

Palonpera Family

Aune Rook Palonpera (nee Ansten)

- Aune was born in 1900 or 1901 in Helsinki, the capital and largest city in Finland.
- She grew up in this beautiful city located on the shore of the Gulf of Finland by the Baltic Sea.
- Aune and her future husband, Emil, decided they both wanted to immigrate to Canada. Emil went ahead in 1923, and Aune arrived a year later in 1924.
- On Form 30A "Declaration of Passengers to Canada", Aune listed her occupation as "domestic". At the time, single women immigrants like Aune had limited occupation choices for entry into Canada.
- Once in Canada, she travelled directly by train to Sioux Lookout, Ontario, where Emil was working.
- She and Emil were married shortly after on March 2nd, 1924.
- When she was married, Aune listed her mother's surname was Ansten, but "unknown" was inscribed in the space for her father's name. Perhaps she was illegitimate and was raised by a single mother, or perhaps the priest simply neglected to obtain the information.
- Aune gave birth to a baby boy, Raymond, in December 1924.
- In the course of one year, Aune had immigrated to a foreign country, married, and given birth.
- Aune was confused and bereft at the death of Raymond in January 1925, just 15 days after his birth.
- When Emil was offered a position with the Howey Red Lake Gold Syndicate for the duration of the winter, Aune insisted upon trying to find work wherever her husband did – they were not to be separated. She was successful at obtaining work as a cook for the Howey camp.
- At the time of her arrival in Red Lake on October 20th, 1925 she could speak little English and was still mourning the death of her infant son.
- The first air flight Aune had taken in her life was to Red Lake. She marveled at seeing the forests from the air.
- While geologists, mining engineers, prospectors and labourers toiled to make a mine out of the Howey prospect, Anne cooked for all of them – up to 35 men at a time.
- Aune's presence at Red Lake attracted the attention of newspaper reporters who were covering the gold rush. Her story is told in respectable length in such national daily newspapers as the *Toronto Daily Star*.
- Prospector-adventurer-journalist Paul Reading noted in his March 13th, 1926 article in the *Toronto Daily Star*, that Aune "has been a sort of culinary angel of mercy to the Howey crowd ever since she flew in to Red Lake from Minaki last October. The usual thing in such cases is to have a 'he cook' and pork and beans infinitum, but Mrs. Palo [*sic*] thrust herself on Red Lake last autumn for the good of its digestion. I have tasted her baked pickerel and can testify to that." More than anyone had before or since, Reading fleshed out salient details of Aune's life up until 1926.
- At first, Aune was not distressed by the lack of established residences or communities in Red Lake. She was game to live without modern conveniences, though eventually grew to miss the small part of civilization that life in Sioux Lookout afforded at the time.
- By March 1926, the Palonperas' contract was expiring and, as Reading continued, "she had not seen a white woman [or an Anishinaape woman] for five months when I saw her, and she was looking forward with some eagerness to her impending return to Sioux Lookout. She had cooked for as many as 35 men at a time, rising at half past three in the morning and finishing work about 9 p.m. She had spent the cold, monotonous winter in a tent, and once or twice she had seen wolves crossing the lake in front of the camp, but she declared that she had enjoyed it all. 'Five months is a little too long, though,' she added."
- Despite her weariness at the long hours spent in poor conditions, Aune still went out of her way to help everyone. Charles P. Henrick, who had come into Red Lake by dog team as a guide for some Dome Mines engineers, arrived after having survived many miles of freezing and treacherous conditions. Aune took pity on the crew and while she "explained that the camp was nearly out of grub, she cooked them a lovely supper of baked lake trout, fresh bread, prunes, and tea," Henrick related to Donald Parrott in *The Red Lake Gold Rush*.
- Although she obviously worked in a community which consisted only of men, it is doubtless that Aune endured sexist remarks, even at the highest level.
- However, Aune was highly respected for the work she did with such good humour at Red Lake. Former Red Lake forest ranger Neilo (Neil) Nylund only knew Aune by reputation. "She was the first white woman to set foot in Red Lake. She was well-liked and there were many [newspaper]

articles about her. One I remember well said that if Red Lake ever became an organized place, she would be the first to be chosen as mayor. Of course, such promises have sunk into the darkness of history," he wrote.

