

IRON RANGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



WHERE HISTORY COMES ALIVE

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM IRHS



WITH EVERY GOOD WISH
FOR YOUR HAPPINESS
AT THIS
CHRISTMAS SEASON

from the Pelto Family collection, IRHS

Americanization Classes

by Catherine Rukavina

I go to evening school not to have a good time and leave eight children at home, but to learn how to read, write and spell so that I will soon become a good citizen of the United States. ~A Woman in Americanization Classes 1925-26

I go to night school because it is my intention to become an American Citizen. And I consider it my duty to make use of the great privilege of free night school which this country offers us. So we may quickly and correctly learn how to talk, read and write the language of this nation. The night school helps us foreigners to learn better the language, also teaches us how to go about in our business the ways and methods of the great nation and how to become a good American citizen which it is my desire to be. ~A Man in English II 1923-24

To be an American! This was supposedly the dream of every immigrant to the New World. According to the criteria set up by the older and native-born Americans, to become an American one had to give up the ways of the old country and become a citizen of the United States.

The process of becoming a citizen included being literate in English and in later years to learn about the American way of life and the governmental processes. This was the area served by the Americanization Classes.

The Americanization Classes, usually known simply as “night school”, varied from town to town. Some were formal school classes held in the evening and taught by teachers from the day school. In other communities there were home classes sponsored by the schools. Mining companies also used their influence to encourage the establishment of and the attendance at these classes.

J. P. Vaughan, Superintendent of the Chisholm Schools, reported in 1914 that the night school for immigrants was active as early as 1909. The basic purpose at that time was to help these people, mainly men, to adjust to the American society and to make them better workers. In addition to the evening classes there was one at 4 o'clock for those working nights. Besides the basic courses, English and civics, arithmetic and manual arts were offered.¹

World War I (1914-1918) created a fear of foreign influence throughout the United States. The loyalty of aliens was suspected and therefore it became important to Americanize these “foreigners” within our country.

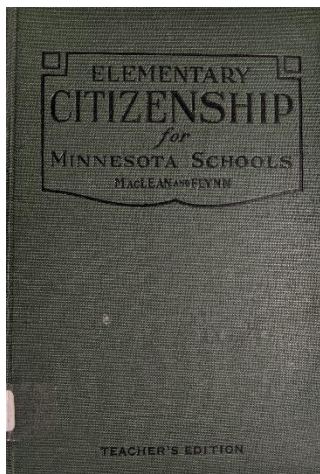
As early as 1916, the Oliver Mining Company was putting up posters encouraging the workers to become citizens and company policy stressed that a citizen had a better chance for an advancement or pay raise than did an alien.²

From World War I to the late 1930s, night schools became a vital part of the school systems across the Iron Range. Immigrants were pressured or coerced from all sides to become citizens. Employers stressed the importance of citizenship and made it a criterion for promotion. The children in the schools were told how important it was to be good citizens of the United States, and they in turn pressured their parents to become “real” Americans. The more reluctant were even approached in their homes by the school officials who felt it their duty to bring the American language and culture to all.

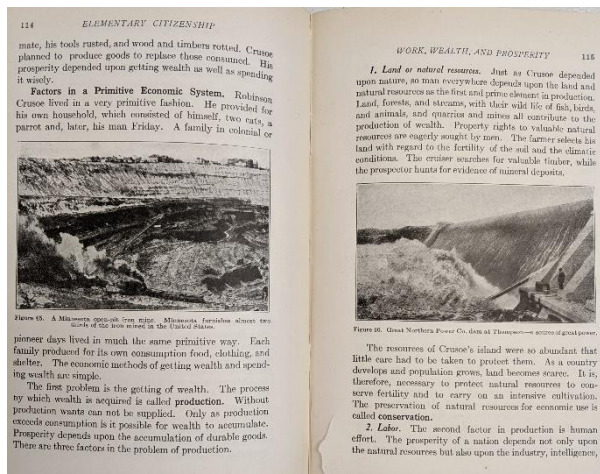
During this time period the Federal government became actively involved in the Americanization process. The *Federal Citizenship Textbook*, better known to night school

¹ J. P. Vaughan, “Superintendent’s Report”, 1913-14.

² _____, Oliver Mining Company Papers, Minnesota Historical Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota (P753, Box 1).



a citizenship textbook used
by teachers on the Iron
Range



was to be no translation, but rather the direct association of objects with
the English word.³

Teaching the night school classes provided a real challenge for any teacher. Within a beginning class could be found students of possibly four different nationalities and many who did not understand English. The literacy rate would also vary greatly. Some students had had no schooling in their native land while others had completed the equivalent of a secondary school.

