

## “ Ely Echo Editorial

# The sad state of ethnic diversity - Where have you gone St. Urho?

No one growing up in the last generation in Ely would have ever dreamed it could happen. The vanishing of St. Urho's Day as one of the area's most honored celebrations.

Held this year on March 13, the day before St. Patrick's Day, the celebration of St. Urho is sadly turning into something of a footnote, with the exception of our friends down Highway 1 in Finland.

In Ely, Mill's Clothing Store, under the proprietorship of the late Bill Mills (a Finn with an anglicized name) featured the day. Restaurants were decorated green and purple and featured Finnish foods such as kola mojakka.

In dozens of homes, Finns gathered for more or less solemn observances. Why green and purple? Because St. Urho became known as the cleric who drove the grasshoppers out of Finland and saved the grape crops for wine. Aha, one might say, but is this not a takeoff on St. Patrick, the Irish saint who reportedly drove the snakes out of the Ireland? In a sense, yes; but that is not the only connection.

History records that one Richard Mattson, who worked at Ketola's Store in Virginia, became so fed up with the annual St. Patrick's Day observances by the Irish, that he determined that something should be done for the Finns. He tendered his thoughts to some friends including Gene McCavic, also of Ketola's who came up with a stirring poem about Urho.

Among the lore is the statement attributed to

the honored saint which is as follows:

'Heinäsiirikka, Heinäsiirikka, mene täältä Hii-teen!' which translates: "Grasshopper, Grasshopper, get outta here!"

It was this order, it is said, which ran the grasshoppers out of Finland.

It is said that Urho gained his great powers by dining regularly on mojakka (moy-yakka) Finnish fish soup and sour milk. Mojakka is still a highly honored, tasty way to prepare fish. Sour milk? Well, we don't know.

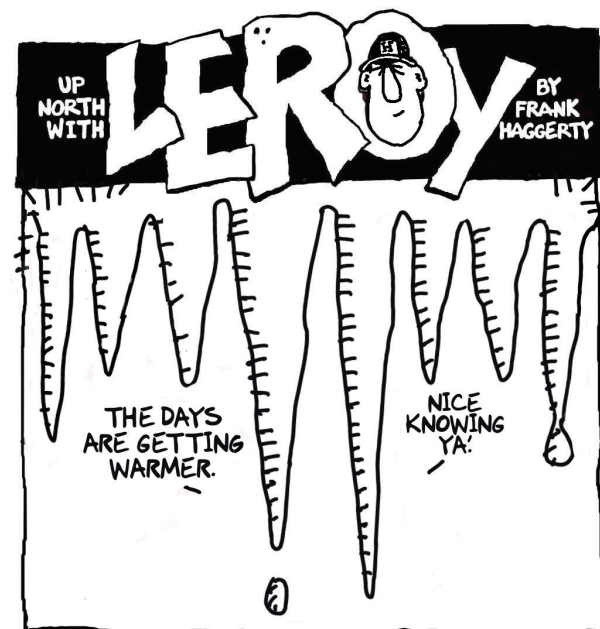
The problem with all of the St. Urho business is that nobody in Finland ever heard of him. Indeed, the Finns are largely Protestants who don't register new saints since the passage of the original disciples and men of the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the celebration did provide some good times and festivity in the northland where Irish are in very short supply and St. Patrick's Day is something watched on a TV station.

Sad to say, there seems to be little observance of St. Urho's Day in this enlightened age and our world is less joyous for the loss.

A St. Urho's Festival is still held in the town of Finland. This year is the 45th annual and the theme this year is St Urho Makes the '20s Roar.

But shed a tear and light a candle for St. Urho - Ely seems to have lost a part of our heritage.



## Letters

...that tie will never be broken by a group of ladies crying racism!

Dear Editor

I agree 100% with Bob Columbo's letter in the Ely Echo February 29, 2020.

You see, I would not be here today, if it were not for the Anderson and Toutloff families.

They welcomed my parents in the late 1940s, by showing them a wonderful way of life in Ely, MN.

Guiding them hunting and taking them fishing.

It was the Andersons who picked out the name for our resort, Shig-Wak Lodge.

John Anderson helped us build the lodge and cabins. Eleanor Anderson help us in the dining room for years.

I grew up with Billy, David, Micky, John, Mark, and Ricky Anderson. All of us within a few years of age.

