

The connection between Kuhmo and "Little-Kuhmo" is preserved through generations.

Immigrants: West Paris, Maine is the name of a small town in the United States. Residents call it "Little-Kuhmo" because many of them have their roots in Kuhmo.

An avid genealogist, Dale Piirainen is already on his fourth visit to Kuhmo. Piirainen smiles at the question of what makes him come again and again to Kuhmo. "It may sound corny, but it seems like coming home." He answers in English because, like many descendants of former immigrants, he does not know Finnish.

Many other visitors to Kuhmo, with whom Dale Piirainen has spoken, have experienced the same feeling of homecoming. (He says) we are all one tribe.

This is the first visit to Kuhmo for Piirainen's daughter and granddaughter. "They must be shown that their roots are here. It is my responsibility as a grandfather." The connection between Kuhmo and "Little-Kuhmo" must not be lost to future generations.

Dale Piirainen's granddaughter, Madeline Peloke, is the fourth generation (of the family) to be born in the United States. Piirainen's grandparents Antti Hermann Piirainen and Kaisa Maatta moved to the United States in 1906 when Finland was still a Grand Duchy of Imperial Russia. Jaakko Mikkonen, his brothers and children, sent tickets, which cost \$36 at the time. Dale Piirainen's grandparents had to work for them as much as a year to repay the cost of the tickets.

They worked at the same type of jobs as in Kuhmo. Piirainen's grandparents bought a small farm on credit in West Paris, Maine. The old farm was in poor condition and they worked to make it better. Their primary goal was to pay of the debt as quickly as possible, 10-15 years. It cost about \$2000 around 1920.

Some of the younger generation in West Paris are interested in their Finnish roots and some are not. The older a man becomes, the more he becomes interested.

Dale Piirainen says that the generational connection to Kuhmo can be easily broken; awareness of their roots disappears. At best, information is passed from parents to children.

"When I was a small boy, my father told me that the family lives in Kuhmo. I was able to show where Kuhmo was on a map," he says with a laugh.

Their roots mean a lot to the Piirainen family. Dale Piirainen's son Carl has two children with Finnish names: Anna and Veikko.

Many of the 2000 residents of West Paris have Finnish roots, but the exact number is hard to say. "Everybody in West Paris knows of Kuhmo. Most families have someone with Kuhmo roots."

The American Finnish community meets monthly at the Finnish American Heritage Society of Maine. The organization has its own museum and library, where you can find English translations of Finnish books.

"Visitors to Kuhmo tell of their visit at meetings of the Society."