



Lakehead University Archives

DESIGNATION:

Finnish Labour Temple, Thunder Bay, Ontario

The Finnish Labour Temple, also known as the Big Finn Hall, in Thunder Bay, Ontario, received designation as a National Historic Site of Canada on 11 May 2012.

Constructed in 1909-10, the building housed two organizations that reflected the activist and collectivist tendencies of Finnish immigrants to North America in the early 20th Century: The Finnish Socialist Local and the New Attempt Temperance Society. The Latin for "Work Conquers All"—*Labor Omnia Vincit*—is carved in the stone course just under the eaves of the facade.

The hall's many rooms accommodated many services: Mutual aid and social services; Finnish language publications; a reading room and library; and plays, concerts, dances and sporting events in a spacious auditorium. . . .

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Parks Canada, Michele Cinanni

... In 1918 the lower level of the Hall accommodated a co-operative restaurant called Hoito. Founded by 59 bushmen (lumberjacks) who pooled \$5 each as "comrade loans," it has endured as a cooperative for almost 100 years. Until the 1970s, it featured long communal tables, not unlike cook shacks' dining rooms of bush camps (lumber camps).

In 1962 the hall was bought by the Finlandia Club of Port Arthur. With the formation of the city of Thunder Bay from Port Arthur, Fort William and several townships in 1970, the club became the Finlandia Club of Thunder Bay.

The hall still hosts Finnish language plays. Its history of hosting documentary films back in the 1950s continued recently with the docu-drama "Big Finn Hall" filmed on location.

(photos: b&w, Lakehead University Archives 1910/1912, Canadian Register of Historic Places; color, Parks Canada, Michele Cinanni 2008, Canadian Register of Historic Places.)

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