The illiterate students presented a special problem because they could not “. . . make use of their ability to read in one language to help them read in another language, for the printed or written symbol . . . (had) . . . absolutely no meaning to them.”⁴ The lessons were also being taught in a language they did not understand by a teacher with whom they could barely communicate.

In the beginners' class the teachers would write a phrase on the board, i.e. “I open the door.” She would then repeat the phrase a few times and demonstrate the activity. The students would parrot the phrase and take turns demonstrating. Writing the phrase would then be practiced. You can well imagine how perplexing this whole activity was to the adult who had never been in the classroom situation.

The lessons in the *Federal Citizenship Textbook* were adult oriented and tried to teach the American way of life. The lessons were simple and developed the vocabulary with great care but at the same time included information that would be of interest to the adult and thereby taught the American way of life. An example is Lesson 17, “I Count My Money”, which used the names of the United States currency, or Lesson 19, “The American Flag”. Another practical aspect is seen in Lesson 22 through Lesson 28, which describe a little girl getting sick, being quarantined, a note sent to the teacher when she returns to school, and finally a list of good food for the convalescing child. There are also lessons on “what to do in case of fire” and “how to use a library”! These lessons were all covered with a simple five-hundred-word vocabulary appropriate for beginners.

The intermediate lessons found in the same textbook described everyday life. There were separate lessons for women and men. The lessons for men were called the “Industrial Series,” and described incidents that might take place on the job. Lesson 32A of the Industrial Series was entitled “A Mistake in Pay”. The “Women's Series” described homemaking and child care that would be part of a woman's daily life.

students as the “I open the door” book, was the standard test. The teacher had a companion book for teachers explaining the proper procedure in a classroom.

This procedure was called the “direct method” and was credited to Francois Gouin and M. D. Berlitz. English was the only language to be used in the classroom. There

³ Lillian P. Clark, *Teaching Our Language to Beginners*, (Washington Government Printing Office, 1924), p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The *Federal Citizenship Textbook II* was also available for use in the Americanization classes. This book incorporated lessons about government and history with English and reading.

Conversation periods were a useful method of helping the class members make use of their newly acquired language skills. The individual teachers used different methods to stimulate these conversations, such as having the students bring objects to the classroom and tell the other students about the object. Other times an upcoming holiday or the weather would be a subject of a conversation.

The newly acquired skills were also used to put on programs for the public at intervals throughout the year. Historical and patriotic pageants were the most popular. Music was an important part of these programs; to be chosen to sing or play an instrument in the program was considered a great honor.

Three such programs were usually presented during the school year. The first was presented during American Education Week, usually in late October. The Christmas season was an appropriate time for the second program. The climax of the year was the graduation ceremonies which included pageants and speeches as well as the presentation of diplomas.



Written work was used to show the public how much progress was being made by the night school students. Night school yearbooks, which contained samples of the students' work were published in some schools. At other times essay contests were held and prizes donated by the merchants were awarded at graduation ceremonies.

After September, 1922, women were required to get their own citizenship papers where previously they had gained citizenship through their husbands. This was a result of the 19th Amendment (1920) which granted women the right to vote, and therefore citizenship. Attending night school was a problem for many women because of household duties and child care. One method of reaching these women used by the Hibbing schools was "home classes."

Started experimentally in 1920 at Kitzville these classes proved to be quite successful. The teacher would go into the neighborhood and try without coercion to get the women to attend classes in their neighbor's home during the day. By the 1924-25 school year, 17 different locations or areas were being reached by the home classes.⁵

The program was under the direction of the Home Economics Department. An essential part of the program was to teach the thrifty preparation of nutritious and healthful foods and the making over and mending of old garments. The teachers also found themselves combating many old superstitions, such as pinning the tail of a rabbit on the shoulder of a baby to keep the child's eyes straight. Since the members of these classes were almost exclusively women this home economics aspect became an important part of the classes. A home teacher reported, "We start our work in the belief that the home is the heart of America, and the (sic)unless the spirit of the home is truly American, nothing has been gained. The mother must not be forgotten in the Americanization process . . ."⁶

The teachers of the Home Classes, graduates of the Americanization Training Courses at the University of Minnesota, were hired specifically for this assignment. This course of study was first announced in the 1919 *Minnesota Alumni Weekly* as a course designed to train Americanization workers (teachers). This article stated that the "home worker" was necessary because the immigrant women faced more problems in becoming "truly Americanized" than did the man who had contacts in the working world.⁷

The university's criteria for the ideal Americanization "worker" differed from the policy ordinarily held by school officials. The regular day school teacher who extended his/her work into night school was not expected to have a second language. The burden of communication was placed upon the student. The university's bulletin stressed the concept that a second language would be of value to anyone going into Americanization training.⁸

The Americanization classes remained an important part of the night school curriculum up to the Second World War. The stress on "Americanization" was decreased as the contributions made by the immigrants to the American culture were recognized. The decline in immigration following the strict quota laws of 1924 meant that the majority of the students had been in the United States long enough to learn to speak English. Therefore the regular day school textbooks became the tools for teaching the reading and spelling of English during the 1930s.

