



A FINNISH SAVUSAUNA IN MINNESOTA

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THE SAUNA or Finnish bathhouse and bath is one of the most distinctive cultural traits the Finns brought when they emigrated to the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No other custom or tradition of these northern Europeans generated as much interest, curiosity, flights of fancy, and, more recently, imitation among their non-Finnish neighbors. Since the beginning of their settlement in rural Min-

nesota in 1865, observers have characterized aptly the saunas as "the sign of the Finn." A nineteenth century writer noted that: "To every [Finnish] farm, no matter how poor it may be, has belonged since time immemorial also a bathhouse, [a] *sauna*."¹

In more recent years the sauna has enjoyed some measure of general popularity. Minnesotans of various ethnic backgrounds have built saunas in their homes and adjoining their vacation cottages. Commercial saunas and those in motels, clubhouses, and in a variety of establishments catering to health cultists and hedonistic excursionists further attest to the adaptability and popularity of the sauna in contemporary Minnesota. Most of the so-called saunas currently in use differ markedly both in architecture and function from saunas that the Finnish immigrants built years ago when they settled in the state. In the past, the purpose of a bath in a sauna was not to help the bather lose weight, improve his or her complexion, or enjoy relaxing sleep, as recent sauna advertisements promised. Rather, to the rural Finns the

ABOVE: The late Urho Hill and his dog in front of the savusauna, now abandoned, that is the subject of this article.

¹ Eugene Van Cleef, "The Finn in America," in *Geographical Review*, 6:210 (first quote) (July, 1918); Federal Writers' Project of Minnesota, Works Progress Administration, *Minnesota: A State Guide*, 79, 292, 347, 437 (New York, 1938); Grace Lee Nute, *Lake Superior*, 193 (New York, 1944); V. A. Heiskanen, *Kävin Tähtilipun Muassa*, 169 (Helsinki, 1946); A[rthur] William Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America, 1880-1920*, 24 (Madison, Wisconsin, 1960); Cotton Mather and Matti Kaups, "The Finnish Sauna: A Cultural Index to Settlement," in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 53:494-504 (December, 1963); O. M. Reuter, *Finlands Natur, Folk och Kultur*, 55 (second quote) (Borgå, 1889).

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separate sauna structure was an essential and complementary appendage to the farmhouse without indoor plumbing. Its primary function was to provide a place to bathe, that is, "a place where people heat their bodies and perspire." Several other traditional functions, which will be considered later, were also associated with the sauna.²

Though bathing was the primary function, noticeable regional differences existed in the sauna's form and use. There is ample evidence that each of the three major sauna traditions (north, east, and west) recognized by ethnologists in Finland were followed by Finns in Minnesota. In addition, saunas with characteristics of more than one tradition were also built, a fact which negates the widely held belief that a homogeneous Finnish immigrant sauna culture once existed in Minnesota. The savusauna or the smoke sauna was the most prevalent type, and it was common in all regions. These old saunas, of which but a few remain in Minnesota, were usually built of logs and characterized by a chimneyless stove (kjuas) of unmortared field rocks. Some of the smoke saunas were constructed with adjoining dressing rooms. In time more elaborate saunas have replaced the old smoke saunas. Usually they are of frame and board construction and are equipped with a brick or stovepipe chimney that connects with a metal-walled or bricked-in stove topped with rocks.³

One of the few unmodified savusaunas which has survived is in Kalevala Township in Carlton County in northern Minnesota. It is of north Finnish origin, which bears on the two other major immigrant traditions in the state, for the north Finnish sauna complex is largely a composite of the east and west sauna traditions. Firsthand information about this particular sauna from the son of its builder makes it a particularly valuable source. Until his death in 1973, Urho Hill lived on the farm which his father, Juho Hyrynkangas, settled when he came to the United States in the early 1900s. Hyrynkangas, who was born in Liminka pitäjä (parish) in Oulu lääni in northern Finland, built the sauna in the spring of 1910. Considered a fire hazard, it sits outside the farmyard 126 feet from the farmhouse. Its external dimensions are 12 feet, 3 inches by 19 feet, and it consists of a bathing room or sauna proper and a dressing room. It fell into disuse in 1959 when the present, more elaborate, frame-and-board structure was completed. This change was unusually late: savusaunas were generally abandoned or modified in the late 1920s and 1930s.⁴

In its architectural characteristics the sauna is analogous to the north European timber house. Its construction involved the use of transplanted folk architectural concepts and techniques. In general, logs to build saunas, homes, barns, and sheds were selected from standing timber on farm property or from nearby unsettled forest lands and were usually felled in January or

February, when they could be sledded to the site selected for construction.⁵ Pine logs were preferred for saunas because their form is affected relatively little by great temperature changes. Other species — such as spruce, balsam fir, cedar, tamarack, and in some cases even poplar — were also used when pine was not readily available.

Provided weather and working conditions were agreeable, construction began in late April or May. After the building site had been prepared, the wall logs were hewn flat on two opposite sides with a single beveled standard broadax weighing from five to eight pounds. To facilitate hewing, logs were commonly placed on a skid or on blocks and fastened either with wedges, rods, or dogs (holding hooks). Following the guidelines provided by a string stretched the length of a log, the desired width was marked off with a pencil or chalk on its upper surface. The excess lateral wood was removed by first notching or scoring the sides of the log two or three inches deep at intervals ranging from half a foot to three feet, depending on the grain and moisture

²*Minneapolis Tribune*, February 17, home and hobby section, p. 1, April 7, section B, p. 10, October 20, 1963, home and hobby section, p. 14; S. C. Olin, *Sauna. The Way to Health*, 85 (New York Mills, 1963). A recent brochure advertising saunas states that: "The centuries-old dry steam bath of the Finns is just what the doctor ordered for today's fast-paced hectic living," in Berns Air King Corporation, "Air King Introduces the Authentic Finnish Sauna" (Chicago, n.d.); Thomas Tuomola, *What Is A Genuine Finnish Sauna?*, 1 (quote) (Helsinki, 1969).

