 people (6 individual families) were living at August's rooming house (which he sometimes called a hotel). Over the years, Olga gave birth to 9 more children (2 died just after birth). They made sure all their children got good educations. Most of them even went on to college. Edward and Emil started their own general store, Henry started out as a bookkeeper; Nora, Lucy, and Hilma became secretaries; Esther (my grandmother) became a nurse; Mary was a hotel receptionist, and Islay became a teacher.

In 1903, if you owned your own home, you were considered "well off". August not only owned the old rooming house on St. Croix Ave., he also had a nice house built in a much better end of town. No more "rat alley" for his family. They built a house at 1 64th Avenue West on the west side of Duluth, where many Finns who could afford to, moved. It wasn't the richest area of town, but it was heads and tails over "rat alley" which had also started turning into a "red light district" by that time. It was a nice two-story craftsman-style house with a porch wrapping the front with a balcony above. They had a large yard where men callers loved to visit August's pretty young daughters and play croquet. They also loved Olga's fresh baked bread and tea cakes, which was an added bonus.

August continued to rent rooms on St. Croix Avenue and operate his bath houses for a time. In 1910, he and Olga made a return visit to Finland to see family they hadn't seen in 30 years. By 1920 August had retired. In 1927, at the age of 78 August died. Olga died in 1934 at the age of 75.

In the 1860's, Denmark was doing much better economically than their neighbor Finland, but they still had their problems. Mostly issues with Prussia that ended in a war. Many young men were enticed by the stories coming out of America with the news of good paying jobs and other opportunities they didn't have at home.

Anders Hanson was born to Hans Hanson and Riborre Madsen in Langeland, Denmark in 1845. Riborre had previously been married to Rasmus Hanson, who died leaving her with three children. She remarried and had 5 more children. At the age of 14 Anders learned the trade of a cooper/carpenter. (Coopers made barrels, buckets, and wooden utensils). He made decent wages doing his trade and also did some farming. His father died in 1863 when Anders was 18, leaving his mother a widow again, with younger children at home. In 1864, at the age of 19, Anders decided to go to America to seek a better way of life. He would send for his mother and sister in 1866. Eventually all his siblings moved to the U.S. He spent a short time in Illinois and then moved on to Columbia, County, Wisconsin, where he met and married Anne Kirstine Hansen in 1867. Anne was the youngest of 6 children born in 1837 to Hans Nielsen and Anne Margarethe Jensdr. She had immigrated from Denmark with her family in 1862. They spent about 3 years in Wisconsin farming and gave birth to their first child, Malizze, in 1867. By 1869, they moved to Steele County, Minnesota. Anders bought 80 acres of land in Merton Township and started a large farm there and continued to do carpentry. While in Merton, they added two more children to their family, Herman F. (my great grandfather) in 1869 and Margarete, in 1872. In 1874, he rented out his farm and moved the family to Owatonna (another city in Steele County) where he started a machinery business. His last child, Emma, was also born that year. He operated the machine business for 6 years and then returned to Merton to farm and raise stock. It was said he had a beautiful brick home and one of the finest farms in the county. In 1882, he was elected Pathmaster (someone who is responsible for the upkeep of the roads and paths). In 1885 his daughter, Malizze dies at 18 and he is elected School District Clerk. By 1897, he moved back to Owatonna, working as a carpenter. That same year, both his wife Anne and his only son Herman died. He is a very successful man and continues to live in Owatonna until his death in 1903. In his Will, the value of his estate, after all his bills are paid, is \$8,320 (approximately \$251,000 today).

Jennie Belle Squires (my great-grandmother) was born in Monona, Iowa, in 1872. She was the 2nd child born to Ruth Ann Blackford and Calvin Squires, the first being her brother Edson, born 2 years earlier. I don't know what happened to Ruth and Calvin, but I'm not able to find them after the 1870 Census. In 1880, the children are living with their maternal grandmother in Indiana. In 1881, their aunt Marian married Henry Summers. By 1884, they are living with the Summers in Owatonna, Steele County, Minnesota, where they remain until adulthood.

