

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Mesaba Co-operative Park

Other names/site number: Mesaba Park

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A



2. Location

Street & number: 3827 Mesaba Park Road

City or town: Hibbing State: MN County: St. Louis Zip Code: 56746

Not For Publication: N/A

Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national X statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

		<u>4/8/19</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title: Amy Spong, Deputy SHPO, MN Dept. of Admin.		Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government


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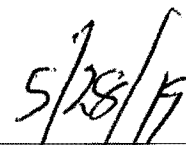
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)


Signature of the Keeper


Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>14</u>	<u>7</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>17</u>	<u>8</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium
RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation
SOCIAL/meeting hall
DOMESTIC/camp

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium
RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: Seasonal frame camp buildings _____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood, asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Mesaba Co-operative Park is located in northern Minnesota within a region known as the Mesabi Iron Range, which contains the largest of the state's iron ore deposits.¹ Mesaba Park is located in Cherry Township, seven miles east of the mining town of Hibbing. The property is situated just to the south of Minnesota State Highway 37, an east-west arterial that extends from Hibbing to U.S. Highway 53, the major route connecting Duluth and the eastern Mesabi Iron Range cities of Eveleth, Virginia, and Mountain Iron.

Mesaba Park is located on 160 acres of boreal forest woodlands.² The picturesque and isolated setting is characterized by a mixture of red pine, spruce, balsam fir, birch, aspen, and maple trees. At the approximate center of the park is North Star Lake, a 42-acre spring-fed lake. (Photo 1) The park was established in 1928 by an association of Finnish organizations as a

¹ The word "Mesabi" is derived from an Ojibwe term meaning "Giant's Mountain." The word is spelled variously as Mesabi, Mesaba, and Missabe. For example, the park is referred to as "Mesaba Park," while the iron range is referred to as the Mesabi Iron Range.

² In 1970, an additional 80 acres was purchased along the western perimeter of the park. However, only the original 160 acres associated with the park is included in the National Register district.

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“Common Festival and Camping Grounds.” While Finnish halls were common on the Iron Range, they could not accommodate large regional events. Moreover, large gatherings of Finns in parks or other public spaces were not always welcomed by public authorities or mining officials because of the Finns’ support for worker’s rights and the leadership roles that the Finns played in the major strikes on the Iron Range in 1907 and 1916. As a result, the Finnish association bought land for their own use and over time constructed a large pavilion (Photo 2), a children’s summer camp, and other buildings to support their activities. Mesaba Park became not only an important center for recreation, but also a focal point for educational and political activities of the Finnish community.

Today, Mesaba Park is no longer operated solely by Finnish organizations, but also accepts individual memberships. However, the park continues the progressive traditions of its founders and many of the current members are descendants of families with long associations with the park. The Finnish traditional Midsummer festival continues to be held each year in June and the park provides camping facilities and rental cabins, and offers various programs and events that attract families and children to the park.

Mesaba Park contains 14 contributing buildings, two contributing sites, and one contributing structure. The park also contains seven non-contributing buildings and one non-contributing structure.

Narrative Description

The primary developed portion of Mesaba Park is roughly a 20-acre area that extends from the western boundary of the property to the shore of North Star Lake. Nearly all other areas of the 160-acre property remain in their natural state. There are three enclaves of buildings within the 20-acre area, which are all in close proximity to each other. The main enclave includes the pavilion and nearby associated buildings. A second enclave includes a collection of cabins located on a hillside to the west of the pavilion. The third enclave includes a number of service and support buildings located off the main entrance road to the northwest of the pavilion. The former children’s summer camp is located along the north shore of North Star Lake, about a half-mile from the primary developed area of the park.

There are a number of small-scale features that are not included in the resource count, including the entrance gate, two docks along the shore of North Star Lake near the pavilion, a concrete block retaining wall near the swimming beach, and a playground area near the pump house. All resources are considered contributing unless otherwise noted.

1. Road and Trails

The circulation system at Mesaba Park includes one primary road, several secondary roads, and a series of foot paths.

Primary Road – The sole access road to the camp enters the property along the western perimeter. The narrow road is about one-quarter mile long. (Photo 3) The road surface consists

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of gravel. After passing through a clearing with mowed grass that is used for camping, the primary road proceeds through a stand of pines near the park's service buildings, and continues toward the pavilion. There is a return loop in the road just to the west of the pavilion.

Secondary Roads – The secondary roads are only used occasionally and consist largely of packed earth with grassy areas. (Photo 4) One of the secondary roads extends to the southeast off the main road and ends at the rear of the enclave of cabins. Another secondary road extends south from the return loop of the main road and leads to North Star Lake and a location where boats may be launched. At one time, this road continued to the west along a bog near the western edge of the property but the road has largely grown over. Another secondary road leads from the main road to the top of Pine Hill. The final secondary road extends from the return loop of the main road and leads to the pavilion.

Foot paths – A series of foot paths connect the various areas of Mesaba Park. The paths are formed with packed earth. Beginning at the pavilion, foot paths follow along the shore and continue around Pine Hill and Birch Hill. The path around Birch Hill passes by the swimming beach and continues to the boat launch. There are also paths that lead to the top of Pine Hill and Birch Hill (Photo 5), as well as the enclave of cabins. The longest foot path at the park leads from the north of the main entrance road and extends to the site of the former children's summer camp. The foot path is approximately one-half mile long and winds around the bay at the northwest corner of North Star Lake and ends at the camp.

The primary road, secondary roads, and foot paths are considered one contributing structure.

2. Pavilion

The pavilion is the focal point of Mesaba Park. (Photo 6) Completed in the summer of 1930, the building spans a shallow ravine between Pine Hill and Birch Hill. Its location is said to have been the result of a disagreement among the membership regarding the siting of the building. Apparently, some members wanted the pavilion built on one of the two hills, while others thought the building should be constructed closer to the lake. The compromise placed the pavilion over the ravine, near the lake, but the building itself was two stories high and the entrances to the main assembly area on the upper level were accessed by ramps from Pine Hill and Birch Hill.

The pavilion measures 50' by 70' and features post and beam construction and a double gable roof covered with asphalt rolled roofing. Brackets support the roof. The walls of the upper level are clad with drop lap siding. Sometime during the 1940s, the drop lap siding on the north and south elevations was covered with brown asphalt siding designed to resemble brick, also referred to as Depression brick. Originally, the lower level was completely open with the exception of a small storage building that also served as a refreshment stand. The earliest photographs of the building depict the open lower level with the building's structural system of 8" and 10" posts exposed.

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The primary entrance to the upper level is on the northeast elevation, approached by a ramp from Pine Hill. Three large sliding doors allow about three-fourths of the wall to be exposed to the outside air during dances and other events. (Photo 7) Both the northwest and southeast elevations include identical fenestration patterns. Paired double-hung windows are centered below each of the two gables. Eight square window openings are spaced between and to the sides of the double-hung windows. The openings may be closed with awning-type wooden panels. However, several of the openings on the lakeside elevation have been covered with asphalt siding. (Photos 8-9) A secondary entrance on the southwest elevation is accessed from a ramp that connects with Birch Hill. The southwest elevation includes paired entrance doors and four awning-type windows spaced along the remainder of the elevation.

Originally, the second level of the pavilion was one large open space. Later during the 1930s, a stage was constructed along the southwest end of the building. The interior remains unfinished and the stud walls and roof trusses are exposed and unpainted. The floor is covered with maple hardwood flooring. (Photos 10-11)

Sometime before 1935, an enclosed kitchen was built along the east side of the lower level. A few years later, an enclosed dining hall was added that spanned the entire center section of the building. In the 1960s, the entire lower level was enclosed when a bunkroom and storage area were added to the west end of the building. But this addition was removed in the 1990s, returning that end of the building to its original open appearance. The exterior walls of the lower level include several doors and windows of various types arranged somewhat irregularly along the elevations.

The dining hall is a large open space filled with long tables and chairs. (Photo 12) The southwest wall of the dining hall is covered with many historic photographs and images, including pictures of well-known figures from the 1930s such as Elmer Benson, John T. Bernard, W.E.B. Dubois, Gus Hall, Paul Robeson, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The kitchen contains an area for preparing food and includes large serving counters that open into the dining hall. There are also two storage rooms off the kitchen. Traditional Finnish stew (mojakka) is still cooked over an open fire between the pavilion and the lake. (Photo 13)

Sometime after the pavilion was constructed, and perhaps as early as the 1930s, a cross gable was added to the roof, joining the two existing gables. This was clearly done to facilitate drainage from the roof. Previously, water from two slopes of the roof drained toward the center of the building. The cross gable directed water to the sides of the building, away from the center. Sometime in the 1970s, the wooden ramp along the northeast elevation was replaced. At the same time, a concrete block retaining wall that supports the ramp was installed alongside Pine Hill to stop erosion that had been taking place.

3. Pine Hill

Pine Hill is located immediately to the northeast of the pavilion. It is believed that the red pine trees that gave the hill its name were planted in the 1930s. The red pine are now mature. There is a large clearing at the top of Pine Hill with several picnic tables scattered around the hilltop as

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well as a campfire ring formed by stones. (Photo 14) Historically, Pine Hill was used for camping and that use continues to this day. Pine Hill is considered a contributing site.

4. Pine Hill Yurt Platform

Overlooking North Star Lake, the yurt consists of a circular platform measuring approximately 20' in diameter. Built in the late 1980s or early 1990s, the wooden platform features posts around the perimeter that support a railing. The yurt was once enclosed with a canvas wall and roof covering and was used for small gatherings, poetry readings, and sleeping quarters. It was also used to display children's art created as part of their summer camp experience. Due to weather deterioration of the canvas wall and roof, they were removed in about 1995. Because the yurt platform was built after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing structure.

5. Birch Hill

Birch Hill is located immediately to the west of the pavilion. It is believed the birch trees that gave the hill its name grew naturally. Some areas of the hilltop are mowed and others are left to grow naturally. There is one picnic table on Birch Hill. (Photo 15) At one time there was a speaker's platform on the lower slope of the hill, facing the open area to the north of the pavilion. However, the speaker's platform is no longer extant. Birch Hill is considered a contributing site.

6. Ticket Booth

The ticket booth is located next to the ramp leading to the upper level of the pavilion. The 4' by 5' building features drop lap siding, corner boards, and a gable roof. (Photo 16) The roof is covered with asphalt rolled roofing. There is a door on the southwest elevation that is built with vertical boards. There are two, small window openings on the northwest elevation for dispensing tickets. A narrow counter beneath the windows is supported by brackets. The ticket booth was recently painted white with blue trim.

The ticket booth was constructed by 1931 as confirmed by an inscription in the interior of the building. Over the years, many people wrote their names on the walls along with a date. The oldest inscription that has been identified is dated August 19, 1931.

7. Refreshment Stand

The refreshment stand is located on a low rise about 100 feet from the pavilion. (Photo 17) The building measures 8' by 6' and features, drop lap siding, corner boards, and a gable roof. The roof is covered with green metal with standing seams. There is one door on the southeast elevation that is also built with drop lap siding. A service window is centered on the northeast elevation that may be closed with a wooden panel. To open the window, the upper section of the panel folds up while the lower panel folds down and also forms the counter. The building is painted white with blue trim.

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Visitors to the park could purchase refreshments at the building as well as the Finnish-language newspaper, the *Työmies*, which was published in Superior, Wisconsin. The building continues to serve its original purpose. Refreshments are sold along with literature and memorabilia that reflect both the historical and contemporary philosophical ideals of the Mesaba Co-operative Park Association.

8. Ice House

Constructed in the early 1930s, the ice house is built into a hillside just to the south of the pavilion. (Photo 18) It was located near the shore of North Star Lake in order to efficiently move ice that had been harvested from the lake during the winter months into the building. The 8' by 10' frame building is clad with sheets of corrugated metal. The shed roof is also clad with corrugated metal. The door is built with vertical boards. The ice house is now used to store oars, paddles, and life jackets.

9. Cabin #1

Cabin #1 is one of three cabins located along the crest of a steep hill that is separated from Birch Hill by a ravine. (Photo 19) Cabin #1 is the largest of the three and measures 12.5' by 18'. The building was moved to Mesaba Park from Hibbing in the early 1940s. The building features corner boards and a gable roof covered with green metal with standing seams. The building is clad with rolled asphalt siding designed to resemble tan brick. The asphalt in the gable end of the southeast elevation resembles tan and red brick. The trim, corner boards, and rafter tails are painted white.

The entrance door is centered on the southeast elevation. There is one double-hung window on the northeast elevation and two, six-light awning type windows on the southwest elevation. There is a small entrance porch with two steps to one side, and a newer deck built one step down from the porch. The interior features a hardwood floor and paneling from the modern era.

10. Cabin #2

Cabin #2 measures 10' by 14' and was built in the early 1940s. (Photos 19-20) The building features drop lap siding, corner boards, and a gable roof covered with green metal with standing seams. The entrance door is on the southeast elevation. The entrance includes a small porch with three steps to one side. Each of the remaining elevations contains a single casement window. The building is painted white with green trim. The interior features a hardwood floor and paneling from the modern era.

11. Cabin #3

Cabin #3 measures 10' by 14' and was built in the early 1940s. (Photo 20) The building features drop lap siding, corner boards, and a gable roof covered with green metal with standing seams. The entrance door is on the southeast elevation. The entrance includes a small porch with a ramp to one side and three steps on the opposite side. There is a single casement window

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to the left of the door. The northwest and northeast elevations also include a single casement window. The building is painted white with green trim. The interior features a hardwood floor and paneling from the modern era.

12. Double Outhouse

There is an outhouse located just to the northwest of the three cabins. (Photo 21) Built in the early 1940s, the small, rectangular building is clad with vertical beadboard and is covered with a gable roof with asphalt rolled roofing. The building measures approximately 8' by 6'. There are two entrance doors on the southeast elevation, which are also constructed with bead board. The building contains two stalls separated by a partition wall. Each stall has a screened window on the northwest elevation. The building is painted white with green trim.

13. Cabin #4

Cabin #4 is located in dense vegetation to the north of the outhouse. (Photo 22) The 8' by 10' building features horizontal siding, corner boards, and a gable roof covered with asphalt rolled roofing. However, there is a section of drop lap siding on the east elevation that was probably installed as part of a repair. The entrance door is centered on the east elevation. There is a single-pane casement window on the south elevation and a three-light casement window on the west elevation. There is a louvered vent in the gable end of the north elevation. The cabin is painted white.

It is believed the building was constructed in the 1930s and served as the nurse's cabin at the children's summer camp. In the early 1950s, the building was moved over the ice during the winter and placed next to cabins #1-3. But the building was eventually moved a short distance to its current location. Because of its small size, Finnish members sometimes referred to it as "kurjala," which translates as the "miserable place."

14. Sauna

Built in the late 1990s, the sauna is located at the base of the hill below cabins #1-3. (Photo 23) The building measures 12' by 38' and features a concrete block foundation, board and batten siding, and a gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. The sauna is divided into three spaces including a screened entry porch, a changing room, and a steam room. The sauna is heated by a stove that is stoked with wood from the outside. Because the sauna was constructed after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

The original sauna, built in the 1930s, was located along the shore of the lake to the southwest of the pavilion. It had two steam rooms, one for men and one for women. Because the sauna was built close to the lake and was exposed to the erosive action of the water, it eventually began to lean toward the lake. It had to be demolished after vandals did further damage to the building in the 1950s. The construction of the new sauna revived an original tradition at Mesaba Park that had been absent for some 40 years.

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15. Restroom

The restroom is a rectangular frame building measuring approximately 9' by 12'. Constructed in the early 1950s, the building features clapboard siding, corner boards, and a gable roof with asphalt rolled roofing. The northeast elevation includes three windows that are separated by two entrance doors that provide access to the men's and women's facilities. There is also an entrance door and a window on the southwest elevation. A stairway to the lower level is located in a rectangular, gabled roof extension on the west elevation. The lower level includes a laundry and a shower. The restroom building is painted white with green trim.

