

**Prof. Olavi Koivukangas:**

**30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LEAGUE OF THE FINNISH-AUSTRALIAN SOCIETIES IN TURKU JUNE 6TH 2015**

Dear Gerald Thomson, Ambassador of Australia to Finland, distinguished guests and the members of the Finnish-Australian Society,

It is a great pleasure for me and my wife Pirjo to be here tonight with you to celebrate the birth of the Finnish-Australian Society 30 years ago in the very heart of Turku. The Finnish culture started in Turku, but later part of it was moved east to Helsinki. Although the status of capital city was moved to Helsinki, Turku has been to present days the home of many new ideas and national enterprises.

A small example may be that in 1968 I was granted a three years scholarship by the Australian National University in Canberra to write a thesis on Scandinavians in Australia. When this was done in 1972, in Canberra I got an idea that perhaps in Finland we also could have some kind of migration research centre. Finland had lost hundreds of thousands of emigrants to Sweden, and here was a need for academic research. So the Institute of Migration started in Turku in 1974, and it became my working place for over 35 years. There I continued my studies on Finns in Australia, and when meeting Finns who had lived in Australia, we discussed why there is no friendship society in Finland dedicated to Australia. One of these persons was Jorma Pohjanpalo, who had been in the Finnish Consulate in Sydney for three years in 1927-31.

Then in 1975 I was elected the chair of the Finnish-American society of Turku, and in 1976 we organised the big USA bicentennial festival in Turku and had nearly 1000 guests. We had a big parade through the city, and in the main event at the Turku theatre the guest speaker was famous actor Danny Kay.

All this experience was very useful when we later started to plan the Australian society. Prof. Pohjanpalo, representing the Suomi Society, was the chair of the Institute of Migration Delegates, and we met at least twice a year and discussed the idea to start an Australian society. In those days there were 70 friendship societies in Finland, but none for Australia or New Zealand.

I have always been a man of action, and consequently I contacted Tauri Aaltio, the Executive Director of the Suomi Society, to make and pay an advertisement in Helsingin Sanomat to invite people to come to discuss founding a Finnish-Australian Society in June 1984. The place was the Australian Government Information Office at Kasarmintori, where I had visited often, even before getting my Australian scholarship. I had to do my language examination there in 1968.

We were very surprised that on June 16th at least 250 persons came to the meeting, and I had to stand up on the table to take chair of the meeting. Time was ripe for the Finnish-Australian Society to promote closer ties between the people of Australia and Finland. Rosaleen McGovern, Ambassador of Australia to Finland, also attended the meeting. The enthusiasm was good, and a temporary committee was named to organise an official founding meeting later in Turku. I was elected to chair this group.

Then in Turku on November 10th a founding meeting of the Finnish Australian Society took place in Gadolinia of the Åbo Academi, close to the office of the Institute of Migration at Piispankatu 3. Also there the room was full of participants, and the Society received a good start. I was elected chair and Mrs. Hannele Hentula-Unger working at the Migration Institute, as Secretary. Later she and her husband settled in Australia. The executive board was elected, and we planned to start the Bumerangi magazine and have the first Australia festival next summer. Soon we had 500 members, and in the first Australia Day in Kalastajatorppa Helsinki there were about 250 participants, and the hotel almost ran short of food.

In the beginning for many years the Society had an office without any pay at the Institute of Migration, and soon the Secretary was named the Executive Director. Later the office of the Society was moved to Helsinki, first to the Suomi Society and then to rented premises starting from Pasila. I tried to get money from the Finnish Government, for example by visiting Mr. Iiro Viinanen at the Finnish Parliament.

Soon I and Hannele, the Executive Director of the Society, started to establish local chapters in major cities of Finland. We had finally 13 local societies, and later the name Australia Society was changed to League of the Finnish-Australian Societies. I think in the best days we had over 2000 members, and we had a good co-operation with the Travel Bureau of the Suomi Society to arrange cheaper travels to Australia.

An important tool of these activities was the Bumerangi magazine first edited for a long time by Mr. Timo Uotila. Many thanks Timo for the good work. The Australia Days were in the beginning arranged every year and later every second year. We had top speakers from Australia and from Finland, for example twice the Speaker of the Finnish Parliament and once the Foreign Minister of Finland Mr. Paavo Väyrynen. It helped that I know him personally, and the Festival was arranged in Oulu. An advantage of high level speakers was that the Australia Festival received good publicity.

Due to my hard work at the Institute of Migration and extensive travels around the world, as well as my sport in Veteran Athletics for a long time, I planned to retire from the chair of the Australian Society. Finally this succeeded in 2004, when we were able to get Mr. Antti Välikangas to take the chair of the Society. I think 20 years to be in an office is enough, although Mr. Urho Kekkonen was better having been the President of Finland for 25 years.

For me this work at the Finnish-Australian Society has given much, especially friends in Finland and Australia. I would like to thank you for this friendship and good co-operation during the years passed. The more we give - the more we will get.

I thank Antti Välikangas and Irma Puttonen who followed me as chair of the Society. I wish Mr. Juha Ollikainen, the present chair of the Society, all the best and enthusiasm in the work. Maybe one day you could break my record of 20 years in the office. Good luck also to Paula Vasama, with whom I have good co-operation trying to sell my books on Finns in Australia. My new book on the Finns in the Titanic went to the printers last week, and the book will appear later this summer. I hope it will be a best-seller.

I wish the League of the Finnish-Australian Society all the best also in the future. I would like to propose a toast to the Finnish-Australian Society and to the friendship of the peoples of Australia and Finland, close to each other in spite of the long distance.