Jennie Belle meets Herman F. Hanson, son of Anders Hanson, mentioned previously. They are married in Owatonna in 1894 and my grandfather is born later that year. They have another son, Everett, two years later. Herman has followed in his father's footsteps and has become a carpenter. Herman contracts tuberculosis. He and Jennie move to Arizona after Everette is born with hopes of improving his condition. Both Harold and Everett remain in Owatonna in the custody of their two aunts, Margarete and Emma. While living there, the aunts give Harold the nickname "Brownie". We were told it was because he had beautiful brown eyes, always wore brown shirts, brown pants and brown shoes. The name stays with him throughout his life. One year later, Herman died in Arizona in 1897. Jennie remarries in 1898 to her late husband's cousin, Christian Jepson. We were told that my grandpa continued to be raised by his aunts, but for how long, we don't know.

“Brownie” finishes school and becomes a Corporal in the Army, fighting in WWI. After the army, he goes on to graduate from the University of Minnesota, getting a Bachelor’s Degree in Science, majoring in Agriculture. Esther O. Johnson, my grandmother (daughter of August and Olga Johnson) mentioned previously, is also attending college to become a nurse. They meet in Minneapolis and the couple are married there in 1922. They move to Chisholm, St. Louis County, Minnesota. They have three children: Doris died at birth in 1923. As newly-weds, they couldn’t afford the burial, so my great-grandfather had her buried in the family plot he paid for in Duluth. Evelyn (my mother) is born in 1924 and Ruth is born in 1926. Esther worked as a nurse and homemaker while Harold taught math and sciences in Chisholm High School. He was considered one of the state’s outstanding 4-H leaders; served as the commander of the American Legion; was active in the Kiwanis and the Elks Club, and was a member of the school board. For 14 years, after leaving teaching, he served as the superintendent of the Chisholm Water Department. My grampa was an excellent pianist and entertained as a soloist, accompanist, and with orchestras and jazz bands. I remember my grandpa sitting at his baby grand piano in his front room by the picture window. After playing a tune once using sheet music, he never needed it again. Most of the time he just “played by ear”. I would sit in amazement watching his hands bounce around on that keyboard as he played those boogie-woogie tunes! Then there was my grandma. I remember my grandma was always neat and tidy with her blue eyes and reddish-brown hair and how rich she looked in her full-length fur coat, hat and muff. She always smelled clean and soft. I felt like such a big girl when she would let me put on some of her perfumed talcum powder using that big, soft, white puff she had. She wasn’t as “jolly” as my grampa but I loved her just the same. She died in 1963 and left each one of us kids \$100.00. My grampa married Dorothy Savoy the next year. She was another teacher he met many years before at a conference. She lived in Hawaii and they apparently, corresponded for many years (without my grandma knowing, of course). When my grampa died in 1969, he left his house, other property he owned, and some cash, to his two daughters. He left his baby grand to the Chisholm United Methodist Church. Dorothy was allowed to stay in the family home and eventually moved into a nursing home. She stayed in Chisholm until her death in 1987.

My paternal side is a whole other story (for another time) going back to England before 1200. I’ll just go back a few generations for now.

James Harrington was born in Otsego, New York in 1814 to Spencer Harrington and Polly Evans. Through his life he had been a farmer, blacksmith, and worked in a lumber mill. He married Roxana Hill and had 6 children: Otis L. in 1836, Spencer E. in 1837, Elisha in 1839, Jane M. in 1842, Hiram H. in 1845, Willard W. (my great-grandfather) in 1850, and James D. in 1902.

Willard was a carpenter/cabinet maker by trade. He grew up in New York, during the Civil War. By the age of 20 he moved to Buffalo, New York and lived there for approximately 7 years. He then moves to San Francisco, California, where he is listed as a cabinet and coffin maker. By 1883, he’s a foreman and master cabinet maker for the Pullman Railcar Company, in Cook County, Illinois. He meets and marries Katherine L. Deethman, a German immigrant, and they marry in 1888. He was given a gold-engraved pocket watch by his fellow employees to commemorate the occasion. Katherine was born in Germany in 1857. She and her younger sister, Wilhelmina, immigrate to the U.S. in 1881. (We were told that Katherine was a chamber maid for one of the royal families in Germany, but I have my doubts about that.) They have two children: Willard Jr. who dies shortly after birth in 1891; and my grandfather, Louis J., in 1892. Willard Sr. died in 1896. Katherine never remarries and dies in 1909. Louis is then raised by his aunt “Minnie”. By the age of 18, Louis is on his own and becomes the first wireless operator on the Great Lakes.

