



# New Yorkin Uutiset

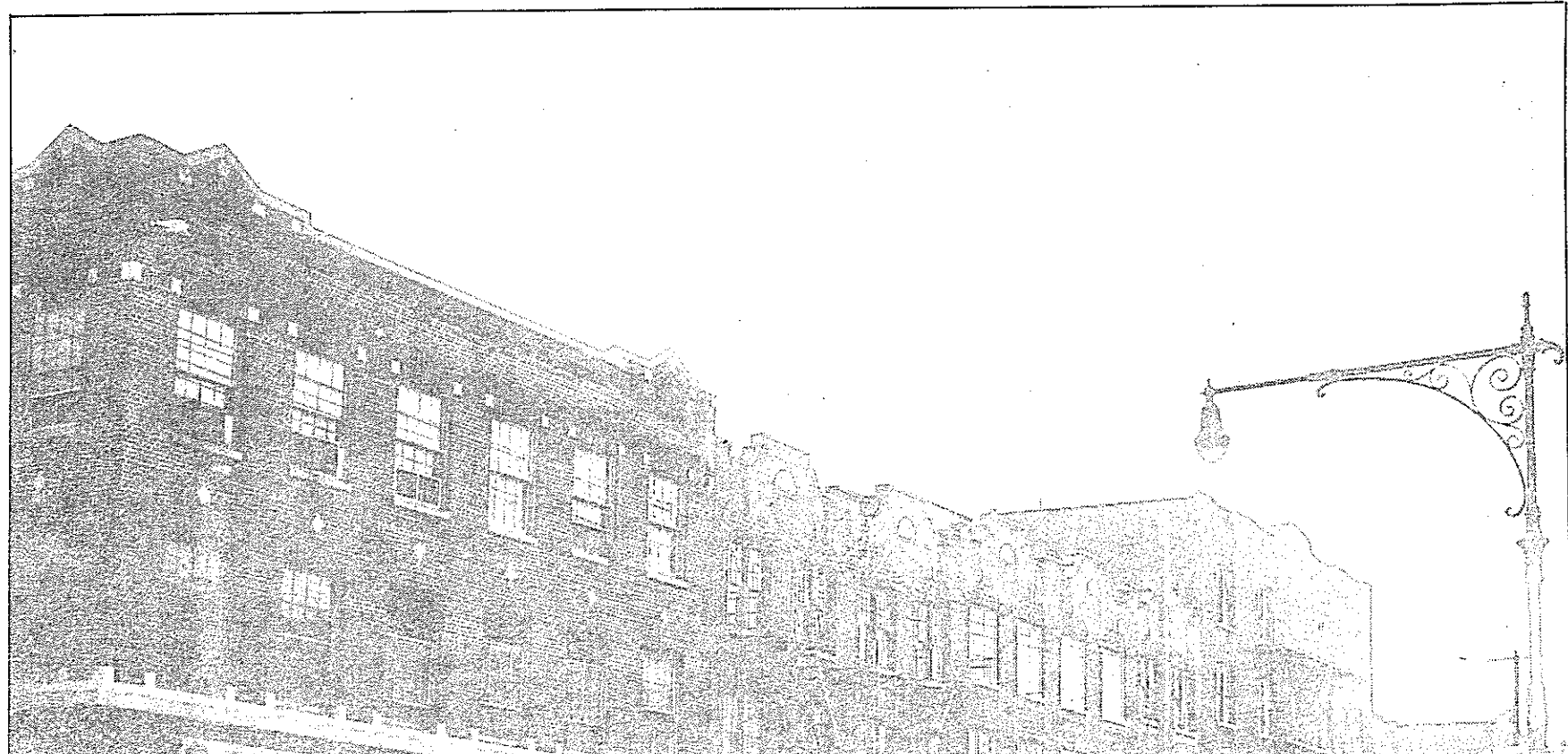
PRESERVING THE FINNISH HERITAGE SINCE 1906

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Irene Aunio Grew up at the Imatra

# There Was Always Something Going on ...

I came to the United States from Isokyrö, Finland, when I was 4 years old with my parents, Valter and Hilda Aunio. We moved to Finntown after first having lived for several years in Quebec, Canada.