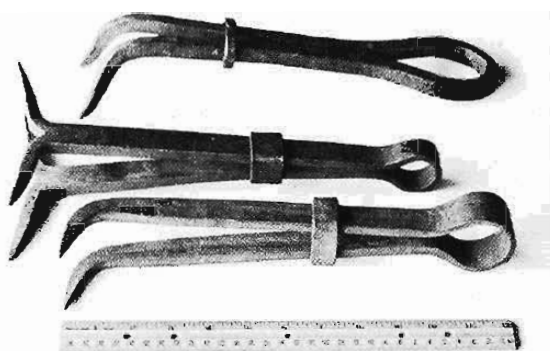
³Ilmar Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus i Nordeuropa*, 353-357 (Nordiska Museet, *Handlingar*: 53-Stockholm, 1960); Van Cleef, in *Geographical Review*, 6:210-211; J[ohn] A. Mattinen, *Thomsonin Muanciljehyseuden Historiaa*, 45-46 (New York Mills, 1935); John Ilmari Kolehmainen, "The Finnish Pioneers of Minnesota," in *Minnesota History*, 25:322 (December, 1944); Hans R. Wasastjerna, ed., *Minnesotaan Suomalaisen Historia*, 97 (Duluth, 1957); *Mesabi Daily News* (Virginia), September 22, 1964, p. 9. Some of the information on timber construction and other aspects of sauna architecture and functions are based on field inquiries carried out by the author in Finnish rural settlements in Carlton, Itasca, Lake, and St. Louis counties in Minnesota between 1964 and 1972, hereafter referred to as Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72. For a brief description of a more elaborate sauna, see Elmer L. Erkkila, "A Finn's Secrets of the Sauna," in *Conservation Volunteer*, November-December, 1964, p. 26-27.

⁴Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 353-354; Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72. The author is indebted to the late Urho Hill for providing valuable information and for permission to measure and photograph the savusauna. The field work was carried out in 1971. In general, the change from the old smoke saunas to more elaborate ones coincided with the aging and retirement of the immigrants; the more elaborate saunas are the product of second-generation Finns.

⁵The regional, vernacular (folk) construction and architectural traditions of Finland which the Finns transferred to Minnesota, though of much interest, are not considered here. Much of the information about construction is from Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72.



LOGS OF sauna walls were shaped and carefully fitted vertically and horizontally. The upper surface of the log is left in its natural curved shape and the underside is shaped to fit it. Three varas or hand-forged scribers are shown below.



content. The excess wood was hacked out lengthwise on both sides of the logs. The process was repeated until the desired wall width — generally between six and eight inches — was obtained. Next, the bark was peeled from the top of the logs with a sheath knife or with a special hand-forged bark stripping iron.

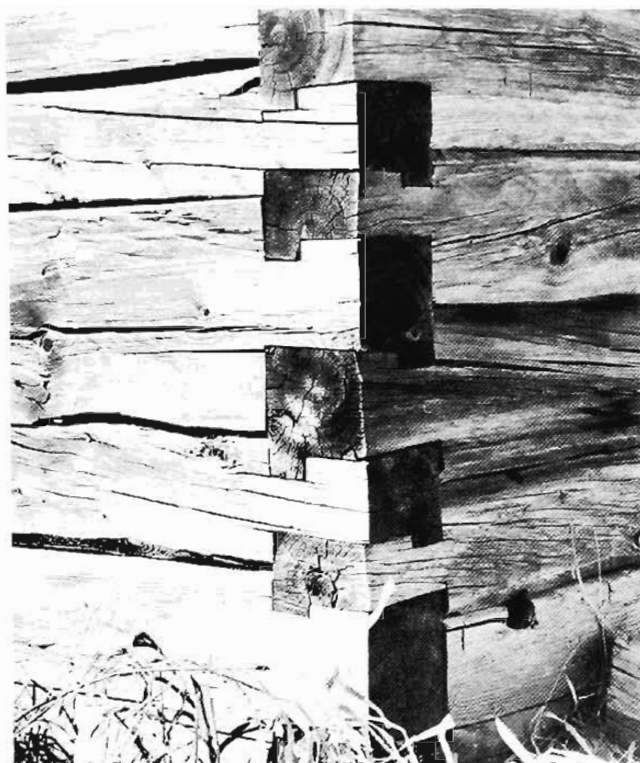
In constructing the walls of buildings in which heat retention was important, a vara or hand-forged scriber with sharp prongs and a broadax were used to fit the horizontally stacked logs together. While it was not necessary for wall logs to be of equal width vertically, the somewhat naturally tapered logs had to fit horizontally. This correspondence was achieved as follows: The horizontal profile of the top of a log was transferred and outlined with the aid of a vara on the lower side of the log to be placed in the tier immediately above. The outlined wood was hewed out with a broadax, resulting in the parallelism of two surfaces. Because the upper surface of the log was traditionally left in its natural curvature, the bottoms of logs required further shaping for vertical fit. Viewed in cross-sectional perspective, the top contour of a log was transferred and marked with the vara on the end of the log to be placed in the tier immediately above.

⁶ Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 291; Sigurd Erixon, "The North-European Technique of Corner Timbering," in *Folk-Liv*, 1:13-64 (no. 1, 1937). The vara were forged by local Finnish blacksmiths in northern Minnesota. On different types and uses of the vara see Sigurd Erixon, "Ett timringsredskap i kulturgeografisk belysning," in *Rig*, 16:29-82 (1933). On different log construction techniques in Minnesota, see Paul W. Klammer, "Collecting Log Cabins: A Photographer's Hobby," in *Minnesota History*, 37:71-77 (June, 1960), and Klammer, "Building With Logs," in *Gopher Historian*, Fall, 1963, p. 13-17.