- Aune made history as the first non-Aboriginal woman to arrive in the Red Lake District. Serious, prolonged research has verified this fact.
- Previous histories do not even include her given name, and all shortened the surname to Palo. In older histories of the area, the contributions of "Mrs. Palo" are usually summed up in one or two sentences.
- Aune's place in the history of the Red Lake District was, for many years, deliberately usurped by prospector Mabelle Duncan Mars, who told everyone she met that she was the first white woman in the Red Lake area, and its first female prospector. She went so far as to have local officials sign statements to that effect. Mars's place in history is already secure because of her accomplishments as a female prospector amongst almost all male gold seekers, but she gave Aune no credit. It is possible that Mars was unaware that Aune had preceded her to Red Lake by several months. Mars also ignored the fact that another female prospector, Lynn Saunders, had also preceded her to Red Lake during the gold rush of 1926.
- No photograph of Aune was known to exist until three 4 x 5 Graphlex negatives in envelopes labeled "Mrs. Palo" were found in the library of the Canadian National Railway (CNR).
- Those negatives and hundreds of others were taken by John Jones, a short, bearded, enterprising prospector and photographer who was well-known for selling his images to newspapers in Toronto and in the United States, most notably in the *Toronto Star*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *Boston Herald*.
- It is not known how the negatives came to be filed with the CNR, but perhaps the company purchased those of the Red Lake Gold Rush because some of the images were of its trains at Hudson, Ontario.
- Since the "discovery" of the negatives, they have been transferred to the Library and Archives Canada.
- The photographs are slightly underexposed – perhaps taken late in the day – but show a broadly smiling Aune obviously pleasantly aware that her photograph was being taken for posterity and perhaps for publication.
- Aune Palonpera's story has come into more focus through research in recent years, but still she remains a somewhat elusive, heretofore unrecorded figure.

Emil Palonpera

- Emil was a sailor and had already seen many parts of the world, but he and Aune decided they wanted to immigrate to Canada.
- He sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on the *SS Andoria* in March 1923, ahead of Aune so he could save money for her passage.
- Upon arrival, he completed Form 30A "Declaration of Passengers to Canada" listing his occupation as a "farmer" who intended to continue farm work – as many immigrants did at the time to gain entry into Canada.
- Instead, Emil found work as a millwright in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.
- When he married Aune in March 1924, Emil provided his parents names as Sanna and John Palonpera.
- Emil was hired by the Howey Red Lake Gold Syndicate in 1925. He had been laid off from mill work when he received an offer of winter employment with the Howey mining crew from Alex Gillies, who managed the Howey camp. Emil gladly accepted the offer of a five month contract.
- To satisfy the wishes of his wife and not be separated, yet again, Emil consented to work as Aune's assistant in the cook tent so she could join him in Red Lake.
- It has been recorded that Aune and Emil Palonpera left Red Lake about March 30th, 1926.
- Little is known about Emil's life after he left the area.