My mother, Hilda, opened up a photography studio on the 4th floor of a building located at 44th Street and 8th Avenue. The studio had a skylight for light for taking pictures.

Who says the neighborhood was safe then? In 1928, I specifically remember having seen a large, brown horse laying dead on the sidewalk. The horse had crashed into the drugstore window which was broken.

As a result of the 1929 crash, most of the Finns in Finntown lost their co-op apartments and there was indeed a depression in the area. I moved with my parents to Köyhäintalo into my mother's brother's apartment, located at 4012-Seventh Avenue. My father was trying to find work as a carpenter during those years. In 1940, Laila Östman, later to become Laila Hagopian, asked



and my father became the first bartender. My mother run the kitchen. The whole family actually moved into Imatra Hall and we lived on the first floor in the area behind the main dance floor and kitchen.

During those years, in the early 40's, the women in the neighborhood would come every afternoon to have their coffee in the yard. The bar was a wooden bar. During the early 40's, my father was actually the manager and oversaw that everything was going OK at the bar and in the general area, he did this while my mother took care of the kitchen and oversaw that area.

In 1942, we moved from Imatra Hall back to Köyhäintalo at 4012 - Seventh Avenue.

The 1940's and 1950's were very active times at Imatra Hall. There were always dances and events going on at the Hall.


My husband, Ernest Saasto, came to Imatra to play pool. We later brought our children (Laurel, and the twins, Ernest Jr and Robert ) to Imatra to the dances. My husband gave the twins 5 cents for every



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parents to rooming into my mother's brother's apartment, located at 4012-Seventh Avenue. My father was trying to find work as a carpenter during those years. In 1940, Laila Östman, later to become Laila Hagopian, asked my mother and father to become the bartender and restaurant keeper at Imatra Hall. Imatra was in the process of obtaining the liquor license



Irene Aunio's mother Hilda Aunio run the kitchen of the Imatra in the 1940's. Ernest Saasto used to come to the Hall to play pool. Later on, the Saastos used to dance at the Imatra. They brought their children with them and in order to encourage the twin boys to dance, the father paid them five cents each time they danced with a pretty, tall Finnish girl.

## Back to the Childhood Memories

Robert Alan Saasto is one of the few active second-generation Finns at the Imatra. It is widely known that he is interested in his Finnish heritage, which has led to such incredible results as the discovery of 97 (ninety-seven) pikkuserkkus in Finland.

Robert Saasto, who is an attorney, was born in Finntown, but moved away when he was only 5 years old. How did he rediscover the area? And what ever made him so interested in his roots that he has even taken the challenge to learn the difficult Finnish language?

I always knew that I was unique because my entire background is Finnish. It is very unique to any American to have only one nationality. This became more acute to me when my children were born, six and four years ago. I was aware that my children now were half Finnish and half Irish and so in many respects I was the end of the line.

One day I was in a bookstore and I bought a Finnish phrase book and I recognized many of the phrases in the book such as "stop jumping", "be quiet". It reminded me of the time when I used to go to my grandmother, Mummu's co-op. That's when I decided that in

my free time, which usually consists of the time when I'm in car, driving, to learn Finnish tapes. And then I got a Finnish secretary and a Finnish instructor. So I started to learn Finnish and this was about five years ago.

In the same time I started to work with my secretary to write to churches to Finland, not so much to find out how far back I could go, but to see if I could find out all the relatives of my four grand-parents and bring all the relatives down to my level and determine what happened to all the people on my level. Theoretically, if my grand-parents never came here I would have been there.

What happened to my generation? That search took about three years.