16. Pump House

The pump house is located to the west of the restroom building in the midst of the children's playground area. Built in 1973-74, the small, rectangular frame building features vertical, V-joint siding, corner boards, and a gable roof with asphalt shingles. The pump house is painted white with green trim. Because the pump house was built after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

17. Manager's Cabin

Built in the 1930s, the manager's cabin was originally located closer to the pavilion. (Photo 24) In the 1950s, it was moved about 100 feet to its current location. The cabin measures approximately 12' by 13' and features drop lap siding, corner boards, and a gable roof covered with asphalt rolled roofing. A brick chimney projects from the roof. There is an entrance door on the east elevation with a small four-light casement window positioned to the right. There is a six-light casement window centered on the south elevation, and a second entrance door on the west elevation. An 11' addition at the north end of the building was constructed in 1977 to provide space for a bedroom. The manager's cabin is painted white with green trim.

18. Tool Shed

The tool shed is located near the manager's cabin. The rectangular frame building measures approximately 10' by 15' and is covered with a gable roof. The walls are clad with metal panels except for the west end of the building, which is clad with vertical boards. The roof and gable ends are also clad with metal. A sliding door, also clad with metal, is centered on the west elevation. There is an open-sided, shed-roofed addition on the east end of the building. The tool shed was moved to Mesaba Park in 1992. Because the tool shed was moved to the property after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

19. Storage Shed

The storage shed is located to the east of the manager's residence. Built in 1994, the shed is a rectangular building measuring approximately 8' by 6'. The walls are clad with plywood. The

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roof features an off-center ridge with uneven slopes and is covered with asphalt shingles. It appears the building was designed to resemble a traditional Adirondack style shelter with one open side. However, the opening has been infilled and a door installed at the center. Because the storage shed was constructed after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

20. Men's Outhouse

The Men's outhouse is located near the manager's cabin. Built in the 1950s, the small rectangular building measures 7' by 7' and features clapboard siding, corner boards, and a shed roof covered with asphalt rolled roofing. The south elevation includes the entrance door to the right and a small screened opening at the center. The door is also built with drop lap siding. The men's outhouse is painted white.

21. Women's Outhouse

The women's outhouse is located a short distance to the east of the men's outhouse. The building was also constructed in the 1950s and is nearly identical to the men's outhouse, although the entrance door is positioned to the left side of the south elevation.

22. Yurt

The yurt is located on the north side of the entrance road to the west of the manager's residence. Built in 2011, the yurt is a circular building covered with a conical roof. (Photo 25) The walls and roof consist of a heavy fabric. There is a skylight at the peak of the roof. Both a ramp and a stairway ascend to the entrance. Because the yurt was constructed after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

23. Outhouse

An outhouse is located next to the yurt. (Photo 25) Built in in about 1977, the outhouse is a rectangular building that features horizontal siding with recessed battens. The shed roof is clad with metal. There is an entrance door on the south elevation. The building is painted green and the door is painted white. Because the outhouse was constructed after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

24. Office

The office is located near the entrance to Mesaba Park. Built in 2012, the rectangular building is clad with drop lap siding and covered with a gable roof. The roof is covered with green metal with standing seams. There is an entrance door and a window on the north elevation. Each of the remaining elevations also includes a window. The building is painted white with green trim. Because the office was constructed after the period of significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.

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25. Kitchen Building at the Children's Summer Camp

The kitchen is the only remaining building at the children's summer camp. (Photo 26) The kitchen had been attached to the camp's dining hall, with the kitchen forming the leg of the T-shaped building. However, the dining hall was demolished many years ago, although remnants of the building's concrete slab still remain.

The kitchen measures approximately 14' by 14' and was built in the 1930s. The building features drop lap siding, corner boards, and a gable roof covered with asphalt rolled roofing. There is an entrance door on the south elevation. A screened opening is positioned to the right of the entrance that may be closed with two wooden panels. There is a similar opening on the west elevation. There is a small window on the north elevation that is now boarded over. There is a second entrance on the east elevation, which is now boarded over, and originally served as the doorway to the dining hall. The kitchen building is painted white.

Assessment of Integrity

Mesaba Co-operative Park retains a high level of historic integrity. Remarkably, the 160 acre property remains completely intact. The property retains its isolated, rural feeling and the views and vistas across North Star Lake are uncompromised by any new construction or modern intrusions. The park's original circulation system remains in place and has never been updated with modern paving materials. Mesaba Park's centerpiece, the pavilion, also retains very good integrity, particularly considering its rather complex design and problematic placement within a ravine, which has necessitated repairs to the building's foundation due to water run-off. The simple fenestration patterns on the upper level are still in place, including the awning-type openings. The interior of the assembly hall remains unfinished with its exposed and unpainted stud walls and truss system.

The remaining buildings at the camp also retain very good integrity. Changes have typically been limited to minor modifications to the interiors. Moreover, all the buildings at Mesaba Park have remained seasonal buildings and have never received the modern updates that often occur, particularly to interior spaces.

The greatest loss of integrity has been the removal of the dining hall and dormitory at the children's camp. In addition, vegetation has encroached on the site, including a field to the north that had once contained a ballfield. However, the kitchen building remains an important reminder of the camp, and the nurse's cabin, which was moved to the core area of the park during the historic period, is also a significant reminder. The two additional buildings that were removed from Mesaba Park, the original sauna and the cook's cabin, were removed during the historic period. Mesaba Park's eight non-contributing resources are generally quite small in scale and are dispersed throughout the property. Moreover, the non-contributing resources are compatible with the property's historic buildings and have only a very minor impact on the integrity of the site.

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Overall, Mesaba Co-operative Park retains very high integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship. Because of the pristine integrity of the site, and original condition of the buildings, the property retains exceptional integrity of setting, feeling, and association. Overall, the property is remarkable for its high level of historic authenticity.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ETHNIC HISTORY

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1928-1959

Significant Dates

1928

1930

1936

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Mesaba Co-operative Park is historically significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage and Social History. Mesaba Park is important for its association with the history of the vibrant Finnish immigrant community that settled in northeastern Minnesota in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The dreams of Finnish immigrants about life in America did not match the harsh reality they encountered upon their arrival. Living conditions were difficult in the mining communities on the Mesaba Iron Range and work in the iron mines was extremely dangerous for very meager pay. Conditions only worsened after the strikes on the Mesaba Range in 1907 and 1916. Many Finns participated in the strikes and often held leadership positions. As a consequence, Finns were often blacklisted from employment by the mining companies, whose abusive actions were sometimes supported by public officials. Finns were sometimes ostracized, and large gatherings of Finns were not always welcomed in public places.

Yet, the resilient Finns were determined to find a place for themselves in America. Known for their strong communitarian spirit, the Finns created an astonishing array of organizations to support their community, including workingmen's groups, temperance societies, women's clubs, mutual benefit societies, and a wide variety of consumer and producer cooperatives that ranged from grocery stores to boarding houses. They also built numerous meeting halls and even opera houses. These complex stories of the Finnish immigrant experience and the reaction to life in America converged with the establishment of Mesaba Co-operative Park when the Mesaba Range Federation of Cooperatives led the effort to build "a place of our own" and "no longer be at the mercy of others." From its inception, Mesaba Park became an important center for social, recreational, and cultural activities for the Finnish community in northeastern Minnesota. The park sponsored festivals and events that included athletic activities, speeches, poetry readings, plays, concerts, musical performances, and dances, as well as a children's summer camp. The attendance at Mesaba Park's multi-day events was often staggering, sometimes reaching into the thousands, which speaks volumes about the role and importance of the park to the Finnish immigrant community.

Mesaba Park is also significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Politics and Government. Mesaba Park was an important focal point of radical politics, particularly during the 1930s. Many Finns felt that freedom and democracy in American had failed them. They pursued alternatives such as socialism or communism, which were viewed as a means to address the injustices they had experienced with the American economic system. Moreover, the Finns became politically engaged as they sought to re-make America into the country they had come here to find.

Mesaba Park is also important as one of the primary centers for the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, which championed many of the progressive ideals that the Finns embraced. Candidates such as Governor Elmer A. Benson and Congressman John T. Bernard used Mesaba

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Park as a springboard for their successful campaigns. Their 1936 campaign rally drew over 8,000 people to the park. Ultimately, the Farmer Laborites merged with the Democrats in 1944 to form the present-day Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party of Minnesota.

Mesaba Park is also important in the area of Politics and Government for its association with the era of anti-communist fervor in the United States. Because of its radical politics, Mesaba Park was subject to surveillance by the FBI as well as harassment by local individuals. Recently identified FBI files confirmed that Mesaba Park was the subject of an internal security investigation that began in August 1940 and extended into the 1970s. The file from FBI headquarters, which was just made available in late 2018 by the National Archives and Records Administration, offers new and extraordinary insight into the activities of the FBI, reflecting this problematic era in the history of the United States.

It is remarkable that Mesaba Park, as a single property, can encompass and represent the many complex themes associated with the Finnish immigrant experience in northeastern Minnesota. In addition, only two other surviving examples of Finnish co-operative parks have been identified anywhere in the United States. Thus, Mesaba Park is not only a rare property type, but it is notable for its high level of historic integrity and authenticity. The park's seasonal buildings have remained in original condition and modern updates to the property have been minimal. Moreover, the park's original 160 acres remain intact and in pristine condition. Perhaps most remarkable is that Mesaba Park continues to operate to this day based on the progressive traditions of its founders.

The period of significance begins in 1928 with the purchase of land for Mesaba Co-operative Park, and ends in 1959, which was the year when the Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association amended its bylaws to expand its membership beyond Finnish organizations and include individual memberships, and the year when the FBI filed its last full investigative report on the park.

Mesaba Park is clearly significant at the statewide level, and additional research may confirm its significance at the national level. The property was previously recognized as a potential National Historic Landmark under the theme of American Labor History. Mesaba Park is also a rare example of a property type that is able to represent important themes in ethnic and political history that transcend state boundaries.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Establishment of Mesaba Park

The first official meeting that led to the creation of Mesaba Co-operative Park took place in September 1928, although the need for such a facility had been discussed for a number of years. The development of the park was similar to the actions that preceded the construction of numerous halls that Finnish immigrants of all political persuasions began building shortly after arriving in the United States. Finnish halls were used for a wide variety of activities including

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athletic contests, temperance meetings, dances, and theatrical productions. However, most Finnish halls were too small for larger assemblies, particularly for the traditional summer festivals. For larger gatherings, the Finnish groups had to utilize auditoriums, arenas, and public parks for their programs.³ In fact, the gatherings could be very large. The *Virginia Enterprise* reported that thousands attended the "Finnish Midsummer Picnic" that was held in Virginia's Olcott Park on June 24-25, 1911. The event included a parade, musical performances, athletic contests, and speeches by various dignitaries including Governor Eberhart.⁴

However, in some places, local authorities and mining company officials did not welcome large gatherings of Finns, particularly if the group promoted radical political causes. Moreover, the Finns had historically promoted worker's rights, and Finns held leadership roles during the strikes on the Mesabi Iron Range in 1907 and 1916. Meetings of the striking workers and organizers were frequently held in Finnish halls. As a result, the Finns were often ostracized in their own communities and refused employment in the iron mines. Finns could be denied credit. By some accounts, some stores and a few public grounds on the Iron Range had signs with the words, "No Finns or Indians Allowed." Not surprisingly, the Finnish community rallied to support its own and created co-operatives and other organizations in order to meet its needs.

The meeting in September 1928 that resulted in the construction of Mesaba Park was attended by members of the educational committee of the Mesaba Range Cooperative Federation, an organization that represented many of the more radical consumer's and producer's co-operatives found throughout Minnesota's iron mining region. A five-member subcommittee was appointed at the meeting and given the task of finding land for a "Common Festival and Camping Grounds." In early November, shortly after receiving authorization to use \$100.00 as a down payment, the region's most radical Finnish-language newspaper, the *Työmies*, published a notice stating that, ". . . the work people of this area will have their own festival grounds, for which purpose land has been acquired." The 160-acre tract of land was located seven miles east of Hibbing, in the heart of the Mesabi Iron Range. Prime timber had recently been logged from the site and the acquisition committee was able to purchase the property for \$2,000.00, a rather low sum for such a large property. But perhaps the primary reason for such a low price was because the existence of a 42-acre lake at the center of the property had been omitted even from official county plat maps.⁵

In late December 1928, a hand-drawn map appeared in the *Työmies* depicting the location of the future park and the roads that provided access to the property. Included with the map was an appeal, requesting that Finnish working-class organizations and institutions purchase shares for \$25.00 in the newly-formed Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association, the entity that was created to own and manage the park. Shares were not available to individuals. The purpose of the association was described in Article I of the organization's bylaws, which stated:

³ Arnold R. Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year: Politics and Recreation at Minnesota's Mesaba Co-op Park in 1936," *Journal of Finnish Studies* 8, No. 1 (August 2004): 70.

⁴ "Thousands Attended Midsummer Picnic," *Virginia Enterprise*, June 30, 1911, 1.

⁵ Susanna Frenkel, "A Common Festival Grounds: Mesaba Range Cooperative Park Association" (unpublished paper in the files of Mesaba Park, 1994), 2.

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The purpose of this Association is to provide and maintain park grounds, buildings and equipment for the recreational and educational use of its affiliated organizations and other workers' and farmers' organizations, in accordance with policies and instructions more specifically determined by the membership in its general meetings. It is the purpose and intention of the Association to erect on the Park lands owned by it an adequate meeting and recreational hall, provide thereon picnic grounds, an athletic field for sports, playgrounds, and other facilities to further the general purpose of the Association.

Membership requirements were described in Article III of the bylaws:

Any workers' and farmers' organization whose purpose is the elevation of the cultural, educational and economic position of the wage-worker and working farmer may become a member of the Association by becoming owner of at least one share of its capital stock and by agreeing to comply with the Articles and By-Laws of the Association and the decisions of its membership meetings.

The land acquisition process was concluded in May 1929. One hundred and twenty acres were purchased from the trustees of the firm of J. and G. K. Wentworth of Bay City, Michigan, a logging company, and 40 acres from the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad Company. When the last parcel of lakeshore property was acquired, the association's enthusiastic treasurer proclaimed that space for an airport was now available, should it be needed in the future.

Once all the land had been acquired, volunteer work crews or "work bees" began working on the property in mid-May. The crews cleared brush and stumps for the access road, building sites, and for the festival grounds. One of the volunteers wrote to the *Työmies*:

A beautiful place it is, once a little more clean up takes place. The men cleared out a line for the road last Sunday, and next Sunday another throng will go there again. All laborers are welcome to the 'work bee'. . . to observe how their efforts can improve a piece of land that is successfully being turned into a festival grounds, and not just a potato field.

In early June, an article in the *Työmies* extended an invitation to anyone who had a "love of work" and was willing to assist in transforming the site into a festival park. Men were requested to bring shovels and axes, while women were asked to bring rakes and whatever else they thought necessary. By the middle of June, the volunteers no longer had to provide their own food as meals were now offered to all workers. Volunteers traveling greater distances were housed with local families, although some reportedly slept in hay barns. Among the volunteers were Matti and Sanna Halberg, as well as their son, Arvo Kustaa Halberg. The Halbergs lived on a nearby farm. Matti Halberg was a township supervisor at the time and had been an early member of the communist party. He played an important role in locating the property for

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Mesaba Park, and he used his bulldozer to level the land.⁶ His teenage son, Arvo, who later adopted the name, Gus Hall, became one of America's leading Communist party officials and a four-time United States presidential candidate.⁷

The park was not ready for the 1929 summer festival sponsored by the Finnish Worker's Federation and as a result the event was held in nearby Chisholm. However, a *Työmies* reporter noted that he and others would still celebrate "heartily" at the gathering, but for the last time "at the mercy of others." Soon, he predicted, "we will celebrate in our own place."

Work progressed at the park throughout the summer. Workers were encouraged to bring the proper gear so they could swim in North Star Lake and also clear the shoreline. In turn, they were offered as much coffee and mojakka (stew) as they could consume. In August, the park was described in the *Työmies* as, "such a beautiful place that one doesn't know how to describe it in words."

