



Skandinavien Suomalaiset ry
Fennoskandia i samverkan / Together in Fennoskandia

QUARTERLY



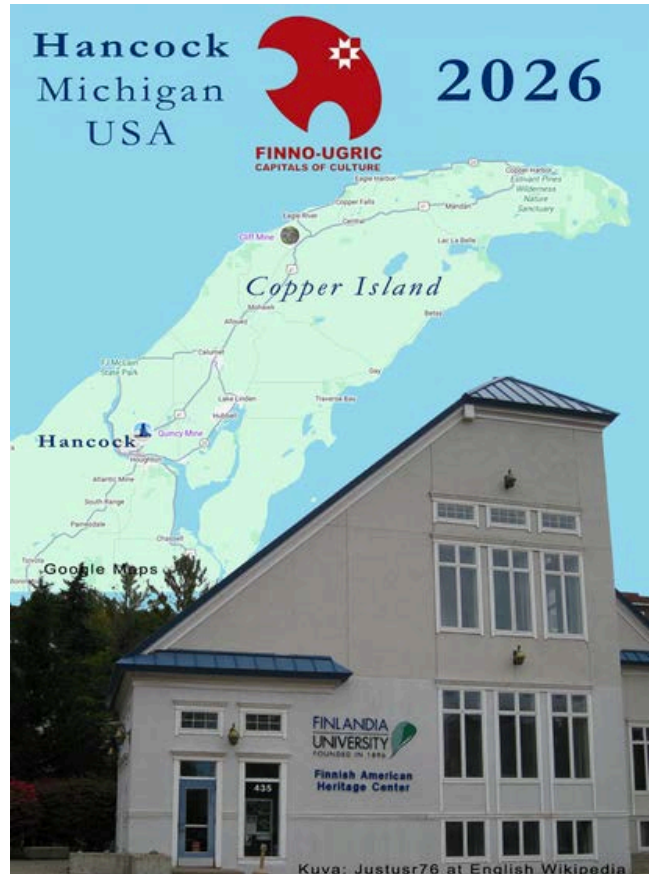
HANCOCK, MICHIGAN 2026 - A FINNO-UGRIC CELEBRATION IN AMERICA'S COPPER HEART

As we prepare for the year 2026, both the United States and Finland's wider cultural family have reason to celebrate. The U.S. will mark its 250th anniversary, and Hancock, Michigan—nestled above the Portage Canal in the Keweenaw Peninsula—has been named the Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture 2026. For many in the Nordic and Finno-Ugric world, this is more than a cultural event; it is a journey of rediscovery.

Many of us have distant relatives in this region, descendants of those who left Finland, northern Norway, and Sweden some 150 years ago in search of a new life. Next year offers a great opportunity to travel to the USA and reconnect with this shared heritage.

Hancock's story mirrors that of the thousands of Finnish-speaking migrants who came to Michigan's "Copper Country" in the late 19th century. Drawn by steady work in the copper mines, sawmills, and forests, these settlers built vibrant communities amid harsh winters and hard labor.

By 1910, Finnish speakers made up nearly a third of Houghton County's population, creating one of the most distinct Nordic settlements in North America.



Faith and education anchored their lives. The Suomi Synod was founded in nearby Calumet in 1890, later establishing Suomi College—today's Finlandia University—in Hancock. At the same time, Laestadian revivalists from northern Finland and Norway created Apostolic Lutheran congregations that remain active today.

Traditions have endured through generations. The Finnish American Heritage Center preserves language, music, and archives, while Hancock's Heikinpäivä festival each January celebrates Finnish humor, snow, and song. I

In 2026, as Hancock hosts Finno-Ugric events alongside America's 250th anniversary, the city will once again unite families and nations in a shared story of endurance, migration, and cultural pride.

DAY OF KINDRED PEOPLES IN HELSINKI



In October, Skandinavian Suomalaiset Ry traveled to Helsinki to participate in the annual Sukukansojen päivä event (Kinship nations day). Sukukansojen päivä (in Estonian hõimupäev) is an international celebration held in October in honor of the Finno-Ugric peoples. The purpose of the festival is to promote Finno-Ugric culture and strengthen the sense of unity among these peoples worldwide.

In Finland, Sukukansojen päivä events are organized annually across the country, but the most significant ones are concentrated in the capital region. Skandinavian Suomalaiset held lectures related to the event at the premises of the M.A. Castrén Society. The association was represented by Chairman Juha Tainio, Secretary Juha Tuikka, and Senior Advisor Rune Bjerkli. The occasion attracted a surprisingly large audience, estimated at around 20 people.