I started out with very little information, just that my grand-father came from Pihtipudas. I had one or two addresses and one or two people to call to get additional information. After having made contact with them and traveling all around Finland and going through numerous files, I traced almost all the relatives and each one of my grand-parents were generally one of five, so that I had to trace all the five brothers and sisters down to come to my generation. And the final result is that I have 97 pikkuserkkus. I

the Hall.

My husband, Ernest Saasto, came to Imatra to play pool. We later brought our children (Laurel, and the twins, Ernest Jr and Robert) to Imatra to the dances. My husband gave the twins 5 cents for every dance they had with a beautiful tall Finnish blond. It was quite a sight to see them dancing slow when they were perhaps at most 4'5" tall and the girls towered over them.

kuuta ja esittää pääji

Imatra-seuran suurjuhlat lähestyvät, mutta vielä on aikaa varmistaa pääsyliput juhlille. Torstai, 19. syyskuuta on ensimmäinen juhlapäivä, joka alkaa taidenäyttelyllä klo 6 illalla. New Yorkin pääkonsuli Garth Castren avaa tilaisuuden, johon ottaa osaa kahdeksan taiteilijaa sekä Suomesta että Yhdysvalloista. Seuraavien taiteilijoiden töitä on esillä: Irene Aunio, Sylvia Hentilä, Mirja Jäppinen, Hannu Kauppi, Sinikka Laine, Esko Nousiainen, Eila Råfeldt ja Midred Wiskari. Tervetuloa tutustumaan tähän monipuoliseen näyttelyyn. Samana iltana esiintyvät Vantaan kansanperinteen ystävät, joka on 30-henkinen tanhuryhmä Suomesta. Tämän päivän pääsylippu maksaa vain 5 dollaria.

Perjantaina, 20. päivänä saadaan kuulla kuorolaulua, Järvenpään Mieslaulajien konsertissa juhlasalissa. Tämän päivän suuri vetonumero on suomalaisten Malhon veljeksien salonkitanssiesitys, joka on silmiä hivelevää taidetta. Suomalainen laulaja Helga Hynninen viihdyttää yleisöä lauluillaan. Hänen miehensä Lasse Hynninen on etevä hanuritaiteilija, joka säestää puolisoaan juhlaohjelmassa. Liput myös perjantain ohjelmiin ovat vain 5 dollaria.

My father's father Onni Saastamoinen came from Pihtipudas. He left in 1920's. There in Pihtipudas I saw many old documents, also letters that my great-grandfather had written, usually in terms of money. I also visited the land where they came from. He married Jenny Pulkkinen who came from just south

of Savonlinna. She was working in a bakery store in Finland and she left when she was about 19 and then she met Onni and they were married.

The story goes that when my grandfather came here he cut his name in half from Saastamoinen and threw his clothes over-board because they were not good here.

My mummu, whose co-op I used to visit in Finntown, was Hilda Latvala. The Latvalas came from Lappajärvi and I visited in Lappajärvi and I met all the Latvalas. One of the girls had her confirmation and there was a party where I went. At first I spoke very broken Finnish, and they spoke nothing but Finnish for 45 minutes. There were a lot of young girls, my pikkuserkkus, very good-looking girls. All of a sudden they started to speak English, everyone of them. Later they told me that their boyfriends had told them that they should beware of people who came to their area and tell them that they are relatives. They should be very careful before they say anything, that we might be looking to steal their money.

I actually went to the house where my grand-mother was born and I went to some of the relative's homes too, which was very nice.

Hilda married Valter Aunio, whose family came from Iso-



Imatra's bar in 1940. Valtter Aunio is on the left, the first woman from the left is Hilda Aunio.

Kyrö which is close to Lappajärvi. They got married there and my mother was born there. They went to Canada first and then they moved to Brooklyn where my mother, of course met my father.

#### Finntown Memories

We, Laurel, Ernie Jr. and me were born in Finntown and we stayed here until we were about five years old. We moved to Dyker Heights in Brooklyn, but we visited Finntown every Saturday. My mother took art courses at the Brooklyn Museum and we stayed with my grand-parents, with Mummu and Pop at 4012

on Seventh Avenue.