The Couple

- Aune and Emil met in their home country of Finland.
- Both wanted to immigrate to Canada, but because the couple had little money, they decided that Emil would make the journey first to find employment, build savings, and then send for his bride-to-be.
- They were both 23 years of age when they were married on March 2nd, 1924 in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.
- They were issued a marriage license by municipal clerk John E. Cole, and married the next day by an Anglican priest. Their witnesses were friends Hilda and Oskar Saari of Sioux Lookout.
- Emil was listed on their marriage record as a labourer and a bachelor, while Aune stated that she had never before been married.
- Both gave their religion as Lutheran. It is likely there was no Lutheran pastor in Sioux Lookout at the time they wanted to be married.
- They also disclosed that they both wrote and read in Finnish, but not in English.
- Ten months after the marriage, Aune gave birth to their son, Raymond. He was born three days before Christmas 1924 in Sioux Lookout. She and Emil were overjoyed.
- However, their happiness was soon crushed when Raymond died from heart failure on January 7th, 1925. He was only 15 days old.
- Dr. H. K. Mitchell attended the tragic scene. The child was placed in a casket in the Palonpera home and was buried the next day in Northway Cemetery in Sioux Lookout.
- Aune and Emil arrived in Red Lake by airplane on October 20th, 1925. J. Roderick Ross of Western Canada Airways Limited was the pilot who flew them. Ross was the senior pilot who managed the transportation of passengers and goods into Red Lake following the Howey gold discovery. In his 1925 flight log book (now in the archives of the Western Canada Aviation Museum in Winnipeg), Ross recorded that on October 20th, 1925, he transferred to Red Lake Mr. E. Palo, Mrs. E. Palo and two Finnish men (their names are indecipherable in Ross's hurried scrawl) from Minaki, Ontario, at an altitude of 1,000 feet and that the flight's duration was three hours and fifteen minutes in length.
- There had only been a few flights into the Red Lake area by this time. Canadian mining titan John Edward (Jack) Hammell's confidence in the Howey claims set everything in motion for the discovery at Red Lake. On the recommendation of Horace Greeley Young, a mining engineer who was the first general manager of the Howey property, Hammell persuaded the Ontario government to allow aircraft to fly into Red Lake, and also secured funding for the Howey Red Lake Gold Syndicate.
- The Palonperas were eager for the adventure to go to Red Lake. Paul Reading, a journalist for the *Toronto Daily Star*, wrote: "The young couple, however, had just lost a splendid little son and Mrs. Palo [*sic*] could not face the prospect. She went to Gillies and explained things to him. She had done some professional cooking before, and she was prepared to go anywhere in order to be with her husband. She won her point, and the arrangement was announced to [Emil] Palo [*sic*]. 'What could I do?' Palo demanded. 'She said she would rather come than stay. What could I do? What he did was consent to work as his wife's assistant in the cook tent, and the pair was brought in by aeroplane shortly afterward," Reading noted.
- A brief mention in a 1934 letter confirms that they were still working for the Howey Mine early in 1926. Young wrote in the letter to Robert C. Rowe of the Canadian Mining Journal, that, "...this would be in January or February of 1926. I called on Hammell in the old Colony Club on the mezzanine floor of the King Edward Hotel [in Toronto], when Jack received the report [by Alex Gillies, his assistant at Red Lake] through the mail. Gillies wrote a long paragraph about the personalities in his crew. There were quite some details about the woman cook [Aune Palonpera]."
- It is recorded that Aune and Emil Palonpera left Red Lake about March 30th, 1926. They and a crew of seven or eight Finnish miners skied all the way from Red Lake to Hudson. "In that crew were some Finns who I knew well. Their names were Erik Iikka, Wille Eilo and Pete Hermanson," recalled former Red Lake forest ranger Neilo (Neil) Nylund, himself Finnish-born.
- Prospector Hubert Inkster (Bert) Tyrrell met the Palonperas and their countrymen on his way in to Red Lake. Tyrrell remembered that "they all had light packs on and told him that they all slept in a row together, the woman [Aune] on the outside edge next to her husband. They were all good skiers, but quite an unusual sight on the trail where everybody else was on snowshoes."

- Nylund added, "This crew had earned a good bit of cash. What happened to Aune and Emil far down the road I do not know, but they did live in Sioux Lookout for a number of years after returning from Red Lake."
- No contemporary has ever recalled the Palonperas background or post-Red Lake life, except that they may have moved to Thunder Bay, Ontario, where there was a large Finnish community.
- Whether or not they had more children or lived long or short lives is unknown.
- Antecedent biographical information (other than the material herein) is also scarce.