⁷ It is relevant to bear in mind that a particular kind of corner notching used in timber construction does not necessarily reveal the ethnic background of the builder. For example, each of the six types of notching techniques which the Finns used in northern Minnesota were also employed by non-Finnish northern Europeans both at home and in Minnesota. Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72.

The outlined wood was hewed out to provide approximate fit of the concave-convex surfaces. A longitudinal groove would be left between the logs which was filled with moss for insulation at the time of construction. The degree of fit or tightness of sauna wall logs varied from farm to farm and is primarily an indication of the ax-handling skills and attitudes of the individual immigrant farmer. Cracks between wall logs caused by uneven shrinking and settling of the timber were in time chinked with strips of cloth and even with oakum. Chinking with clay, mud, stones, sticks, or concrete was not a traditional practice among northern Europeans at home.⁶

STRUCTURAL STABILITY of wall logs was achieved primarily through interlocking the ends of the logs at each of the four corners of a building. In the Hyrynkan-gas savusauna in Carlton County the ten layers of hewn logs that make up the walls (almost exclusively of balsam fir) are fastened by full-dovetail notching, a jointing method that the Finns as well as other immigrants from northern Europe frequently used in buildings in which heat retention was desired. Other notch types found in the walls of old Finnish saunas in Minnesota include the vertical double notch and the tooth notch. Because of their obvious limitations and disadvantages, the square notch and the saddle notch were used infrequently in sauna construction; the latter was used, as far as can be determined, in a single savusauna in Minnesota. The notches were outlined on the logs, sawed or hewed out, and finished with a chisel if necessary. In parts of the walls where structural stability was not provided by corner notching — for example around the windows, the doorway, and the gables — shaped wooden pegs or dowels (preferably of tamarack) some 8 to 10 inches in length and 1½ to 2 inches in diameter were pounded into auger-bored holes to provide the needed strength.⁷



AX-HEWN, plank-shaped wall logs joined with tooth notching

Savusaunas were built usually on unmortared foundations, either of packed earth, stone, or wood. The foundation of the Hyrynkangas sauna is formed of four glacial boulders, one placed under each corner in pebble-lined beds. Sills were shaped to fit the contours of the boulders. The total height from the level of the supporting glacial boulders to the vertex of the roof is 11 feet, 2 inches. The board lathing of the saddle-type roof, once covered with split cedar shingles and more recently with tar paper, is supported by ten rafters, each 3 to 3½ inches in diameter. The rafters are shaped to fit the contours of the wall logs of the topmost tier and at the vertex are nailed to the ridgepole of pine (nearly 6 inches in diameter) set squared in the gable logs. The three-sectioned ceiling is constructed of boards placed latitudinally on four longitudinal joists set also squared in the gables. The ceiling boards are covered by tar paper overlaid with moss, sand, sod turned upside down, and straw. These layers were once probably 3 to 5 inches deep and provided insulation for the sauna.

A small doorway (2 feet, 8 inches by 4 feet, 8 inches) located in the gable end facing east is the entrance to the sauna dressing room. This room is provided with a table and a bench and has wall pegs and tree crotches for holding clothing. Much as in the sauna room, the small six-pane window (1 foot, 11 inches by 2 feet, 2 inches)

and the doorway are the main sources of light, except for a lantern, because there is no electricity, a trait typical of saunas. Baths were often taken in poorly lighted saunas, particularly if they lacked windows also. Another small door (2 feet, 8 inches by 4 feet, 4 inches) leads to the sauna proper. It is, of course, necessary to stoop in entering; the doorways were deliberately kept low and narrow to prevent large heat losses. The low ceilings are yet another indication of heat economy. The maximum height of the central part of the sauna room is a mere 6 feet, 6 inches. The over-all dimensions of savusaunas were, however, determined by the size of the farm family and by the number of regular saunagoers anticipated at the time of construction.

Most of the floor space of the sauna room, measuring 9 feet, 5 inches by 11 feet, 2 inches, is occupied by a raised platform (lavo), the three steps leading to it, and by a chimneyless stove or kiuas. Only the left half of the room has board flooring; the remainder is of dirt. The nearly square-shaped kiuas (measuring 4 feet, 8 inches by 5 feet, 1 inch horizontally, and 1 foot, 9 inches vertically) is built of unmortared rocks obtained from surface glacial drift. It is located immediately to the right of the door, with the opening of the fire chamber facing toward the rear gable wall. Since the stove is close to the walls, the adjacent logs are covered with sheet metal to protect them against overheating and potential conflagration.⁸

The massive back and side walls of the stove (the latter averaging about 2 feet thick), consisting for the most part of stacked slabs of graywacke and of some slate, enclose a relatively small doorless central fire chamber measuring about 1 foot square and extending some 3 feet in length. Several transverse beams, including the mantel of graywacke, support the heaped stones and rock fragments that form the top of the stove. The stones, which measure from 3 to 6 inches in length and have an average weight of 2 pounds each, and the rock fragments were all obtained from surficial glacial drift on the farm property. They are composed of rhyolite, schist, andesite, granite, graywacke, red granite, and diabasic rock. The cross-beamed construction of the stove, its placement, and the orientation of the fire chamber all are characteristic of stoves associated with the west Finnish sauna tradition, yet the stove type is also found in some of the north Finnish saunas in Finland as well as in Minnesota.⁹

⁸Other Finnish words for platform or lavo are laude and laari. The terms used by Hill to identify sauna details are sometimes different from those the author expected him to use. On general and regional sauna vocabulary in Finland see Saunaseura R.Y., *Suomalais-Ruotsalais-Saksalais-Englantilainen Saunasanasto* (Helsinki, 1958); Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 291–338.