The Grand Opening of Mesaba Park

On September 22, 1929, the official opening of Mesaba Co-operative Park was held. The event was announced in a notice in the *Työmies* that invited interested people to view their new festival grounds and enjoy its beauty prior to winter's arrival. In the spring of 1930, workers constructed a residence for the park's caretaker and completed the pavilion, the primary building at the park. The pavilion was modeled after the pavilions that continue to be very common in Finland. The grand opening for the pavilion was held on June 29, 1930, with music provided by a local orchestra, the Ragadours. An article in the *Hibbing Daily Tribune* proclaimed that Mesaba Park was now destined to become "the dance center of the Range."⁸

The opening of the pavilion served as a prelude to the 1930 summer festival, which took place from July 3-6. The four days of activities began on Thursday night with a dance at the pavilion. On Friday, the Fourth of July, the festivities began with presentations by Finnish and English-language speakers followed by swimming in North Star Lake, a lottery, and other activities. That evening the program moved to the Finnish Socialist Opera House in Virginia, where the audience paid seventy-five cents to see the play *Lumimyrskyssa* (In a Blizzard), performed by a group of Finnish actors from New York City. The Saturday program began at Mesaba Park where men and women and boys and girls participated in track and field events. That evening a concert was held at the Chisholm Recreation Building, with performers from New York, Duluth, and Superior, followed by another dance. The Sunday program drew an estimated 4,000 participants to Mesaba Park. The activities included musical performances, poetry readings, and speeches, including one by the well-known radical activist Oscar Corgan. The four-day

⁶ Weikko Jarvi interview with Susanna Frenkel, May 23, 1992; Bemidji, Minnesota. Mesaba Co-op Park Oral History Project II, second phase. A Project of the Northstar Foundation of the Mesaba Range.

⁷ The name Gus Hall was derived from Arvo's middle name, Kustaa (Gustav), and a portion of his last name, Halberg.

⁸ *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, June 27, 1930, 8, quoted in Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 72.

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celebration concluded on Sunday evening with the opera *Sirkusprinsessa* (The Circus Princess) performed in Chisholm by singers and actors from New York.⁹

Organizational Members of Mesaba Park

By the end of 1930, a total of 40 Finnish-American organizations had joined the Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association, including the following:

Alango Young Communist League
Alango Town Farmer's Association
Balkan Finnish Worker's Association, Chisholm
Balsam Women's Workers Club, Bovey
Brittmount Women's Auxiliary, Britt
Buhl Women's Auxiliary
Cherry Farmer's Co-operative Association, Iron
Cherry Women's Workers Club, Iron
Cherry Worker's Society, Iron
Chisholm Finnish Worker's Association
Chisholm Women's Club
Consumers Co-operative Company, Hibbing
Cook Co-operative Association
Cook Women's Auxiliary
Corbin Women's Auxiliary
Embarrass Women's Auxiliary
Eveleth Women's Workers Club
Finnish Federation, MN-WI District, Virginia
Finnish Women's Workers Club, Virginia
Hibbing Women's Auxiliary
International Work Peoples Co-operative Association, Gilbert
Markham Co-operative Association
Mesaba Range Co-operative Creamery
Mesaba Range Co-operative Federation, Virginia
Nashwauk Finnish Worker's Association
Nashwauk Women's Auxiliary
Northern Farmer's Co-operative Association, Angora
Onnela Women Worker's Club
Palo Worker's Society, Aurora
Sturgeon Worker's Association, Angora
Sturgeon-Alango Women's Club, Angora
Toivola Co-operative Mercantile Association
Toivola Finnish Worker's Association
Virginia Worker's Support Circle
Worker's Työmies Society, Superior, WI

⁹ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 72.

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Zim Farmer's Club¹⁰

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The cooperative organizations that founded Mesaba Park were directly related to the labor and working-class struggles on the Mesaba Range. The first cooperatives were developed to avoid exploitation by local merchants who monopolized economic activities in small communities. The concept received further emphasis in 1906 when delegates attending the meeting of the Finnish-American Socialist Federation in Hibbing identified cooperatives as one way to deal with working-class economic problems. During the strikes on the Mesaba Range in 1907 and 1916, Finns organized cooperative buying clubs when merchants and wholesale distributors sympathetic to the interests of the mining companies would not extend credit and service to striking miners and their families. Over a period of twenty years, an array of cooperative ventures were established, including grocery and hardware stores, gas stations, wholesale distributors, creameries, meeting halls, opera houses, and a variety of education entities, including a worker's college.¹¹

One of the most tangible legacies of the Finnish-American community has been the development of consumers' cooperatives. No other group, immigrant or otherwise, has succeeded in establishing such a large number of consumers' cooperatives that operated over such a long period of time. What also distinguished the Finnish cooperative movement was how cooperation was viewed as an instrument of the working class struggle. While most cooperatives were developed to deal with very real problems in retail distribution at the local level, the Finns were also concerned with political and economic issues at the national and international level. This concern with socioeconomic issues undoubtedly contributed to the high visibility of the Finnish cooperative movement, although it also led to later divisions within the Finnish-American community.¹²

The men's and women's organizations that were members of the Mesaba Co-operative Park Association were involved in a variety of activities. The organizations were typically under the auspices of the Finnish Workers Federation. The men's groups usually focused on labor issues and were essentially forerunners of unions. The women's groups organized fund raising efforts for such causes as striking workers and their families and for organizations that supported unemployed workers such as the Worker's Alliance. They supported the Finnish-language women's newspaper, *Toveritar* (Woman Comrade) and later the *Naisten Viiri* (Women's Banner). The women's groups also had an educational focus and attempted to teach the broader public about their political beliefs and the value of cooperative organizations. They also

¹⁰ Mesaba Range Cooperative Park Association, Inc., "Mesaba Co-op Park: A Deeper History" (Duluth: Service Printers of Duluth, 2016), 31-32. The listing includes the location of the organization if not included in its title. All organizations were located in Minnesota except the Worker's Työmies Society located in Superior, Wisconsin.

¹¹ Arnold R. Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 62. Frenkel, "A Common Festival Grounds" (unpublished paper in the files of Mesaba Park, n.d.), 1.

¹² Arnold R. Alanen, "The Development and Distribution of Finnish Consumer's Cooperatives in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, 1903-1973," *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 1975), 103-105.

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organized "Sunday schools," youth groups, and summer camps in order to provide political education to children.¹³

Moreover, the Finns believed that a collective, organized effort was the best way to find a place for themselves in America. "Thus, the Finns in America organized themselves in a variety of ways and, in the process, created remarkable movements and social institutions."¹⁴

The Evolution of Mesaba Park

When Mesaba Park's pavilion was completed in 1930, the lower level was completely open. (Figure 2) Within a few years, the northeast end of the lower level was enclosed to provide space for a kitchen. During this initial construction phase at the park, the ticket booth, refreshment stand, manager's residence, and the children's summer camp were also constructed. (Figure 3)

In the 1930s, the programs at Mesaba Park continued to grow in size and importance. Many of the programs were full-day or multi-day events that encompassed a combination of activities. Programs included athletic and recreational events, musical or cultural performances, social events, and there was often a political component. The attendance at the events was often staggering, with hundreds if not thousands of participants. The park's events and activities continued to receive significant attention in articles in the *Työmies*, including full-page notices for the annual summer festivals throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Among the most commonplace activities at Mesaba Park were the weekly dances that remained a mainstay of park life for many years. The most celebrated dance at Mesaba Park took place on July 18, 1936, with a performance by accordionist Viola Turpeinen-Syrjala, who had emerged as the most popular entertainer in North America's Finnish halls. In the summer of 1936, Turpeinen-Syrjala, along with her husband, musician Bill Syrjala, traveled from New York City to present twenty-seven performances in northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The highlight of the tour was her appearance at Mesaba Park, an occasion still recalled by participants several decades later. Over 1,000 people purchased tickets for this dance at Mesaba Park's pavilion. Since the auditorium could not accommodate all the dancers at one time, the participants divided into two groups that would rotate between the dance floor and the hillside outside the pavilion. Local band leader Eino Leino and his orchestra also performed regularly at dances at Mesaba Park, and sometimes offered more exotic programs such as a "masquerade and carnival dance."¹⁵

The traditional Finnish sauna was also a popular attraction. Although no longer extant, the original sauna was built in the 1930s along the edge of North Star Lake. The sauna was open each Saturday from mid-afternoon until late into the evening at a cost of 15 cents per person.

¹³ Frenkel, "A Common Festival Grounds," 2. Arnold Alanen, interview with Rolf Anderson on November 7, 2016.

¹⁴ Michael G. Karni, "For the Common Good: Finnish Radicalism in the Western Great Lakes Region, 1900-1940" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1975), 63, 74.

¹⁵ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 69, 75.

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The sauna had separate rooms for men and women, while a wood-fired stove in the middle of the building heated both spaces simultaneously. A long dock extended into the lake and allowed participants to cool off after taking a sauna. Another Finnish tradition that has taken place at Mesaba Park since its origin has been the Midsummer celebration (Juhannus), including the lighting of a night-time bonfire on the shore of North Star Lake.

It was common for related organizational members of Mesaba Park, such as worker's or women's groups, to band together to sponsor events. For example, the Finnish Women's Clubs of the Minnesota-Wisconsin District sponsored their own annual festival at Mesaba Park. Their 1938 festival was typical of many held at the park in that it was a multi-day event and included a variety of activities. The event began on Saturday with a (potluck) supper followed by a concert and dance in the pavilion. The Sunday program began with games in the morning followed by dinner and concluded with speeches and a musical presentation in the afternoon.¹⁶

The success of the on-going events at Mesaba Park, particularly those that attracted large numbers of attendees, is directly attributed to the tremendous organization energy and volunteerism displayed by the park's supporters. After the 1936 festival, the editor of the *Työmies* noted that the Finns who were responsible for the two-day program should be recognized for their abilities to organize and manage such a huge event. Providing food for thousands of people was a major undertaking, which required scores of volunteers. Prior to the 1936 festival, a notice appeared in the *Työmies* requesting that each of the thirteen largest local organizations affiliated with the park provide up to fifteen people for six-hour-long shifts in the kitchen. Other volunteers supervised and carried out tasks such as ticket sales and automobile parking. Cars were organized into orderly rows by a "car parking captain" and his crew, although festival organizers warned that anyone who planned to drive to the park for the Sunday program should expect a "huge throng of people."¹⁷ These volunteer efforts continued to be a mainstay at the park. One "work bee" from 1941 depicts a group of women chopping wood. (Figure 4)

Over time, additional improvements were made to the park. In the late 1930s, a permanent dining hall was added to the pavilion by enclosing the center section of the lower level alongside the kitchen. In the early 1940s, three cabins were added to the park. A major improvement was made in the late 1930s or early 1940s with the introduction of electricity to the park through the New Deal's Rural Electrification Administration (REA). Previously, the park had depended on a gasoline-powered generator along with gasoline lamps and lanterns. Perishables had been stored in iceboxes utilizing ice that was harvested by "ice-lifting bees" in the winter months and stored in the ice house.

¹⁶ "Finnish Women's Club to Hold Outing Aug. 6-7," *Midwest Labor*, August 5, 1938, 5.

¹⁷ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 78. Several historic photographs depict large numbers of cars parked in a field, although the exact location of the field is not known. The field might have been located off Mesaba Park Road, although with the large crowds that often attended events at the park it may have been necessary for cars to park along the road or even along Minnesota State Highway 37.

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North Star Camp

A key purpose of Mesaba Park was to provide a summer camp for children. The park's North Star Camp included two dormitories and a dining hall that could accommodate 30-40 participants during two-week sessions. Instructors and staff members came from various Finnish organizations affiliated with the park, although the campers did not have to be of Finnish descent. The fee for attending the camp was \$10.00, including room and board.

The campers, who were typically from nine to sixteen years of age, pursued various recreational activities such as swimming, rowing, volleyball, baseball, ping-pong, tennis, horseshoes, and Finnish folk dancing. The instructors also taught the campers about nature study, American history, and current events, as well as about labor organizations, cooperatives, and working-class economics. If a camper played a musical instrument, he or she might be asked to give lessons to other children. Campers went swimming in North Star Lake and the summer camp even had its own pet deer. (Figure 5)

Campers were organized into groups to perform chores such as dishwashing, hauling wood and water, and cleaning the camp's buildings. Popular culture was not forgotten either, at least by some of the campers. Those campers who brought Flash Gordon or Mickey Mouse comic books were reported to be very popular. Evenings were sometimes devoted to singing, which provided the campers with the opportunity to learn songs that had proletarian lyrics.¹⁸

Mayme Savander, whose father was one of the founders of Mesaba Park, wrote of her experience at North Star Camp during the 1930s:

I remember the big red flag with the gold hammer and sickle that we flew, and I remember the sky-blue skirt I wore, and the red kerchief that meant I was a Young Pioneer. And I remember the camp songs we sang that said we were proud to be Communists. The membership card we each were issued laid out what it meant to be a Young Pioneer. Even today, it sounds quite noble: "A Young Pioneer fights for food and clothing for children of the unemployed, fights against racial discrimination and for better education for all." I wore my kerchief proudly.¹⁹

Bertha Kurki, who served as a camp counselor in 1949, explained how she used the book *The Life of Eugene V. Debs* as a textbook for older campers.²⁰ Debs was a union leader and one of the co-founders of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He was also a five-time U.S. presidential candidate for the Socialist Party of America.

¹⁸ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 74-75.

¹⁹ Frenkel, "The Role of Mesaba Park in Organizing the Iron Range, 1936-1939" (unpublished paper in the files of Mesaba Park, 1994), 2-3.

²⁰ Brenda Poropudas, ed., "Mesaba Co-operative Park Association: 40 Years of Progressive Co-operation, 1929-1979" (Superior: Työmies Society, 1979), 30-31.

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Through the summer camp, youth groups, and other educational activities, members of Mesaba Park hoped to raise a generation of class conscious activists who would serve their movement.

Politics and Mesaba Park

But it was politics and the radical politics of the Finns that brought the greatest attention to Mesaba Park. The Finns had placed great expectations on freedom and democracy in the United States as evidenced by the lyrics in a Finnish ballad that stated, "I'm going to America, everyone is on his way, the American shores are sanded with gold they say."²¹ But many Finns were bitterly disappointed once they arrived. The living and working conditions were not at all what they expected. The quality of life in the mining towns in northern Michigan and Minnesota was anything but ideal. Housing was poor and the cost of rent, food, and fuel was high. Working conditions were even worse. Immigrants labored under extremely dangerous conditions for very low pay and extremely limited chances for advancement.²² There was appalling exploitation of the workers on the part of the mining companies, often with the support of public officials. Many Finns were blacklisted for participating in the strikes on the Iron Range in the first part of the twentieth century and were often denied credit. Not surprisingly, within the Finnish community there "gave rise to a radicalism that sought to re-make America into the paradise the Finns had come here to find."²³

Many of the miners of the Iron Range became involved in radical political parties because in the early decades of the twentieth century the Socialists and Communists were the only ones addressing the injustices within the American economic system. Both parties advocated for higher wages, better hours, workers' and unemployment compensation programs, and the right of workers to organize unions. From the workers' perspective, initially neither the Democratic nor Republican parties were addressing the issues of great concern to the miners and their families. Ironically, however, actions by the Progressives within both major parties paved the way for greater participation by immigrants and their children in the political system. . .²⁴

But what truly distinguished the Finns is that they were not passive participants. "Whether they associated themselves with the church, the temperance movement, the cooperative movement or the radical labor movement, they believed they could act on the American environment and shape it into what it was not."²⁵

This activism is clearly represented at Mesaba Park, where many members embraced socialism or communism. But members also embraced the more mainstream Farmer-Labor Party in order to enact change, and with astonishing results. In fact, during the 1930s, and particularly in 1936, the park served as one of the primary centers for the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota. Farmer-

²¹ Quoted in Karni, "For the Common Good," 32.

²² Karni, "For the Common Good," 64-65.

²³ Karni, "For the Common Good," 6-7.

²⁴ Pamela A. Brunfelt, "Political Culture in Microcosm: Minnesota's Iron Range" (unpublished abstract, n.d.), 4-5.

²⁵ Karni, "For the Common Good," 11-12.

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Laborites had organized in 1918 and successfully challenged both the Democratic and Republican political parties throughout much of the 1930s. The most dynamic and charismatic of the Farmer-Labor politicians was Floyd B. Olson, who was elected governor of Minnesota in 1930. Olson had a strong following on the Iron Range, where the Farmer-Labor Party quickly became a dominant political force.

