

1880s — *Finnish Pioneers First Come to Canada*

”Isoja kaloja kannattaa pyytää vaikkei saisikaan”

– Finnish Proverb

English meaning: *It is worth going after the big fish even if you don't catch any*

It is impossible to establish an exact date of arrival of the first Finnish settler to Canada. However, one can approximate that Finns began settling here in larger numbers in the 1880s. These were the big risk takers and adventurers of their time, leaving the motherland with little knowledge about the conditions they were about to face in a foreign land. During this period, many Finns who had arrived in the United States in the 1860s crossed the border into Canada. By 1890, many communities of Finnish Canadians had formed. The largest west coast community of Finns initially settled in Nanaimo. Another notable group arrived in south Richmond and bought land there, forming the fishing community of Finn Slough. Many of the early settlers were religious people. So churches of varying denominations served as important institutions of social and cultural gathering.

The first large wave of Finnish immigration to Canada occurred in the early twentieth century up until the outbreak of the First World War. Approximately one-third of all Finnish immigrants to Canada arrived between 1900 and 1914. As a result of this immigration, the first secular Finnish cultural society was created in 1902 under

the name of Finnish Society of Toronto. The west coast also received another large influx of Finnish settlers. One notable Finnish group settled in northern Vancouver Island on Malcolm Island in 1901. The leader of the group, Matti Kurikka, a Finnish radical, founded the idealistic agrarian society and named the settlement Sointula, meaning Haven of Harmony. However, the challenges of rural life, the heavy indebtedness of the community's incorporated company and a major fire resulted in the end of Kurikka's involvement in the Sointula commune, and a large portion of the Finnish population there departed. In 1904 and 1905, many of the original Sointula immigrant families ended up resettling in Webster's Corners in Maple Ridge.

As a result of quotas placed on Finnish immigration to the United States following World War I, many more Finns opted to settle in Canada instead. This second period of large scale immigration also increased the number of Swedish-speaking Finns who settled predominantly on the West Coast. The Great Depression of the 1930s caused a lot of Finnish emigration from Canada. Many recent immigrants chose to leave for the United States or move back to Finland rather than living in poverty in Canada. Furthermore, over 2,000 Finnish Canadians moved to the Soviet Karelia between 1930 and 1935. The last large wave of Finnish immigration to Canada occurred during the period after the Second World War from 1948 to 1961.

The Origin Story of FCRHA – The Inspiration for the Initial Dream

"Alku aina hankala, lopussa kiitos seisoo."

- Finnish Proverb

English translation: *The beginning is always difficult, in the end stands the thanks.*

By the late 1950s, there was a fairly large Finnish community living on the Canadian west coast. There was a growing awareness that a Finnish rest home for seniors was needed. In addition, there was a need for decent affordable rental housing for Finns who were primarily widowers and single men, many of whom were working part of the year and living in the downtown eastside the rest. However, most people believed providing housing a care for Finnish seniors was an impossible dream. Yet, one evening in the spring of 1958 would finally change the course of Finnish Canadian history in the Lower Mainland. That night, an evening social with Finland's consul Helge Ekengren was held, during which he lamented, "Sometimes it is embarrassing to be a Finn. Periodically officials contact me on behalf of elder Finns who have reached a point in their lives where they are unable to care for themselves, and I am asked if the Finnish rest home wouldn't have room for this individual. When I have to reply that no such facility exists, then I am embarrassed."

Community leader Niilo Itkonen was present at that meeting and took up the challenge to try to remedy this. This issue was raised at a June 8, 1958 meeting of the United Finnish Kaleva Brothers and Sisters and a decision was made to call a public meeting, inviting all interested parties to discuss this matter further. On October 26, 1958, over 100 people attended a meeting to gauge interest in building a rest home. It was decided to pursue this matter further and a committee was formed and chaired by Niilo Itkonen. At that meeting, the first donation towards this worthy

cause was received in the sum of \$40.81. On November 23, the founding meeting of the Association was held at Clinton Hall in Vancouver which was attended by 250 people. A constitution and bylaws was approved under the name of "Finnish Canadian Rest Home Association (FCRHA)". Alas, the rest home dream was about to become reality and a new era for Finnish community living on the west coast of Canada was about to begin.

