

Russia: Columbia Press evolved from Finnish Lutherans

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Columbia Press began its life as the Finnish language newspaper *Lännen Suometar*, loosely translated as “The Western Finn.” But most people aren’t aware of the fascinating connections our Warrenton newspaper has.

Born of a desire to keep the area’s abundant Finnish immigrants connected to the church, it remained a vital social connection for Finns after religious ties were cut.

But its birth on April 21, 1922, was ill fated. Downtown Astoria’s great fire of Dec. 8, 1922, would redesign the city and wipe out the Finnish Lutheran Church’s new publishing venture. The Michigan-based synod (church governing body) lost \$15,000 through its mission to reach the West, according to Armas Holmio’s “History of the Finns in Michigan.”

Yet *Lännen Suometar* rose from the ashes.

Coverage of the Finnish-Russian Winter War of 1939-40 in which as many as 85,000 from the homeland were killed and, eventually, World War II, was vital to Astoria-area Finns, and *Lännen Suometar* was up to the task.

Editor Onni Syrjäniemi, a name he later shortened to Niemi, kept Astoria’s Finns and their interests in center focus.

Niemi’s daughter was Maija Nurmi, a 1940 Astoria High School graduate better known as “Vampira,” the campy 1950s TV and film star. The Vampira Show, which featured late-night horror movies and the Vampira persona were copied later by Cassandra Peterson (Elvira, Mistress of the

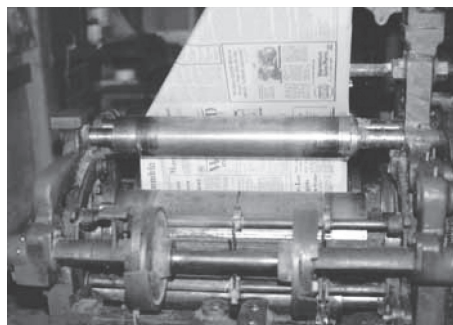


The March 19, 1940, issue of *Lännen Suometar* is filled with war news.



Courtesy Liisa Penner

Oke Zatterlow, far left, with Henry Elfving, center, relax at the Koffee Kup on 14th Street, which was owned by Liisa Penner’s mother.



The old press with the Aug. 7, 1988, edition still mounted, can be viewed during the Astoria Underground Tours.

Dark), Carolyn Jones (Morticia Addams) and Yvonne De Carlo (Lily Munster).

When Niemi retired, the editor’s reigns were turned over to Niemi’s right-hand man, Oke Zatterlow.

By 1946, the synod sold *Lännen Suometar* and its commercial print shop at 575 Bond St. to Zatterlow. He briefly renamed it *Lännen Uutiset*, or “Western News,” before deciding in 1951 to

change the name to the Columbia Press and print in English.

In 1962, the Columbia Press was purchased by Hal and Edla Allen, a talented cartoonist and political satirist. During World War II, he ran a military post newspaper and, after the war, worked for the Walt Disney Company in California.

In 1978, the Allens decided Warrenton needed its own newspaper and moved their operation into an old wooden building at 45 N.E. Harbor Court adjacent to Warrenton Marina. The ramshackle structure is still there, owned by Bornstein Seafoods and used for storage.

Gary Nevan, a public relations director from Bellingham, Wash., purchased the Columbia Press in 1988 and became the youngest newspaper publisher in Oregon.

“Even back in the late 1980s, that old building was a mess,” Nevan wrote recently in an email. “There were giant wharf rats everywhere and they somehow found their way into the building on a regular basis. We had a shop cat who took care of them.”

Nevan purchased a building a few blocks away at 926 E. Harbor Drive and moved operations there in 1990.

When Nevan retired at the end of 2016, the Columbia Press was sold to Clatsop County Media Services, a company owned by Cindy Yingst and her husband, D.B. Lewis.

We are proud of the newspaper’s quirky yet important history.



Monica Steele, center, with county commissioners Kathleen Sullivan, Sarah Nebeker and Lianne Thompson, and County Manager Don Bohn.

Interim county manager honored

Assistant County Manager Monica Steele was honored by the Board of Commissioners recently for the difficult job she had juggling two roles recently.

Steele simultaneously filled the role of interim county

manager while also working as the county’s budget and finance director.

New County Manager Don Bohn was hired in September and replaces Cameron Moore, who retired last January.

Submissions sought for magazine

Rain Magazine, Clatsop Community College’s long-running literary arts publication, welcomes submissions for its 2020 edition through Feb. 1.

Submissions from the public, as well as CCC students and area high school students, are welcome.

The magazine’s theme section this year is “Broke,” which could include poverty, divorce, political division, jail breaks, horse breaking, breaking free, breaking bad — however the writer or art-

ist interprets the concept.

All general submissions of art, fiction, poetry and non-fiction also will be considered.

For more information, including art and writing specifics, contact instructor Ryan Hume at rhume@clatsopcc.edu.

Rain Magazine is a production of the Writing 270: Literary Publications class, which includes instruction in editing and Adobe InDesign, the industry standard for book design.

Senior lunch menu

Monday, Dec. 30: Ham, potatoes au gratin, carrots, navy bean soup, dessert.

Thursday, Jan. 2: Pulled pork, macaroni and cheese, mixed vegetables, tomato soup, chocolate cake.

The Warrenton senior lunch program is at noon (doors open at 10:30 a.m.) Mondays and Thursdays at Warrenton Community Center, 170 SW Third St. Suggested donation is \$6 for ages 55 and older; \$7 for those younger. For more information, call 503-861-3502.