

THE TRADING CENTRE FOR THE NORTH

The expansion of agriculture increased the purchasing power of the population of Rovaniemi to the extent that permits were already being applied for in the 1860's to establish rural shops, and the large-scale forestry work that began during the following decade created a trade that soon exceeded the volumes known in the towns of Kemi and Tornio. The role of the commercial sphere was further enhanced by the introduction of the railway and improved connections with the north.

The stalls of Rovaniemi Market were for a long time arranged along the main street, and it was only much later that the fields of the Yliruokanen farm were purchased to provide a market place.

The horse was the Rovaniemi farmers most important, and often best, working companion up to the 1950's. In the picture, Huusko, the contented coachman.

Shops and markets

Until the mid-19th century the people of Rovaniemi had to purchase practically everything they needed from merchants living in the towns or from travelling pedlars from the White Sea area of Karelia. The first rural shop in Rovaniemi was granted a licence in the early 1860's, and the number was increased by the "Great Contract" to 13 in 1877, far more than in the town of Kemi. There was also a café beside Ounaskoski, and a community of a score or more artisans.

The local people evidently felt that they should also have a



market. The first event of this kind to be held in Rovaniemi took place in February 1881, when people from all over Lapland gathered to sell their wares and purchase whatever they needed. Amusements were also well represented, including a photography booth, a cinema, a circus and most of all dancing. The winter market was soon followed by corresponding



Furs were the main commodities produced in Lapland. Reindeer skins were available in the largest numbers, but buyers from the south were most interested in fox, lynx, wolf and bear skins and pelts of smaller fur-bearing animals.

Rovaniemi Market was a place for the Laplanders to meet the Finns, exchange wares and have a good time together.



The first specialized shop in Rovaniemi was Ida Hannula's bookshop, opened in 1895. The shop acquired a telephone a couple of years later.

events at Midsummer, Michaelmas and sometimes even Easter. The merchants included not only Finns but also Russians, Tatars, Jewish tradesmen, English furriers and merchants from Northern Norway and Northern Sweden.

Trading soon began to adopt more specialised forms, including a chemist's shop in the 1880's and a bookshop in 1895. There were a total of 27 shopkeepers in Rovaniemi in 1898, and although many of the shops went bankrupt in 1900–1903, the place had already grown into a business centre equivalent to Tornio, an old-established trading town. A cooperative store was opened in Rovaniemi in 1906 and the Workers' Cooperative Movement of Lapland was established in 1922.

The first shops were located close to the church, of course, but others were soon to emerge elsewhere, so that approximately ten smaller villages already had shops of their own in the 1920's. People living in remote areas would also purchase goods from the temporary depots established at the logging sites by "provisions merchants".

Looking after the money

A savings bank was established in Rovaniemi in 1881, the sixth in Northern Finland, and this was soon followed by the commercial banks, beginning with a branch of the National Shareholders' Bank (KOP) in 1896. The first cooperative bank was opened at Sinettä in 1910, followed by Yläkemijoki in 1916. These sprung up at a very rapid rate in 1922 in particular. A total of 12 such organizations were combined in 1937 to form the Rovaniemi Cooperative Bank Association.

Improved communications

The increase in business life required an improvement in means of communication. A post office was opened in Rovaniemi in 1882, and telegraph and telephone services were introduced in 1897.

Long-distance passenger and goods transport posed a problem of its own. It was possible to reach Rovaniemi from Kemi by horse-drawn carriage when there was no snow on the ground from 1839 onwards, and from 1857 one could con-

The completion of the railway in 1909 made it easier for outsiders to reach the gateway to Lapland. River steamers from the pier at Lainas went up the Kemijoki for a further 50 km and the Ounasjoki for 30 km, but after that it was still necessary in the 1920's to rely on a small boat or a carriage.

tinue from there to Kemijärvi, though the going was rough and the journey expensive. Almost 1300 cartloads of goods were transported from Kemi to Rovaniemi before the winter market in February 1890, and about twenty thousand cartloads a year were following this route at the beginning of the 20th century, so that on the busiest days there could be as many as 200 horses on the road between Kemi and Rovaniemi, a journey of 2 days. It is no wonder that people were eagerly awaiting the building of a railway, which was finally completed in 1909. This gave a decisive impulse to the development of Rovaniemi as the gateway to Lapland, from where routes fanned out into the more remote countryside in practically all directions.