The Sixties – A Fast Start Turning a Dream into a Reality

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead

At the turn of the decade, the Association and the Finnish community started on the hard work to turn the dream into reality. By 1960, membership of the FCRHA reached 300 and funds were raised to take the initial steps. In 1961, the Association purchased its first properties consisting of 14 lots on Harrison Drive, Vancouver for \$95,000. Construction started the next year, but only after a \$100,000 loan was personally guaranteed by 10 dedicated community members. On October 12, 1963, the official opening of the Harrison Drive Seniors Apartments with 93 suites and Finnish Home care facility, called a hostel at the time, with 56 rooms was attended by about 700 people. Miriam Koskinen was appointed as the first administrator of the Finnish Home. It took only five years following Ekengren's initial comments of being "embarrassed about being a Finn" for the community to rally to the cause and build a much larger rest home complex than ever imagined. The west coast Finns had made something they could truly be proud about, as it was also the one of the first such facilities built by a Finnish immigrant community in North America.

1967 marked Canada's centennial birthday. However, it was also a noteworthy year for FCRHA. Tragically, a fire erupted in

REZONING APPLICATION

2230 Harrison Drive


DETAILS:

To rezone and develop the site with a 6-storey seniors rental building including:


- 72 seniors affordable rental housing units;
- a floor space ratio (FSR) of 1.91;
- a floor area of 5,795.8 sq. m (62,385.5 sq. ft.);
- a maximum height of 20.0 m (65.6 ft.); and
- 22 vehicle parking spaces and 93 bicycle spaces.

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APPLICANT: dys architecture
260 – 1770 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC



PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT



LOCATION

What's happening:

Rezoning application submitted

Application review by City staff


Open House:
Finnish Home
2288 Harrison Drive
Monday, June 25, 2018, 5:00-8:00 pm

Further application review

Public Hearing:
Information to come

Decision by Council

For more information:
vancouver.ca/rezapps
or phone 3-1-1



2230 Open House Signage-on Site at Harrison Drive

a resident's room at the Finnish Home which required the evacuation of all residents, sending 16 residents to the hospital and claiming two lives, including the caretaker. Fortunately, the year did not bring only sad news. It was also a year of tremendous generosity and forward progress for the Association. The Finnish community was blessed when Mrs. Leonda Koski big-heartedly gifted the Association her Coquitlam home and the adjoining five acres of land. Also, in recognition of the community's growing need for more skilled care, the Board made the decision to consider developing a second nursing home.

In 1968, the Association purchased two acres of land on Kalyk Ave in Burnaby for \$60,000 in anticipation of building a nursing home. The following year the Finnish Canadian Low Rental Association was founded to manage the Harrison Drive rental units which were eventually transferred to this new entity to help preserve charitable tax status for the Association.

The Seventies – Opening of the Finnish Manor and the Evolution of Care

By the early 1970s the Association's membership had surged to nearly 900. It became clear more housing and care were required for the elderly community. The membership officially voted in favour of proceeding with the development of the recently purchased Burnaby property into a nursing home and apartments in 1972. Construction began soon thereafter. The Finnish Manor was opened in April 1975 and its inaugural ceremonies were attended by 700 members and guests. The facility consisted of a 60-bed nursing home and 48 independent living apartments. There was also further progress for the Harrison Drive properties, as separate men's and women's saunas, a whirlpool spa and a caretaker's suite were added. 1978 marked an important year in the Association's evolution of care. The Association recognized that the level of complexity in residential care was increasing, and required additional resources. Therefore, the FCRHA entered into a contract with BC Ministry of Health which significantly increased the level of provincial government funding for expanded clinical care at the nursing home, but which also reduced the level of autonomy of FCRHA.

The Eighties – A Final Resting Place for Finnish in Forest Lawn

The eighties were a time when the Association benefited from full operations of its two facilities in Burnaby and Vancouver. Following the prior two decades of rapid development, it was time to reap the rewards of the hard work and the Association was tasked to ensure the operations were running smoothly. The principal new development was to find a final resting place for members of the Finnish community. In 1980, the FCRHA reserved a burial plots section at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Burnaby for Finns, thanks to the initial donation of member Matti Maki.

