

Emigration from Kaustinen

A New Life Overseas

People from Kaustinen emigrated to North America and Australia for almost a century, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Among them were some of the first pioneer settlers, as well as people from Kaustinen who served in the World Wars and their descendants.

Emigration was driven by the harsh living conditions in nineteenth-century Finland. The crop failures and famine of the 1850s, in particular, forced many people to seek better opportunities abroad. Reports of higher wages, plentiful employment and stories published in Finnish-language newspapers encouraged people to leave. For many, emigrating was the biggest decision of their lives, motivated by the hope of earning enough money to build a home of their own or to support the family they had left behind.

People from Kaustinen found work in the forests of Canada and the western United States, in the mines of Michigan, Montana and Utah, in the automobile factories of Detroit, and on sugar cane plantations in Australia. They also carried with them the musical traditions of Kaustinen. Today, family names originating from Kaustinen can still be found across North America.

Leaving as an Emigrant

The Passport Decree of 1862 made travelling abroad easier than before, but emigrants still had to meet a number of requirements. Military service obligations, responsibility for supporting a family and poor health could all prevent emigration. Emigration also divided opinion in Finland, as the departure of working-age people reduced the country's labour force.

Work and Life in the New World

The rapidly industrialising United States required a large workforce. People from Kaustinen found employment in mines, forestry, agriculture, domestic service and fishing, reaching as far as Alaska. Many mining towns developed Finnish neighbourhoods known as *Finntowns*, some of which still survive today.

Emigrants at War

The First World War also affected emigrants. Many people from Kaustinen served in the United States Army, as military service could lead to American citizenship. Others worked in wartime

industries, including shipyards and munitions factories. Their descendants later served in the Second World War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Returning to Kaustinen

Around one third of the estimated two thousand emigrants from Kaustinen eventually returned home. They brought back savings, new skills and international influences. Returning emigrants built houses, bought farms and contributed to the development of local businesses and communities. Money, parcels and goods—including sewing machines and, according to local tradition, even an entire piano—were also sent from America.

Researching the History of Emigration

Emigration from Kaustinen formed part of the wider emigration from Vaasa Province, which accounted for more than half of Finland's approximately 350,000 emigrants during the great wave of migration. Research into the lives of these emigrants continues today, preserving knowledge of the experiences of people from Kaustinen around the world while strengthening the connection between their descendants and their ancestral home.

Photo:

Standing in the front row, from left to right: Oskari Isokangas, Jalmari Isokangas and Jaakko Leanteri Jylhä.

Seated in the doorway: Nestori Isokangas, with Kristian Isokangas standing behind him in the doorway.

The man standing on the far right is Emil (Eemeli) Käsälä (from Kaustinen, returned to Finland in 1918).

The other men are Matti Saari (from Veteli), Kalle Aalto (from Kiikka) and Herman Jansson.

Photograph courtesy of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

John Näsi and his family in Naselle.

From left to right: Antti Nikolai Koskela, Richard Pesola, John Koski and Konsta Käsäkoski.

Matti Alfred Järvelä

The Hakamaa family with members of the Wintturi and Järvelä families in Fitchburg.