

Kaleva History by E. H. Pustinen

Our town first became known as Kaleva when the Michigan Land Society secured a Finnish land agent by the name of Jacob Saari from Brooklyn, New York, to sell land in this vicinity and induce Finnish people to make a settlement here. In 1900 Mr. Saari moved here and with him came John Haksluoto who built a home on the site of the Charles Brooks home on Industrial Avenue. Other pioneers arriving here in 1900 were the families of Jacob Lemponen, Kalle Hendrickson, Matti Kemppainen, Antti Myllyla and John Palomaki. The late Vieno Haksluoto Hagelberg Kaskinen was the first Finnish child born in Kaleva. The late Edward Lemponen was the second. Mr. Saari named the town Kaleva, a name which was taken from the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala.

The Land

In the year 1900 the Michigan Land Society surveyed the village into lots. The names of the streets were also taken from the Finnish epic, Kalevala--Aura, Osmo, Kauko, Tapio, Tavi, Louhi, Panu, Sampo, Metsola, Wuoksi, etc. Previous to 1900 the town consisted of the depot, a post office connected with it, a small store owned by John White and one house on the location of the Frank Dickson home on Walta Street. The house was used as a boarding place for the section men on the railroad. There also were a few lumber camps. The first postmaster was Frank Shimmel.

The Newspaper

In the fall of 1901 the Finnish Publishing Co. which published the newspaper, "Siirtolainen," meaning "Immigrant," moved here from Brooklyn, New York. The newspaper, housed in what later became the drug store, had national circulation and through it Finnish families in America learned of the Finnish settlement in Kaleva. As a result many came here in 1901 and 1902 and more in 1903 and later.

Early Struggles

Life for the Kaleva pioneers wasn't easy. Many of them had to clear space on which to build homes. In fact there were stumps on the main street. The land wasn't very fertile and there wasn't much money. However, the Finns were determined to make their livelihood and establish homes for their families. It must have been their Finnish "sisu", or perseverance, which kept them struggling in spite of their many hardships.

Religion

Christian faith of the Finns was strong. They were God fearing and God loving people. They realized the importance of Christian worship and Christian education. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, now known as the Bethany Lutheran Church, was organized on January 12, 1902. The organizational meeting of the church was held at the railroad depot on January 12, 1902. Sunday School held its first session on February 16, 1902. The Temperance Society, Kalevatar, was also organized on January 12, 1902. The Temperance Hall was built next to the church, and made available for use in December 1902. At first, worship services were held in homes and then in the Temperance Hall. The Finnish Lutheran Church was built in 1913. It burned down in 1969. The new church building was built and dedicated in 1970. The Wesleyan Church had its first services on August 17, 1939 and organized as a church on April 7, 1940. It

closed its doors in 1989. The Kaleva Baptist Church began its services in 1950 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. John E. Wiitala and the church was built in 1951.

Education

In addition to Christian education, the children of the newly settled town needed public school education. At first the pupils attended a small school house about three quarters of a mile southwest of the village. The first school was built in 1904. It burned down in 1912. A new school was built in 1914. On July 13, 1914, at the annual meeting of School District No. 5, Maple Grove Township, a decision was made to change from a primary school system (K-8) to a graded school (K-12). The first high school class was graduated in 1917. The Kaleva High School was placed on the accredited list of the University of Michigan on June 30, 1928. Area rural schools were consolidated into the Kaleva Rural Agricultural School in 1935. New elementary classrooms were built in 1960. The Kaleva School consolidated with the Norman Dickson Township Schools in 1963 and is now known as the Kaleva Norman Dickson schools with an elementary school in Kaleva and Wellston and the middle school and high school in Brethren.

Business

The Union Store was organized in 1907 and the Haksluoto Brothers Meat Market in 1908. Other early businesses were John Makinen's Grocery Store, the Drug Store. Dickson Hotel, Manner Hotel and Kaywood Hotel. Our first doctor was Dr. W. E. Coates who moved here from Onekama in 1911. Not only in his career as a doctor, but in many ways Dr. Coates served his fellow men faithfully until his death in 1928. Coates Highway was named for him.

The Bank

The bank of Kaleva was established in 1912 by C. Billman and Sons, Bankers. Now our bank is the Kaleva branch of FMB Security Banks (since taken over by Huntington National Banks.) Electric lights and power became possible in Kaleva in 1926. The village of Kaleva was incorporated in 1948. Robert Rengo was the first president/mayor. Other officers were John Rengo, Charles Dodt and Richard Brotherton.

Historical Facts

The Kaleva Historical Museum was dedicated in 1982. It not only is a Michigan Registered Historical Site but also was placed on the National Register of Historical places by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Today in Kaleva

Today our village is a thriving community with profitable businesses and industries. We have stores, restaurants, churches, a beauty shop, a barber shop, a flower shop, a school, a bank, a post office, a branch library, a doctor, service clubs, the fire department, telephone company, lumber company, funeral home and even a county road commission garage.

Not just a Finnish Community

Kaleva is no longer considered just a Finnish community as it was in the beginning. Newcomers with various ethnic backgrounds have come to make their contributions to the advancements of our town. However, many second and third generations of the early settlers are still here with

names such as Asiala, Beldo, Hakala, Harju, Hendrickson, Hill, Hiipakka, Hulkonen, Holso, Jouppi, Kaskinen, Kemppi, Kuuttila, Leppala, Lemponen, Lindroos, Luhtanen, Makinen, Mannisto, Niemitalo, Nyrkkanen, Pihl, Puustinen, Rengo, Troppi, Tuisku, Wiitala and others. I am pleased that the Brethren High School Service Learning Class has taken such an interest in Kaleva's history and its heritage. Students and teachers are to be commended for their many projects.

A historical marker commemorating the founding of Kaleva in 1900 by Finnish immigrants was erected and dedicated in 1978. It stands on Wuoksi Avenue in downtown Kaleva and reminds us of the brave pioneers who founded this great little village of Kaleva of which I am happy to be a native resident and daughter of Kaleva's first Finnish family.

Written by: Esther Haksluoto Puustinen, May 1997