⁹Niilo Valonen, *Zur Geschichte Der Finnischen Wohnstuben*, 440 (Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, Toimituksia: 133 — Helsinki, 1963); Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 315, 321–322, 354.

Although the stove cover stones were selected carefully, it is not essential that they be gathered along lake shores or riverbanks as some observers mistakenly suggest. And contrary to some recent advertisements, it is not necessary to import "genuine Finnish rocks" in order to prepare and enjoy a bath in a sauna. In general, the stones and rocks found on savusauna stoves in Minnesota are igneous and metamorphic rocks that "give good steam" and do not decay or disintegrate as rapidly as most sedimentary rocks when repeatedly exposed to fire, water, and concomitant temperature changes of considerable magnitude, for the heated rocks frequently reach temperatures of 800 to 950 degrees Fahrenheit. Aside from defining the fire chamber, a primary function of the stove walls as well as of the heaped pebbles and rocks on top is, of course, to absorb and store energy from the burning logs on the hearth, which is used to heat the sauna room.¹⁰

Another essential fixture of the sauna room is the step-up platform (3 feet, 3 inches above the floor boards) on which bathers sit. It is situated against the rear gable wall and extends the width of it. Both the platform (2 feet, 2 inches wide) and the steps are constructed of boards and supported on 2-by-4 beams. While the platform is of a general type, its placement against the rear gable end wall, and its designation, *lavo*, are characteristic of both the west and north Finnish sauna traditions.¹¹

TRADITION was probably less important in determining the frequency of baths than was the season of the year and related farm chores. During the summer months when field work was being done, the sauna was

readied for bathing every other evening and at times even more frequently. But during the winter months, there was only the weekly or even fortnightly Saturday night sauna. Although the sauna on the Hyrynkangas farm was a family sauna in which men bathed first, followed by women and children, guests were welcomed. In the early years of settlement, Finnish lumberjacks from a nearby lumber camp paid a small fee to use the sauna from time to time, so on some Saturday nights there were as many as thirty to forty saunagoers.

It took from three to five hours of hardwood (birch and maple) fire to heat the stove before sufficient energy was stored in the rocks for continued heating of the sauna room. At the time of firing, smoke escaped out of the sauna through a small (4 inches by 7 inches) rear gable wall vent provided with a shutter, and through a roof flue constructed of boards (with inside dimensions of 6 inches by 6 inches) terminating about 4 feet above the left side of the stove. More draft could always be provided by leaving the doors to the dressing and sauna rooms ajar. The smoke flue is a trait associated with the east Finnish sauna tradition; its presence in some north Finnish saunas dates to past migrations from eastern to northern Finland. Despite the small quantities of water sprinkled on the *kivas* to rid the air of noxious fumes, enough smoke residue remained to cause slight eye irritation. The observation that a bath in a savusauna leaves one "smelling like smoked cheese" is not without foundation.¹²

Once the sauna room was hot, firing of the stove ceased, and the sauna cleared of smoke eventually. By the time the sauna was ready for use, the wall vent was closed with the shutter and the aperture of the roof flue stuffed with cloth to prevent heat loss. Variations existed among immigrant households as to the sequence of bathing, which was an individual and not a regional tradition. In the Hyrynkangas sauna it was customary to undress in the sauna dressing room and then enter into the sauna proper. But in savusaunas that lacked an adjoining dressing room, sauna users generally undressed in the farmhouse and went to and from the sauna naked or wrapped in towels or sheets. Other savusaunas were equipped with exterior gable-end wall pegs and tree crotches on which clothing could be hung so that undressing and dressing could be done immediately outside the sauna.¹³

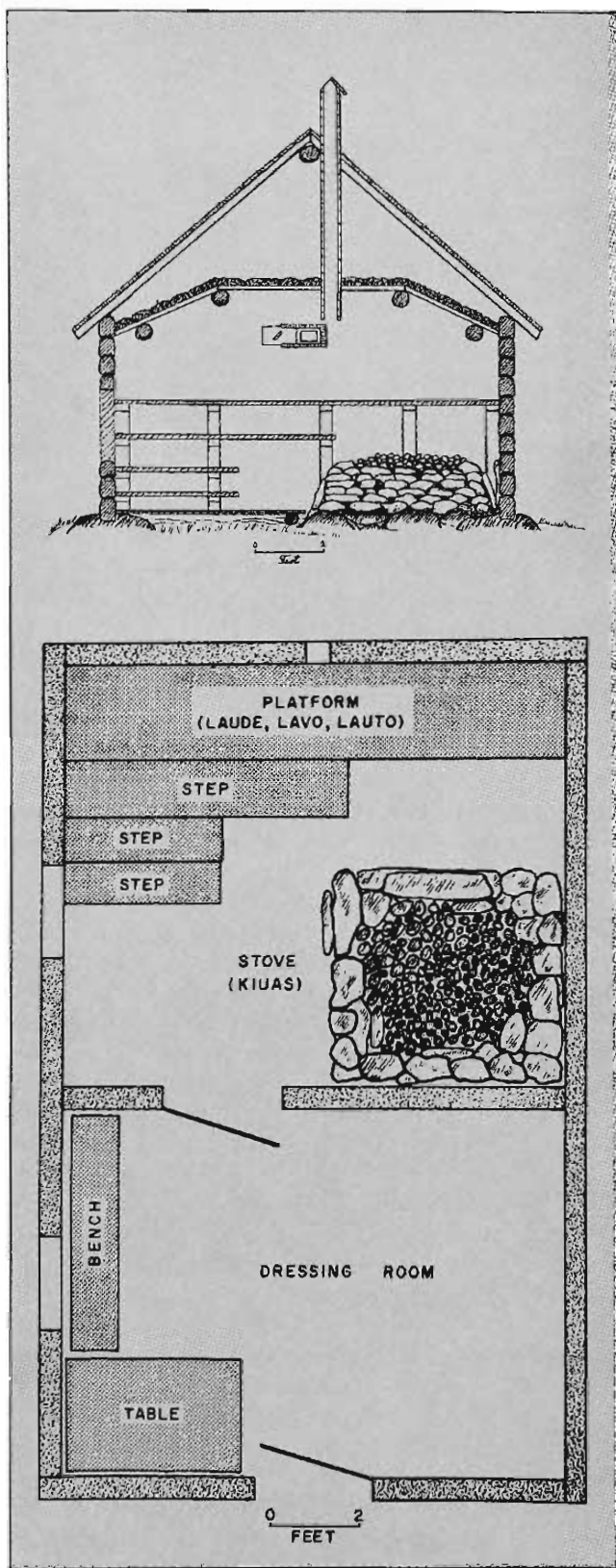
The step-up platform, which accommodated as many as five or six adults at a time, was wiped clean of soot before bathers sat on it. Children, older people, and others averse to excessive heat sat on the steps or on a removable wooden bench placed on the floor. Bathers made use of such accessories as homemade wooden buckets, a dipper, and bath whisks. It was customary to perspire for about ten to twenty-five minutes in the relatively dry heat of the sauna where temperatures prob-