We would play in the park. Sometime in early afternoon we were given money - I always remember it as a quarter - to go to movies, to see cowboy movies. The movie theatre was on Eighth Avenue in the low 40's on the east side of the street. We used to walk there. Nobody ever walked kids those days.

Mummu always spoke Finnish to us and we understood it, but my mother had hard time to encourage us to speak Finnish. Our friends always spoke English and I remember having been confused about whether I was learning Finnish or English

We went to Sunday school in Gloria Dei. I remember being told to remain after class as punishment for acting up during the class. I must have stayed for about an hour but no-one came to tell me I could leave. Finally I wandered outside and I went to Seventh Avenue and I remember specifically looking to the right and thinking there's my grand-parents, but so much time had gone by that my parents probably had come to pick up my sister and brother and so I left and walked to 78th Street between 10 and 11th. I know that was the way to go because that's where grand-father

was swimming, too, even if I don't remember that.

My friends became in Dyker Heights and Finntown was like a childhood memory place and slowly I didn't have any friends here any more.

I never moved back to Finntown. My real contact back to this neighborhood came through Mauno Laurila. He knew my parents and he knew that I was a lawyer and I came to help with the by-laws of the Imatra which were changed to ensure that there was a proper distribution of money in the event that Finns could no longer run the Imatra. I came involved in helping with that

before they say anything, that we might be looking to steal their money.