The Farmer-Labor Party attracted members from two segments of the population: farmers who belonged to co-operative grain exchanges in Minnesota's primary agricultural region and members of organized labor movements who were concentrated in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, and the Iron Range. While Farmer-Laborites believed that "the political and economic systems were unresponsive and malfunctioning and that the two major parties were either unwilling or incapable of reforming them," the membership displayed a wide range of political philosophies within their ranks. Supporters of the Farmer-Labor Party on the Mesaba Iron Range, many of whom were Finns, called for a political agenda that emphasized socialistic and often radical solutions to social and economic problems. Whereas the agrarian wing generally advocated a more moderate course of action.²⁶

During the 1930s, Mesaba Park hosted annual summer festivals, which were major political and cultural events for the entire region. The festivals combined the typical mix of leftist politics, music, recreation, athletic competitions, and dancing. One of the most important festivals was held at Mesaba Park in 1936, when the park played a major role in the emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party.

Minnesota's 1936 political season began in June with primary elections and party conventions. The primary election in Cherry Township, the home of Mesaba Park, reflected the strength of the Farmer-Labor Party throughout northeastern Minnesota at the time. The township voted overwhelmingly for the Farmer-Labor candidates. Shortly after the primary election, the Farmer-Labor Party held its convention in St. Paul and selected Elmer A. Benson for governor and John T. Bernard for congressman.²⁷ Many Finnish Americans in northeastern Minnesota quickly united behind Bernard, a World War I veteran and fireman from nearby Eveleth who had been blacklisted by local mining companies because of his efforts to organize the iron ore workers. Bernard also demonstrated that the Farmer-Laborites were willing to support a candidate who did not come from one of the three largest nationality groups on the Mesaba Range, the Finns, South Slavs, or Italians.²⁸

Mesaba Park's 1936 summer festival was scheduled to take place shortly after the Farmer-Labor Party's convention and featured appearances by Bernard and Benson as well as two days filled with activities. A front-page article in the *St. Louis County Independent* announced the upcoming festival and political rally that was to be held at Mesaba Park on July 4-5, 1936:

²⁶ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 75-76.

²⁷ Governor Floyd B. Olson had been the unanimous candidate for U.S. Senator, but his candidacy ended with his untimely death in August 1936.

²⁸ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 76-77.

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Elmer A. Benson, candidate for governor on the Farmer-Labor ticket will be the principal speaker at the Finnish Workers Federation Festival to be held at the Mesaba Park. . . . This will be Senator Benson's first speaking engagement on the range during this campaign, and it is expected that hundreds of people from every section of the northern part of the state will be in attendance to hear his keynote address.

John T. Bernard, Eveleth, who received the nomination for congress from the Eighth District on the Farmer-Labor ticket, will also be on the speaking program as will also a number of other prominent speakers.

There will be an elaborate program of sports, music and other entertainment during the two days of the festival which is being sponsored by the Wisconsin and Minnesota divisions of the Finnish Workers Federation.²⁹

A subsequent announcement provided additional information about the event and also confirmed how such events often encompassed a variety of activities at multiple venues. The article noted that Saturday's events at Mesaba Park would include a youth program in the afternoon. The evening program would begin with a choral concert presented by various Federation clubs followed by a dance in the "spacious park pavilion." Sunday's program would begin with a Farmer-Labor election victory parade in Virginia led by the United Front Band from Ironwood, Michigan:

Every effort is being made to make the Sunday morning's parade one of the most impressive demonstrations of unity of the progressive forces ever held anywhere on the Range. Co-operative, Worker's and Farmers' clubs, women's and youth and local organizations and local Farmer-Labor clubs will participate in the Victory parade with their slogans and banners.

Immediately after the Victory Parade the crowd will begin the journey to the beautiful Mesaba Park where people will assemble for the day. A caravan of cars, busses and trucks will go in a colony transporting the people from Virginia. . . .

[Following an afternoon of events and speeches] the two-day festival will come to an end on Sunday evening with a presentation of a Finnish Play at the Chisholm Recreation auditorium. . . .

"From all indications," says Mr. Matt Wick, the District secretary of the [Finnish Workers] Federation, "the Festival this year will be one of the largest and one of the most representative ever held in this part of the country among the Finnish people."

²⁹ "Sen. Elmer Benson Principal Speaker at Finnish Festival," *St. Louis County Independent*, 1.

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“The thousands of people gathering at the Festival will be a living testimony of the strong desire of the progressive people to unify their ranks against the common enemy - reaction - and thus prepare for a huge Farmer-Labor victory in the fall elections,” states Mr. Wick.³⁰

Following the conclusion of the festival, the *St. Louis County Independent* reported on the unprecedented size of the gathering:

Over 8,000 people were in attendance on Sunday at the annual festival of the Finnish Workers Federation at Mesaba Park, and was considered one of the largest gatherings of its kind ever held in the northern part of the state.

The entire afternoon was given over to talks by prominent speakers who spoke on the economic problems that are now confronting the people of this state and nation.

The principal speakers were Senator Elmer A. Benson, candidate for governor on the Farmer-Labor ticket and John T. Bernard, Eveleth, the endorsed Farmer-Labor candidate for congressman from the Eighth District. Both men gave splendid talks on the present day problems and urged the election of the entire Farmer-Labor ticket. . . .

Sunday witnessed the closing of a two day session, which the officials of the Finnish Federation state was the most outstanding festival that the organization has ever held.³¹

Newspaper articles and editorials published regularly in the *Työmies* throughout the summer and fall of 1936 gave strong support to the entire Farmer-Labor ticket. In late September, with the general election just over a month away, an article written by Rudolph N. Harju, a second-generation Finnish-American, predicted that Finns would “rally around the banner of progress.” Harju noted that most Finns were liberal in their political outlook, even those involved in the church and temperance movements. Nevertheless, it was the Finns involved in supporting labor unions, cultural organizations, and co-operatives who were “decidedly progressive and radical.” Harju suggested that a vote for Farmer-Labor candidates such as John Bernard would ensure “progress, a safeguard for our civil and political liberties, better opportunities for a livelihood, the right to the possession of our farms and homes, the alleviation of the suffering of the people and a mighty bulwark against fascism and war.”³²

The general election on November 3, 1936, was a stunning victory for the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota. Their candidates for U.S. Senator, governor, lieutenant governor, and five of the state’s nine congressional representatives had won. Historian Arnold Alanen stated, “. . . it can

³⁰ “F.-L. Candidates to Speak at Finnish Festival Sunday,” *St. Louis County Independent*, July 3, 1936, 1.

³¹ Nearly 8,000 are in Attendance at Finnish Festival,” *St. Louis County Independent*, July 10, 1936, 1.

³² Quoted in Alanen, “A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year,” 78-79.

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be argued that few, if any, state-wide elections that occurred anywhere in the United States at any time were so strongly influenced by Finnish immigrants and their American-born descendants.”³³

Mesaba Park’s supporters were particularly pleased that John Bernard had won. He never forgot Mesaba Park and his Finnish-American supporters. A May Day message to his Finnish compatriots was published on the front page of the *Työmies* and he also spoke at Mesaba Park’s festivals in both 1937 and 1938. The 1937 program simply listed one of the Saturday evening musical soloists as “John T. Bernard,” as he was known for the operatic quality of his voice and often performed publicly. For his keynote speech on Sunday, he was identified as “Kongressmies John T. Bernard.”³⁴ Another speaker at Mesaba Park in 1937 was Gus Hall.

Other notable events in 1937 also had connections with the Farmer-Labor Party. In August-September, a two-week camp was held at Mesaba Park for young men and women ages 16 to 30 that was sponsored by the Junior Farmer-Labor Association of Minnesota.³⁵ In September, the park hosted a trade union school conducted by the Minnesota Lumber and Sawmill Workers Local No. 29 of the International Woodworkers of America. A number of attendees, many of whom were apparently from Michigan, provided comments about their experiences:

Greetings to the boys in Michigan from the Minnesota lumberjacks school out here at Mesaba Park, Minn. It sure feels grand to be out in this Farmer-Labor state, breathing this Farmer-Labor free air, and it sure is a different situation here among the lumber workers than there exists among the lumberjacks of Michigan.

You may rest assured that we will carry the information into the camps and industrial plants in Michigan so that others may profit [from] the things we have learned in Minnesota.³⁶

The optimism of 1936-37 carried into the summer festivals at Mesaba Park in 1938. *Midwest Labor* reported that “thousands of people of all nationalities turned out to hear progressive speakers” during a three-day event in July. Gene Saari, the secretary of the Finnish Workers Federation of Minnesota and Wisconsin stated, “Our festival has been organized for the purpose of consolidating and mobilizing the progressive people to fight back the forces of reaction in the interest of peace, democracy and economic security.”³⁷ The editor of *Midwest Labor* also commented on the event:

Over the week-end I attended the festival of the Finnish Workers Federation at Mesaba Park. It will be a long time before I forget that event. For you saw thousands of farmers, miners, steel workers, timber workers, men and women who had worked farms from a barren soil, dug the riches of the Mesaba Iron

³³ Alanen, “A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year,” 70.

³⁴ Alanen, “A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year,” 79-80.

³⁵ Frenkel, “The Role of Mesaba Park in Organizing the Iron Range, 1936-1939,” 8.

³⁶ “Timber Workers Express Thanks for School at Mesaba Park,” *Midwest Labor*, September 24, 1937, 3.

³⁷ “Thousands Attend Finnish Festival,” *Midwest Labor*, July 8, 1938, 3.

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Range, spanned a wilderness with wide highways, men and women who had worked and lived under the greatest difficulties, had overcome and were overcoming the great hardships.³⁸

The editor also noted that any freedoms that had been won under a Farmer-Labor administration would not be taken away without a struggle. However, John T. Bernard's progressive and radical viewpoints, and support for the most liberal New Deal legislation, caused concern among some of his key Minnesota supporters, including some who believed that the freshman congressman's views were too far to the left for a nation and region moving increasingly toward the middle and conservative side of the political spectrum. These issues contributed to his defeat in the November 1938 election. Governor Elmer Benson also lost his 1938 re-election bid along with all but one of Minnesota's Farmer-Labor representatives in Congress.

The losses experienced by the Farmer-Labor Party in 1938 were a great disappointment to many of Minnesota's Finns, particularly those associated with Mesaba Park. Additionally, in 1939, the entire Finnish radical community in North America was shocked when the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression treaty and the Soviet Union attacked Finland. These events fractured the Finnish radical community and resulted in membership declines within the ranks of the many organizations that supported Mesaba Park. The entry of the United States into World War II also resulted in a subtle change in the 1942 summer gathering at Mesaba Park. The event was no longer referred to as a "summer festival" or "festival of struggle," now it was called the more patriotic "American Independence Day" celebration.³⁹

During the war years, Minnesota's Farmer-Labor and Democratic parties began to work toward a merger. In 1944, the two groups formed what is still known today as the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party of Minnesota. While the DFL did not incorporate all of the objectives that Finnish-American radicals had promoted, it did at least embrace some of the principles of labor, gender, and social equality that had been advocated for many years. Following the merger, the majority of Finnish-Americans in Minnesota would support the DFL Party in most election contests.⁴⁰ Carl Ross, a former radical-turned-scholar, explained this phenomenon in Minnesota and elsewhere as follows:

Republicans and radicals were the losers, having lost their bases of Finnish support, but Finnish Americans were the gainers: [they were] moving into the mainstream of American labor organizations and political life with opportunities to influence their destinies far beyond their ethnic community.⁴¹

Historic photographs of Mesaba Park from 1938-1940 depict large crowds of people near the pavilion listening to speakers. John T. Bernard and Elmer A. Benson are also pictured on the

³⁸ "The Editor Says," *Midwest Labor*, July 8, 1938, 3.

³⁹ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 79-81.

⁴⁰ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 81.

⁴¹ Quoted in Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 81.

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speaker's platform on Birch Hill. (Figures 6-9). One particularly evocative photograph depicts a crowd by the pavilion with the northwest wall covered with advertisements. (Figure 10)

Mesaba Park in the Post-World War II Era

Mesaba Park continued the tradition of its summer festivals and other programs in the post-World War II era. The children's camp also continued to offer summer programs. However, because of its radical orientation, Mesaba Park came under scrutiny by the FBI. The park was referred to by some as the "Red Camp" or the "Commie Camp." Members recall witnessing men recording license plates in the parking lot and some of the park's key supporters went underground in the early 1950s in order to avoid surveillance. Although there was no direct harassment by authorities at the park itself, harassment did occur and was doled out by "local vigilante committees" who damaged property and threw rocks through windows. When Finns did experience direct harassment from the government, it happened non-publicly, one-on-one, or in their own homes.⁴² The hysteria during the McCarthy era, in particular, led to a decline in membership and a drop in attendance at park events as people feared the consequences of being branded a communist or a sympathizer.

By 1959, Mesaba Park was facing both decreasing membership and financial difficulties. The membership realized that the park would have to be sold or the membership policies modified to extend beyond organizations associated with the Finnish-American community. In addition, as Finnish immigrants and their descendants assimilated into American society, the need for the numerous Finnish organizations that were members of the park declined, and many ceased to exist. In response, the park's bylaws were changed in 1959 to allow any individual to purchase shares in the Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association.

This change in the membership policy helped the park to weather a number of challenging years. However, the park's members continue to maintain the traditions and spirit of the original founders, although the strong political focus of earlier years has subsided. The summer festivals focus on general issues of peace, labor, and human rights. One notable change has been the transition from Finnish to English for Mesaba Park's meeting minutes. Remarkably, the first time the board's minutes were recorded in English was on June 15, 1969.

Mesaba Park's summer festival in 1977 was particularly memorable. That year the program honored former Governor Elmer A. Benson and former Congressman John T. Bernard, both of whom the park membership helped elect on the Farmer Labor ticket in 1936. Both men were once again on the Mesaba Park podium together, both steadfast in their political philosophies that harkened back to the 1930s. Many of their supporters from the past were in attendance, including Spanish Civil War Veterans, former Timberworker Union members, Farmer-Laborites, and Communist party members.⁴³

⁴² Jarvi interview.

⁴³ Frenkel, "The Role of Mesaba Park in Organizing the Iron Range, 1936-1939," 10.

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In June 2004, three hundred people gathered to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association. The program included Finnish-American music, presentations about the history of the park, children's activities, a dance, and a midnight bonfire. The theme of the festival, "Against All Odds," paid respect to the fact that the park, remarkably, had survived all the various political and financial challenges of the past, and that the park was still able to honor its eventful origins and traditions.⁴⁴

In a 2016 publication, the Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association proclaimed that its mission in the 21st century is to preserve Mesaba Park, particularly its iconic pavilion, and to maintain the park's facilities for the enjoyment of its members, particularly families with limited incomes. While Mesaba Park, as an association, is no longer actively involved in political issues, ". . . the Park may someday again assume new and different roles in the advocacy of dignity and justice for its members and for the working-class community at large."⁴⁵

FBI Surveillance of Mesaba Park

While there had been considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that Mesaba Park had been under FBI surveillance during the post-World War II era, there had been no documentation to confirm the surveillance or its extent. In conjunction with the preparation of this National Register of Historic Places Nomination, the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, was contacted under a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to determine if documentation exists that could confirm if Mesaba Park had been subject to FBI surveillance. In response to the request, the National Archives identified two FBI case files compiled as part of an internal security investigation of Mesaba Park.

Case File 100-HQ-3827 (FOIA case number 50838) represents the case file on Mesaba Park maintained at the FBI's headquarters in Washington, D.C. The file contains 170 pages representing documentation dated between October 1940 and September 1971.

Case File 100-MP-110 (FOIA case number 50812) represents the case file on Mesaba Park maintained by the FBI's Minneapolis field office.⁴⁶ The file is arranged in seven sections and contains an estimated 1,350 pages representing documentation dated between August 1940 and September 1978.⁴⁷

The National Archives prioritizes the processing and release of case files based on the size of the file. Because of its smaller size, the file from FBI headquarters was assigned to a higher priority queue for processing and the file has just recently been made available. The larger file from the Minneapolis field office was assigned to a lower priority queue for processing and may not be available for perhaps two years or longer. However, staff at the National Archives stated that the

⁴⁴ Alanen, "A Remarkable Place, An Eventful Year," 84.

