

with an emphasis on Finnish studies and Finnish backgrounds, and has played an integral role in supporting Finnish language courses in Thunder Bay high schools and the Lakehead University Chair in Finnish Studies. Fundraising for the Finnish Chair began in 1988, and the Foundation has donated over \$400,000 to the program thus far.

The Chair in Finnish Studies, also supported by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture as well as through local donations, brings Finnish scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds to Lakehead University to foster Canadian and Finnish academic collaboration, to highlight this cooperative research, and to bring Finnish-centred course offerings to Lakehead students. So far, six Chairs have occupied the position at Lakehead.⁵ The Chair program successfully highlights the unique position of Thunder Bay in Finnish Studies. Lakehead University regularly coordinates student exchanges between Canada and Finland through, for example, the University of the Arctic and a bilateral agreement with Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki and its participation in the UArctic's north2north program. Lakehead University, furthermore, holds a significant collection of rare Finnish language books and boasts an impressive archive that is a gem for any researcher interested in Finnish immigrants in the Thunder Bay region or more broadly in Canada. Upholding its commitment to maintaining educational and cultural reciprocity with Finland, Lakehead University bestowed an honorary Doctorate upon esteemed Finnish scholar Dr. Keijo Virtanen in 2016.

Today, an active interest is evident in the region's Finnish history. The Thunder Bay Finnish-Canadian

Historical Society and Finlandia Association continually welcome new members representing younger generations. New research on area Finns continues to enrich the image of regional history. The interactive website "Lakehead Finns" (www.lakeheadfinns.ca) has introduced this history to people world over. Using the site as a course resource, students at the University of Turku were recently surprised by the Finnish customs upheld in Thunder Bay and wanted to share the website with their family and friends. The strong commitment to preserving and making visible Thunder Bay's Finnish immigrant past resulted in the designation of the Finnish Labour Temple as a National Historic Site of Canada in 2011.

Just as Thunder Bay preserves its Finnish heritage through the Finnish Labour Temple, a love of *pulla*, and Finnish language classes, the region also looks to modern Finland as a source of inspiration in art, education, and forestry, among many areas. But if Thunder Bay keeps a careful eye on all things Finnish, past and present, there is a real curiosity about Thunder Bay, too, from the Finnish side. Young Finnish travellers come to see a bit of Finland in the middle of Canada, and researchers and journalists come looking for evocative stories that bridge Finland with the Northwestern Ontario wilderness. They do not leave disappointed. In the words of artist and Chair of the Thunder Bay Finnish-Canadian Historical Society, Kathy Toivonen, "Thunder Bay has taken *sisu* to heart with a drive and a passion to keep our unique heritage alive."⁶ To keep this proud tradition vibrant, the Thunder Bay community actively fosters and innovates Canada-Finland connections.

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5 <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/academics/chairs/cfs>

6 <http://www.northernontario.travel/thunder-bay/finnish-culture-in-thunder-bay-a-city-of-sisu>