

Lindgren Cabin

The historic Lindgren Cabin, as well as the original building housing the sauna and storage room, rests on a plot of ground near Cullaby Lake. The official address is 89990 Hawkins Road, Warrenton, Oregon 97146. Clatsop County owns the land, and its care and maintenance falls upon the Columbia-Pacific Chapter of Finlandia Foundation (FFCPC), one of 58 Chapters in the United States. On November 16, 2018 Clatsop County Cultural Association awarded FFCPC \$1,125 to repair and develop a restoration plan for the cabin.

The cabin has an interesting history, and it goes back to Erik Lindgren, a Swedish Finn who was born in 1861 near Tammela in southwest Finland. In his home he listened to songs and tales from the Kalevala, the epic of Finland, and throughout his life the Kalevala was in his veins. After serving in the Finnish army, he began to learn carpentry skills and applied them to the craft of building log cabins. During his twenties he met Johanna Karolina, who was born in 1857. After they married, they had two children, a son named Emil, born in Turku in 1889, and a daughter, Anna, born in 1902 in Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

Erik left his family in Fitchburg and traveled to Astoria, with the intention of claiming property somewhere along the northern Oregon coast. He held odd jobs in Astoria and worked in a lumber mill for a short time before finding property in the Soapstone Creek area near the Nehalem River. With the help of a friend, William Merila, he built a barn, a sauna, and eventually a log house. Work was complete by

1928, and by then his family had joined him in the wilds of Soapstone Creek. It took Erik six more years to obtain title to the land.

Erik was like the singing, merry-making bards of the *Kalevala*. Helmi Romppanen, who is now 97 years old and lives in Seaside, said he “was full of mirth, and he loved to stroke his long beard and hop on one foot.” Neighbors in the area made excuses to wander on his property and join in the singing and merriment. Mr. Lindgren loved to entertain, and word spread around the Soapstone area of this character out of the *Kalevala* who made all his guests feel welcome. The guests especially appreciated time spent in the large sauna building that was also used to smoke fish and meat.

The Lindgren Cabin was ax hewn out of old growth Oregon Red Cedar logs. Some of those trees were nine feet in diameter. The cabin was 40-feet long and 24-feet wide. Erik and William Merila hewed those timbers into planks four and one half inches thick and forty-two inches wide. The logs were so squarely hewn that Erik did not need to do any chinking. The five-room cabin was put together with scarcely a nail. Erik fishtailed the corner planks, cut each outside wall plank at a cant to keep out the rain, erected 42 foot eave timbers gouged out for rain runoff, and used wooden dowels to hold together the long and wide wall planks. The boards of the roof were rain tight. The cabin was a marvel of forest carpentering.

Sadly, the fun-loving bard passed away in 1938. During his time at the Soapstone site he never thought to pay property taxes, and by 1941 Clatsop County foreclosed on the property. Erik’s son, Emil, and daughter, Anna, had moved on, Erik settling in Deep River as a logger and Anna moving to New Port Richey in Florida.

Both were unaware that their father had not paid property taxes. Emil achieved some fame for his building of giant sleds for logging engines.

It wasn't long before people were attracted to the abandoned Lindgren Cabin. A new logging road made it easier for hunters, anglers, berry pickers, and vagrants to use the property as a picnic area. One individual squatted in the home and chopped up the barn's cedar slabs into firewood. In 1955 the property was transferred from Clatsop County to the Board of Forestry. Two individuals deserve mention for keeping the cabin from falling into disrepair. The first person, Charles Gilman Davis, was a Portland State University Associate Professor of Architecture. He surveyed the cabin in 1966 and was amazed at its craftsmanship. He spread the word to his students and fellow architects about protecting the Lindgren Cabin. He wrote the *Columbia Press* and submitted pictures. The second person was Clatsop County Commissioner Hiram Johnson who recognized the pioneer craftsmanship of the cabin, and he was able to convince the public and the county to relocate the cabin to Cullaby Lake Park. He organized a crew to save the historic building. The crew took apart the cabin and numbered all the boards and planks. For a year the parts were stored in a warehouse in Seaside before members of the Astoria Finnish Brotherhood (Lodge #2) reassembled the structure at its current location.

By 1973 the reassembled structure was open for public viewing. The Finnish-American Historical Society of the West cared for the cabin for several decades until January 2018 when FFCPC absorbed the membership of the FAHSW. Thanks to our volunteers and to the grant from CCCC, the cabin will remain open to the public and

much needed restoration work will keep the cabin in good repair for years to come. The Lindgren Cabin is culturally relevant and historically essential. It tells a story of a Swedish-Finn who went out into the wilds and built a home for his family, and visitors today can get a glimpse into the living conditions of a Finnish family during the early twentieth century.

Greg Jacob, Ph.D, Associate Professor of English, Portland State University
1331 NE Parkside Dr. Hillsboro, OR 97124
503-747-8005; jacobgk@comcast.net