⁴⁵ "Mesaba Park: A Deeper History," 28.

⁴⁶ The investigation was initially handled by the St. Paul office of the FBI, but beginning in the 1950s the investigation was handled by the Minneapolis office.

⁴⁷ Noah D. Shankin, Archivist, National Archives and Records Administration, email message to Jane King Hession, August 24, 2016.

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file from FBI headquarters would contain the “distilled intelligence” found to be most pertinent to the FBI’s investigation of Mesaba Park, while associated field office files are often more voluminous as an office may pursue every lead.⁴⁸ Thus, the following summation of the information in the file maintained by the FBI’s headquarters should reflect a thorough account of the investigation of Mesaba Park.

Case File 100-HQ-3827

Case File 100-HQ-3827 contains periodic reports submitted to FBI headquarters by the local field office, as well as correspondence between the two offices. The file also contains aerial photographs of Mesaba Park. A typical report might include background information about the park, and the findings that resulted from investigations into activities that took place at the park, as well as individuals associated with the park, particularly the officers of the Mesaba Park board of directors. Outside groups that utilized Mesaba Park for events were also investigated. The FBI also monitored Mesaba Park’s bank records as well as the phone calls and mail for various individuals, and the results of those actions are also listed in the reports.

The National Archives completed a line-by-line review of the case file, and, of the 170 pages, 145 pages were released in full and 25 pages were released in redacted form. Very little text was redacted. The majority of the redactions involved the removal of the names of informants, although only the names of confidential informants were removed.⁴⁹

The first FBI report on Mesaba Park was filed in October 1940. The report does not explain what specifically prompted the investigation, however, the onset corresponds with two national anti-communist initiatives. In 1938, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was founded as a committee of the U.S House of Representatives. The committee investigated alleged communist activities in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s as well as the activities of leftist or suspected subversive groups or individuals. The Alien Registration Act of 1940, also known as the Smith Act, made it a criminal offense to advocate the violent overthrow of the government as well as organizing or belonging to any organization that did the same.⁵⁰ As a result, socialists and communists, and some immigrant groups, were particularly vulnerable under this act.

The following summary from the FBI file on Mesaba Park is organized by decade.

⁴⁸ Noah D. Shankin, Archivist, National Archives and Records Administration, email message to Rolf Anderson dated August 2, 2018.

⁴⁹ Noah D. Shankin, Archivist, National Archives and Records Administration, email message to Rolf Anderson dated December 13, 2018. Shankin explained that the criteria for determining whether the name of an informant would be redacted is based on whether an informant provided information of a general nature and was not under the protection of anonymity versus those who provided more sensitive information with the promise of protection as a confidential source.

⁵⁰ Donna T. Haverty-Stacke, *Trotskyists on Trial: Free Speech and Political Persecution Since the Age of FDR* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 2-3.

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The first FBI report on Mesaba Park is dated October 22, 1940, and begins with the following "Synopsis of Facts" on page one. (Figure 11)

Mesaba Range Cooperative Association is a Communist organization which openly preach(es) Communism. It consists principally of Finnish people living in the vicinity of Hibbing, Buhl, Chisholm, and Virginia, Minn. The Association owns the land which it operates as a park and conducts Communist classes in a private school house located on the premises.⁵¹

The report included information about the president, secretary, manager, and caretaker of Mesaba Park, although frustration was expressed that little information had been found concerning the then president, Charles Markkula. The report noted that "undeveloped leads" would be pursued to obtain additional information.

One incident is described in detail and illustrates the perception of Mesaba Park on the part of both the FBI and local authorities. On June 30, 1940, a picnic was held at the park. The report noted that ". . . Elmer Benson, a former Governor and several other prominent individuals who favor Communism spoke. A few of the young Americans in Hibbing showed their resentment and disapproval of this meeting by carrying a dummy labelled "Stalin" which they brought to the picnic and placed on the speaker's stand." A fight ensued and the three boys who caused the disturbance were taken into custody for disturbing the peace. However, the assistant attorney for St. Louis County stated, "He felt that the Mesaba Range Cooperative Park Association was unquestionably Communist and that the defendants in this particular matter were justified in their actions." Furthermore, on July 9, 1940, this same incident was brought to the attention of FBI headquarters, ". . . by Wayne Ikola and others, who directed a letter to J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Bureau, advising of the growing interest in Communism on the iron range."⁵²

The FBI report dated November 10, 1942, confirmed that Mesaba Park was still active and that "Informants state (the) organization held its annual children's camp in August of this year, and several leading communists in Duluth sent their children for instruction in Communism. Investigation shows that part of the Finns belonging to co-ops are not of a radical nature, but that the part that conducts this children's camp follows the Communist Party very closely."⁵³

The report also illustrates the range in geographic locations of the FBI informants. A source identified as "Confidential Informant T-1" was from Duluth, some 70 miles from Mesaba Park. Another informant was from New York Mills, about 180 miles from Mesaba Park. That individual had previously lived in Hibbing, and suggested several local persons who might be contacted as potential sources of "valuable information."

⁵¹ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, Mesaba Range Cooperative Association, October 22, 1940, 1; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Record Group 56; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

⁵² FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, October 22, 1940, 3.

⁵³ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, November 10, 1942, 1.

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There are a number of citations in the report that quote articles from *Työmies*, the Finnish language newspaper published in Superior, Wisconsin.⁵⁴ Throughout the course of the investigation, the FBI often relied on *Työmies* for information about events and activities at Mesaba Park. The newspaper was also utilized as a source for the names of individuals associated with Mesaba Park.

The last report from the 1940s filed by the local FBI field office with FBI headquarters is dated March 22, 1943. Six informants were interviewed as well as a number of law enforcement officers and government officials. The report noted that, "Informants advise little or no activity has existed on part of subject organization during (the) past year due to anti-Communist feeling among Finnish laborers. It is believed organizers are meeting quietly rather than in the open as in the past." All those interviewed for the report stated they would contact the FBI if they came into possession of information indicating that Mesaba Park was involved with Communist Party affairs. The report concluded with the statement, "In view of the fact that this organization appears to have disbanded, this case is being closed subject to being reopened in the event information is received to the contrary."⁵⁵

1950-1959

The file was reopened in 1952, when FBI headquarters apparently inquired about the existence of any communist party camps in Minnesota and North Dakota. In a report dated October 9, 1952, the Minneapolis field office stated they had not identified "any special Communist party camp," but wanted to call the Bureau's attention to Mesaba Park, for which reports had been submitted in the 1940s. "This Park has been frequented by Communists and is managed by individuals who are sympathetic to Communism. . . . The matter has been reopened for investigation in view of the fact there has been reported activity in the camp this summer primarily by members of the Red Finn group and Finnish Mutual Aid Society."⁵⁶

The next report, dated May 13, 1953, is the most extensive report in the entire file, totaling forty-six pages. The report is divided into the following sections: Synopsis, Organization, Location and Facilities, Board of Directors, Membership, Security Measures, Schools Conducted at Mesaba Park, Other Activities, Miscellaneous, Enclosures to Bureau, Administrative Page, Leads, and Informants. The report includes information about the establishment of Mesaba Park, as well as the articles of incorporation for the organization. Events and activities that were held at the park over the years were discussed, as well as known individuals associated with the park. The report also contains a description of the park's buildings.

Fifty-two informants were interviewed in conjunction with the report. Informants were identified with a letter and a number, and if the source was believed to be accurate it was noted as such. For example, "T-18, of known reliability, advised . . ." When an informant was

⁵⁴ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, November 10, 1942, 2-3.

⁵⁵ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, March 22, 1943, 1-3.

⁵⁶ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, October 9, 1952, 1.

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providing information about a Mesaba Park board member or other individual, they would typically comment on whether they believed the individual was a member of the Communist Party or a communist sympathizer. (Figure 12) However, it could be difficult identifying individuals associated with Mesaba Park because membership was at an organizational level and there were no membership lists that named individuals. Reports also included a separate section where the informants were identified. (Figure 13)

The investigation continued to rely on articles and announcements in the *Työmies* newspaper for information about individuals and activities at Mesaba Park. The newspaper merged with the *Eteenpain* (Forward), another Finnish language newspaper, in 1950 and was thereafter known as *Työmies-Eteenpain*. The FBI noted that, "The Tyomies and the Eteenpain were cited by the California Committee on Un-American activities report . . . as being publications which the aforementioned committee found 'to be in the Stalin Solar System.'"⁵⁷

The FBI also investigated organizations that conducted schools in Mesaba Park's summer camp buildings. The report noted that classes had been held by the National School of the Communist Party, District #9 of the Communist Party, Labor Youth League, and American Youth for Democracy, although it was noted that organizations might simply rent the park's buildings and did not necessarily have a direct connection with Mesaba Park. The report noted that both the Labor Youth League and the American Youth for Democracy were declared by the United States Attorney General on August 24, 1950, to be organizations within the purview of Executive Order #9835. This order, signed by President Harry Truman on March 21, 1947, was designed to root out communist influence in the federal government. However, the order later facilitated the creation of a list of subversive organizations by the attorney general.

This report is also the first that discusses Mesaba Park's finances. An informant stated that Mesaba Park maintained a checking account at the First National Bank in Hibbing. The informant also provided the account balance on various dates and information about checks issued on the account, including the amounts and the names of the payees.⁵⁸ This report was also the first to discuss the interest in monitoring the mail of certain individuals.

The report referenced four aerial photographs of Mesaba Park. One aerial view was provided to the FBI by a commercial photographer who had taken photographs of Cherry Township on September 23, 1948. The photograph depicts the park from a high altitude and includes the entire property. Three additional aerial photographs were taken by an FBI agent on December 23, 1952. These photographs were taken at a much lower altitude and depict many of the park's buildings. (Figures 14-16) Of particular interest is a photograph of the Children's Camp (Figure 15), since currently only the kitchen wing of the dining hall remains extant, and the photograph of Cabins 1-3 (Figure 16), since no historic photographs of these buildings have previously been located. Thus, the FBI file contains important historic images of Mesaba Park.

⁵⁷ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, May 13, 1953, 7.

⁵⁸ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, May 13, 1953, 11.

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On June 25, 1953, the office of the director of the FBI forwarded a copy of the May 13th report to Assistant Attorney General Warren Olney III of the Criminal Division. The cover letter stated, "You may desire to review the above report in detail in connection with the provisions of Executive Order 10450."⁵⁹ This order, issued by President Dwight Eisenhower on April 27, 1953, replaced Executive Order 9835 and was even more far-reaching in scope.

The report dated November 9, 1953, listed all fifty-one organizations that were members of Mesaba Park as of August 31, 1946.⁶⁰ The report also included a list of the forty-one checks drawn on Mesaba Park's checking account from June through October 1953.⁶¹ The report also included a list of all toll calls made from Mesaba Park between January 6, 1951, and September 6, 1952.⁶²

It was clear that FBI headquarters scrutinized the reports from the field offices. After reviewing the report dated November 9, 1953, FBI headquarters noted that the report did not include sufficient information about a number of organizations that were referenced in the report and they requested an amended report with additional details.

On March 22, 1954, the Minneapolis FBI field office requested permission from FBI headquarters to monitor the mail for eight individuals for a three-month period. A separate request was required for each individual. The request had to specify the name, address, type of mail (first class, registered, and special delivery, for example), type of cover (return addresses, for example), the time period covered, the purpose of the cover (to determine contacts and correspondents, for example), and the justification. (Figure 17) The section on justification stated that the requestor should comment on the necessity, desirability, productivity, and possibility of embarrassment to the FBI. The justification statement was typically worded as follows:

This individual is a member of the Board of Directors of the above-captioned organization, which is presently controlled by Communists and Communist sympathizers, at which park Communist Party schools and meetings have been held in the past, and at which place meetings of front organizations still take place; therefore, it is felt that this investigative technique is necessary and desirable in order to determine the contacts of this subject, and it is not thought that it will result in any embarrassment to the Bureau.⁶³

Of the eight individuals, seven were current or former board members, and the eighth person was the park's caretaker. It is notable that a formal request was required in order to monitor an individual's mail, although it did not appear that approval was necessary in order to monitor bank records or phone calls. On April 19, 1954, the FBI field office submitted an additional request to monitor mail for the park's auditor. FBI headquarters approved all the requests.

⁵⁹ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, June 25, 1953, 1.

⁶⁰ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, November 9, 1953, 5-8.

⁶¹ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, November 9, 1953, 9-11.

⁶² FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, November 9, 1953, 17.

⁶³ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, March 22, 1954, 1.

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The next report is dated May 24, 1954. The report notes that the first dance of the season was held on May 8, 1954, and while the schedule of other activities for the season was not yet known, the annual Minnesota-Wisconsin Finnish-American Summer Festival would likely be held in late June 1954. Information about the park's financial transactions over the past two years was also included. The results of monitoring phone calls from Mesaba Park for the period from January 6, 1951, to September 6, 1952, were described as follows:

The results of such examination are not being set out in the body of this report inasmuch as these calls appear to be mainly routine calls to business houses and to persons who frequent the park, however, it is noted for informational purposes that the bulk of the calls to individuals were to Walter Park, Evelth, Minnesota, President of the Board of Directors of the park, and to Andy Moine, Angora, Minnesota, member of the Board of Directors.⁶⁴

In July 1954, the Minneapolis field office filed requests with FBI headquarters to continue monitoring the mail for the eight individuals whose mail had previously been monitored. All requests were approved.

On August 17, 1954, the Minneapolis field office advised FBI headquarters that because Mesaba Park was only open on a seasonal basis, a single report would be filed in the fall, and that following the submission of the report the file would be closed until May 1955. The summary report, dated October 19, 1954, noted that the primary events of the past season were the summer festival and a Labor Youth League conference, described as an organization for young communists. "Informants advise the majority of activities are social gatherings attended predominately by foreign-born Finns who are Communist sympathizers and followers of the Communist line Finnish newspaper *Työmies-Eteenpain*." The name of an individual might be included in the report just for subscribing to the newspaper. One individual was listed because of their involvement with the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, an organization considered subversive by the federal government.⁶⁵

A single report was also filed in 1955. Dated October 19, 1955, the report contains a lengthy statement from the owner of a tavern located on the highway near the park's entrance, which still exists to this day. The informant stated, ". . . Mesaba Park has always been rumored to be a gathering place for Communists and Communist Party sympathizers, which he said keep many people from attending; however, he believes many of these elderly Finns attend merely to see their friends and converse in their native tongue."⁶⁶ The report also included information about activities that had taken place over the summer and details about the park's finances.

No reports were filed in 1956 and 1957. Then on April 22, 1958, J. Walter Yeagley, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Internal Security Division, wrote to the director of the FBI noting that

⁶⁴ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, May 24, 1954, 6

⁶⁵ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, October 19, 1954, 1-6.

⁶⁶ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, October 19, 1955, 2.

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the last investigative report received on Mesaba Park was from 1955. He stated, "It is, therefore, requested that this Division be advised of the current status of this organization and also of any Communist Party classes or meetings held at the location of the subject subsequent to those previously reported."⁶⁷ FBI headquarters contacted the Minneapolis field office and requested an update on Mesaba Park, which was later submitted on June 11, 1958. The report described activities at the park and also included the most current list of the board of directors. As had been the case with previous reports, information was provided about the individuals and whether it was believed they were communists or communist sympathizers. At times, there were references in the reports that cited older information. For example, the 1958 report included a statement from an informant who had stated in 1941 that a current board member, ". . . was an active Communist who was once a leader in a strike movement."⁶⁸

The last full-length investigative report on Mesaba Park was issued just over a month later on July 29, 1959. The report described Mesaba Park's recent reorganization, which involved a change in the bylaws to allow for individual memberships, rather than just membership at the organizational level as had been the case since the park's establishment. The park's board members were also listed in the report, and the report confirms that the FBI sometimes conducted interviews directly with those associated with the park. The report states that the FBI interviewed board member Aileen Koskela on September 9, 1957, and July 13, 1959. She acknowledged that she was involved with Mesaba Park and that she received the *Daily Worker* newspaper, which the FBI considered a communist publication.⁶⁹

The fact that this was the last full report filed with FBI headquarters seems to suggest an evolving opinion about Mesaba Park, which may have also been reflected in the following statement from an informant:

She stated that she knew of no subversive activities being carried on at Mesaba Park, such as had been carried on a number of years ago. . . . The dance hall and other facilities at Mesaba Park, she stated, are open for rental to any organization and that various service clubs from surrounding communities have engaged the park for picnics and social affairs. Public dances open to the public are held each Saturday night.⁷⁰

Furthermore, a memorandum on Mesaba Park dated October 20, 1959, from J. Walter Yeagley, Assistant Attorney General, to the director of the FBI stated:

A review of the investigative reports furnished by the Bureau concerning the captioned organization indicated that there is not sufficient evidence to permit the filing of a petition with the Subversive Activities Control Board to require the captioned organization to register as a Communist front organization.

