

"Family Roots are in Kuivakangas"

TO THE TORNEDALIAN RIVER SOCIETY IN NORTH FINLAND



My grandfather, Karl Johan Ranta Kohkoinen left the family farm along the Tornio River, in the Finland, on May 25, 1880. Borjie Byrsten, my second cousin, whom I have met, now owns and maintains this farm in Kuivakangas. Karl Johan was 25 years of age at the time of his departure. He secured passage to Canada by ship and then traveled further west in Canada by train and by lake vessel.

He settled in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada where he met his future wife, Susanna Filppula who was from Laihia, Finland. They were married in 1886. The marriage was after Karl Johan attained enough monetary funds. He did this in a work crew building the Canadian Pacific railroad around Lake Superior from 1883 to 1885.

By late 1886, they resided in Ironwood, Michigan where Karl Johan secured a position in the Norrie iron mine along with 3,000 other men. The family name was changed to Randa in 1904 when the

family moved to a farm in Oma Township, south of Hurley, Wisconsin. The family of three children consisted of one son, my father, Carl Hjalmer Randa, born November 8, 1892. Life was not easy in northern Michigan as the winters were quite tough. This is because about 250 inches of snow fell each year.

In 1918 Carl Hjalmer was drafted into the army during World War I and served until January 1919. He was discharged as a qualified electrician and mechanic. He secured employment in New Port News Navy Yards in Virginia. He led the team installing the boilers in the battleship, Maryland. After the launching in 1920 he returned to Ironwood and worked on the Chicago and Northwestern railroad as a boilermaker.

Later he secured a boilermaker position in La Crosse, Wisconsin in 1922, on the Burlington and Quincy railroad. For the next three months he worked 14 hours per day, seven days a week for a five-month period. Now, with the ample money funds earned he married my mother, Aina Lydia Raitanen in 1923. Aina was a Wisconsinite born in Finland in 1896. Aina was a high school graduate with one year of business school that she secured in Vancouver, British Columbia. She was employed as a business manager in Ironwood at the Brannas plumbing firm. They traveled to La Crosse, Wisconsin in a new 1923 Model T-Ford with their belongings. Carl returned to his railroad position there. Carl retired in 1953.

My brother, Gerald Randa was born on April 18, 1925 and I was born on December 17, 1933. Gerald served in the Army Air Corp during World War II.

I served in the army in the late 1950's. From the University of Wisconsin, Gerald obtained a mechanical engineering degree and I obtained a chemical engineering degree. Gerald worked for Wooster Brush and I worked for the E. I. duPont de Nemours Co. Inc. Gerald and I are both retired.

Gerald has three children, Susan, David and James along with two grandchildren Mathew and Lindsey. I have three children, Eric, Laura and Sonja. All of Gerald's and my children attained several collegiate degrees. I have six grandchildren, Erica, Stephen, Autumn, Adam, Christopher and Lauren. The oldest, Erica, just finished college and Stephen will start engineering school next month at Auburn. The Randa descendants have been making, and will continue to make, Karl Johan and Susanna proud. To recognize these two deeply religious grandparents, two exquisite church banners made in Belgium were donated to the Zion Lutheran Church in Ironwood in 2008. This was partly because they were chartered members of the church in 1896.

By: Stuart K. Randa, a 2009 member of the Finish Tornedalian River Society.