The road connections from Rovaniemi onwards were still quite poor, however, so that a steamship was introduced in summer 1910 to ply the five Swedish miles up the River Kemijoki to Vanttauskoski. Ship transport was later introduced on the River Ounasjoki as far as Tapionkylä. Eventually the arrival of the automobile made this form of transport too slow and laborious by comparison, and in the late 1920's the Lapland Steamship Company changed its name to Rovaniemi Motors.

The first car successfully drove the cart road from Kemi to Rovaniemi in June 1907, though the experiences gained from this adventure caused the whole project to be laid aside for some years. The first car to be based in Rovaniemi was an Opel



owned by the Kemi Company, in 1912, and a couple of years later private citizens were buying cars and applying for driving licences.

There were 96 drivers or chauffeurs in the town of

The main centre for Lapland and the Peräpohjola region was entirely a timber-built town: even the pavements were of wood. Motor cars made their appearance in the 1910's. The hotels and hostels were essential for businessmen and lumbermen alike, and for tourists in the course of time.





Rovaniemi in 1930, an employment category exceeded in numbers only by that of labourers.

A carriage road from Kemi to Rovaniemi was built in 1839, but to go any further it was necessary to cross the River Ounasjoki by ferry, a situation that prevailed up to the early 1930's. Especially with the advent of motor vehicles, the Laines Ferry became something of a bottleneck, however frequent its services, and travellers sometimes had to wait hours to cross.

The first local newspaper

The people of Rovaniemi gained their own newspaper in 1909, the same year in which the railway was introduced. The main problem with the paper was that it had to be printed in Kemi, as printing works were permitted only in towns. For this reason only 34 issues of the Rovaniemi News were ever published.

Once the law had been amended, a newspaper called simply Rovaniemi began to be published three times a week from 1921 onwards. As the paper became closely associated

Although bus routes to all parts of the north sprung up with great rapidity in the early 1920's, winter conditions still posed insurmountable problems well into the next decade, e.g. when setting out for Kemijärvi.

with the Coalition Party, the local members of the Agrarian Party established Lapin Kansa, 'The People of Lapland', in 1928, so that two newspapers were being published side by side in the period before the Second World War.

Early entrepreneurs

Small-scale handicrafts gave way to mass production at the beginning of the 20th century, when the first local steam-powered sawmill was established, and a brewery and soft drinks factory beside it. There was also a resin and turpentine plant operating in Muurola from 1914 to 1917. The only thing that remained of the Tar Distilling Company (1918) and the Rovaniemi Tar and Turpentine Work (1920)



The Pohjanhovi Hotel, opened in July 1936, was a fine example of the Functional School of architecture, and soon became famous as the starting point for the Arctic Road.

was the popular local Tar Song:

"On my way from
Rovaniemi to Ylikylä,
Was the first time I
saw a tar works,
And the works was as
big as the tower of Babel,
And its chimney kilo-
metres high"

Johannes Lauri, from Ostrobothnia, opened a knife factory in Rovaniemi in 1925 and also began to make souvenirs from reindeer horn, and another knife works was established by Janne Marttiini three years later, the products of which included a special multi-purpose Lappish knife.

The first cinema opened its doors in Rovaniemi in 1908, and many specialised shops and motor salesrooms were opened in the 1920's in particular. A number of lodging houses were already in operation, some of them even calling themselves hotels. The extension of the Arctic Road to Petsamo in 1931 gave a real impetus to tourism, and 1936 saw the erection of the Hotel Pohjanhovi, of which the Finnish Tourist Association and the town of Rovaniemi could be justifiably proud.

"Lights shining miles off..."

The construction of the Hotel Pohjanhovi was enough to prove that Rovaniemi had finally risen from a rural village to become a major residential centre over a period of five decades. In fact, a commercial centre had grown up beside Ounaskoski much earlier, as suggested by the



following words written in 1908: "You can see the light of the new gas lamps miles off. When you reach the village, you find that the front wall of each shop is nothing more than a window behind which the wonderful world of shopping presents itself."

The gas lamps in the main

village were joined by electric light in the houses in January 1914, and electric street lamps were introduced the following autumn. Rovaniemi was now ready to move into an entirely new era.

The lobby of the Pohjanhovi Hotel shortly after it opened.

