

# Eric Heikkala Oral History Interview, 1981

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Heikkala, Eric
<b>Title</b>	Eric Heikkala Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 1 photograph 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t085
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Eric Heikkala, a Finnish immigrant.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections</a> Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 <a href="mailto:archives@plu.edu">archives@plu.edu</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	The oral history collection is open to all users.
<b>Additional Reference Guides</b>	
<b>Languages</b>	English
<b>Sponsor</b>	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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## Biographical Note

Eric Heikkala was born on April 24, 1916 in Hailuoto, Finland, which is located on an island between Sweden and Finland near Oulu in the north. His parents were Viljo Heikkala and Fanny Sipila, and Eric was the eldest of five children. After grammar school, Eric began farming and then became a sailor so he could earn enough money to go to school and obtain his captain's and pilot's licenses. Eric sailed to England, Italy, North Africa, and the United States. In 1939, Finland went to war with Russia, and Eric was sent to northern Finland, where he was in charge of six other men. When the shooting started, they rowed to Norway, but the Norwegian village they arrived at was full of Russians. The Russians found them, and Eric became a prisoner of war for four months and twenty days. By the time he was released, Eric was so weak that he had to be carried back to Finland. He remained in the hospital for awhile and then started working on ships again. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, the United States bought the ship Eric was working on, and he was told to go to America and find work. Eric stayed with an uncle in New York for several months, during which time he met his future wife, Ida Pitkanen, in Manhattan. Ida was originally from Muuruvesi, Finland. After his stay in New York, Eric then went to Vancouver, WA and began doing carpentry work. Once he was settled, he sent for Ida and got married.

They had two sons, Wayne and Roy. Both of the boys understand Finnish, and Eric is very proud of his heritage. He has belonged to the Finnish Brotherhood and has made several trips back to Finland.

### Lineage

Full Name: Eric Heikkala. Father: Viljo Heikkala. Mother: Fanny Siplia. Paternal Grandfather: Kustaa Heikkala. Paternal Grandmother: Erika Pirkola. Brothers and Sisters: Anne Heikkala, Elsa Heikkala, Inkeri Heikkala, Simo Heikkala. Spouse: Ida M. Pitkanen. Children: Roy Heikkala, Wayne Heikkala.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with Eric Heikkala on August 27, 1981 in Vancouver, Washington. It contains information on family background, being a prisoner of war, coming to America, marriage and family, and Finnish heritage. The interview also includes a photograph of Eric at the time of the interview.

## Use of the Collection

### Restrictions on Use

There are no restrictions on use.

## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

The Oral History collection project was started during an experimental course on Scandinavian Women in the Pacific Northwest. Students in the course were encouraged to interview women and learn about their experiences as immigrants to the United States. The project was continued and expanded with support from the president's office and by grants from the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, from the Joel E. Ferris Foundation and the Norwegian Emigration Fund of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project was directed by Dr. Janet E. Rasmussen. The collection was transferred to the Archives and Special Collections Department.

### Acquisition Information

### Related Materials

To search and view Pacific Lutheran University's digitized images, visit our [Digital Assets Website](#)

### Processing Note

The interview was conducted by Donna Mallonee using a cassette recorder. A research copy was also prepared from the original. To further preserve the content of the interview, it is now being transferred to compact disc. We deliberately did not transcribe the entire interview because we want the researchers to listen to the interviewee's own voice. The transcription index highlights important aspects of the interview and the tape counter numbers noted on the Partial Interview Transcription are

meant as approximate finding guides and refer to the location of a subject on the cassette/CD. The recording quality is good

The collection was transcribed by Mary Sue Gee, Julie Peterson and Becky Husby.

## Bibliography

Rasmussen, Janet Elaine. *New Land New Lives: Scandinavian immigrants to the Pacific Northwest* Tacoma, Washington University of Washington Press 1993

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

The partial interview transcription highlights important aspects of the interview. Numbers may be used as guides to important subjects. Two numbers separated by a slash indicate that the first number is for cassette and the second for CD.

Container(s)	Description
Cassette	
85, side 1	007: ERIC SAKARI HEIKKALA Born April 24, 1916 in Hailuoto, Finland. Hailuoto is on an island between Sweden and Finland near Oulu in the north.
85, side 1	037: PARENTS Viljo and Fanny. Father was a farmer and fisherman.
85, side 1	054: BROTHERS AND SISTERS One brother and three sisters. Eric is the eldest. Anne, Elsa, Inkeri, and Simo.
85, side 1	073: GRANDPARENTS Kustaa Heikkala and Erika Heikkala. He was a farmer and a sailor. Sailed to America and all over the world. This was before Eric was born. He could speak English and taught Eric.
85, side 1	111: FAMILY NAME You got your name from the place you lived. If you moved, you'd take that name with you. His great grandparents had no children. They took in a boy who they were godparents for. The boy came from a large family. The boy's name was Heikkinen but he took the name Heikkala when he moved in with them.
85, side 1	148: The island Hailuoto is: Small island, about 30 miles long and 15 miles wide. There used to be a lot of people on the island - about 2300 when he left. Now about 900. People fished and farmed. A lot of pilots left from the island. You could go to school and get your captains license and then your pilots license.