Americanization classes played an important role in the life of an immigrant. Through these classes he learned about an America that he might never have known in his day to day existence, which was bound on all sides by frustrations and hard work. Just as important, if not more so, was the deep love of learning which was imparted to the second generation by seeing their parents going to school. The Iron Range communities reaped this harvest for

⁵ Grace Gardner, "Home Teacher's Yearly Report, Hibbing, Minnesota 1924-25".

⁶ Genevieve Anderson, "Americanizing the Immigrant Woman Through the Home Teacher" 1924.

⁷ _____, *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, v. 18 no. 17, Jan. 29, 1919, p. 6-8.

⁸ _____, *The Bulletin of the University of Minnesota*, "Announcement of Americanization Training Course, 1921-22", v. 24 no. 41, Oct. 22, 1921.

several decades as the young people went on to outstanding scholastic achievement. Iron Range schools commanded great respect throughout the state.

The night school students, like the day school children, retained many memories of their school days; and “school days are school days” – whether the student is a young child or an adult. As time passed, the memories of the good times and the joy of accomplishment overshadowed the hard work involved. An old woman in her 80s recalled with great pride that she had been chosen to sing in the Christmas program. An old man told with delight about a friend accusing him of getting good grades because he “sweet talked” the teacher.

It is hard for us to imagine the joy of an adult learning to read and write. It is even harder for us to realize their pride in becoming a citizen of the United States when we take our citizenship so much for granted.

A person can not help but admire the courage and fortitude of these newcomers to America and we marvel at their efforts to be accepted as good citizens. Attending night school was no minor accomplishment for a woman who was busy with her home and family or for a man who had worked hard in the mines all day.

Credits: (1978) Catherine Rukavina, Chisholm, has taught in the Chisholm school system for the past 11 years. She is currently employed by the Minnesota Historical Society and Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board as part of a team that will conduct an inventory of Iron Range historic sites. This article originally ran in *Range History*, the Society's newsletter dated September, 1978, Vol. 3, No. 2. **Photo Credits:** 5-B Americanization class graduation, date unknown, Lee Brownell Collection, which is on permanent loan to the Ely-Winton Historical Society from the Iron Range Historical Society; *Elementary Citizenship for Minnesota Schools* textbook cover and pages, 2023, Michele Lammi for IRHS.

An Immigrant's Story

The Trip to America – A Recollection

“My mother and I started our trip about the middle of August, 1909. My father was a blastman for a mining company. We left our town, St. John in Fiore, Calabria, Italy, on a two-horse stage coach. . . . The trip took 16 days.

“At Ellis Island my mother had a box of fruit – apples, pears, oranges, and bananas. That was the first time my mother and I saw bananas. I was looking for fresh figs which I never did see. They told us that bananas were American figs. . . . They put us in a line in a big room. As we walked someone would mark an “X” on our coat lapel with chalk. All the young boys were separated from the adults. My mother got scared; she thought all of us would have to go back to Italy. . . . There was a case of measles on the boat. . . . The doctor looked in my eyes and I was O. K. My mother was happy. . . . We took the train from Duluth. . . . my father met us. We were glad.”

Language Problems

James Mancina, Sr. found it necessary, in order to survive, to adjust to many different Italian dialects and to learn a whole new language as well. “The language is upside down,” he said. “‘Uomini’ in Italian is ‘men’ but in America it means ‘ladies’.”

Schooling in America

“Our subjects were a little bit of reading, arithmetic and history of America. I was in an upgraded class; in drawing and arithmetic I was best.” Later he attended manual training school, erected in 1914, the first school building in Minnesota dedicated entirely to boys’ industrial subjects. He was an excellent student, and was selected to demonstrate skills to others. “At Open House I demonstrated for visitors in every classroom – printing, cement, carpentrywork, tinwork, mechanical drawing, painting and varnishing.”

An Immigrant Story, James Mancina, Sr. of Eveleth, Minnesota – 1909,
unpublished manuscript by Dr. Mary Ellen Mancina Batinich, 1976.

Iron Range Historical Society Happenings

To collect, preserve and share the history of Minnesota's Iron Ranges for the benefit of future generations

TIME FOR RENEWING. If there is a renewal form enclosed with your newsletter it is time for you to renew your IRHS membership. If you don't find a form, you are good for 2024. If you renew via PayPal, remember that PayPal automatically renews your membership yearly. Thank you to all who continue to support and be a part of this organization.