The Nineties – As Complexity Increased, a New Finnish Home is Redeveloped

The Finnish Manor was honoured to host Finland's President, Mauno Koivisto, and his wife, Tellervo, in 1990. This was a great recognition of the founding members' initial bold vision and all the hard work by the membership to build a legacy that Finns could be proud of.

It was increasingly clear that the needs of the elderly were shifting and becoming more complex, in large part because the average

age of patients and residents was increasing. Significant expansion of the dining area at the Manor was completed to accommodate the growing number of residents using walkers and wheelchairs. Stairs were also becoming an increasing problem for elderly residents. Thanks to the initial financial contribution by Martin Hill, all three apartment buildings on Harrison Drive received elevators.

By the early 1990s, the original building of the Finnish Home had reached the end of its useful life. Residents were relocated to a temporary care facility in 1992 to allow for the redevelopment of the new nursing home. Construction began in 1994. The new Finnish Home was opened on Finland's Independence Day, December 6, 1995 with 400 people in attendance. It was a 64-bed residential care facility which included a special care unit for residents with dementia.

In 1996, the membership was surveyed about the five-acre property in Coquitlam which had been gifted by Mrs. Koski. At the time, the membership supported ongoing operations of its current facilities in Vancouver and Burnaby, even if it required the sale of the Koski property on Johnson Street. In 1998, the Association celebrated its 40th anniversary at John Oliver high school auditorium with over 300 in attendance. Sadly, the Association's founding chairperson, Niilo Itkonen, passed away shortly before this event. At the close of the decade, a new 16 passenger wheelchair accessible bus was purchased after successful fundraising efforts.

Entering the New Millennia – Increasing Complexity Raises Long-term Sustainability Issues

As the Association entered the new Millennia, the Association turned its attention to the next matter at hand. The Harrison Drive low rental apartments were finally debt free after the last mortgage payment was made in 2004. However, by this time the apartments were starting to show their age. An opinion poll amongst the membership showed overwhelming support for reconstruction. Additional enhancements were made to both residential care facilities, including the installation of ceiling lifts in residents' rooms at the Finnish Home to minimize the risk of injury to both residents and staff. The Finnish Manor also installed a state of the art fire detection and suppression system.

By the late 2000s, and following the successful redevelopment of the Finnish Home a decade earlier, attention turned to the Finnish Manor. The Fraser Health region assessed the Finnish Manor's physical plant and concluded that its viability to provide complex care over the medium-to-long term was limited. In order to assess a potential new residential care facility, the first steps were also taken to develop the five acres in Coquitlam with an environmental and topographical survey of the land.

As the first decade of the millennium came to a close, the Association recognized that the demands on its resources in an increasingly complex regulatory environment was not sustainable. When originally opened in 1963, residents would typically walk into the Finnish Home on their own and often spend years living reasonably independently. In contrast, by the late 2000s, residents tended to arrive at the Finnish Home and Finnish Manor either in wheeled gurneys or in wheelchairs. Indeed, as the years passed by, the residential care side of the Association's operations had started to resemble that of a hospital, focused on end of life care which was in stark contrast to the original rest home where Finns would live together in a close-knit retirement community in

relative good health for numerous years. Simply put, the demands of modern day seniors' care had become far more complex than those initially envisioned. The Association would need to confront this reality in the coming decade.

The 2010s – Back to the Future as the Association Pivots Back to Basics

“Loppu hyvin, kaikki hyvin”

English equivalent: *“All’s well that ends well.”*

In the early part of this decade, the Association began to study its next steps. It hired the research firm Lumina for a market study on demographics and engaged with focus groups. Meetings were started with City of Vancouver about potential redevelopment of the seniors' apartments, which was supported by the membership. A feasibility study from Omicron, one of the largest integrated development services, design and construction firms in Western Canada, found that rebuilding would be more feasible than renovating the existing building. The first rezoning application for Harrison Drive was submitted in 2000 which required the tenants in 2230 to be relocated. Legal and topographical surveys were completed and it was estimated that construction of a new building would begin in 2012 with completion in 2013.