¹⁰Air King Corporation advertisement in *Architectural Record*, 149:105 (April, 1971). On kinds of rocks used in building sauna stoves in Finland, see R. V. Stigell, "Tutkimustuloksia Hämeen, Kainuun ja Keski-Suomen Saunoista," in *Sauna*, 2:11 (no. 1, 1948); Pekka Laurila, ed., *Sauna*, 10 (Helsinki, 1964). Even igneous and metamorphic rocks crumbled eventually and had to be replaced. It was customary to clean the soot-covered stones on top of the stove once a year. Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 318.

¹¹Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 303, 309-310, 354.

¹²Spruce was used where hardwoods were not available. Generally pine was not burned because it would make the *kivas* sooty. In Finland as in Minnesota birch was and is the preferred wood used in heating saunas because of the greater amount of heat it generates compared to any other wood grown in Minnesota. On the heating economy of saunas see Stigell, "Saunaa koskevia lämpötaloudellisia selostuksia," in *Sauna*, 1:16-17 (no. 2, 1947); Stigell, in *Sauna*, 2:12. H. J. Viberjuuri, *Sauna — The Finnish Bath*, 27-29 (Brattleboro, Vermont, 1965); Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; K. F. Hirvisalo, "Karjalan Savusaunoista," in *Sauna*, 1:6, 8-9 (no. 2, 1947); Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 295, 354.

¹³Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; Konrad Beronovici, *On New Shores*, 102-103 (New York, 1925); Federal Writers' Project, *Minnesota*, 292.



SKETCHES of the exterior and interior of the Hyryn-kangas savusauna show architectural and construction details and the interior arrangement.

ably reached 194 to 212 degrees Fahrenheit near the ceiling at the beginning of the bath. Not every Finnish sauna in Minnesota was heated to the same intensity. Sauna temperatures varied according to the bathers' preference for and tolerance of heat as did their length of exposure to it. After some time spent in perspiring, users threw water with a dipper on the hot stones of the kiuas to produce löyly or steam (vapor heat). This increased the humidity and produced a sensation of higher temperatures, inducing more perspiration. The experience of löyly is an old and essential feature of Finnish savusaunas in general.

Another common aspect of the sauna was the whisking of one's body with bath whisks. It was done either before or after löyly with leafy whisks that had been dipped in water and momentarily placed on the kiuas to soften them. In the early years of settlement in Kalevala Township the annual supply of bath whisks, much as in Finland, was made of leafy birch branches cut during June to assure the adherence of the leaves as the whisks gradually dried. But later, bath whisks were also made of local oak, maple, and cedar. Cedar whisks in particular have enjoyed widespread popularity among second-generation Finns. In this particular sauna, bathers usually did not have individual bath whisks, but shared a few whisks which were thrown away after each bath.¹⁴

After heating, perspiring, löyly, and whisking in the sauna came rinsing with cold water and cooling off either in the dressing room or outside. The lack of lakes and rivers near the farm made cooling in water impossible, and rolling or sitting in the snow was not, as some believe, generally practiced. At times, the cooling off was simply an interval followed by more löyly, washing with soap, rinsing, drying, and dressing. Traditionally, however, bathing in the sauna did not involve washing with soap. Particularly during the summer months, when bathing was almost a daily event, a bath consisted of perspiring, löyly, whisking, and rinsing. Washing with soap was largely reserved for the Saturday night sauna. Characteristically, the old savusaunas lacked special built-in facilities for heating water. Water for soaping in the Hyrynkanngas sauna was heated in a small metal tub placed on top of the kiuas. Another removable tub on the floor contained cold water.¹⁵ It was customary for a bath to last from forty-five minutes to an hour and even longer. The immigrant generation's attitude toward the sauna seems more intuitive and relaxed than that of contemporary saunagoers. Bathing was done without the aid of thermometers, hygrometers, and other technical paraphernalia, and without special sauna soaps and

¹⁴Vilherjuuri, *Sauna*, 16-17, 26-35, 36, 37-41, 44-47; Tuomola, *What Is A Genuine Sauna?*, 3. See also Sanastoimikunta, *Saunasanasto*, 9, 31; Kalevala, 160 (Hancock, Michigan, 1944); Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72.