Juha Tainio and Juha Matias Tuikka

The first lecture was given by Chairman Juha Tainio. His lecture addressed ancient place names in Fennoscandia, the Kvens, Oskari Tokoi, as well as his own Swedish-Finnish background. A particular focus of the lecture was on old Bronze Age place names, which testify to the ancient connections between Finland and Norway.

The next lecture was given by our Norwegian partner and advisor Rune Bjerkli. His lecture, delivered in English, focused on the Kvens and Arctic Finns, and was very engaging. He illustrated his talk with old family photographs from the early 20th century taken in Ruija, which gave the presentation a personal and vivid touch. In addition, he brought along authentic North Norwegian stockfish, which for centuries has been prepared using traditional methods. In the past Norwegian stockfish was sold as far as the Mediterranean.



Rune Bjerkli

PER MARTIN TVENGSBERG – THE MAN WHO REVIVED THE FOREST FINN HERITAGE



Among the Forest Finns of Norway and Sweden – and among Finnish people throughout Fennoscandia – the name Per Martin Tvengsberg stands as a symbol of perseverance, knowledge, and love for cultural heritage. He was an architect, art historian, museum curator, and researcher – but above all, a communicator of the Forest Finn spirit.

Tvengsberg descended from a family of Forest Finns who came from Savonia to Norway in the 1600s. He grew up in Kirkenær and devoted his entire life to documenting and preserving the Forest Finn way of life and slash-and-burn farming tradition.

As director and county conservator at the Hedmark Museum, he developed a deeply interdisciplinary approach – where language, agriculture, architecture, and mythology were viewed as parts of a single cultural whole.



Juha Tainio and Per Martin Tvengsberg

His greatest achievement came when he rescued an ancient rye variety from oblivion. In a crack in an old drying house in Grue Finnskog, he found ten rye grains that had lain there for over a hundred years. Seven of them sprouted – and became the beginning of Tvengsberg slash-and-burn rye, a bushy rye traditionally sown at midsummer and harvested the following autumn. In 2013, the variety was officially recognized in Norway as a conservation variety, and in 2020 in Finland under the name Mustialan Tvengsberg.

In 1997, he bought the dilapidated Varangu manor in eastern Estonia, where he created an international meeting place for cultural researchers and farmers. With tea, honey, and long conversations about the Kalevala, rye, and local traditions, he filled his kitchen with life and ideas.

THE THREE FENNOSCANDIAN ORIGINS OF SANTA CLAUS



In the north, Christmas marks the birth of Jesus Christ – yet Santa Claus, or Joulupukki in Finnish, has become the season’s most visible figure. His message is simple: be good and bring joy. Whether real or not, Joulupukki is what you believe him to be. The modern Santa took shape in the 19th century, and three of his defining traits stem from Arctic Europe: his home, his reindeer, and his image.

Santa’s Home: Korvatunturi, Kvenland

Many believe Santa’s true origins lie north of the Arctic Circle. The winter solstice – when the light begins to return – has long been a time of celebration for northern peoples. In 1673, Johannes Schefferus described these traditions in Lapponia. Later, Swedish author Bengt Pohjanen identified Korvatunturi, in the land of the Kvens (Kveenimaa/Kvenland), as Santa’s mountain home. Together with Norse myths of flying creatures, these



tales helped shape the Santa we know today.

The Reindeer from the North

Santa’s flying reindeer likely evolved from Odin’s horse Sleipnir. Clement Clarke Moore’s 1822 poem “Twas the Night Before Christmas” introduced eight reindeer pulling St. Nicholas’s sleigh. Decades later, Saami families brought reindeer from Kautokeino, Norway, to Alaska, and in the 1920s Carl Lomen’s company popularized both reindeer meat and festive parades featuring Santa and Saami herders. The meat business faded – the reindeer legend did not.

The Image: A Finnish-Swedish Creation

In 1931, Coca-Cola hired artist Haddon Sundblom – the American-born son of Finnish-Swedish immigrants – to depict Santa in their winter ads. His warm, red-cheeked, friendly Santa became the global icon we recognize today. Any Santa who claims not to come from Rovaniemi and Korvatunturi? A fake!

THE PUBLICATION DATES OF OUR NEXT NEWSLETTERS

VERNAL EQUINOX

SUMMER SOLSTICE

AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

WINTER SOLSTICE