

SETTLEMENTS BY THE RIVER

The first written data on the inhabitants of Rovaniemi are contained in tax registers dating from the 1540's. At that time the village of Rovaniemi itself comprised a total of 19 dwellings on the banks of the River Ounasjoki, of which the northernmost one must have been located at Heiskarinniemi above Tapionkylä. The village of Korkalo had six dwellings, but Jaatila only one. All in all, the population of the area was about 200.

The following decades were characterised by alternating increases and decreases in population, the changes being rapid and extensive. The 1560's was a period of peace and favourable weather conditions, and success in livestock rearing and grain cultivation encouraged the inhabitants to split the existing farms. Crop failures followed in 1568 and 1569, however, and the outbreak of war with Russia in 1570 was reflected in everyday life in the form of additional taxes and enemy incursions in 1578 and 1589.

Intensive settlement mea-



asures were launched after the Peace of Täyssinä in 1595, however, and even the climate improved again. The abandoned farms were resettled, with people from Savo in particular coming to the formerly uninhabited riverside areas.

Although Rovaniemi was officially part of Sweden, the Swedish crown did not offer the local people any protection against marauders from outside, so that the householders had to defend their territories by themselves. In fact, the actions taken by the Swedes tended to have the opposite effect, for the failure of their attempts to conquer the Kola Peninsula and the northern part of Karelia around the White Sea led the people of the latter area to take revenge in

The houses were usually built end-on to the river, with the room that was used the most, the living room, at that end. The cowshed was normally opposite the house, and a storehouse formed the third side of the yard. The sauna, threshing barn, hay barns and other outbuildings were further away. The fields around the house were fenced off to keep out the cows and sheep that had been put into the forest to graze. The picture is of the Pulli farm on the bank of the Kemijoki just below the hill of Ounasvaara.

the form of a punitive raid in 1611. Nine houses were burnt down in the village of Rovaniemi and 11 in Korkalo. This was the last time that the area was ravaged by war, however, until the destruction of 1940 and 1944, and the population quickly recovered, so that there were already as many as 68 dwellings and almost 500 inhabitants in 1621.

The farm of Viiri was founded in the mid-17th century on a picturesque site beside the River Kemijoki, to take advantage of the abundance of fish in the river and the favourable local climate.





Winter fodder for the animals was cut from meadows on the islands and bogs, for which purpose this scythe with a curved handle was the ideal implement. Rovaniemi Museum of Local History.

Wooden vessels from the 19th century in the Rovaniemi Museum of Local History: from the left, a wooden plate, a pail, two cups made from hollowed birch knarls and a flat dish for fish.



The hardships of war and famine

The number of dwellings began to decrease rapidly in the 1620's on account of high taxes, years of crop failure and the continual recruitment of men to the Swedish army. In addition, the coldest climatic period of all occurred between 1620 and 1650. Many people fled to Russia or to Lapland to escape the taxes and military service, many of them settling in Kemijärvi. Thus there were only 38 inhabited farms in Rovaniemi in 1648. The community then recovered rapidly in the early 1650's, thanks to the more favourable weather conditions and the efforts of the governors. The number of inhabited farms had increased to 55 by 1695 and remained at this level even through the years of the Great Wrath.

Wars take their toll

From 1555 onwards the position of Sweden as a major power almost constantly required the people of Rovaniemi to take up arms, and at least 101 local men were recruited into the army in 1630–1721. Although the number does not seem very great, it should be remembered that this detracted greatly from the economy of the area, for 69 of the men were farmers themselves and the remainder hired farmhands of one kind or another.

The men recruited from Rovaniemi seldom took part in the actual hostilities, however,

The main material for producing utensils was wood, which was suitable for a wide variety of purposes. A box for salted fish in the Rovaniemi Museum of Local History.



as the majority of them were stationed in the garrisons at Wismar in the 1630's, Narva in the 1640's and Riga from 1655 until 1708.

The most notable battles involving soldiers from Rovaniemi took place at Leipzig in 1642 and at Poltava in the Ukraine in 1709. From the year 1710 onwards, they only saw military action in Finland, although 15 were included in the expedition launched by King Carl XII into the fjells of Norway. Nine of them survived the raid, which was well above the average.