As the population in the Lower Mainland continued to grow and age, the capacity of the existing residential care facilities was becoming stretched. The two respective Health Authorities were forced to look into expanding the facilities in the region. As the scope of these multiple projects increased beyond the resources of the Board, the Association retained the well-regarded firm Field & Marten as its consultants to help navigate the increased complexity.

In 2011, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA) approached the Association and asked it to submit a proposal to add more residential care beds to the Finnish Home. After engaging in further discussions, the Association became concerned about the long-term viability of its operations. Of note, the VCHA suggested that while the existing Finnish Home was adequate for the time, it might be in danger of losing funding for its care beds in the future because it was considered too small to be economically viable. Over the long term, the VCHA wanted to support facilities that had twice the bed capacity of the Finnish Home. The Board faced a new dilemma. Should it continue on its earlier path to develop seniors housing on 2230 Harrison Drive, or should the land, which was adjacent to the existing Finnish Home, be used to expand its residential care operations as requested by VCHA in order to preserve its long-term financial viability? Meanwhile, the Association moved ahead with health and safety upgrades to the remaining two original rental buildings located at 2180 and 2130 Harrison Drive, which included the re-piping of both buildings.

Around the same period, the Fraser Health Authority (FHA) requested that the Finnish Manor be redeveloped. The FHA issued a request-for-proposal for a large residential care facility in Coquitlam and indicated that the Association's empty five acres on Johnston Street was viewed favourably. In conjunction to these efforts, feasibility studies were completed for the Coquitlam site. The first drawings included a 125-bed residential care facility and 4 multi-story buildings, including 3 rental buildings and one life lease with assisted, and supported living facilities. After spending significant time and expense to prepare for this development,

and receiving encouragement from the FHA along the way, the Association was very surprised when the FHA announced in late 2013 that it had awarded the new funded beds to another organization. This would mark a pivotal turning point for the Association.

Over its fifty years of existence, many of the Association's accomplishments had come from its work in providing residential care beds for elderly Finns, most recently with the redevelopment of the Finnish Home in 1995. These residential care facilities were state of the art at the time of development. However, times had changed. As a charity organization that depended on volunteers, starting from the grass roots level to the directors of its Board, it had become increasingly challenging to run an organization which looked more like a hospital with significant regulatory oversight than the original rest home idea of a bygone time. It also became clear that there were far more stakeholders whose opinions and decisions could alter the direction of the Association. It took only one dissenting view from the Health Authority to thwart years of hard work and forward progress.

As a result of this unexpected setback, the Board took the pragmatic decision to defocus on potential projects that required favourable approvals from other external stakeholders. Over a series of strategy sessions, the FCRHA's Board of Directors decided to change course and reduce its residential care capacity and refocus on what it believes were the more pressing needs of the community – development of affordable housing for seniors and the home services to help seniors bridge the gap of aging at home and the need to be moved to a residential care home. The Association also recognized the urgent need for more affordable housing which had become more acute after years of soaring housing costs across the Lower Mainland. There was virtually no development of purpose built seniors affordable housing in the region and the Association was determined to help out with the resources it had at its disposal. Of note, the decision was made to continue to support residential care at the Finnish Home as long as it was financially viable, but the focus would now move to developing affordable seniors housing and providing other home services.

With this new change in focus, redeveloping the Finnish Manor as requested by the FHA to meet the modern standard for residential care was no longer a priority due to the Association's limited financial and human resources. The Association began seeking alternatives to sell the Finnish Manor property to help fund affordable housing. On August 21, 2015, the Association announced the sale of the Finnish Manor to the Jubilee Multi Generational Housing Society (JMGHS). The sale of Finnish Manor was the first step in a long-term plan to devote the FCRHA's limited human and financial resources to:

- consolidating residential care at the existing Finnish Home facility;
- renewing our affordable housing for seniors at one or more appropriate locations;
- continuing to review the possible sale of all or a portion of our Coquitlam property in order to provide additional affordable housing for seniors at an appropriate location;
- exploring the provision of in-home support services to our senior citizens.