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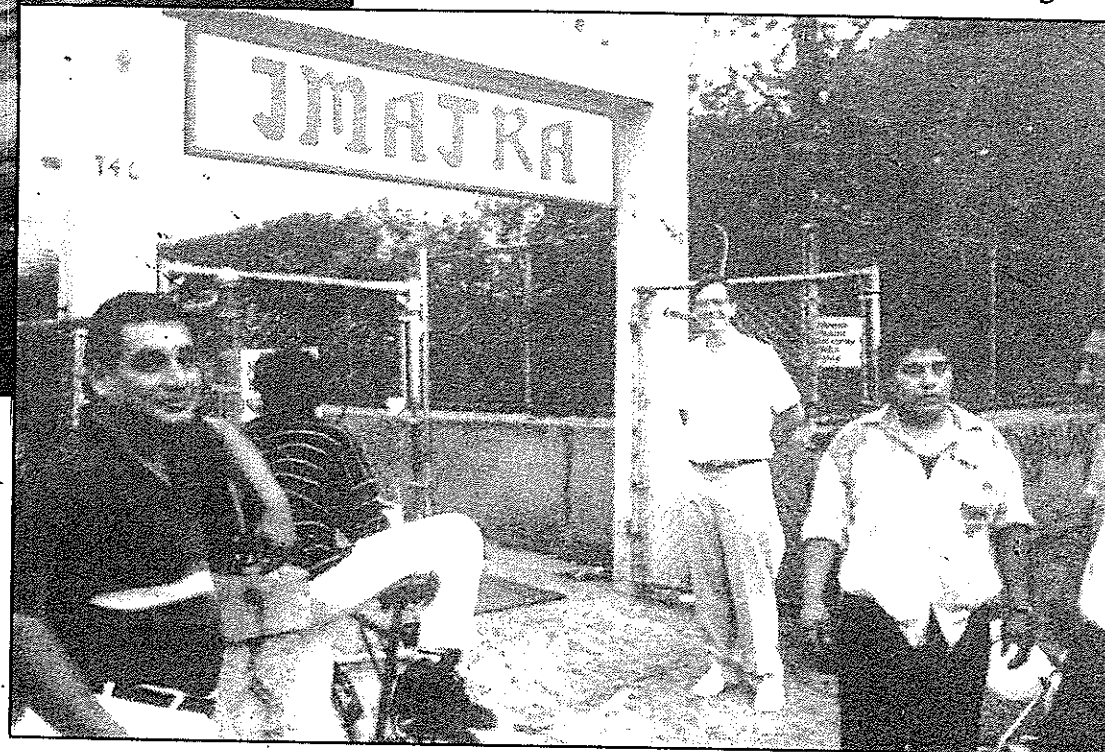
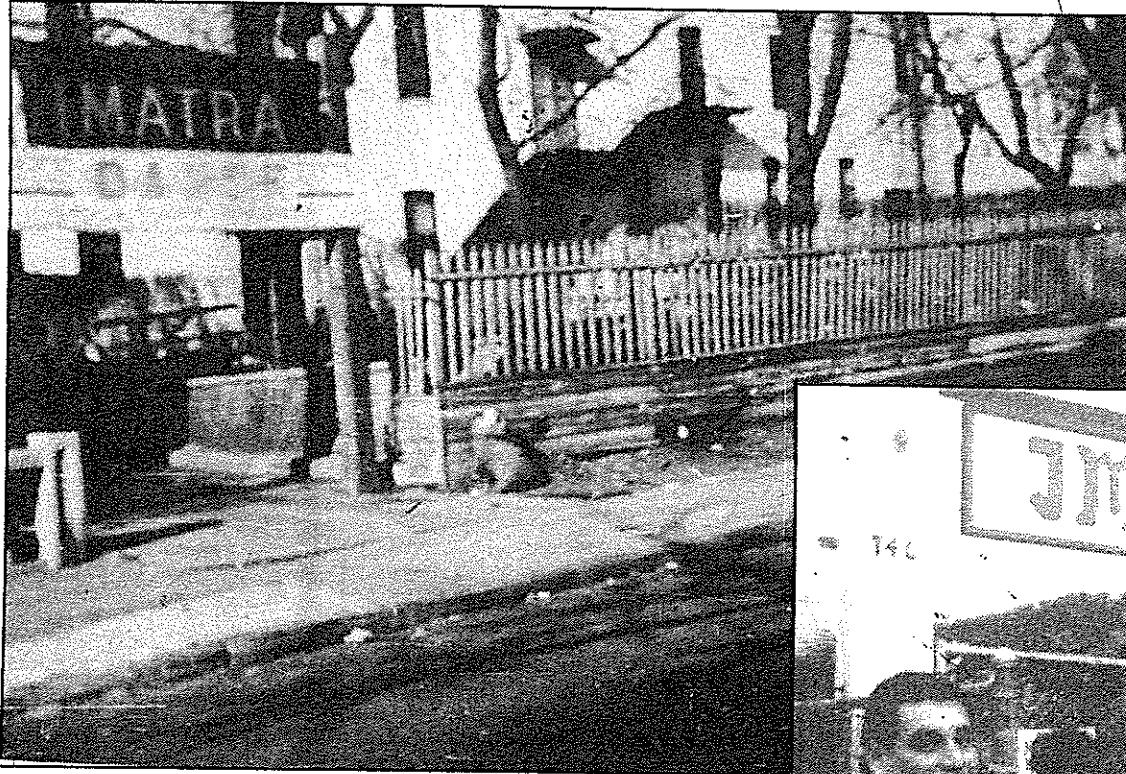
and thinking there's my grand-parents, but so much time had gone by that my parents probably had come to pick up my sister and brother and so I left and walked to 78th Street between 10 and 11th. I know that was the way to go because that's where grand-father always drove us. But that was a long distance for a kid who was less than 10 years old. But I found the house, no problem, and when I walked in, my mother was on the phone with the police, crying. She got so upset that she took us out of the Sunday school.

Sunset Park is what I remember of the Finntown. I used to play there, probably I

knew my parents and he knew that I was a lawyer and I came to help with the by-laws of the Imatra which were changed to ensure that there was a proper distribution of money in the event that Finns could no longer run the Imatra. I came involved in helping with that particular matter - this was about five years ago - and so I started to become more active at the Imatra.

Imatra raises in me boyhood memories. That time certainly has gone by.

I also started to advertise in the Finnish paper. All this happened in the same time when I started to get interested in my relatives in Finland. It all sort of co-incided together.



