



# **Challenge Accepted: A Finnish Immigrant Response to Industrial America in Michigan's Copper Country**

*Gary Kaunonen*

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The copper mines of Michigan's Copper Country, in the Upper Peninsula, were active for 150 years, from 1845 until 1995. Many of the mine workers attempted to unionize, in order to obtain better working conditions, wages, and hours.

The Michigan miners were unsuccessful in their struggles with mine owners, which came to a climax in the 1913–14 Copper Country Strike. This nine-month battle between workers represented by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and the three major mining companies in the region took a particularly nasty turn on Christmas Eve, 1913, at a party for strikers and their families organized by the WFM. As many as 500 people were in the Italian Benevolent Society hall in Calumet, Michigan, when someone reportedly shouted "fire." There was no fire, but it is estimated that 73–79 people, more than 60 of them children, died in the stampede for the exit.

Against this dramatic backdrop, Gary Kaunonen tells the story of Finnish immigrants to Copper Country. By examining the written record and material culture of Finnish immigrant proletarians—analyzing buildings, cultural institutions, and publications of the socialist-unionist media—Kaunonen adds a new depth to our understanding of the time and place, the events and a people.

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