⁶⁷ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, April 22, 1958, 1.

⁶⁸ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, June 19, 1958, 2.

⁶⁹ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, July 29, 1959, 1-3.

⁷⁰ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, July 29, 1959, 3.

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The file on this organization will be re-examined as additional information is furnished. . . ⁷¹

1960-1971

No reports were filed with FBI headquarters in the 1960s. The final documentation in the file is in the form of a memorandum from the Minneapolis field office to FBI headquarters dated September 14, 1971. (Figure 18) The memorandum states that there are “currently active Communist Party sources” that can provide coverage on activities at Mesaba Park. Furthermore, it was noted that the Milwaukee field office of the FBI covers the *Työmies-Eteepain* newspaper, which publicizes activities at Mesaba Park.

In view of the nature of the presently existing coverage on the activities of the Mesaba Range Cooperative Park Association, which are of a temporary and sporadic nature, it is believed that this phase of party activity is sufficiently covered and that future investigation can be appropriately handled under the over-all investigation of the CP (Communist Party), Minnesota-Dakotas District, rather than opening a separate . . . investigation.⁷²

While this is the final document in the FBI headquarter’s file on Mesaba Park, it is notable that the surveillance did not officially end in 1971, but was consolidated within the FBI’s general investigation into the Communist Party. The file on Mesaba Park from the Minneapolis field office has not yet been redacted, but it is known that the final document in the file is dated in September 1978. While it is believed that the most significant information about the surveillance of Mesaba Park is found in the headquarters file, the 1,350 page file from the Minneapolis field office file has the potential to yield additional information about Mesaba Park and the FBI.

The recently discovered FBI files on Mesaba Park have provided extraordinary insight into this era of anti-communist fervor in the United States. The files are remarkable for their size and scope, and for the unexpected early onset and duration of the surveillance. They also provide considerable insight into the FBI’s surveillance processes and procedures.

Mesabi Iron Range Strikes of 1907 and 1916

A discussion of the strikes on the Mesabi Iron Range in 1907 and 1916 provides contextual background for understanding the dire working condition that miners faced, the important role played by the Finns during the strikes, and why the Finns in particular created a multitude of organizations to provide support to the Finnish immigrant community.

Finns were among the first wave of immigrants to come to northern Minnesota, arriving shortly after iron ore was discovered on the Mesabi Range in 1890. By 1910, Finns were the single

⁷¹ FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, October 20, 1959, 1.

⁷² FBI Case File No. 100-HQ-3827, September 14, 1971, 2.

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largest immigrant nationality in the region, constituting "a quarter of all foreign-born persons."⁷³ Like other non-English speaking and largely unskilled workers who came to work in the mines, the Finns were assigned the most difficult and dangerous jobs and rewarded with the lowest pay. In the 1890s, many workers were employed by locally owned or operated mining companies. However, by the turn of the century, most companies had been absorbed or had become subsidiaries of huge, powerful East Coast corporations, most notably the United States Steel Corporation (US Steel), which counted banker and financier J.P. Morgan among its founders.⁷⁴ In addition to owning over 40 mines on the Iron Range, US Steel also controlled critical rail lines to Duluth and a fleet of 112 shipping vessels on Lake Superior.⁷⁵ Demand for steel was high and the driving principle of the corporations was "the highest profit at the lowest cost."⁷⁶

Miners saw little of this profit but contributed significantly to keeping costs low. For roughly \$2.00 a day, miners worked twelve-hour days, six days a week, and were responsible for purchasing their own equipment, the costs of which were deducted from their monthly paychecks. Under the contract system, they were paid for the amount of ore they produced, not the hours they worked. Unscrupulous shift supervisors and bosses often cheated miners out of their wages. The pay rate remained unchanged between 1909 and 1916 making it extremely difficult for miners to support their families in even the most basic ways.⁷⁷ Appeals by miners for better pay and improved working conditions fell on deaf corporate ears. Prior to 1907, any attempts by miners to unionize or strike were quickly and firmly suppressed by company bosses.

Finnish immigrants, many of whom embraced the socialist philosophies of their homeland where "labor movements were well-established," found ways and places, such as temperance halls or workers' clubs, in which to mobilize strike and unionization efforts.⁷⁸ In an attempt to help unite and organize the disparate immigrant miner groups in the common goal of seeking improved wages and working conditions, they sought the assistance of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), which was led by Italian socialist Teofila Petriella. By 1907, roughly 2,500 Iron Range miners had joined the WFM.

On July 20, 1907, more than 10,000 miners, the majority of whom were Finnish, struck the Oliver Iron Mining Company, a subsidiary of US Steel. During the walkout, Finnish halls became the strike headquarters. Although US Steel used professional strike-breakers, hired gunman, and employed other ruthless tactics, the strike ended without the loss of life by mid-September. But the striking miners suffered consequences as many were subsequently blacklisted or the subject of retaliation by the mining companies. Nonetheless, and even though the WFM left the Range following the strike, the "socialist Finns kept the idea of unionism alive

⁷³ David La Vigne, "Immigration to the Iron Range, 1880-1930," accessed November 11, 2016, MNopedia, <http://www.mnopedia.org/immigration-iron-range-1880-1930>.

⁷⁴ Philip S. Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 487.

⁷⁵ Foner, 487.

⁷⁶ Foner, 488.

⁷⁷ Foner, 488.

⁷⁸ R. L. Cartwright, "Mesabi Iron Range Strike, 1907," accessed November 7, 2016, MNopedia, <http://www.mnopedia.org/event/mesabi-iron-range-strike-1907>.

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. . . and continued to hold meetings and discussions in and around the workers' halls."⁷⁹ Three decades after the 1907 strike, sociologist Paul H. Landis noted that the strike had served to "erect a barrier of animosity between Finns and the mining companies."⁸⁰

Despite the fact that US Steel reported earnings of \$131 million during the first half of 1916, conditions did not improve in the mines, nor were miners' appeals for increased wages and other modest benefits acknowledged.⁸¹ Amidst rising frustrations, on June 2, 1916, the impulsive walk-out by an Italian miner in Aurora incited similar spontaneous actions by thousands of miners across the Mesabi Range. This time, the miners asked for assistance from the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), not the WFM, as they felt the latter group had failed them in 1907. They asked the IWW to act in an advisory capacity and to help organize the strike.

Established in Chicago in 1905, the IWW differed from other labor organizations, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL), in that it proposed replacing existing unions representing individual crafts with one large union that represented all industrial workers. The IWW, whose members were known as "Wobblies," quickly gained numbers and notoriety because it demonstrated "an ability to organize workers neglected by the AFL, notably immigrant steel and textile workers in the Northeast, miners, timber, and harvest workers in the West," and for its "revolutionary program and class-war rhetoric [which] yielded more enemies than allies."⁸²

As in 1907, Finns served as strike leaders and comprised the majority of striking miners. Finnish halls continued to function as meeting venues. One such gathering place was the Finnish Socialist Opera House in Virginia, which, in addition to offering dances, plays, and performances, also served as the headquarters for both IWW organizers and the local strike committee.⁸³

Strikers presented their list of demands to the management of the Oliver Iron Mining Company (US Steel). They included an eight-hour working day, a daily wage of \$3.00 to \$3.50 for underground workers, and abolition of the contract system. US Steel responded by recruiting and deputizing special guards and enforcers and arming them with guns and riot sticks. To break the strikers' collective wills, they resorted to intimidation, home invasions, and arrests. They pressured local businesses not to grant credit to the mine workers, which drove many mining families to near starvation.

US Steel also took full advantage of the IWW's reputation as a revolutionary organization and used local newspapers, notably the *Duluth News Tribune*, to create fear among the citizens of the

⁷⁹ Foner, 493.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Arnold R. Alanen, "Early Labor Strife on Minnesota's Mining Frontier, 1882-1906," *Minnesota History* 52, no. 7 (Fall 1991): 262.

⁸¹ Andrea C. Allard, "A War of Words: The Mesaba Ore and Hibbing News Takes on the "Big Fellows," *Minnesota History* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 103.

⁸² "IWW History Project: Industrial Workers of the World 1905-1935," accessed November 7, 2016, University of Washington, <http://www.depts.washington.edu/iww>.

⁸³ Kate Roberts, "Socialist Opera House, Virginia," accessed November 12, 2016, MNopedia, <http://www.mnopedia.org/structure/socialist-opera-house-virginia>.

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Iron Range. A July 7, 1916, article instructed citizens to, "get out of their heads that the trouble on the range . . . is a labor strike and the I.W.W. is a labor union. The I.W.W. is a revolutionary organization whose sole aim is to overthrow the government and take possession of all property for the uses of its members. What is faced on the ranges and threatened in Duluth is revolution, just that and nothing else."⁸⁴

On June 22, a march in Virginia turned deadly when strikers resisted efforts by guards to break up the assembly and the guards opened fire. John Alar, a Croatian miner was killed. No arrests were made. When advised of the violence, then Governor John Burnquist added fuel to the fire by instructing local authorities to arrest anyone who had participated in riots or assemblies and to "use all your powers, including the summoning of a posse for the preservation of life and property."

The order did not offer similar protection to miners. On July 3, "special deputies" entered the home of striking Montenegrin miner Phillip Masonovich and his wife Milica, near Biwabik, to arrest the miner on a liquor violation. In the ensuing scuffle, sheriff's deputy James Myron and Tomi Ladvalla, a Finnish delivery man, were killed. The Masonovichs were arrested and jailed, as were several IWW organizers, who were miles away at the time.⁸⁵

With key leaders jailed, the IWW sent Elizabeth Gurley Flynn to the Iron Range to negotiate the release of the jailed strikers and organizers, and to raise money for defense funds for those who faced charges.⁸⁶ Flynn was at the forefront of the American labor movement and was known for organizing workers. Upon her arrival, the *Duluth News Tribune*, which supported mining interests, reported that "Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Arrives to Stir Up Strife." The *Duluth Labor World* responded, "Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the most feared woman in the whole of the corporation world is now in the Hibbing District."⁸⁷ Ultimately, Milica Masonovich, the incarcerated strikers, and the IWW organizers were released, with the exception of Phillip Masonovich and two other miners who pleaded guilty to a first degree manslaughter charge and were subsequently sentenced to serve time in the state penitentiary.

The persistent strong-arm tactics applied by the local law enforcement agencies and the mining companies proved to be so effective that the miners called off the strike on September 17. But the strikers vowed to restrike in the spring if conditions did not improve. Whether in the spirit of good will or the fear of another strike, US Steel agreed to a few of the miners' demands, including a 15-20% wage increase and the dismissal of exploitative shift bosses. It was enough to avoid a strike in 1917.

An article in the *International Socialist Review* reported on the strike, calling on its members to support the miners through fundraising events. The article stated that, "the Iron Heel of the Steel

⁸⁴ Foner, 498.

⁸⁵ David La Vigne, "Rebel Girls: Women in the Mesabi Iron Range Strike of 1916," *Minnesota History* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 92-93.

⁸⁶ Foner, 508.

⁸⁷ Helen C. Camp, *Iron in her Soul: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the American Left* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995), 70-71.

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Trust has wiped out all labor organizations in the steel industry. . .” and that “the Socialists among the Finnish miners have been the only force the companies have been unable to overcome. . .” While John Alar was a Croatian immigrant, the article noted that his funeral was held at the Finnish Socialist Opera House in Virginia, and the Finnish Socialist Band performed at the funeral service and led the procession to the cemetery, where, “funeral orations were delivered in all languages of the strikers.” It did not appear to be an exaggeration when the article stated that a full 7,000 miners accompanied the funeral procession. A photograph included in the article depicted a sea of people at the cemetery.⁸⁸

Unions would not be officially established on the Mesabi Iron Range until 1937, when a U.S. Supreme Court decision upheld the constitutionality of the New Deal's National Labor Relations Act. The act made it possible to challenge the practices of the mining companies. In 1938, charges were filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that the Oliver Iron Mining Company had blacklisted 47 miners in 1935-36. The charges were filed on behalf of the Labor Mutual Benefit Club of Ely by Maurice H. Greenberg, an attorney from Eveleth who was a frequent speaker at Mesaba Park:

The charges as filed claim that the Oliver Iron Mining Company has engaged in unfair labor practices within the meaning of the National Labor Relations Act. The charges further state that the Oliver Co., through its officers and agents, have threatened their employees with discharge and have threatened not to rehire them after the shut down of their mines in 1935 if they became members of or active in the affairs of the Labor Mutual Benefit Club.⁸⁹

The miners claimed that after a temporary shut-down that began on December 1, 1935, they were not rehired although each was considered a permanent employee. While the outcome of this particular legal challenge is not known, it nonetheless serves to demonstrate how workers had endured decades of abuses by the mining companies before effective challenges were possible.

National Historic Landmark Theme Study in American Labor History

In 2003, the National Historic Landmarks Program of the National Park Service completed a theme study on American Labor History.⁹⁰ Theme studies provide a national historic context for specific topics in American history and assist in the identification and evaluation of properties that may qualify for National Historic Landmark (NHL) designation. The Newberry Library in Chicago was a partner in the NHL study and an article in their journal, *Origins*, discusses the study and the history of Mesaba Park. The article notes that Mesaba Park was one of nearly 300 sites that were researched for the study.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Leslie H. Marcy, “The Iron Heel on the Mesaba Range,” *International Socialist Review* 17, no. 2 (August 1916): 74-76, 79-80.

⁸⁹ “Charges Against Oliver Mining Co. Placed Before NLRB,” *Midwest Labor*, August 19, 1938, 1

⁹⁰ Eric Arnesen, Alan Derickson, James Green, Walter Licht, Marjorie Murphy, and Susan Cianci Salvatore, “American Labor History Theme Study,” Draft Multiple Property Documentation Form, National Park Service (January 2003).

⁹¹ Robin Bachin, “Preservation and Celebration at Mesaba Park,” *Origins* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 4.

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The study noted that the traditional approach to labor history is now considered somewhat limited in scope. Historically, labor history was framed as a broad narrative with workers and unions striving for a better future. The current approach to labor history broadens the perspective. Familial and communal life is now included in labor history. Recreational and religious activity was not previously considered by labor historians, but it is now acknowledged that workers often used chapels, saloons, clubs, and ballparks as places to express values and even oppositional ideas. Historians have also taken a new interest in working-class intellectual life, recognizing the critical importance of teaching and learning to workers and their organizations. Finally, worker's struggles and their efforts to organize, the traditional concerns of labor historians, are now considered together. Union organizing, collective bargaining, striking, boycotting, and political activity are now studied in a wider social and cultural context. Workers are seen not only as economic beings, but also as family and community members, and agents of democratic change. The struggle for worker's rights extends beyond the right to work eight hours or join a union. It also involves the crusade to extend the Bill of Rights to working people.

The result of this change in the approach to labor history is to broaden the types of properties that should be considered important in the history of American labor. In other words, properties that might be considered significant should go beyond the factories, mills, union halls, or scenes of strikes that were typically considered in the past.⁹²

The following citation in the NHL theme study about Mesaba Park reflects this more insightful approach to labor history and acknowledges the importance of sites like Mesaba Park and the broad range of activities that took place at the park.

Workers made popular culture and sporting places their own. Many an organizing rally and strike meeting took place in ball fields and parks, like Mesaba Park in the northern Minnesota iron range, where thousands of workers, including many Finnish socialists, attended festivals and rallies for unions, radical organizations, and for the powerful Farmer-Labor Party.

