

THE BEGINNINGS OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION



Rovaniemi moved over from a parish administration to a local council system at the beginning of 1867. Parish meetings led by the vicar were replaced by council meetings led by a chairman who had been elected by the local people and in which the landowners were entitled to vote in proportion to the amounts of tax that they paid. Of the women, only those who were unmarried, widows or divorced were allowed to attend the meeting, for married women were declared subject to the guardianship of their husbands until 1930, in spite of the fact that they became eligible to vote in national elections in 1906.

All tax-payers resident in the area had the right to contribute directly to council decisions until 1919, after which the council was an elected body. The preparation of matters for the meeting and the execution of its decisions were from the beginning entrusted to a smaller group, the local committee, later known as the administrative board. Each village in Rovaniemi could nominate a representative to it, and it comprised a chairman, vice-chairman and 13 members. The council meeting also elect-

The main village, and later the borough, grew up mostly on land belonging to the farms of Ruokanen and Korkalo. The Alaruokanen farmhouse shown in this picture survived the ravages of the war and has now been restored by the Town Council as a place for family gatherings and other celebrations.

ed members to the taxation board and guardianship board. The local people were not required to declare their taxable incomes themselves, but instead the taxation board was charged with the difficult task of assessing these.

The largest amounts of money at first went on road maintenance and care of the poor, and in 1910, for instance, Rovaniemi had by far the highest expenditure of all the rural councils in Northern Finland, although the lively economy of the area meant that taxes could be kept quite low, at only about a third of the average rate for the Kemi district as a whole. When the government assumed responsibility for road maintenance in 1921, Rovaniemi was faced with a new need for investment: schools.

The number of local council officials was small at first. Its leaders and the members of the administrative board were all acting in this capacity alongside their regular jobs. It soon became necessary to hire full-time employees for the most important posts, however, including the first teachers in 1870, a midwife in 1877, a person to run the poorhouse when it was established in 1880, and a district physician in 1883.

Education points the way

In their very first council meeting of March 1867 the people of Rovaniemi decided to establish an elementary school. The outcome of this decision, the Rantavitikka school, was opened in 1870, becoming the first rural elementary school in Northern Finland, with separate departments and teachers for girls and boys.

One school could of course only offer education to a few pupils relative to the size of the district. This is illustrated by the fact that there were 990 children aged 7–16 years in Rovaniemi in 1882, of whom only 74 were attending elementary school. Two peripatetic teachers were consequently hired in the same year, who would stay in each village for three weeks before moving to the next. This enabled teaching to be given to almost 600 children.

When the local people began to insist that the individual villages should be provided with schools of their own, as allowed for under the elementary school district act of 1898, this led to the establishment of elementary



schools at Jaatila, Nampa and Saarenkylä in 1902. There were as many as ten elementary schools in the district as a whole by 1908.

Although the northernmost secondary schools providing a qualification for entering university at the beginning of the 20th century were located in Kemi and Tornio, pupils from Rovaniemi usually preferred to go to secondary school in Oulu. An intermediate school maintained by a sponsoring organization of its own was established in Rovaniemi in autumn 1908, taking 50 pupils at first. The first two pupils completed the matriculation examination there in spring 1925.

The parish meeting of 1860 had already decided that Rovaniemi should have a library. A collection of several hundred volumes was lost in a fire at the elementary school in 1872, however, after which the library was re-established in

The people of Rovaniemi decided in their very first local council meeting to start a primary school, and the resulting Rantavitikka School became the first rural school of its kind in Northern Finland. Although the picture above shows only boys, the girls also had their own class and teacher from the very beginning.

Rantavitikka soon became the focus of "education" in Rovaniemi, alongside the vicarage, to be followed in their time by the Vocational School, the Polytechnic and the University of Lapland.



The primary school was soon joined by an intermediate school with five grades, started by a private foundation in 1908. Six years later it acquired a fine new building of its own, designed by the famous woman architect Vivi Lönn.



1881. The sum of FIM 1.50 was charged for publication of the banns of marriage for each couple in order to finance the purchase of books for the library.

Building up the villages

Although the area had knots of houses in places where the land offered good opportunities for cultivation, we cannot talk of actual village communities until the first services were available in the early 20th century, i.e. a shop, school and post office.

The first centres beside the River Ounasjoki were the sawmill area at Sinettä, which gained a shop and post office of its own at the beginning of the century and a school in 1918, Lohiniva, close to the border with Kittilä, Nivankylä, Ylikylä, Tapio, Patokoski and Meltaus.

Some services also became available at Autti further up the River Kemijoki in 1917–1920,

When the population centre was separated out to form a borough in 1928, the last council to be responsible for the whole of Rovaniemi posed for a final portrait. The council consisted of 20 men and just one woman, Helmi Kiviharju. Eight members were absent when the photograph was taken.



and Pekkala and Viirinkylä became the other village centres in that direction.

The emergence of village centres beside the river below Rovaniemi began with the establishment of post stations in 1909. Muurola had gained a shop and school by 1922, Hirvas by 1929 and Jaatila by 1934.

Two villages grew up beside the River Raudanjoki, Nampa in 1902–1920 and Ylinampa in the 1920's and 1930's. A village centre also began to form at Taipaleenkylä in the direction of Ranua.

A poor rural district and a wealthy township

The centre of the local government district was marked off as a separate town of its own in 1929. It was easily able to gather sufficient tax revenues to manage its own economy, for although the costs arising from municipal engineering and road construction were the highest of all the towns in Finland, the rate of taxation could be kept at a level substantially below that of



The coat of arms designed originally for the borough of Rovaniemi was later adopted for the town. It alludes to the position of Rovaniemi as the capital of Lapland.



The coat of arms of the rural district of Rovaniemi depicts silver rivers flowing through a landscape of green forests, with an ancient warning fire located at their confluence. This should perhaps nowadays be interpreted as symbolizing the light of knowledge.

all the rural districts in the north of the country.

The rural district, on the other hand, received very little by way of taxes, and the high costs of the elementary schools, public welfare and relief for the poor in particular meant that its economy was in such a poor condition in the depression years of the early 1930's that the local authority was placed under special central government supervision.

Rovaniemi gains its charter

Towns or boroughs in Finland had traditionally received their charter from the ruler of the time, first the King of Sweden and later the Russian Tsar, in his capacity as Grand Duke of Finland. The ruler would grant land to the town and define its trading and other rights, a procedure that had been followed in the case of Kemi, for example, when it was founded by the Tsar in 1869.

The town of Rovaniemi was not created by decree of the ruler, however, but developed gradually to meet the needs of the surrounding areas. The expansion that had been brought about by the forestry work in the area led a public meeting as early as 1886 to decide that the main village should be given the status of a borough, but the project was abandoned before any actual proposal had been submitted. A new attempt was made in May 1901, when a committee was set up by the public meeting to make preparations for having the main village declared a town. A statute had been passed in 1898 allowing for the recognition of densely populated rural centres, and the preceding committee report had made particular reference to Rovaniemi. The local people were not at all enthusiastic about this, however, but insisted instead that Rovaniemi should proceed directly to the status of a town. The project was nevertheless interrupted by the Senate in October 1901, with a decree that the main village should be designated a densely populated rural community and that it should be provided with bylaws and building regulations of its own.

When the local people appeared to be causing intentional delays, the provincial governor assigned the task of drawing up a set of building regulations to the public surveyor, G. A. Gustafsson, who submitted a proposal to the people of Rovaniemi in February 1904 for a planning area slightly over a half a kilometre across located on the western bank of Ounaskoski between Lainas and the church. The total area of this densely populated rural centre would thus be 1, 25 km². This area corresponds to Ward No. I in the current town plan, and many of its streets still follow Gustafsson's scheme.

The resulting rural centre remained part of the local government district of Rovaniemi, but had its own administrative committee for executing the decisions of the local council within its area. The less affluent sector of the population moved outside the planned area, to Kirkonkangas and the current Ward No. III.

The establishment of a rural centre was regarded from the very beginning as no more than a temporary solution, and by April 1908 a new move had been launched to gain recognition as a borough. The application submitted to the Senate in 1910 did not lead to any concrete results, due mainly to the fact that the inhabitants of the other parts of the administrative district were against the project, fearing a loss of tax revenues. In addition, the local landowners were afraid of their land being claimed for compulsory purchase by the new borough.

The idea was never entirely shelved, however, and it emerged again later in the decade as part of the plan for a Province of Lapland, which would need a capital of its own. In June 1923, the authorised representatives of the rural centre made a new proposal to the Council of State that the community should be granted the status of a borough. Although the local council was still against the change, the local government reorganization law of 1925 allowed decisions to be made that went against the opinion of the local council. The Council of State was thus able to make a decision regarding this application which had been pending for such a long time.

When the borough of Rovaniemi received its charter in January 1929, it had a total area of 14 km², comprising not only the population centre but also Ratantausta in the west, Veitikkaharju in the south and the area east of the river as far as the summit of Ounasvaara. It had 4100 inhabitants, leaving the rural district with 108900. The borough was enlarged in 1948 by the addition of Viirinkangas and Korvaniemi.

Numerous boroughs were created in Finland in the years following independence, but the number of towns did not increase at all until laws were passed in January 1959 making the granting of a charter easier. After some persuasion from the government, Rovaniemi finally agreed to apply for a charter, making it one of the first new towns to be created at the beginning of 1960.

The idea of reuniting the rural district and borough of Rovaniemi was raised for the first time soon after the Second World War. Although the subject has now been talked about from time to time for a full 50 years, their reunification has proved even more difficult than that of the two Germanies.



The settlement at Korkaloniemi began to take on the appearance of a population centre around the turn of the century, particularly along the main street. The Post Office, seen in the picture on the right, had been opened in 1882, and the first telephone wires were installed in 1897.

As the density of houses between the church and Färinranta increased, the Senate decreed in 1901 that this should be regarded as a built-up area and submitted to planning and other regulations of its own. The inhabitants themselves would have preferred to be looked on as townspeople, but this aspiration was fulfilled only in 1960.

At the stage when Rovaniemi was declared a borough, areas on both banks of the Ounaskoski rapids were annexed to it, and the Rural District has had to relinquish land to the population centre on several other occasions since then to relieve the pressure on space. It has nevertheless retained its administrative independence up to the present day.