¹⁵Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 327.

shampoos, articles now deemed by some as indispensable to a good sauna.¹⁶

IN FINLAND as well as in Minnesota the savusaunas had other functions in addition to providing space for bathing. The Hyrynkangas savusauna was used for smoke-curing of meat and fish, drying and shelling beans and peas, and for malting wheat. The dressing room served as summer sleeping quarters for the farm boys, who found some relief from plaguing mosquitoes in its smoky-odored atmosphere. In curing meat, pieces of slightly salted venison were placed on a special, remova-

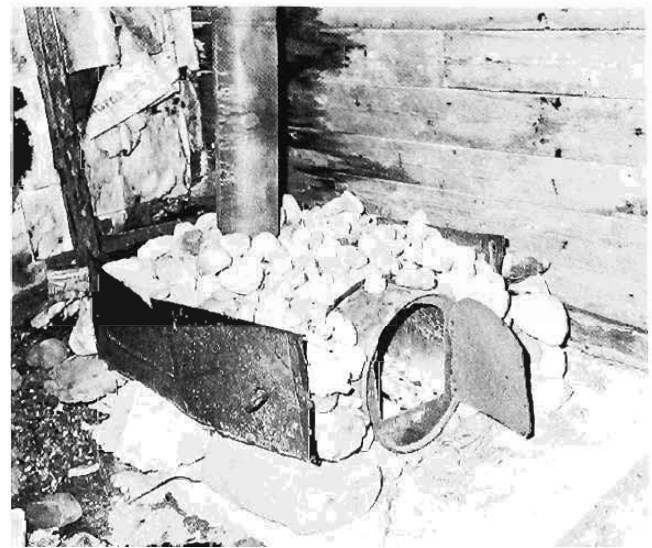
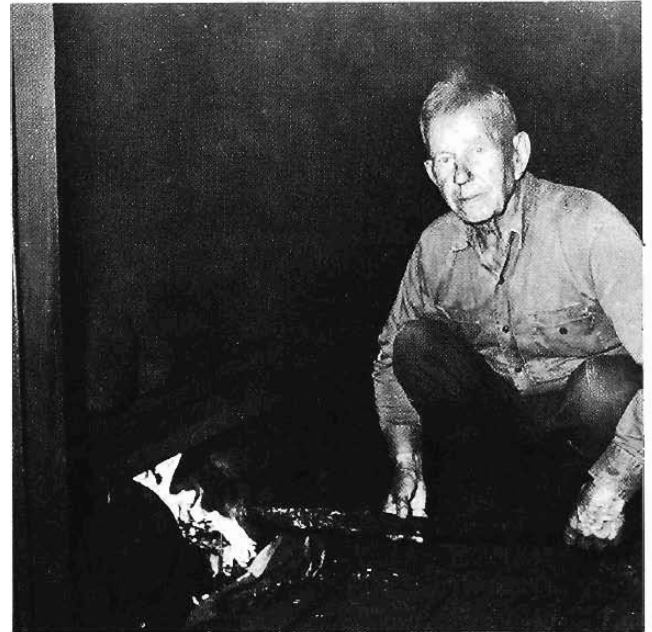
¹⁶Compare, for example, Laurila, *Sauna*, 28, and Olin, *Sauna*, 188-191. For recommended sauna etiquette and furnishings, see Amy Vanderbilt's column in *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 1, 1967, women's section, p. 2.

¹⁷On different types of smoke curing of meat in saunas and on malting platforms in Finland, see Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 329-330, 307, 309-313. Hill said at the time of the interview in 1971 that malt meal was still a staple on the farm but was obtained from a commercial source.

ble framework of poles secured directly below the ceiling. It took two days of smoke and heat to complete the process. The fish were cleaned and slightly salted and spread flat on chicken wire attached to a wooden frame which extended above the kiuas from the sauna platform to the opposite wall. Curing required some four to five hours of exposure to smoke. The framework was then removed or readied for another round of fish. Both beans and peas were dried on the platform. Malting took place on the sauna platform also, since this sauna lacked the special malting platform found in some bathhouses. Hulled wheat saturated with water was placed in a wooden trough for a period of two to three days to effect germination. Then the sauna was heated and the grain spread out on the platform for drying or malting. The drying process that arrested germination lasted from twenty-four to thirty-six hours. The malt was then sacked and stored. On this farm, malt was not used in brewing liquor. Rather, after it was processed in a coffee grinder, the meal was used for malt porridge, a breakfast dish eaten three to four times a week by the family.¹⁷



THE HYRYNKANGAS stove (above) is a traditional kiuas. The rocks and stone fragments over the fire chamber are supported by transverse beams and mantel, both made of stone. Above right, Albin Tikkanen, a Finnish immigrant, tends the fire in the savusauna he built in 1922. This is a modified kiuas with a rail mantel over the fire. At right the stone-covered oil barrel stove with a connecting stovepipe chimney is a "third generation" stove. The more sophisticated kiuas reduced by two to four hours the time needed to heat the sauna.





A THIRD-GENERATION Finn, William Salminen, holds old bath whisks made of birch. Note the vertical double-notching and plank-shaped walls behind him.

Relatively few household and farm-related tasks or events took place in this particular sauna, since the north Finnish sauna tradition includes fewer secondary functions than the east and west Finnish traditions. Additional secondary sauna functions — such as its use in childbirth, massage, wet cupping, making candles, drying grain, leaves, and bark, distilling liquor, and washing clothes — are known in Minnesota, although they were not practiced in the Hyrynkangas sauna. In Finland as well as in Minnesota other uses were the result of expediency, not necessarily of tradition, and most of these secondary uses are extinct or nearly so. In rural Finland, and to some degree in rural Minnesota, the savusaunas functioned as maternity rooms. Their interior arrangement and furnishings, including the facilities for heating water, caused savusaunas to be excellent places for childbirth, an occasion usually attended to by a midwife. A strong tradition reinforced the practical aspects. The last known birth in a Finnish savusauna in Minnesota took place in 1937.¹⁸