The writer may have been under the impression that Mesaba Park was a public space as the citation concludes with the following:

The contested nature of parks and other public places, like markets, squares, and commons, is of great importance in new studies of urban space. Given the sanctity of private property, the workers' struggle to find and hold free spaces is central to the effort to gain equal rights and economic justice.⁹³

In spite of this apparent misunderstanding, the citation confirms the problems that workers faced when attempting to use public spaces for events and gatherings, and confirms why the founders

⁹² Arnesen, 4-10, 143.

⁹³ Arnesen, 8-9.

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of Mesaba Park were committed to establishing “a place of our own,” where members could gather on their own terms without harassment.

Thus, sites like Mesaba Park are now finding new recognition for their importance in the history of American Labor.⁹⁴

Finnish Halls and Camps

Over the years, with the closing of many Finnish halls, Mesaba Park became the recipient of building materials and furnishings. Lumber from the nearby Cherry Hall was used in the construction of the dining hall on the lower level of the pavilion. Chairs and benches for the auditorium came from the Suomi Hall in Deer River. The Vaasa Hall in Superior, Wisconsin, donated wooden folding chairs. Benches, stage drops, and scenery came from the Markham and Angora Halls.

Yet, buildings remain in northeastern Minnesota that were associated with the many organizations created by the vibrant Finnish community. The following are among the surviving examples.

Hill's Finnish Boardinghouse was constructed in Buhl in 1906. It was built by Finnish immigrants Charles and Gustava Hill. The large, two-story building provided room and board for large numbers of single men who worked in the iron mines. When the building was threatened with demolition, descendants of the Hill family donated the building to the Minnesota Discovery Center. The building was moved to the Discovery Center in Chisholm and is now open to visitors.

Several buildings remain in Virginia that were associated with the Finnish immigrant community. The **Finnish Sauna** (NRHP, 1980) was a public bathhouse built ca. 1912 to serve Finnish immigrant miners and their families. The **Jukola Boardinghouse** (NRHP, 1982) was built in 1912 to house unmarried miners. The **Socialist Opera House** was constructed in 1913. Built by a Finnish socialist organization, the elaborate four-story building was a major center for culture and entertainment. During the miner's strike on the Mesaba Iron Range in 1916, the building served as the headquarters for the strike committee as well as the Industrial Workers of the World, which had come to town to assist in the strikes. In 1955, the building was purchased by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and altered to provide office space. The **Temperance Hall** was built to provide newly arriving Finnish immigrants with a social outlet.

⁹⁴ Correspondence in Mesaba Park's files suggests that the board understood the property might be nominated as a National Historic Landmark as part of the theme study on American labor history. Ultimately, Mesaba Park was not among the sites that were nominated. When this outcome was questioned in 2000, the response suggested that additional contextual information would have been required about Mesaba Park as well as a thorough assessment of the park's integrity. It was recommended to first nominate Mesaba Park to the National Register before considering landmark designation.

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The first co-operative store was organized in Meadowlands in the 1920s with assistance provided by Finnish co-operators from the nearby community of Toivola, who had established their own store several years earlier. The **Meadowlands Co-op Grocery** had several locations until the current building was constructed in 1941.⁹⁵

Very few examples of facilities similar to Mesaba Park have been identified. **The Northern Wisconsin Cooperative Park** was established in Waino in 1932. The park appears to have been very similar to Mesaba Park and historian Arnold Alanen recalls that his mother attended summer camp at the park.⁹⁶ The WPA guide to Wisconsin published in 1941 described the camp as follows:

Finnish people coming here from their original settlements along Lake Superior brought the cooperative movement into this region. In 1930 an association, with a present membership of 450 individuals and 25 organizations, was formed to buy and equip this tract at a cost of \$10,000. Pleasantly wooded, its 80 acres are transected by the Bois Brule River and contain housing quarters for 75 people, a community building with store, kitchen, dining room, and recreation room. The park is in almost constant use. Children's camps operate at capacity throughout the summer, and on Saturday nights large crowds throng to dances in the community hall. Sunday is reserved for group picnics. In the late summer the Harvest Festival is held.⁹⁷

Although it is possible that a log building at the park was moved to a boy's camp on Lake Nebagamon, all remaining buildings were completely razed and the site of the park is now a campground within the Brule Forest State Park.

Saima Park in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, traces its beginnings to 1912 when a farm was purchased by the Saima Society in 1912 for the organization's summer activities. The group had been active since 1898, providing cultural, educational, and athletic activities to the Finnish community. Since 1912, Finns have gathered at Saima Park for festivals, dances, and track and swim meets. A dance hall built in 1941 was lost in a fire in 1977 and was replaced by a new facility built in 1980. Today, Saima Park is operated by the Finnish Center at Saima Park, Inc., which was the result of the merger of three Finnish organizations.⁹⁸

The **Detroit Finnish Co-operative Summer Camp Association** (NRHP, 2007) was founded by the Detroit Finnish Educational Association in 1925. Commonly known as Finn Camp, the facility was built on a farmstead in the town of Wixom in the suburban Detroit area. Similar to Mesaba Park, the camp is located on a lake and contains a large dance hall. Finn Camp also includes numerous one-room rustic cabins. The camp continues to serve its original purpose,

⁹⁵ Alanen, "Pines, Mines, and Lakes," 2-22, 2-96, 2-100.

⁹⁶ Arnold Alanen, interview with Rolf Anderson on November 7, 2016.

⁹⁷ Workers of the Writer's Program of the Works Progress Administration, *Wisconsin: A Guide to the Badger State* (Federal Works Agency, Works Projects Administration, 1941), 448.

⁹⁸ "The Finnish Center at Saima Park," accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.saima-park.org>.

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which was to provide physical, cultural, and recreation activities for its members.⁹⁹ However, based on the information in the National Register Nomination, it does not appear that Finn Camp had the political focus that characterized Mesaba Park in the 1930s.

Conclusion

Mesaba Co-operative Park is a highly evocative property that recalls the multi-faceted history of the Finnish immigrant community that once flourished in northeastern Minnesota. The construction of Mesaba Park was the result of their remarkable communitarian and cooperative spirit. The park met the social, cultural, and recreational needs of its members and also served as a mechanism to improve the lives of the Finnish community and beyond. It is a rare surviving property type with remarkable historic authenticity.

⁹⁹ "Finn Camp: Detroit Finnish Cooperative Summer Camp Association," accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.finncamp.org>.

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Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State

the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives. Minneapolis: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 1975.

La Vigne, David. "Rebel Girls: Women in the Mesabi Iron Range Strike of 1916." *Minnesota History* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 90-100.

Poropudas, Brenda, ed. *Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association: 50 Years of Progressive Co-operation: 1929-1979*. Superior, Wisconsin: The Työmies Society, 1979.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): SL-CHR-007

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 160

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 15 | Easting: 515360 | Northing: 5248860 |
| 2. Zone: 15 | Easting: 515680 | Northing: 5249060 |
| 3. Zone: 15 | Easting: 516110 | Northing: 5249060 |
| 4. Zone: 15 | Easting: 516120 | Northing: 5248260 |
| 5. Zone: 15 | Easting: 515700 | Northing: 5248250 |
| 6. Zone: 15 | Easting: 515330 | Northing: 5248030 |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Southwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter (SW ¼ of the NW ¼) and the Northwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter (NW ¼ of the SW ¼) of Section 29; and the Southeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter (SE ¼ of the NE ¼) and the Northeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter (NE ¼ of the SE ¼) of Section 30, all in Township 57 North, Range 19 West

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the lands and buildings historically associated with Mesaba Co-operative Park and that maintain historic integrity.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Rolf T. Anderson and Jane King Hession
organization: _____
street & number: 212 West 36th Street
city or town: Minneapolis state: MN zip code: 55408
e-mail roanders6@aol.com
telephone: 1-612-824-7807
date: November 28, 2016; revised December 2018

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Mesaba Co-operative Park

Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN

County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Mesaba Co-operative Park

City or Vicinity: Hibbing

County: St. Louis

State: Minnesota

Photographer: Rolf T. Anderson

Date Photographed: August 8-9, 2016 except as noted

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 26. North Star Lake, facing northeast
- 2 of 26. North Star Lake with the pavilion, facing northwest
- 3 of 26. Primary entrance road, facing southeast
- 4 of 26. Secondary road west of Birch Hill, facing northeast
- 5 of 26. Trail on Birch Hill, facing south
- 6 of 26. Pavilion, southeast elevation, facing northwest
- 7 of 26. Pavilion, northeast elevation, facing southwest
- 8 of 26. Pavilion, southeast elevation, facing north (June 26, 2016)
- 9 of 26. Pavilion, northwest elevation, facing southeast
- 10 of 26. Pavilion auditorium, facing west
- 11 of 26. Auditorium stage, facing southwest
- 12 of 26. Dining Hall, facing west (March 10, 2016)
- 13 of 26. Vern Simula preparing Finnish stew (mojakka) adjacent to the pavilion, facing northeast (June 26, 2016)
- 14 of 26. Pine Hill, facing northwest
- 15 of 26. Birch Hill, facing northwest
- 16 of 26. Ticket Booth, facing north
- 17 of 26. Refreshment Stand, facing west (June 26, 2016)
- 18 of 26. Ice House, facing west (June 26, 2016)
- 19 of 26. Cabin #1 and Cabin #2, facing southwest

Mesaba Co-operative Park

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Name of Property

- 20 of 26. Cabin #2 and Cabin #3, facing northwest
- 21 of 26. Double Outhouse, facing west
- 22 of 26. Cabin #4, facing southwest
- 23 of 26. Sauna, facing northwest, (NC)*
- 24 of 26. Manager's Residence, facing north
- 25 of 26. Yurt and Outhouse, facing northwest, (NC)
- 26 of 26. Kitchen Building at the Children's Summer Camp, facing southwest (June 26, 2016)

*Denotes a non-contributing resource.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

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Figure 1. Certificate for one ownership share in the Mesaba Range Co-operative Park Association for the price of \$25.00. Image: Mesaba Park

Mesaba Co-operative Park
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Figure 2. Pavilion ca. 1930 with open lower level. Photo: Mesaba Park

Mesaba Co-operative Park
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Figure 3. Refreshment Stand, July 1938. Photo: Minnesota Digital Library

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

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Figure 4. "Work bee" with women chopping wood in 1941. Photo: Minnesota Digital Library

Mesaba Co-operative Park
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Figure 5. Children Summer Camp ca. 1930s with pet deer. Photo: Mesaba Park

Mesaba Co-operative Park
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Figure 6. Crowd at the pavilion on July 3, 1938. Photo: Minnesota Digital Library

Mesaba Co-operative Park
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Figure 7. John T. Bernard on the speaker's platform in 1938. Photo: Mesaba Park

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Figure 8. Elmer Benson on the speaker's platform in 1940. Photo: Minnesota Digital Library

Mesaba Co-operative Park
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Figure 9. John T. Bernard and Elmer Benson in 1940. Photo: Mesaba Park

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Figure 10. Crowd by the pavilion on July 3, 1938. Photo: Mesaba Park

Mesaba Co-operative Park
 Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
 County and State

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Form No. 1
 THIS CASE ORIGINATED AT **ST PAUL, MINN.** FILE NO. **100-110**

REPORT MADE AT ST PAUL, MINN.	DATE WHEN MADE 10-22-40	PERIOD FOR WHICH MADE 9/13, 14; 10/11/40	REPORT MADE BY ROBERT E. LETHERT SC
TITLE MESABA RANGE COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, CHARLES MARKKULA, President, SOERIA NEVELA, Secretary, LITTLE DICKMAN, Manager, EINO MAATA, Caretaker.			CHARACTER OF CASE INTERNAL SECURITY
SYNOPSIS OF FACTS: <p>Mesaba Range Cooperative Association is a Communist organization which openly preach Communism. It consists principally of Finnish people living in the vicinity of Hibbing, Buhl, Chisholm, and Virginia, Minn. The Association owns the land which it operates as a park and conducts Communist classes in a private school house located on the premises.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">P.</p>			
DETAILS: <p>This report is predicated upon information received from three different sources, the first of which is EMIL PESONEN, caretaker of the cemetery at Buhl, Minnesota, who submitted a clipping in Finnish taken from the Tyomies daily paper which has been interpreted by him to read as follows:</p> <p>"Mesaba Park Summer Camp Committee announce notice to those who intend to attend camp. Old folks talk it over with your children. The cost is \$5.00 for two weeks. The school starts July 14th. Send your application to the Secretary, Lyyl Dickman, Box 444, Elm, Minnesota".</p> <p>Pesonen advises that this is a Communist school giving two week courses in Communism for a cost of \$5.00; that during the summer</p>			
APPROVED AND FORWARDED <i>W. H. Richmond</i>	SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES	
OFFICE OF THIS REPORT 5 - Bureau 2 - St. Paul COPIES DESTROYED 3-26-58 RWD		100-3827-1 OCT 25 1940 OCT 29 1940	

Figure 11. Report dated October 22, 1940, FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

NP #100-110

T-19, of known reliability, advised on March 6, 1953, that ~~MARTHA LEVANIEMI~~, with alias, Mrs. ~~JOHN LEVANIEMI~~, nee ~~MARTHA MUKKI~~, 21a, Minnesota, was probably a member of the Board of Directors of Mesaba Park during the 1940's. T-19 stated that ~~MARTHA LEVANIEMI~~ had the general reputation of being a Communist sympathizer. T-19, of known reliability, advised that ~~MARTHA LEVANIEMI~~ is presently listed as Secretary of Mesaba Park. *Minnesota*

T-18 advised also that ~~GUST WIRTANEN~~, Nankin, Minnesota, and ~~ANDREW ROINE~~, Angora, Minnesota, were members of the Board of Directors in 1949. T-18 stated that both ~~WIRTANEN~~ and ~~ROINE~~ are generally regarded as Communist sympathizers in their home communities.

T-20, of known reliability, advised on March 3, 1949, that ~~ANDREW ROINE~~ and ~~GUST WIRTANEN~~, in 1940, were two of the signers of the ~~EARL BROWDER~~ nominating petition in St. Louis County, Minnesota, when the latter was a candidate for president on the Communist Party ticket. The December 19, 1952, issue of the "Tyocies Eteenpain" indicated that ~~ROINE~~ was a member of the Board of Directors of that paper. T-20 advised that ~~GUST WIRTANEN~~ has a son, ~~DONALD WIRTANEN~~, who formerly worked for the "Tyocies" newspaper. As set out later, ~~DONALD WIRTANEN~~ attended a 1947 National Student School of the Communist Party, USA, at Mesaba Park. *1946, Minnesota, Office*

T-19, of known reliability, advised on March 5, 1953, that the Mesaba Range Cooperative Park Association, Iron, Minnesota, has a checking account in the First National Bank, Hibbing, Minnesota. He stated that the balance of the account was \$1,192.26 on November 27, 1951; that it was \$1,210.72 on November 3, 1952; and that the balance on March 5, 1953, was \$1192.92. T-19 stated that as of February 15, 1952, ~~WALTER PARK~~ was the president, ~~AILEEN KOSKELA~~ was the treasurer, and ~~MARTHA LEVANIEMI~~, the secretary of the Park.

T-19 advised that there is little activity in the checking account at this time due apparently to the fact that the Park is closed for the winter but that by check number 340, dated February 25, 1953, the Northern Electric Cooperative Association was paid \$3.85, and by check number 344, dated February 25, 1953, one ~~LAINI LAINE~~ was paid \$50.00. T-19 advised that previous checks in the amount of \$50.00 were drawn on March 5, 1953, February 10, 1953, December 5, 1952, November 3, 1952, and approximately at one month intervals prior to that time, such checks probably being monthly payments to

Figure 12. Information provided by informants. Report dated May 13, 1953, FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
 Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
 County and State

FOIA(b) (7) - (D)

100-110

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Identity of Source	Date of Activity and/or Description of Information	Date Received	Agent to whom Furnished	File Number Where Located
--------------------	--	---------------	-------------------------	---------------------------

T-5 GUSTAV LAHTI, Plant Protection Manager, Oliver Iron Mining Co., Duluth, Minn.	IWO District Committee member- ship of JOHN SALO			100-4366
	Info re EINO MAATTA	Oct. 1942	J. WILLIAM NOWBRY, orally	100-110
	Info re LYYLI DICKMAN	Oct. 1942	"	"
	Info re AILI KOSKI and Finnish Women's Club	Oct. 1942	"	"

T-6 [Redacted]	Info re CP member- ship AILI KOSKI	6/6/45		100-5921
	Info re CP member- ship AILI KOSKI in 1944			100-411

T-7 is NIILLO PALMI, Postmaster, Florenton, Minn., who furnished information orally to the writer on December 5, 1952.