Dorothy Tumuth was born in Charlevoix, Michigan in 1897 to Robert H. Tumuth and Carrie B. Ferris. Dorothy married Chester Cazier in 1932. She was 15 and he was 20. Chester dies in an accident, 3 years later. In 1915, Dorothy marries Louis Harrington and they have 4 children: Herbert D. in 1915, Katherine L. “Kaye” in 1922,

Robert W. "Bob" in 1924, and Rosemarie "Rosey" in 1929. They move around for a while and finally settle in Grand Rapids, Michigan. By now, Louis is working as a retail agent for the railroad and is on the road a lot because of his job. Dorothy starts a diner called "The 5 Cent Lunch". They stayed in Grand Rapids until 1940 when they moved to Muskegon, Michigan. Dorothy worked for the Grossman's Department Store as a buyer and Louis worked at the train depot as a telegraph operator. Dorothy dies in 1949 and Louis in 1950.

Herbert D. Harrington (my father) grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has a real talent for music and can play any instrument, but his specialty is the guitar. His mother has a nervous breakdown when he is a teenager and he is forced to quit school to help support the family. Besides working in the diner, he earns money playing music at the country club. Later, he becomes a music instructor at Hager's Music House. He married Vera Webster in 1935 and they divorced in 1939. That same year, he married Bertha Culver. They moved to Saginaw, Michigan and had one son, Herbert II "Herbie" in 1940. In 1944, during WWII, he went into the Navy. Bertha dies in 1945, and since Herbert is still in the Navy, custody of Herbie is given to my Aunt Kaye.

Evelyn Hanson, (my mother) daughter of Harold and Esther Hanson, grows up in the small town of Chisholm. She learned how to play piano and was an excellent vocalist. She was a beautiful baby and grew up to be a beautiful woman. She graduates high school in 1942. She wasn't interested in going to college, something her parents wanted her to do. In 1944, WWII was still going on. This was her opportunity to leave Chisholm, have an adventure, and serve her country, so she joined the Navy.

Both she and my dad were stationed at the Naval Hospital at Oakland, California. While he was there, he was allowed to start a jazz band to entertain the sailors. My mom was always singing or humming when she worked. One day, my dad heard her singing and walked up to her and asked if she'd be the singer in his band. She accepted. After his wife Betty died, he and my mom married. My grandparents were NOT happy that their daughter had married an older man who already had a child, but there was nothing they could do. After they were discharged from the Navy, my parents had planned to live in California, but first they had to go to Muskegon to get my step-brother, Herbie. By the time they got to Muskegon, they didn't have enough money to go back to California, so they made their home here. My brother Robert "Bob" was born in 1946. My sister, Cheryl "Cheri" was born in 1952. That was it...they didn't want anymore kids. My dad was a music teacher and didn't earn much money. Surprise, surprise...before the year is out, my mom is pregnant again. Even bigger surprise...my mom gave birth to twins! I was born first and a half hour later, my brother, William "Bill" was born. We all grew up in Muskegon and stayed here. My dad died in 1974, my mom in 1997, my brother Bob in 2009, my brothers Herbie and Bill both died in 2018. Cheri and I are the only ones left.

If I hadn't taken those headstone pictures in Minnesota for Cheri, I never would have started this quest. I wish I'd asked more questions when my mom was alive. Without those letters my sister kept, I don't think I would have been able to narrow my search down and find the right people, and I probably would have given up. Yes, at times it's been frustrating and heart-breaking at others. But it's also been exciting and rewarding. I found out I may have come from poor immigrant folks, but they didn't stay poor. They wanted better. They took a chance; they left their home land, they married, had children and lost some; they worked hard, and never gave up. They raised their families and was able to give them more than they ever thought possible. I come from GOOD people. These are MY PEOPLE.

Am I done searching yet? Are genealogists ever done searching?



"Rat Alley", St. Croix Ave., Duluth, MN



1 64th Ave N, Duluth, MN



August Kylmä Johnson Family

Back left to right: Nora, Emil, Lucy, Edward, Henry

Front left to right: Hilma, Olga, Mary, August, Lucy, Islay in front of August



Jennie Belle Squires



Harold Hanson



Esther Johnson



Evelyn and Harold Hanson



Herbert Harrington



Herbie, Evelyn, Bob



Evelyn with Frances, Bill, & Cheri



Herbie, Evelyn, Bob, Fran, Bill, & Cheri