The sign is still there but otherwise Imatra's surroundings have changed quite a bit since Finntown was blooming. The picture above was taken in 1940 and the one on the right some weeks ago when Robert Saasto was on his way to the meeting of the 100th Anniversary Planning Committee at the Hall.

Tyyni Kalervo  
New York City

Ravintoloitsija Tyyni Kalervo on ollut Imatran kunniajäsen vuodesta 1978. Hän on nyt toista vuotta "trustee", eli yksi seuran luottamusmiehistä.

1. Pidämme yllä Suomen kulttuuria ja kieltä.

2. Imatran tulevaisuutta ei voi arvata. Minua huolestuttaa se, että nuoret eivät enää toimi. Imatra on hyvä seura, joka tekee paljon hyvää Suomelle ja suomalaiselle kulttuurille Yhdysvalloissa, eikä sen missään tapauksessa saa antaa kuolla. Jos suomalaiset loppuvat, kannattaa ehkä harkita muuttoa muualle. Imatra voisi toimia paikkakunnalla, jossa on paljon suomalaisia. Sellainen on esimerkiksi Florida, jossa on nyt suomalaisia niin kuin täällä Brooklynessä ennen.

Harry Manner  
Brooklyn, NY

Harry Manner on toiminut Imatran puheenjohtajana ja varapuheenjohtajana sekä näytelmäseuran ohjaajana. Hän on huvitoimikunnan jäsen. Hän on New Yorkin Laulumiesten puheenjohtaja ja pitkäaikainen jäsen, joten Imatra on tullut hänelle tutuksi myös monien lauluharjoitustuntien takia.

## Aktiivijäsenet yksimielisiä:

# Imatran toimintamalli voi muuttua, mutta hyvää seuraa ei saa hävittää

Imatran toiminnassa aktiivisesti mukana olevat ihmiset kantavat luonnollisesti huolta seuran tulevaisuudesta. On havaittu, että uusia tulokkaita talkoisiin ei tahdo enää löytyä. Siksi on mietittävä keinoja Imatran toiminnan turvaamiseksi tulevaisuudessa.

New Yorkin Uutiset kysyi muutamalta Imatran 100-vuotisjuhliä valmistelevalta komitean jäseneltä heidän ajatuksiaan Imatrasta. Vastanneita yhdistää yksi ajatus: Imatra on hyvä ja arvokas seura, eikä sen saa antaa kuolla. Moni tuntuu miettineen Imatran muuttamista jollekin toiselle paikkakunnalle, jossa olisi suomalaisia enemmän kuin Finntownissa..

Kysymykset: Mitä Imatra merkitsee sinulle? 2. Millaisena näet Imatran tulevaisuuden?



Tämä ioukko on suunnitel.

Jean Pellinen  
Little Falls, NJ

Jean Pellinen on ollut Imatran jäsen yli 20 vuotta. New Yorkin Laulumiesten mukana hän on harjoitellut Imatralle monet kerrat vuosina 1970-85.

1. Imatra on erittäin tärkeä New Yorkin alueen suomalaisille ja se pitäisi ehdottomasti säilyttää.

2. Täytyy ajatella positiivisesti. Yritetään pitää Imatran toiminnassa kaikin mahdollisin keinoin.

Mauno & Anja Laurila  
Voluntown, CT ja  
Hypoluxo, FL

Mauno ja Anja Laurila ovat olleet Imatran jäseniä 29 vuotta. Mauno Laurila on toiminut seuran puheenjohtajana viisi vuotta sekä luottamusmiesten puheenjohtajana ja sihteerinä 15 vuotta.

Anja Laurila on toiminut pitkään Imatran lehtikirjeenvaihtajana amerikansuomalaisille lehdille ja lisäksi hän on kuulunut huvitoimikuntaan.

1. Imatra on ollut suomalaisten kulttuurikeskus kaikki nämä vuodet ja voin todeta, että olemme olleet mukana tässä toiminnassa suomalaisten edistämiseksi.