In recognition of the potential disruption to the lives of its tenants and residents, the Association ensured that the new owners (JMGHS) committed to a three-year transition plan to minimize disruption as part of the sales agreement. The Association also moved ahead on the development of the Coquitlam project, and in 2016 announced a turn-key development deal with Intracorp to develop an affordable rental building with 67 units with nice amenities, including an assembly hall, kitchen facilities to host larger events and a communal sauna. In addition, the Association began to review its Constitution and Bylaws in order to be compliant with the upcoming changes which were required of all societies as mandated in B.C.'s new Societies Act. These changes to the FCRHA's constitution and bylaws were passed by the membership in a Special Meeting in 2017.

Recognizing the chronic need for affordable housing, the City of Vancouver finally gave the 2230 Harrison Drive development the green light and it started public consultations for the project in 2018.

The journey that began in 1958 has had many bumps along the way, but much has been accomplished in the sixty years since the inception of the Association. Today, with one project in Coquitlam already under construction, the City of Vancouver signaling their interest to fast track the Harrison Drive development, and initial rollout of Home Services, the vision and sacrifice of previous Finnish generations and their proud legacy building the FCRHA should endure well into the future.

The Future – Building on the Association’s Proud Legacy

An illustration of the Association’s recent journey that was sourced from the Board’s most recent strategy session can be found below. Although the Association has had many assets which are valuable from a financial perspective, the Board recognizes that assets are truly only productive to our community as well-maintained, modern facilities. As such, the Association’s productive capacity from a community perspective can be summarized into three main categories.

Are Our Assets Serving Our Community Well?



Lazy Asset - Not Working Hard Enough
Not Serving Our Community At All

OK Asset - Near End of Life
Serves our Community "OK"

Excellent Asset for our Community
Serves our Community Exceptionally Well

Using this easy to understand red/yellow/green legend, the chart below illustrates the Association’s journey, starting in 2012, and follows the pivot the Board made following the Fraser Health Authority’s rejection of our development plans to add residential care beds in Coquitlam in late 2013.

*It has Been a
Long Journey—
But we can see
a green light
at the end of
the tunnel...*

FCRHA - Fiscal year ended March	2012	2013
Property owned:		
Coquitlam		
<i>1226 Johnson</i>	Empty lot	Empty lot
Vancouver		
<i>Finnish Home - critical care at 2288 Harrison</i>	Finnish Home (64 care beds)	Finnish Home (64 care beds)
<i>Affordable Seniors Housing - 2130/2180 Harrison</i>	Vancouver LR Housing (58 units)	Vancouver LR Housing (58 units)
<i>Affordable Seniors Housing - 2230 Harrison</i>	Empty lot	Empty lot
<i>Home Services - administered from 2288 Harrison</i>		
Burnaby		
<i>Finnish Manor - 3460 Kalyk</i>	Finnish Manor (60 care beds + 48 units)	Finnish Manor (60 care beds + 48 units)

Board makes strategic decision to focus on housing and home care for seniors

As shown, most of the Association’s major assets have been tied up in empty lots, which were held as strategic assets, but not productive from a community viewpoint and in older facilities that were near the end of their useful lives and required significant investment, or replacement. The Finnish Home was the only asset that the Association felt was truly exemplary and served the community well. Fortunately, the other assets were financially valuable which could be sold or further developed to better serve the community.

The Board’s strategic decision to focus on care for the elderly at Harrison Drive while providing more affordable housing where possible and provide a new focus on home services will have a multi-decade impact on the community. The impact of this big strategic decision is sometimes hard to see over a short periods because it takes some time to develop large projects. However, the progress becomes clearer when viewed over a longer timeframe. As the chart illustrates, the Association is currently well past the halfway point of one of the most ambitious decades in its history. We can see “green” as the Association moves forward with its current journey. Over the next few years, the Association’s progress will become more evident as two new modern affordable seniors’ housing facilities officially open (assuming the Harrison Drive project is approved by both Vancouver and the Board) and the newly launched Home Services segment, which has already proved to be exceptionally well received by the te-

nants of 2130/2180 Harrison Drive, is rolled out to the broader community.

Soon the Association anticipates that its two new modern facilities and additional Home Services will enable it to benefit more seniors, including more Finns, than ever in the history of the Association. That is a legacy that Niilo Itkonen and other founding members of the FCRHA would be truly proud of.



FH Opening 1995