Container(s)	Description
85, side 1	<p>174: SCHOOL Went to school on Hailuoto. Finland had just gained independence. At that time, you still had to pay for high school. He started farming first and then became a sailor so he could earn money and go to school.</p>
85, side 1	<p>199: SAILING First went to England, Italy, and North Africa. Sailed between Finland and the U.S. when the war broke out. English started war and then it came to Finland. They sailed to South America and North America. In 1937, He'd served his compulsory 440 days in the Finnish Army. Then he came to America. Went back to Finland in 1939 when war broke out.</p>
85, side 1	<p>247: WINTER WAR: 1939 Finland went to war with Russia. Eric was sent to the northern most part of Finland. He was in charge of six other men. They stayed there for 2-3 months, watching for Russians. The Russians had thousands of men. They had a boat and it was about 5 kilometers to the place they had to report to. The morning they started shooting, Eric had to burn all of the books with secret codes.</p>
85, side 1	<p>284: Their boat had already left. They found another little boat and tried to row to Norway, which wasn't very far. Heavy winds made it difficult to get in. They tried for two nights. Went to a Norwegian village. They were hungry. Village was full of Russians. The Russians saw them. There was nobody else around. They went back to their old boat, which was upside down and slept underneath it. The Russians</p>
85, side 1	<p>300: found them. The Russians took them to Murmansk for 2-3 weeks and then to Petrozavodsk for about a month. Then they took them somewhere else. He was held prisoner for 4 months and 20 days. He got Typhus while at the camp. When they let the prisoners go after the Winter War.</p>
85, side 1	<p>322: Eric was so weak that he had to be carried back to Finland. There were 600-700 prisoners in the camp and about 5,000-6,000 Russian soldiers. The next war started one year later. They weren't treated very well at the camp. They didn't get much to eat. Their camp in Petrozavodsk was an old naval station. The other camp was in an old Catholic monastery in Tradsovich (?). Before they were moved to that camp, about 5,000 Polish officers who had been there were shot.</p>
85, side 1	<p>370: LAND LOST Although Finland had to give up quite a bit of land, still it was amazing that the Finns could hold off the Russians. The Finns were really outnumbered. Mannerheim was the leader of the Finns. The Germans came to help fight Russia in WWII. Then the Finns had to fight the Germans to get them out. The</p>

Container(s)	Description
	Germans burned and destroyed northern Finland as they left. Eric was in the hospital for a while after the war. Then he started working on ships again. They worked out of Petsamo, Finland's only ice-free port in the North.
85, side 1	415: After England started the war, they couldn't work at Petsamo (The Russians took it).
85, side 1	416: They rented the ship, North McCormick American Line (sp), registered a Panama flag, and sailed to North and South America.
85, side 1	426: STAYING IN AMERICA When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the U.S. needed ships. They bought the ship Eric was on. They told him to go work in America. He had to check in once a month. He was still considered an alien.
85, side 1	453: FINDING WORK He stayed with an uncle in New York for 2-3 months. He met his wife in Manhattan. He met a lot of Finnish people there. Then he went to the West. Worked for carpenters in Vancouver, WA.
85, side 1	467: None of the other members of his family have come to the U.S. They still live in Hailuoto, Oulu, and Rovaniemi. He has gone back to Finland several times to visit.
85, side 1	488: Eric had neutral feelings when the ship was sold and he was told to find work in the U.S. He just wanted to save money and go to school. He never got to be a pilot on a ship but he has his own boat.
85, side 1	500: LEARNING ENGLISH Didn't speak much when he came. Could read a little. He took a bus from New York to the West coast in 1942. Got to Portland, Ore. on the last day of February. When he was in Chicago, the bus didn't come at the time it was scheduled. He went to the information desk to find out when the next bus would come. Nobody could speak Finnish, so they acted out what was going on. This is how he
85, side 1	537: communicated. He learned English by taking a few classes, working, and listening to baseball games on the radio.
85, side 1	554 :

Container(s)	Description
	Eric and his wife-to-be wrote to each other. She was still in New York. She came to Vancouver, WA and they got married. They have two boys both were born and grew up in Vancouver. Wayne - born in 1946, went to the Wash. St. Univ. Roy - born in 1949, went to Portland State. Has his masters.
85, side 1	579: CHURCH They went to the nearest church. There weren't any Finnish people there other than themselves. When the boys were young, they joined a church in Portland that had a Finnish minister. They still belong to that church.
85, side 1	599: FINNISH ORGANIZATIONS They belonged to the Finnish Brotherhood or "Veljesseuratu." They don't go very often now.
85, side 1	613: TRIPS BACK TO FINLAND Things have gotten a lot better. They have lots of relatives there. Write and telephone each other. Parents still living in Hailuoto. Mother 86 and father 87 years old.
85, side 1	633: FINNISH TRADITIONS CELEBRATED IN AMERICA They carry on the same traditions as Americans.
85, side 1	637: IMPORTANCE OF BEING FINNISH Eric is proud of his heritage. Heikkala is hard to pronounce but it's good for business. His sons help him with his construction business now. Wayne worked for a bank for five years and Roy has worked for the City of Portland.
85, side 1	665: FINNISH LANGUAGE IN THE HOME He and his wife speak Finnish around the house. The boys understand it. Roy went to Finland a year ago and got along pretty well.
85, side 1	676: HE SPEAKS THE FINNISH LANGUAGE: Don't judge a person's intelligence by his looks.
85, side 1	698: Circumstances brought Eric here to the U.S. He can't really say whether he'd have come here otherwise, but he's happy here.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Finland  
 Finland--Social conditions--1945-  
 Finnish-Americans--Northwest,Pacific--Interviews

Finnish-Americans--Social life and customs

Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940

World War, 1939-1945

**Personal Names :**

Heikkala, Eric--Interviews

( creator)

Pitkanen, Ida

Sipila, Fanny

Heikkala, Roy

Heikkala, Viljo

Heikkala, Wayne

**Corporate Names :**

Finnish Brotherhood (Vancouver, Wash.)

Messiah Lutheran Church (Portland, Or.)

**Family Names :**

Heikkala family

Pitkanen family

Sipila family

**Geographical Names :**

Hailuoto Island (Finland)

Muuruvesi (Finland)

Vancouver (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Carpenters

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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