

New Information on Finnish Americans

By Mika Roinila, PhD
Assistant Professor
Bethel College, Mishawaka, Indiana

After years of trying to find data on the number of Finland-Swedes in the United States, I recently discovered an invaluable website that provides just this information. Housed at the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota, interested individuals have free access to the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). The Minnesota Population Center is one of the world's leading developers of demographic data resources, and provides population data to thousands of researchers, policymakers, teachers, and students. The best part is that all MPC data are available free over the internet! Visit the MPC homepage at <http://www.ipums.org/>

Several different data bases are available through IPUMS, but the one most appealing to researchers interested in the Finnish-American population is IPUMS-USA. This data base draws on every surviving United States census from 1850 to 2000 (with the exception of the 1890 census, which was destroyed in a fire) and from the American Community Survey of 2000-2007. The IPUMS provides consistent variable names, coding schemes, and documentation across all the samples, facilitating the analysis of long-term change.

For the first time, it is possible to obtain data on the number of Finland-Swedes within the United States from 1910 to 2000. Unfortunately, the census did not ask about mother tongue or language in the 1950 and 1970 census years. Calculated by using the available online analysis functions, cross tabulations of Finnish born respondents who maintained a Swedish mother tongue (1910-1960) or speak Swedish (1980-2000), results in some surprisingly small numbers. Data can be specified for every state of the country, including county level for the 1910-1930 period. Unfortunately data at the county level is not available for other census years. For such data, it appears that customized cross-tabulations will be the only recourse, which would include a high cost.

The table below indicates the total number of Finland-Swedes (born in Finland with Swedish mother tongue/language) in the United States, along with the proportion of Finland-Swedes among the total Finland born population of the country for each census year. These numbers represent all members within a household, but successive generations who may have lost their identity and/or language may be impossible to determine through statistics. It is hoped that much more data will be discovered through this invaluable resource. Enjoy!

Table 1. Finland-Swedes in USA, 1910-2000.

	1910	1920	1930	1940	1960	1980	1990	2000
Total Finland-Swedes	16135	19789	17776	4887	10755	2620	1647	1402
Total of all born in Finland	126105	148058	143218	113694	64446	30240	23035	23199
%ge Finland-Swedes	12.8	13.4	12.4	4.3	16.7	8.7	7.1	6.0

Source: <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>