

Hibbing, Minnesota

Heather Jo Maki, Hibbing Historical Society – 2001

128 pages

books.google.com/books?isbn=073851859X

"[Finn Hall] Originally built on Washington Street in 1902, it was the first Finnish workers' hall in America. In 1906, a new hall was built on Lincoln Street." pp 26-27



Dramatic and comedic acting is not only for high school students, and could always be found in theaters and clubhouses around town. It is not known what play these actors were putting on, however, it took place at the Finnish Workers' Hall not long after the hall was rebuilt on **Lincoln Street** in 1906.

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1909 Hibbing Finnish Workers' Club hall

...before the 1907 [Mesabi Range] strike began there were 64 members [of the Hibbing Finnish Socialist Chapter], and before the strike was finished there were 174. "This unusual rise in membership," even the *Päivälehti* was forced to admit, "was due to the strike, so that it may be said that if there were no other benefits from the strike at least it created hordes of socialists." In the beginning there were difficulties in finding a meeting place, for neither temperance society rented their hall to the socialists. They were forced finally to build a meeting place of their own... The Hibbing Workers Hall built in 1909 was considerably larger than the first: this one was 46 x 120 feet. It became one of the most important centers of activity among the Finnish workers' groups in Minnesota, with numerous flourishing auxiliaries. **

http://www.historymuseumeot.com/mfahs/html/part9_0008.htm

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The Hibbing Workers Hall built in 1909 was considerably larger than the first: this one was 46 x 120 feet. It became one of the most important centers of activity among the Finnish workers' groups in Minnesota, with numerous flourishing auxiliaries. In 1914, following the schism within the Socialist Party, the Hibbing society joined the IWW faction and supported the cause of industrial unionism and the Industrialists in the decades which followed. However, activity diminished here, too, just as it did elsewhere (p.519) due to changing circumstances and the aging of its members the corporation controlling the property took advantage of the plans for the relocating of North Hibbing and sold its property to the mining interests in 1938.

The sale, however, resulted in a dispute between the 'corporation' and the society as a whole on the disposition of the funds realized through the sale: the Finnish Workers Club, Inc., claimed to be the proper owner of the property and accused the 'corporation' of ignoring the wishes of the members (there were about 70 in 1956) by using the funds arbitrarily, by refusing to go along with the members' decision to build a new hall in the re-located part of town. Since no solution seemed possible, the matter went to the courts, and after four years of waiting the decision which was handed down took the control of the money out of the hands of both litigants. (p.520)



p. 519 Hibbing Finnish Workers' Club hall

The above chronicle does not give the full story of the workers' movement in Hibbing. To trace another aspect of it involves a return to 1914 and the split in the socialist ranks. At that time

several of the founding members of the original local society resigned, among them Mr. and Mrs. Frank Nevala, Amanda and Henry Wuopio, Alice and Charles Wirta, Mr. and Mrs. John Lampela, and proceeded to organize a new socialist chapter - the so-called 'yellow chapter' as the dissenting radicals labelled it - which remained faithful to the Työmies newspaper and the Socialist Party. During the entire period of its existence, some 20 years, it operated in rented quarters. It was big enough, however, to include auxiliary activities such as a dramatics group, a chorus, a band, a sewing circle and a women's group. The society owned land in South Hibbing but never managed to build on it. When the chapter came to an end, some of its former members started a Hibbing chapter of the Finnish Mutual Aid Society of International Workers Order and steered its program along policy lines laid down by the communist Työmies and locally devoted itself to aid in the maintenance of the Mesaba Range Co-op Park. The significance of the Mutual Aid Society among Hibbing Finns has been extremely limited, and as for any ideological activities it may sponsor, nothing is heard, at least not in public. That communist ardor had been high, however, is shown by the fact that at least several Hibbing Finns. (p.521)

Virginia Finnish Socialist Opera House

The Virginia Finnish Socialist Opera House was completed in 1913 by an organization calling itself the Finnish Men's Working Association. The 800 seat opera house was completed for more than \$40,000, quite a sum in its time.

The first performance was held Saturday, April 5, 1913, a vocal concert with Choir Director Jukka Makirinne conducting. Box seats for the event sold for \$25, where general admission in the future was typically \$0.25. The second dedication evening was the first play performed - Goethe's "Clavigo" -



translated from German to Finnish. **

<http://virginiamnuseum.com/opera%20house%20stage.jpg>

** <http://www.vccu.org/about-us/history> Feb 12, 2012 3:45 PM



Crockett Opera House, Virginia, Minnesota

1890-99

Exterior view of the Crockett Opera House, storefront with staff and customers**.

<http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/image.cfm?imageid=25982&Page=4&Digital=Yes&Keywords=virginia&SearchType=Basic&bhcp=1>

** <http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/irrc/id/2037/rec/20>

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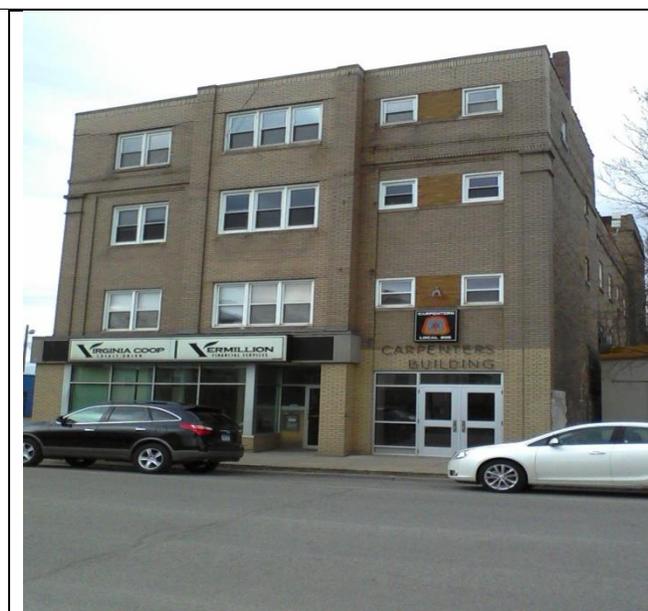


Virginia's Socialist Opera House was one of many halls built in communities across the nation where concentrations of Finnish immigrants had settled. Most of the halls served a dual purpose, encapsulated in the unusual pairing of the words "socialist" and "opera" carved over the Virginia hall's entrance. Used for dances, gymnastic performances, and stage plays, they also provided meeting places for like-minded Finns, many of them laborers who embraced socialist ideals. The Socialist Workers' Organization of Virginia built the Virginia hall. Its mission statement outlined its goals: With the help of plays "it was possible to draw audiences unaware of the [socialist] movement to hear agitators' speeches, poems, songs and such material with which it was possible to elevate their knowledge."

The most significant moment in the building's long history came in 1916, during a miners' strike that rocked the Iron Range. The Socialist Opera became the headquarters for the local strike committee and for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a national organization that had come to town to direct the strike effort. Fiery, emotionally charged speeches and rallies were staged at the Opera House, with IWW leaders' speeches translated into the workers' many languages

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[http://discovery.mnhs.org/MN150/index.php?title=Socialist Opera House](http://discovery.mnhs.org/MN150/index.php?title=Socialist_Opera_House) Feb 22, 2012 7:10 PM



Virginia Socialist Opera House photographed in 2013

