



The Finnish Nationality Classroom

Recognized far and wide, the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh show places where immigrants received the education they later brought along with them to add to American culture. There are over 30 Nationality Rooms, representing nations around the world. The rooms are viewed by tens of thousands of visitors annually and are still being used as classrooms by university students.

Our project is to build a **Finnish Nationality Room** to join these rooms. The future Finnish Room will represent a Finnish farmstead where students were instructed at home, in the early days before schools.

Take a Walk through a Finnish Farmstead--the Future Finnish Nationality Room



You have just entered the Finnish Room. You see a path going forward. Ahead of you, at the end of the path, is a sauna, a life sized model with benches you can sit on. Above you in the sky are seven stars, recalling Seven Brothers, the first novel in the Finnish language. On the left is a forest scene--you are near the woods.

You walk halfway into the room and turn to the right. In front of you is the large living room of a farm house. Tables and chairs are here. In front is a monitor and a podium. Windows are on the left. Display cabinets for art and historical events are on the right.



Then you walk straight ahead and turn around. The sauna and the forest scene are now in front of you. The cabinets are on the left.



The Finnish Nationality Room will highlight two aspects of the Finnish culture which the Finnish immigrants brought to America:

Education

A primer to teach reading, the *ABC Book*, was published in Finland in 1543. Reading and writing soon spread widely there, through instruction in two-week schools sponsored by the Lutheran church. Two hundred years later, in the 1700's, reading and writing were common, and additional education was offered in vocational and academic schools. In the American colonies, in 1640, the first Lutheran Church in the New Sweden settlement, near Wilmington, Delaware, had a Finnish pastor, Reorus Torkillus¹. The Finnish ABC book was used there. [1 Engle, Eloise, *Finns in North America* (Annapolis, MD: Leeward Publications, Inc., 1975).]

Unique Finnish Log Construction

Although many Finns remember that their ancestors lived in log houses, most have not seen one. Finnish log houses seem to have lived their time and been forgotten. But during his extensive search for Finnish log houses in North America, Finnish log construction expert **Frank Eld** found that the structures of Finnish fitted logs exist in buildings everywhere that Finnish immigrants settled, including the oldest log houses built by Finns in colonial New Sweden Colony. This was the work of skillful men following building traditions of generations of forefathers. In admiration, he studied how a log building starting from the base was brought up with a unique systematic technique and detailed craftsmanship using special skills and tools brought from Finland. The logs were so tightly fitted that the buildings did not need caulking. To share this remarkable tradition with others, Mr. Eld preserved the log houses and barns his father and other Finns made in an open air museum in Roseberry, Idaho, similar to the Seurasaari Museum in Finland.



It is because of the importance of this unique log construction throughout Finnish architectural history that it was decided that the Finnish Nationality Room should reflect this achievement of the Finns. This traditional building style will be showcased in the walls of the Finnish Nationality Room, which will be constructed in the same way using original 100 year old logs from the building shown. The classroom will be built with Frank Eld's guidance and tools including the Finnish axe man's 'secret' tool, "vara."

A Student Contest Sets the Theme for the Room

In 2006, a competition to design the Finnish Nationality Room was held in Finland for students of architecture and design. Sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh's Finnish Nationality Room Committee, the contest was organized by Professor Anna-Maija Ylimaula of the University of Oulu (left), who is pictured along with Nationality Rooms Director E. Maxine Bruhns (middle) and the University of Pittsburgh architect Park Rankin (right).



The design “Big Dipper” by Mika Gröndahl was selected. It was based on a traditional Finnish smoke house. The design was later expanded and functionalized by Frank Eld, the Finnish Room Committee, and architect Stephen Altherr.

Savu-pirtti (Smoke House)

The oldest of these Finnish log houses were called “smoke houses” since their huge fireplaces did not have chimneys but instead allowed the smoke to drift upwards and out a “smoke hole” in the roof. It was an opening covered with a flap which was let down when the fireplace was heated and then closed by lifting it up again. On the upper part of the wall there were also smaller holes where the smoke was let out. The Smoke House was a common dwelling in Finland in the 1700s and earlier. The log walls had interlocking corners, often using traditional "salmon tale" (dovetail) connections. The floors were made from thick planks.