Wet cupping, or drawing blood from the surface of the body, was traditional therapy for a variety of ills. The cupper was usually an older woman who practiced her

art, including massage, in a heated savusauna. Incantations and charms were commonly part of the procedure. The cups were made of cleaned and hollowed-out cow horns. In one collection of fourteen cups belonging to a former practitioner, the cups range in length from 1½ inches to 4 inches and have a capacity of ½ ounce to 3 ounces. The top diameters of the cups vary from ½ inch to ¾ inches, the lower diameters from 1¼ to almost 2 inches. The upper opening in each is covered with a layer of treated pig's bladder fastened with a string. The cups were always soaked in hot soapy water for about an hour. Patients "took steam" and whisked for twenty to thirty minutes first. After a brief diagnosis, the practitioner would place a cup on the afflicted area of the body (but, except for the face, never on the head or the genitals), and through a small slit in the cover of the cup create sufficient vacuum by suction so that an impression of its outline remained on the skin when the cup was removed. Six to eight surface incisions were made with a straightedge razor or with a sharp knife point within the circumscribed area. The cup was again placed on the body, the suction started anew, and was continued until the cup was full. The cup was then removed and its contents discarded. It was customary to place several cups over the diseased area at once and to repeat the procedure several times until "bad blood" had been let out. Once bloodletting was completed, tissue fluid formed over the incisions so that bleeding stopped easily. In order to prevent infection, the cupped areas and the cups were washed with "carbulated" soap.¹⁹

The most frequent complaints that led Finns to submit to cupping were muscular aches, arthritis, heavy head, dizzy spells, high blood pressure, headaches, and general malaise. While most came to seek cure for a

¹⁸Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 354; Sakari Pälsi, "Vanha Sauna," in *Kalevalaseuran Vuosikirja*, 1:189 (1921); U. T. Sirelius, *Suomen Kansanomaista Kulttuuria*, 2:221 (Helsinki, 1921); Kustaa Viikuna, "Saunan Syntyä ja Kehitystä Maalaisen Talouudessa," in *Joulu-Sauna*, 2:22 (1946), Aulis Ojajärvi, "Bastu," in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*, 1:387 (København, 1956); Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 328–329; Kamps, unpublished field notes, 1964–72. This account is given to show only the spectrum, not the magnitude, of secondary sauna use. The 1937 date is based on the author's field research, including an interview with Dennis Järvi, March 24, 1973. Official vital statistics do not, of course, provide data on births in savusaunas, so it is difficult to say with certainty when they ceased to function as lying-in wards in Minnesota's Finnish communities.

¹⁹On Finnish folk medicine, including cupping and massaging practiced in sauna, see Konrad Reijjovaara, "Suomen kansan lääkitsemistaito ja suomalainen sauna," in *Oma Maa*, 3:47–58 (Porvoo, Finland, 1908); Sirelius, *Suomen*, 2:573–576. Each major Finnish settlement in Minnesota had its resident cupper; in addition there were itinerant cuppers. They were usually paid in kind for their services. Author interviews with Lillian Saarela, February 6 and 14, 1973, and with Henry Halminen, January 14, 1965.



A COLLECTION of cups (above) made of cows' horns and treated pigs' bladders and a straightedge razor for puncturing the skin. At right is Mrs. Lillian Saarela, a former cupper, with a cup on her arm.

specific ailment, others felt that cupping was preventive medicine to be experienced regularly. "Old people said that one would catch fewer colds if one had cupping every spring and fall because it would adjust the blood," according to one Finn. The practice of cupping among the Finns in northern Minnesota, though greatly diminished, is not as yet dead. A former practitioner, who is of the fourth generation in her maternal line to have been a cupper, still gets inquiries from time to time on such therapy from prospective patients, who are invariably old immigrants. Finns believed that saunas possessed general therapeutic qualities, and some of them considered it as a kind of last resort. An old proverb states: "If pine tar, whisky, and sauna will not cure you, it's death." Pine tar was a remedy for chest colds. It was either sprinkled on the sauna stove or drunk diluted in a glass of water while in the sauna.²⁰

²⁰ Bloodletting as a therapeutic measure was not, of course, limited to the Finns. The idea that disease is caused by blood impurities or the intrusion of alien substances into the body, which can be cured by bleeding the ailing person, is old and was widely held. See Fielding H. Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine*, 28-29, 134, 172-173, 298-300, 409-410, 657 (Philadelphia and London, fourth edition, 1929); interviews with Lillian Saarela, February 6 and 14, 1973 (quote).

²¹ Kaups, "A Finnish riihi in Minnesota," in *Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science*, 38:66-71 (nos. 2 and 3, 1972); Mattinen, *Thomsonin*, 48; Ilmar Talve, *Den Nordosteuropiska Rian*, 82-161 (Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland, *Skrifter*, vol. 387 — Helsingfors, 1961).

²² Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 333; "Sauna: An Old World Custom Survives in Minnesota," in *Minnesota History News*, April, 1960, p. 2; Erkkila, in *Conservation Volunteer*, November-December, 1964, p. 28.

Some of the savusaunas in Minnesota were also used for drying threshed grain and sheaves of harvested grain, mostly rye. The small amount of grain grown on incipient farms that produced grain at all did not in most cases warrant the construction of the traditional riihi, the special grain-drying, threshing, and winnowing barn. Therefore grain was often dried on the sauna platform. In time, however, the immigrants realized that the drier climate that prevailed during the harvest season in Minnesota, compared to that in Finland, made artificial drying of grain superfluous. On some farms, the savusauna was also used as the household laundry, for water could be readily heated either on the sauna kiuas or on a smaller chimneyless fireplace sometimes located in the dressing room. Such dressing rooms also functioned as summer kitchens.²¹