T-8
[Redacted]

T-9 is BATTISTA ANSELMO, Buddy's Tavern, Iron, Minn., who furnished information orally to writer on October 23, 1952, to SA ROBERT MC CARTHY, orally on August 15, 1950, and to SA ERLING W. HARBO, orally, on October 18, 1950.

T-10 [Redacted]	IWO membership of HANNAH KUSANPA and AILEEN KOSKELA	11/23/51	DAMON W. PITCHER	100-847
--------------------	---	----------	---------------------	---------

T-11
Anonymous

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Figure 13. List of informants and their identities with several redactions. Report dated May 13, 1953, FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

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Figure 14. Aerial view of Mesaba Park with the Pavilion in the lower center, December 23, 1952. FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

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County and State



Figure 15. Aerial view of Mesaba Park with the Children's Camp at the lower right, December 23, 1952. FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State



Figure 16. Aerial view of Mesaba Park with Cabins 1-3 in the lower center, December 23, 1952. FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State

FD-227
(3-5-54)

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Director, FBI (100-3827) DATE: March 22, 1954

FROM : SAC, Minneapolis (100-110)

SUBJECT: MESABA RANGE COOPERATIVE
PARK ASSOCIATION, aka.
IS - C

Authorization is requested for a mail cover.

Name: AILEEN KOSKELA or Mrs. VILHO KOSKELA

Address: Box 82, Route #1, Iron, Minnesota

Type of Mail: First-class, registered and special delivery.

Type of Cover: Return addresses.

Period Covered: 3 30-day periods (Bureau authorization for additional coverage will be requested thereafter if necessary)

Purpose of Cover: To determine contacts and correspondents.

Justification: This individual is a member of the Board of Directors of the above-captioned organization, which is presently controlled by Communists and Communist sympathizers and at which Park CP schools and meetings have been held in the past and at which place meetings of front organizations still take place; therefore, it is felt that this investigative technique is necessary and desirable in order to determine the contacts of this subject, and it is not thought that it will result in any embarrassment to the Bureau.

Sm

Postmaster to whom form FD-115 will be directed if authorized: Iron, Minnesota

INDEXED - 15 100-3827-12
NOT RECORDED
12 MAR 26 1954

OWL:DAK

53 APR 6 1954 APPROVED Date 4-5-54

Figure 17. Memorandum dated March 22, 1954, FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park
Name of Property

St. Louis County, MN
County and State

OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10
MAY 1962 EDITION
GSA FPMR (41 CFR) 101-11.6

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (100-38274) DATE: 9/14/71

FROM : SAC, MINNEAPOLIS (100-110) (P)

SUBJECT: MESABA RANGE COOPERATIVE
PARK ASSOCIATION
IS - C

Re Minneapolis airtel to the Bureau, captioned "Communist Party, USA, Education, IS-C," and dated August 10, 1971.

For information of the Bureau, Mesaba Park is a rural location south of Cherry, Minnesota. The site of Cherry consists of just one business establishment, which is a small tavern and there are several rural surrounding small homes.

There have been no full-time residents at the Mesaba Park grounds proper and a caretaker has been there only periodically and then only during the warm summer months when the park is used as a limited recreational facility for picnics by surrounding residents. It has been closed over the fall, winter and spring seasons.

It is noted that the following currently active Communist Party sources now provide coverage on activities of such Party at Mesaba Park:

In addition, the Milwaukee Office of the Bureau covers "Tycmales Eteepain," the Finnish language newspaper, located at Superior, Wisconsin, and this paper periodically

Wili

2 - Bureau (RM)
2 - Minneapolis
REV:cm
(4)

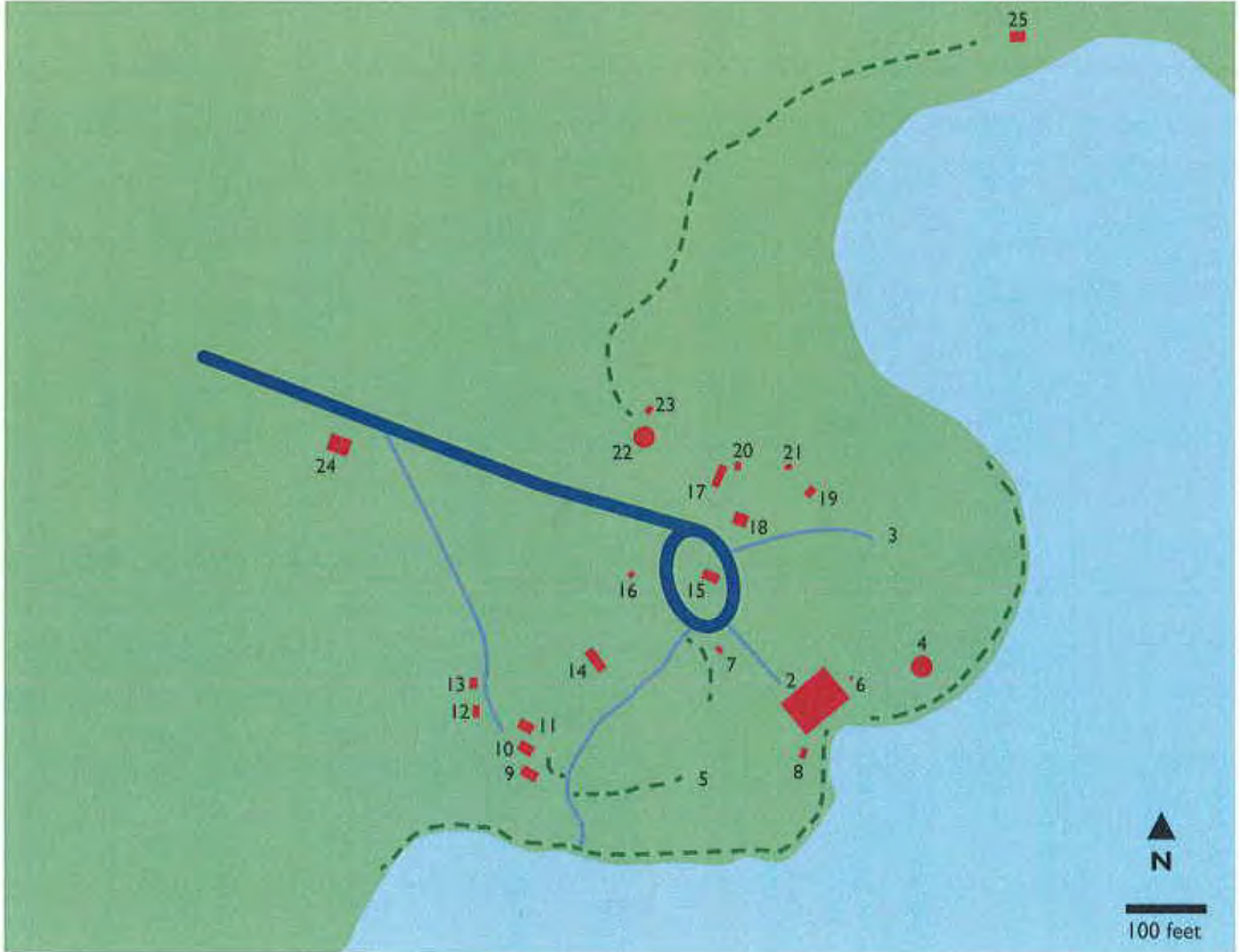
REC-45
EX-103
100-3827-41
17 SEP 17 1971

SEP 16 1971
Buy U.S. Savings Bonds Regularly on the Payroll Savings Plan




UNRECORDED COPY 100-3827-41

Figure 18. Memorandum dated September 14, 1971, FBI Case File 100-HQ-3827.

Mesaba Co-operative Park Site Plan



1. Roads and Trails

- Primary Road 
- Secondary Roads 
- Trails 

2. Pavilion

3. Pine Hill

4. Pine Hill Yurt Platform (NC)*

5. Birch Hill

6. Ticket Booth

7. Refreshment Stand

8. Ice House

9. Cabin #1

10. Cabin #2

11. Cabin #3

12. Double Outhouse

13. Cabin #4

14. Sauna (NC)

15. Restroom Building

16. Pump House (NC)

17. Manager's Cabin

18. Tool Shed (NC)

19. Storage Shed (NC)

20. Men's Outhouse

21. Women's Outhouse

22. Yurt (NC)

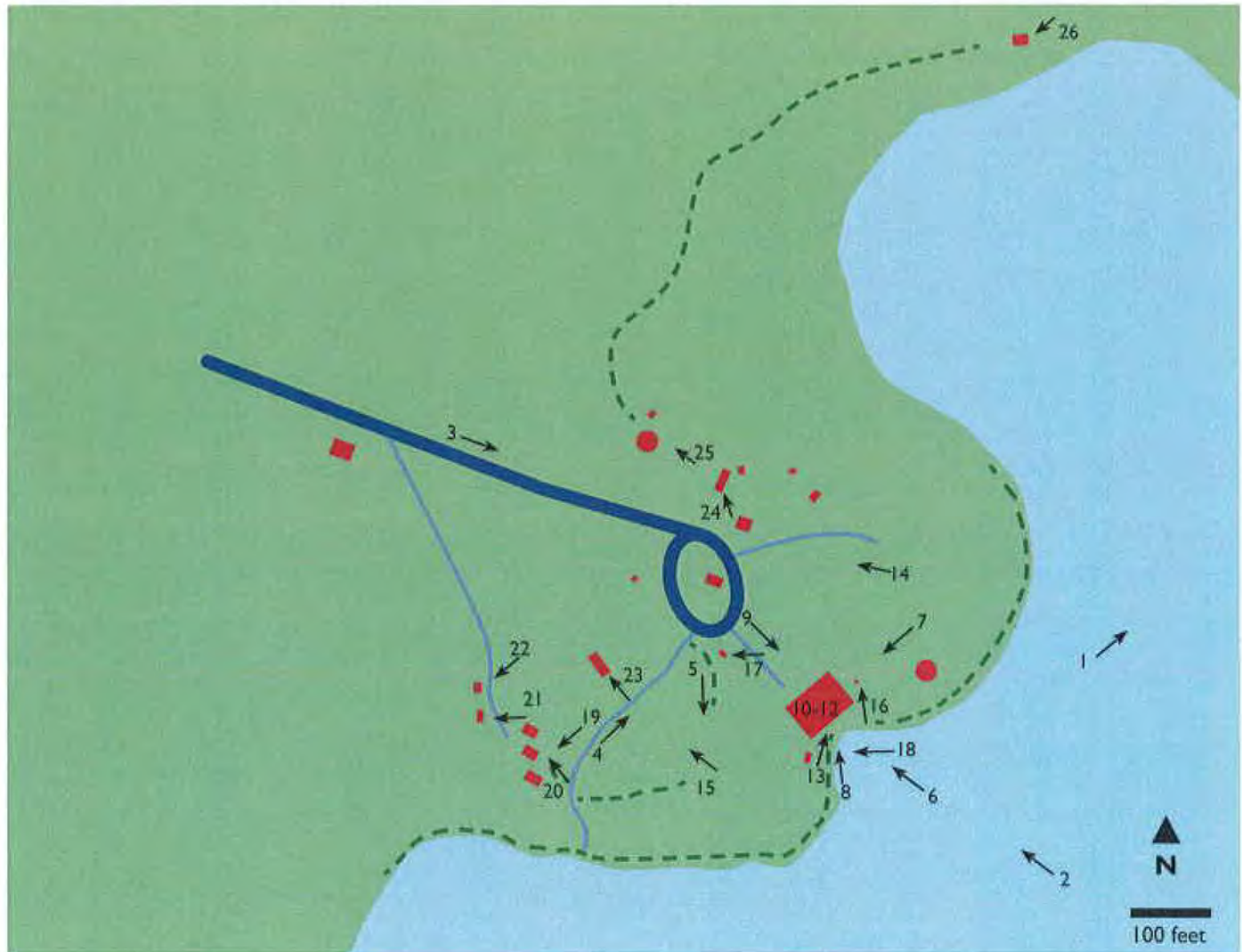
23. Outhouse (NC)

24. Office Building (NC)

25. Kitchen at Children's Summer Camp

* Denotes a non-contributing resource

Mesaba Co-operative Park Photo Key



- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. North Star Lake | 10. Pavilion auditorium | 20. Cabin #2 and Cabin #3 |
| 2. North Star Lake with the pavilion | 11. Auditorium stage | 21. Double Outhouse |
| 3. Primary entrance road | 12. Dining Hall | 22. Cabin #4 |
| 4. Secondary road west of Birch Hill | 13. Vern Simula preparing Finnish stew adjacent to the pavilion | 23. Sauna |
| 5. Trail on Birch Hill | 14. Pine Hill | 24. Manager's Residence |
| 6. Pavilion, south elevation | 15. Birch Hill | 25. Yurt and Outhouse |
| 7. Pavilion, east elevation | 16. Ticket Booth | 26. Kitchen Building at the Children's Summer Camp |
| 8. Pavilion, south elevation | 17. Refreshment Stand | |
| 9. Pavilion | 18. Ice House | |
| | 19. Cabin #1 and Cabin #2 | |

Mesaba Co-operative Park Aerial View



Mesaba Co-operative Park Historic District Boundary



























BARK BEE
Camp
Empty at 7:00
11:00
12:00
13:00
14:00
15:00
16:00
17:00
18:00
19:00
20:00
21:00
22:00
23:00
24:00

FESTIVAL
MAY 1962











"A WORKING MAN'S
IN MEMORY
OSCAR B. AND ANNI

Boating Safety Rules

1. Life jackets Required for all Boaters.
2. Parental consent & Supervision is Required for Boaters 14 & Under.
3. RETURN & hang up the Boating Equip
4. Unsafe Boating Will Result in loss of Boating Privileges.
5. NO Boating after Sundown.





2



2

3







RINSE
FEET
↓

WELCOME







UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination
Property Name: Mesaba Co-operative Park
Multiple Name: _____
State & County: MINNESOTA, St. Louis

Date Received: 4/10/2019 Date of Pending List: 4/30/2019 Date of 16th Day: 5/15/2019 Date of 45th Day: 5/28/2019 Date of Weekly List: _____

Reference number: SG100003961
Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 5/28/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: This nomination is significant in Finnish-American ethnic and labor history. The nomination also broadens our understanding of the context of mid-twentieth century labor history by documenting investigations by the F.B.I. in the late 1940s and 1950s. Because of the organized labor activities by Finnish-Americans in the mining communities on the Mesaba Iron Range, and their involvement with the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, tangential associations with the American Communist Party (real or imagined) generated extensive F.B.I. investigations of camp activities. The files uncovered by the nomination preparers, and documented in this nomination, broaden our understanding of the importance of labor organizing in social parks like the Mesaba Co-operative Park.

Reference is made to mention of Mesaba Park in the National Historic Landmark Theme Study, but that document is still in draft form.

Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Roger Reed  Discipline Historian
Telephone (202)354-2278 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : **Yes**

Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office
50 Sherburne Ave., Suite 203, St. Paul, Minnesota 55155
651.201.3292

TO: Joy Beasley, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Denis Gardner
National Register Historian
MN SHPO

DATE: 4/4/19

NAME OF PROPERTY: Mesaba Co-operative Park

COUNTY AND STATE: St. Louis County, Minnesota

SUBJECT: National Register:

- Nomination
- Multiple Property Documentation Form
- Request for determination of eligibility
- Request for removal (Reference No.)
- Nomination resubmission
- Boundary increase/decrease (Reference No.)
- Additional documentation (Reference No.)



DOCUMENTATION:

- Original National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- Multiple Property Documentation Form
- Continuation Sheets
- Removal Documentation
- Photographs
- CD w/ image files
- USGS Map(s)
- Sketch map/photo key
- Correspondence
- Owner Objection

The enclosed owner objections

Do Do not constitute a majority of property owners

STAFF COMMENTS: