

12-1-2008

Sweden and Finland--two countries

Elisabeth Thorsell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Thorsell, Elisabeth (2008) "Sweden and Finland--two countries," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 28 : No. 4 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol28/iss4/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Sweden and Finland two countries – one future

And a long history together

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

Sweden and Finland are during the years 2008-2009 commemorating the ominous years 1808 and 1809. In those years Finland was separated from Sweden and became a grand duchy of Russia, and Sweden lost about a third of its realm.

The Swedish and Finnish governments have started a project called *Märkesåret* (Year of Remembrance), and there will be several events during the year in both Sweden and Finland. The above headline is the motto for the project.

There is a link to the official web site on page 30 [the English link does not work in early March].

There will be seminars, art exhibitions, festivities at the Skansen out-door museum in Stockholm in May, a reenactment of the Battle of Sävar, near Umeå, in August in the presence of the King and Queen, and Finland will be the theme for the giant Book and Library Fair in Göteborg in September. If you are coming to Sweden or Finland this summer, check out the web site.

How it all started

The Swedish Earl *Birger*, who lived around 1250, felt that the Swedes should also go on a crusade, but where were the closest heathens? The answer were the wild Finns, across the sea, who sometimes came and burned Swedish villages and pillaged there. So Birger went with an army to Finland and conquered quite an area there and established

Swedish sovereignty over the area, which was sparsely inhabited.

During the following centuries many Swedes moved across the sea and settled along the coast, where there are still many Swedish-speaking inhabitants.

Swedish became the dominant language of the nobility, administration, and education, as well as for the clergy and local courts, even in predominantly Finnish-speaking areas. Finnish was chiefly a language for the peasantry.

The Bishop of Turku was the most socially preminent person in Finland before the Reformation.

During the Reformation, the Finns gradually converted to Lutheranism. In the 16th century, Mikael Agricola published the first written works in Finnish.

The first university in Finland, The Royal Academy of Turku (*Åbo Akademi*), was established in 1640, the third university in Sweden; the second was the *Academia Gustaviana* in Dorpat in Estonia, established in 1632 (the University in Lund was founded in 1666, after Skåne became Swedish).

Finland suffered a severe famine in 1696-1697 and almost one third of the population died. In the 18th century, wars between Sweden and Russia led to the occupation of Finland twice by Russian forces, known to the Finns as the Greater Wrath (*Stora ofreden*) (1714–1721) and the Lesser Wrath (*Lilla ofreden*) (1742–1743).



Finland was considered a part of Sweden, just as Småland or Västergötland, and it was not unusual that officials moved from one side of the Baltic for a couple of years and then returned. Many poor students preferred to study in Turku (Åbo) as that was cheaper than going to Uppsala or to Germany. Even students from Värmland in western Sweden went to Åbo.

After Finland had been conquered by the Russians in 1809, it was named as a Russian grand duchy, and for many years was allowed to follow the laws from the Swedish times, and keep their church and court records in Swedish. But also during this period the Russian influences grew, which fostered a resistance, and people started to say “We are not allowed to be Swedes, we do not want

Peasant Paavo

to become Russians, so let us be Finns." This started around the 1850s, and has been steadily growing since. This movement encouraged people to study the old Finnish myths, and some of them were published in the *Kalevala*, which had a great impact on many, and caused many to change Swedish surnames to Finnish ones [example: Renberg to Reenpää], and also change their language to Finnish.

The compiler of *Kalevala* was called *Elias Lönnrot* (1802–1884), who was born in a poor family in southern Finland, and grew up speaking Finnish, but also learnt Swedish, as that was the learned language. As a student he travelled in eastern Finland and collected old folktales, which became the basis for his masterpiece.

Another famous poet from the middle 1800s was *Johan Ludvig Runeberg* (1804–1877) who wrote in Swedish and also became very popular in Sweden. In one of his early collections of poems, *Idylls and Epigrams* (1830), one can first learn that he romanticized the poor Finnish peasant, who stoically accepted his fate, and still decided to help his neighbor, when he was in trouble, as in the poem to the right.

Later Runeberg wrote poems about the simple soldiers of the 1808–1809 war, who became heroes in many ways in his work "The Tales of Ensign Stål" (*Fänrik Ståls sägner*), which was still read in schools in Sweden in the 1960s, and from where many phrases have become part of everyday speech. Runeberg was married to *Fredrika Tengström*, and they had eight children. Mrs. Runeberg was also a talented writer, but had to do her writing early in the morning, before the family awoke and all the chores needed doing.

(Translation of "Peasant Paavo", by Judith Moffett in *The North! To the North!*. Published by Southern Illinois University Press 2001.)

*High among the pines of Saarijärvi
Peasant Paavo farmed a frosty home-
stead,*

*Tendered it with unremitting labor,
But for increase trusted in the Lord
And he bided there with wife and
children,*

*Ate in sweat his scanty bread beside
them,*

*Dug his ditches, plowed the land and
sowed it.*

*Springtime came, and when the
snowpack melted*

*Half the sprouting seeds were car-
ried with it;*

*Summer came, and in a storm of hail-
ing*

*Half the ears were beaten down by
hailstones;*

*Autumn came, and frost killed what
was left.*

*Paavo's goodwife tore her hair de-
spairing:*

*"Paavo, Paavo, born to bear mis-
fortune,*

Take your staff! for we are

Godforsaken;

Hard it is to beg, but worse to starve."

*Paavo took her hand and said, all
patient:*

*"God but tries us, he does not forsake
us.*

*Mix the bread with bark, a half of
either,*

*I shall dig me twice as many ditches,
But for increase wait upon the Lord."*

*So she kneaded bark into the bread
dough,*

*Paavo dug him twice as many
ditches,*

*Sold the sheep, and bought the rye
and sowed it.*

*Springtime came: the snowmelt off
the plowland*

*Never washed away a single seedling;
Summer came, and when the hail fell*

rattling

*Half the ears were beaten down by
hailstones;*

*Autumn came, and frost took all the
rest.*

*Paavo's goodwife beat her breast
despairing:*

*"Paavo, Paavo, born to feed mis-
fortune,*

Let us die, for God has us forsaken.

*Death is hard, but living worse than
death."*

*Paavo took her hand and said, all
patient:*

*"God but tries us, he does not forsake
us.*

*Mix the bread with bark, a double
measure,*

I shall dig my ditches even deeper,

But I look for increase to the Lord

*So the extra bark went in the bread
dough,*

So he dug his ditches wider, deeper,

*Sold the cows, and bought the rye and
sowed it.*

*Springtime came, again the snow-
pack melted,*

*Taking with it, not a single seedling;
Summer came, and brought the hail*

as ever,

*But no ears were beaten down by
hailstones;*

*Autumn came, and frost, the fields
avoiding,*

*Let them stand in gold and wait the
reaper.*

*Then upon his knees fell Paavo, say-
ing:*

*"God but tries us, he does not forsake
us."*

*And his goodwife knelt beside him,
saying:*

*"God but tries us, he does not forsake
us."*

*But to Paavo then she said rejoicing:
"Paavo, Paavo, wield your sickle*

gladly,

*Now's a time for pleasure and good
living,*

*Now's a time for bark to be got rid of,
And to bake our bread of rye alone."*

*Paavo took her hand and pressed it,
saying:*

*"Woman, woman, he but bears the
trying*

Who will not forsake a needy fellow.

*Mix the bread with bark, a half of
either,*

*For our neighbors' fields stand black
and frozen."*