

Virginia, MN Work People's Trading Co.



Cooperatives

Yet another kind of mutual support was organized by Finnish-American immigrants - the cooperative.

While individual co-ops sought to satisfy the immediate material needs of their members, the movement's theoretical objective was the creation of an alternate system without the faults of capitalism.

Socialists found these principles compatible, holding that co-ops helped liberate the miner, worker and farmer by offering a more democratic system. **

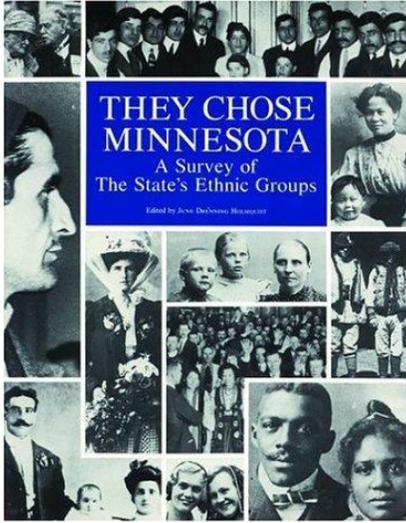
The Mesabi Range Co-op Federation

The Mesabi Range Co-op Federation was made up of 17 societies, including creameries, a regional oil association and co-op stores. Between 1922 and 1929 the sales of the cooperatives on the Iron Range doubled.

Cooperative enterprises were directly tied to the labor struggles of the region and groups such as the Western Federation of Miners and the Socialist Party of America (1907 Miner's Strike), Industrial Workers of the World (1917 Miner's Strike), the Communist Party and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

From 1920 to 1940 Minnesota was home to more Finns than any other state except Michigan. Since 1905 Finns constituted the largest of six major foreign-born immigrant groups on the Mesabi Range and they made up some 40% or more of the foreign population in twelve of the towns and villages. By 1920 the Finnish population of St. Louis County peaked at 17,342.

<http://www.lakesnwoods.com/images/Nashwa57.jpg>. ** <http://www.lakesnwoods.com/NashwaukHistory4.htm>
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Thus the "father of cooperation was Socialism - a strange parent," wrote John Kolehmainen, "reluctant to embrace the child wholeheartedly and blind to its unique possibilities in its own right."

Although Finnish Socialists gave impetus to the movement, they were by no means responsible for all cooperatives, even among Finns.

The first such group / cooperative in the state, the *Sampo* of Menahga, for example, was established in 1903 with \$170 raised by 13 Wadena County farm families who objected to the poor quality of merchandise and to being paid by local merchants for their butter, eggs, etc., in scrip instead of American currency. To market their products more effectively, the people of Sebeka also organized a co-operative creamery in 1908.⁶⁴

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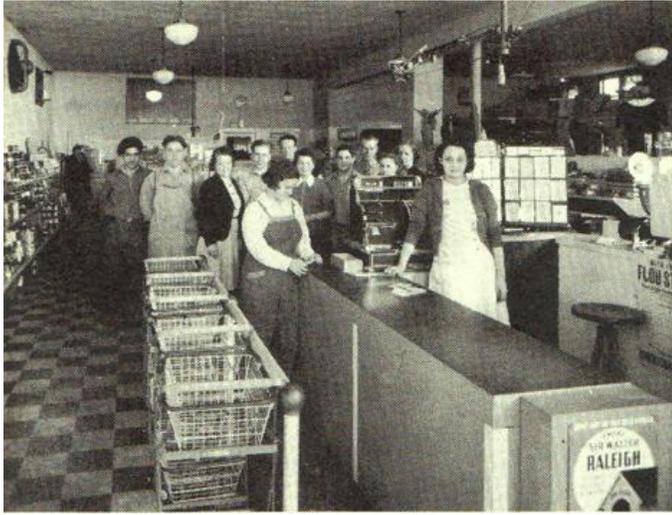
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The Co-operative Store, Finland Minnesota, 1932. Courtesy MIN Historical Society*

*<http://www.lakesnwoods.com/images/Finlan14.gif>



Elanto Co-op employees in late 1930's. L. to R.: Joe Simone, Elmer Kettunen, Anna Sumi, Brynolf Kukkonen, Lauri Koskela, butcher; Ann Botanich, Philip Pascuzzi, Arvid Salo, manager; Ellen Kari, Erma Laakso, customer at left; Mrs. Arnie Pickering and Theresa Papatola Wesanto, cashier.**

<http://www.lakesnwoods.com/images/Nashwa57.jpg>

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Deserted Store photographed 2013 by s.m.ivancic