And by no means the least important function of the sauna, both within folk society in Finland and within the Finnish immigrant community in Minnesota, was that of a social institution. Gossip and news were often exchanged while bathing, especially when neighbors or guests came over for a sauna. Socializing with guests continued over rolls or cake and coffee, served in the farmhouse, which was the traditional way of ending a bath.²² In some localities, a group of farm families constituted what might be called a sauna neighborhood. Instead of every family heating its own sauna on Saturday, each family would take a turn and invite all the others. Saunas also provided a measure of prestige for the immigrant males who vied for the honor of becoming the local "steam man." The "steam men" could take more heat than others in sauna, which was taken as evidence of superior physique and status. Several tales are told in

jest about such competitions. For example, one Finn relates: "I remember once Mr. Saari and Mr. Maki went with fur caps and mittens to sauna to see who could outdo the other. The mittens were on because otherwise fingernails would hurt and curl from the heat. The fur caps protected the head. Mr. Saari finally won when Mr. Maki passed out from the heat." Introducing the inept non-Finn to the sauna was also a source of stories. For example: "A certain Mr. Kivi had company from southern Minnesota. They were not Finns and had never been to a sauna before. Mr. Kivi advised them that if it got too hot, they should throw cold water on the stove. This they did. And shortly thereafter, they left the sauna on their hands and knees to the amusement of their host."

This list of uses of savusaunas in Minnesota does not complete the spectrum of functions they had in Finland at the time of emigration. So far, research in Minnesota has not revealed, for example, any trace of traditional group bathing involving members of farm households and hired help of both sexes and of marriage saunas or baths. Apparently savusaunas were not used to dry flax and hemp, make soap, or to slaughter pigs, sheep, and calves, chores that in Finland were carried out in saunas, though with considerable regional variation in both occurrence and emphasis of individual customs.

The discontinuance of certain sauna traditions in Minnesota may, however, be more apparent than real. Only a few men and women remain who can provide firsthand information regarding a relatively small number of savusaunas and the kinds of functions they once had. The matter is complicated by the fact that modern practices and ideas including literary traditions and myths held in Finland about the sauna and its uses were, in time, transplanted and blended with folk traditions, resulting in a modified image of old savusaunas.²³ And the lore of the Finnish sauna was (and still is) further amplified by the second- and third-generation Finns and by American observers in general. Such lore comprises some rather remarkable beliefs and fables: that saunas were really houses in which Finns practiced witchcraft; that it was customary for the Finns to cool off after a bath in the sauna by rolling or sitting in snow; that saunas were holy places not to be defiled by swearing and whistling while bathing; that pioneer settlers at first lived in saunas; and that bathing in sauna is superior to other forms of baths.²⁴ Even some of the widely acclaimed and supposedly unique benefits resulting from sauna are apparently little more than the effect of cultural conditioning. A recent Finnish study investigating the psychological impact of sauna on bathers concludes that its "positive effects upon mood" (reduction of depression, hostility, and anxiety, sometimes expressed as a state of euphoria) are not limited to sauna; similar effects are achieved merely by taking a shower or by more conventional bathing.²⁵ A bath in a savusauna was relax-

ing not least of all because it took place in a relaxed environment.

Except for providing shelter for a few rodents, birds, and insects, the old north Finnish savusauna in Carlton County stands unused today. Its smoke-darkened, soot-covered interior walls recall its former functions. It is a relic on Minnesota's multiethnic landscape and a reminder of a transplanted institution that functioned within the broader Finnish folk culture in Minnesota. The north Finnish sauna built by Hyrynkangas indicates that concepts and expressions of folk culture in Minnesota are continuations of local traditions in Finland and not extensions of a hypothetical, culturally homogeneous Finland. It is evident, too, that the indigenous timber resources of northern Minnesota permitted immigrants to use traditional wood construction techniques and tools. The materials and techniques used in sauna construction, as well as the concept of sauna itself, have of course, changed in Minnesota as the result of changes of attitudes and technology from within both Finland and the United States.²⁶

²³ Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; Pälsi, in *Kalevalaseuran Vuosikirja*, 1:186-193; Sirelius, *Suomen*, 2:226; Gunnar Suolahti, "Suomalainen Sauna," in *Historiallinen Arkiosto*, 32:1-27 (no. 3, 1924); Viljuna, in *Joulu-Sauna*, 2:22; Ojajärvi, in *Kultur*, 1:387; Aulis Ojajärvi, "Morsiussauna," in *Kalevalaseuran Vuosikirja*, 39:293-330 (1959); Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 325-338.

²⁴ Kaups, unpublished field notes, 1964-72; Talve, *Bastu och Torkhus*, 124-125, 341-342, *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 17, 1963, home and hobby section, p. 1; Olin, *Sauna*, 35-38, 79-95; Bercovici, *On New Shores*, 101-102, Federal Writers' Project, *Minnesota*, 292; Meridel Le Sueur, *North Star Country*, 135 (New York, 1945); Van Cleef, in *Geographical Review*, 6:211; Olin, *Sauna*, 42-46, 56-58; Aili K. Johnson, "Lore of the Finnish-American Sauna," in *Midwest Folklore*, 1:35, 37 (April, 1951). This last article should be read with care because some customs the author believes are ancient sauna traditions are really modern practices and myths regarding uses of the sauna. Although the practice of sitting and rolling in snow is frequently associated with the Finnish sauna in America, according to Talve, p. 328, only immature youths occasionally indulged in it in Finland as a means of boasting and jesting. It is probably true that saunas were the first buildings erected on most Finnish immigrant farms in Minnesota.

²⁵ Jorma Kuusinen and Markku Heinonen, *Immediate Aftereffects of the Finnish Sauna Upon Psychomotor Performance and Mood*, 7 (University of Jyväskylä, *Reports from the Department of Psychology*, 112 — Jyväskylä, 1971).

²⁶ On the changes in sauna practices and customs in Finland, see Sakari Pälsi, *Sauna* (Helsinki, 1961).

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ALL PHOTOGRAPHS in this article were taken by the author. The sketch of the savusauna exterior was drawn by the author's father, the Reverend Richard Kaups. The author sketched the interior.



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