2023 annual meeting and anniversary celebration. On a very cold October 7th members of the Iron Range Historical Society came together at the community center in Aurora to celebrate 50 years of preserving Iron Range history. The gathering also included the annual meeting of members. Elected for 3-year terms were Bob Kivela, Sandy Markovich, and Dave Peterson. They will begin their terms in January 2024. Treasurer Rich Soderberg presented the yearly financial picture and President Lammi offered a brief history of the organization and spoke of its highlights (and some lowlights) over the last 50 years. Mary Palcich Keyes, historian and columnist for the *Mesabi Tribune*, was the keynote speaker and presented "Schools That Did It All." Mary is an excellent presenter and did not disappoint! Some numbers from the day; 39 meals were served, 33 IRHS members were in attendance, 43 people listened to the program, 7 items were sold by IRHS, 300 members belong to IRHS. Financially, over the last year, IRHS paid \$2400 for rent, \$631.96 for phone services, \$567.84 for liability insurance, and \$1810 to publish the newsletter (about \$190 per quarter) and to reprint IRHS books. There is about \$8000 in the IRHS general fund. Those who donated to IRHS are very generous! Membership fees account for about \$1900 a year but donors gave over \$7084.00! Donations were as follows: \$2400 Aurora American Legion, \$3647 unsolicited, \$743.55 from GiveMN.org donors, \$47.99 AmazonSmile, \$245.50 from the garage sale in July. IRHS sold \$2810 in books of which most was from the sale of the Erie Mining history book.

Arrowhead Library System mini-grant. IRHS applied for and received a \$250 mini-grant from the Arrowhead Library System to help defray the cost of the keynote speaker for the annual meeting. Thank you, ALS, for your support of IRHS.

As we look back at 2023

- IRHS gained 13 new members
- Items donated include: photos from Bass Lake, Ely, and Biwabik, yearbooks from Virginia, Aurora, Chisholm, and Eveleth, postcards, many Range history books, 21 years of the Cook Herald, Daniel Andersson family tree, Klemetsmo family documents, 4-H song books, framed photo of White's Lake in McKinley, files of Esther Leino Garrity, buttons, maps, information on Palo, the 1937 & 1957 telephone exchange books for Eveleth, an article on the Northshore Mining railroad.
- Volunteers completed research requests on the cities of Winton (history), Kinney, Biwabik (public library), development of Nashwauk, property parcel history on Gilbert main street, Colvin Township hall fire and the Whiteface dam, many family research requests, store signs in Aurora, Gilbert school history, St. Louis County sheriff history, verifying names and dates for the Ely Miners' Memorial project, Finnish history on the Range, labor at the turn of the century on the Range, grocery stores in Eveleth, we also tried to help 3 different college students with research regarding the Iron Range (from Paris, France; Cleveland, OH; Rochester, MN)

- Received a \$10,000 grant from Cliffs Foundation and will act as the fiscal agent for the City of McKinley playground project for these monies.
- Received a \$2,400 donation from the American Legion in Aurora to purchase leather-like 3 ring binders. We have ordered 160 binders so far and will need to place another order to finish out the project. We worked with American Crafts in Utah to get the binders at a discount and free shipping. Each binder is \$20.
- We hosted three Saturdays at the Society over the summer, a celebration with the City of McKinley for the 4th of July, presented information on the history of Eveleth in two events in July, had our annual meeting/50th anniversary in October, and had a booth at Laskiainen in February. All told these events reached over 300 people. We have been averaging 40 people each month who visit the IRHS offices in McKinley.
- Our Facebook/Instagram coordinator created a great presence on social media this year. We had each month an Experience the Range post, old board photo post, Range recipe post, and puzzles and games post to engage followers during this special year. IRHS has over 7,700 followers on Facebook.

Attention Members: The Board is putting together a “photo album” e-book of photos from our collection. The Board invites you to submit photos that are identified and dated and of the Iron Range. These photos can be of your family, locality, school, sports, or whatever topic you think would be a good addition to the e-book. One photo per person, please. If you would like to submit a photo, please know you are donating it to IRHS and the photo will be added to the Society’s photo collection. The photo can be black & white, sepia, or in color and from any time period. The e-book will be free to all and available on the IRHS website for download. The e-book will carry a creative commons license. Submit your photo by February 1, 2024 to ironrangehistsoc@gmail.com. The IRHS Board reserves the right to reject any photo for any cause.

IRHS OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED DECEMBER 25 & 26, AND JANUARY 1



from our greeting card collection, 1910