Agriculture gains in importance

Fishing was still important as a source of livelihood, and the tax registers of 1608 indicate that the area covered by fields and meadows was so small and the quality of the fields so poor that

fishing sites were used as the main basis for calculating the land assessment unit for taxation purposes.

The role of agriculture gradually increased, however. Practically all cottages had cattle of their own, for it offered them a sense of basic security even in the years of colder weather. There were an average of 3,5–5 cows per farm in the mid-16th century, although the figure dropped to one by the end of the century. In the favourable years of the 1620's a farm in Rovaniemi would typically have 6–7 cows, 3 heifers or bulls, a horse and 5 sheep, the largest collections of livestock comprising 12–15 cows and 2–3 horses. It should be remembered, however, that the farm animals of that time were much smaller in size than those of today and yielded only small amounts of milk and meat.

Since cattle-rearing was largely based on the availability of natural meadows, the shore and island meadows at Ylikylä and Saarenkylä in the mouth of the River Ounasjoki attracted the densest settlements, though hay was also collected from the meadows beside more remote lakes and brooks in spite of the distances involved.

The more cattle a farm had, the more manure there was to be spread on the fields. Arable land remained limited, however, averaging half a hectare per farm in the 1620's, and slightly less

Irons were introduced for trapping foxes in the 17th century. Rovaniemi Museum of Local History.



than two hectares on the largest farms. Even this was enough to keep people busy, for all the tilling was done by hand.

Barley was soon accompanied by rye. The introduction of slash-and-burn cultivation may have been connected with the arrival of settlers from Savo, but it was not long before rye was being grown in fields as well. The average grain yield would not have been sufficient even for domestic use in the south, but in the north people were content with less bread, replacing some of it with fish. Even so, grain cultivation was more extensive in Rovaniemi than at the river mouth, where the farm owners would concentrate on salmon fishing in summer.

Freeholders in the majority

The largest village at the beginning of the 18th century was Kemihaara, which had 12 farms. Some of these were located at the upper end of Saarenkylä, and the rest were scattered beside the River Kemijoki. There were 11 dwellings in the village of Ounasjoki and 7 in that of Rovaniemi, the current Ylikylä area and parts of Saarenkylä.

Eight dwellings were located in Korkalo, between the head of Ounaskoski and Valajaskoski, 5 in Muurola and another 5 in Jaatila.

The estimated population of Rovaniemi was approximately 400–420 persons in 1710, which was still almost a hundred less than 90 years earlier. The majority of the inhabitants were freeholders, as indicated by the 1710 tax register, in which 148 of the people concerned were registered as farmers, 90 as farmers' wives, 14 as sons and daughters of farmers, 20 as brothers and sisters, and 6 as sons-in-law and sisters-in-law. Only three hired farmhands and nine maids were reported, though in reality their number in the population must have been slightly greater. The population also contained independent persons, living on old deserted farms or in crofter's cottages on other people's land. There were 17 families or persons of this kind in 1683.

Hunting remained an important occupation for a long time, providing both game and furs. The original spears and arrows were exchanged for firearms in the course of time.



Debts common

Whatever the people could not obtain from the forests or fields, they would barter for at the market in Kemi or from travelling Karelians. The people of Rovaniemi would exchange fish, particularly pike, whitefish and salmon, and butter and furs for grain, iron and other metals, cloth, and from the late 17th century onwards cigarettes, wine and even books. It was at that time that the local people also learned the skill of distilling their own alcohol.

Since farmers living in the backwoods were essential customers for the merchants of Tornio and Oulu, the latter began in the mid-17th century to lend them large sums of money. They would not charge any interest, but received the necessary compensation by selling commodities produced by the peasants. The main guarantee of repayment was the salmon that could be relied upon to rise into the dams on the River Kemijoki each year.

This trading on credit was by far the predominant form of business in the parish of Kemi in particular even before the time of the Great Wrath, to the extent that of the 55 inhabited farms in Rovaniemi at the end of the 17th century, 31 had been mortgaged. The parsonage had the largest debts of all. The Rovaniemi people can be regarded as having profited from this innovation, as it helped them to cope with the difficult years of the late 17th century much better than they had with previous crises.