Our families have always been very close, and still are today generations later!

That tie will never be broken by a group of ladies crying racism!

Shame on you, ladies!

Alan White  
Elyite for 68 years

...came into the idyllic Ely culture

Editor:

First a heartfelt and beyond honest thank you going out to Ely native and historian Bob Columbo down in sunny Brazil for your deeply felt letter to the Ely Echo Editor of last week. As one of the "outsiders" who came into the Idyllic "Ely Culture" of the 1950s and 60s of which you pine nostalgically, I must apologize. I, like the women to whom you refer, have brought foreign ideas and practices to this little oasis of brotherly love and have ruined the special culture that you remember. I see in your heart the memories of life with the native kids back those many years ago and how really wonderful it must have been, sandlot baseball with integrated teams, hockey till dark on the clear ice of December in front of the Indian villages, and I suspect you even had sleepovers in the teepees and at your intown homes with dinner and TV. What about track and field day at school each spring when the bare footed native kids were so hard to catch in the 100 yard dash or the mini marathon? Thanks for sharing the wonders of life in Ely back then.

You point out how much we (I guess you mean white Europeans) have given to the Indians to help them survive. As you point out "we" gave them pickup trucks, rifles, fishing gear, boats and motors and the list goes on and on including good educations (well, the Indian schools were a little less than ideal you must admit). But I might add to this stellar list if don't mind. Our white European ancestors came bearing great gifts like smallpox, bubonic plague, chickenpox, cholera, the common cold, diphtheria, influenza, malaria, measles, scarlet fever, typhoid, typhus and tuberculosis. Smallpox was the big one that wiped out 90% of the native population 100 years before most Indians ever saw a white European. Like you say, the list is endless. Our modern gifts of recent history include methamphetamine,

opioids, heroin, fentanyl not to mention alcohol that we used as a welcoming gift for centuries. And of course we ask no thanks for all these wonders.

As you so adroitly point out, Indians gave us white folk some stuff too. As you say, they helped the early Ely folk become one with the forests and waters. But, did you know that they gave us other stuff too? The lowly potato came from American Indians of your neck of the woods in Peru and Bolivia. That one vegetable, when brought back to Europe, was the sole reason European population quadrupled in the 17th century. Indian horticulturists worked for centuries to develop maize. The original plant still exists but would be unrecognizable as corn. Science by trial and error can be the most productive scientific method. Did you know that, none other than Benjamin Franklin, modeled the American Union after the union of Indian tribes in eastern north America? The tribes sent representative to what they called a Congress on a regular basis just as we do today. Amazing eh? Their gifts to us must be nearly as numerous as the fishing gear and trucks and motor boats we have given them.

Our hero and present President uses a form or rhetoric so skillfully, I can't help but adopt it here. A lot of people say that your form of paternalism is in itself a form of racism. Of course you don't know if I'm lying because I won't tell you who "they" are but I'm really not lying here. "They" say that when you say stuff like "we do it because we are happy to see the joy they get from all of life's creature comforts (that we have given them)," they say that's racist. But I cast no shame on you as you do on "the ladies" as it's just "they" who would label you a racist for those comments, not me.

Steve Piragis

Native of Massachusetts via Lithuania and East Africa

...I will fight tooth and nail for the legitimate and legal process

Letter to the editor:

I was heartened some by comments by Steve Piragis and Carol Orban during the open forum part of the city council meeting to say they felt the mayor is not a racist before railing on him some more, but they were woefully short of apologizing for the sick use of racist comments toward the mayor by the others in the anti-mine group. Peta Barrett had a chance to apologize and did not so she apparently stands by her use of racist comments.

My speech in the open forum:

I'm here to voice my

opinion about the careless and thoughtless use of calling people racists. The anti-mine zealots have created a significant amount of community divisiveness with their demeaning, derogatory, and disgusting comments from the likes of anti-mine leaders Becky Rom and her husband Reid Carron.

Now we have very disturbing use of race baiting by other anti-mine zealots Peta Barrett and Betty Firth. There is no condemnation or repudiation of these people's reckless use of racism accusations by the other anti-mine zealots, and thus,

at minimum, they give this repugnant behavior tacit approval.

To be clear, I'm not here to defend comments by Mayor Novak and I'm also not here to criticize him. And I'm not here to condemn Fortune Bay for their unfortunate stance about copper nickel mining projects, it is their right to do so. But I also do not need to reward the Fortune Bay casino and nor does anyone else who disagrees with what the Tribal Council did, it is our right to do so. I also do not need to reward any other business for the same reasons.

I will fight tooth and nail for the legitimate and legal process established by the National Environmental Protection Act and will fight against those who thwart the environmentally responsible advancement of these projects, it is my right to do so.

I do not want to see the city council kowtowing to these environmental bullies, especially since they have gotten to the very offensive and disturbing new low of mouthing off racist comments.

Respectfully,  
Mike Banovetz  
Ely, MN

...enjoyed our time sharing stories and learning about our neighbors

Letter to the Editor:

We wish to thank all those folks who attended the True Stories from the Edge events over the last three years. We want to also thank the Gardner Trust for assisting us with financial support this year.

We enjoyed our time sharing stories and learning about our neighbors from all around the Ely area.

We asked the participants at our last event to share with us their answer to the question; How does the "True Stories" event help Ely?

Here are some of their responses: Brings us closer as a community. Allows us to share our lives with others. Everyone has a story, we always get along better when we know each others stories. Stories bring us together when so much pulls us apart. Connecting generations relieves cabin fever. Connection and social times and personal stories help us understand one another. Brings people from all persuasions together. Brings Elyites together to get to know each other better and

to share experiences.

True stories makes good use of our abundance of senior citizens. It cut to the truth, we get insight into the lives of our neighbors. It connects people, deeper relationships and entertains. It makes us vulnerable, helps me make meaningful relationships with community members. It brings fellowship and an opportunity to get to know people.

Hearing other stories helps folks connect and see commonality in humanity. Bridges ages, backgrounds,

nationalities, beliefs = we are all one in being Elyite. Discovering surprising things about our neighbors enriches our community. Brings people together- making a stronger community. It brings people together for good, warm, fun on a cold winter night. We make connections with each other that last. And... Ely for most... is a storybook ending!

Terry Cooper and Julie Nester  
Ely, MN



## From the miscellaneous drawer

by Anne Swenson

I'd like to get serious. My grand nephew Gregory Pernia died last weekend. He was in his early 30s. Way too young. He had visited Ely fairly recently and spent time with the family.

After my disastrous health issues last summer, I figured I wouldn't last through the winter.

But this winter has been an easy one. I get rides to morning work at the Echo by son Nick and either he or our photo guy Cam brings me home in the afternoon.

Meanwhile I'm trying to tidy up my house and ephemera. It's amazing what we collect over the years. From children's toys to reminders of other places and other times.

I have lived in four Illinois towns, also Michigan, Iowa, Berkeley, San Diego and Rome, but my favorite spot continues to be Ely, Minnesota.

The trouble with getting of the age where death could be around any corner, is that you can't prepare for it.

Yes, my mother lived to age 100 in the Ely nursing home. Yes, I've writ-

ten my obituary, my will and final instructions. My hope is to live in my house until that time.

There's a PBS show by Matt Paxton called "Legacy List." His team goes to homes where the person has sold and is re-locating. While they pack, they unearth treasures which have been lost in time and missed by the home owner.

I know I have a few things akin to that. Maybe I sold them on eBay or gave them away. Or maybe I just put them in a cupboard, box or storage.

If I had the same energy I had 20-30 years ago and a memory to go with it, none of this would be such a challenge.

I am reminded of Dylan Thomas's poem: Do not go gentle into that goodnight, He says: "Old age should burn and rage at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

\*\*\*And on another note: If you have time and the inclination to write for the Echo, possibly reporting on meetings, give us a call.

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In the Ely Echo for **March 3 1980, 40 years ago**, the headlines were:

- Gold is spelled BUZZ in Babbitt;
- Jackpine Bob challenges U.S. candidates to Ely debate;
- Paul Pengal reports on Birkebeiner;
- Jim Grahek contends in Nationals; looks to return to Olympics in '84;
- Swimmers sink Babbitt 56-27.

In the Ely Echo for **March 10, 1980, 40 years ago**, the headlines were:

- High school students choose Jackpine over Carter, Reagan;
- Bill Mills to head up Dept. of Commerce in Jackpine's cabinet;
- Plans made for Wilderness II;
- Ron Mavetz named Ely's newest Postmaster;
- Orchestra Hall performances will include Moroni;
- Season ends for girl cagers.

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