Kari Tarkiainen

The Emigration of Swedish – Finnish Burnbeaters to Delaware

The question of the role played by Finnish colonists in the New Sweden settlement on the banks of the Delaware River during the 17th century has attracted considerable attention during the recent celebrations of the 350th anniversary of the colony. At the various discussion forums, widely differing opinions have been put forward on the scale and nature of the Finnish contribution to the colony. In this paper, I wish to concentrate exclusively on the role played in the New Sweden settlement by the forest Finns, or "burnbeaters".

The justification for this is that the other Finnish settlers, who emigrated from Ostrobothnia, the Åland Islands, and the towns along the southern Finnish coast, actually belonged to the same cultural environment as the settlers who emigrated from metropolitan Sweden; the forest Finns, however, formed a distinctive ethnic grouping, in terms both of language and of culture. The basis of their economy, i.e. the exploitation of extensive tracts of forest by burnbeating, their adherence to the Finnish language, and their extended family institutions, all sharply differentiated them from the cultural formation represented by settlers originating from the established Swedish/Finnish town and village culture. There have long been differences of opinion between Finnish and Swedish scholars as to the numbers (and even existence) of forest Finns in the backwoods areas of Sweden. As far back as the 18th century, the Swedish local historians Erik Fernow and Abraham Hulphers argued that there were relatively few forest Finns in the provinces of Dalecarlia and Värmland, whereas the scholar Henrik Gabriel Porthan from Åbo (Turku) came to the conclusion that their numbers in those regions were very considerable.

Porthan's informant was a student called Johan Halberg, who argued that it was difficult to obtain reliable information on the numbers of forest Finns from the Swedish population, even in areas with considerable Finnish settlement, since the majority of these Finns were fully bilingual. He described the situation in Bjuråker parish as follows: "De talte den renaste svenska, men också finskan så ofördärvad, att jag ej annat visste än att jag talte med den ramaste savolaxare". ("They spoke the purest Swedish, yet they also spoke such uncorrupted Finnish that I had no way of telling that I was not talking to genuine Finns from eastern Finland"). This bilingualism, maintained by the forest Finns over several centuries, is a striking feature of their ethnic culture,

Kari Tarkiainen, Ph.D., Archivist
National Archives, Stockholm, Sweden

since usually for an ethnic minority bilingualism means assimilation to the majority population.

The identification of the forest Finns and their descendants among the settlers in New Sweden is a difficult, indeed an impossible task. The major sources from which information can be gathered on the migration of forest Finns from Sweden to America are the following:

- Rolls and registers of two kinds: passenger lists from the ships which brought the settlers over, and a variety of census type surveys carried out within the colony itself. The last of these was one drawn up by the settlers themselves in 1693.
- The Accounts of the New Sweden Company, especially the Great Book for 1637–1657, where all the economic transactions are recorded, such as payments made and dues collected.
- The Parish Registers, kept by the Swedish pastors sent out to Delaware from the 1690s. The earliest of these have, to my knowledge, been lost – although the valuable notes which Pehr Kalm made from them do survive – but the later ones have survived from the Swedish parishes at Penn Snec and Raccoon Creek for 1713–1831. Parish registers for the Swedish congregations in America are also extant from the 1750s at the Cathedral in Uppsala.
- Other sources, such as letters, reports, descriptions of the conditions in the colony, etc., containing references to the settlers.

Each of the categories of sources mentioned above requires a different kind of source criticism. It must be asked for what purpose each source was drawn up. When there were only a few Finns, the usual Swedish practice was often followed in the rolls and lists, for example, of putting the word "finne" (Finn) against a name. When the Finns formed a large group, or even the majority, however, the word "finne" could no longer be used to distinguish individuals, and might in such cases be inserted in the heading of the register; an example of this is the catalog of original Swedish and Finnish settlers drawn up in 1693.

In relation to the Accounts of the Company, on the other hand, it has to be borne in mind that these record transactions – not only in America, but throughout the area of the trading Company's operations, including both Stockholm and even Holland – must always be checked that a transaction really refers to settlers actually resident in the colony. In the case of letters, the important question is as to who wrote them and for what purpose. One of the most important sources of information concerning the forest Finns in the 1690s, for instance, is one Anders Printz, about whom nothing else is known; it is unclear, for example, what relationship he may have had to the former Governor, Johan Printz.

Many investigators have taken the last names used by the settlers as a crucial guide to their origins. The evidential value of last names varies considerably, however. Last names such as Rambo, Cock, Stille, Minck, etc., have been interpreted as adaptations or translations of the Finnish names Romppainen, Kokkonen, Hiljakainen and Minkkinen, even in cases where the individuals' first names Gunnar, Åke, or Sören, for example suggest a very different origin; for the forest Finns made use of a very restricted range of first names, and avoided Swedish names such as these. Nevertheless, names can be useful evidence, particularly when other corrobatory evidence concerning the individuals is also available.

With reference to last names suggested as eastern Finnish, it is wisest to restrict

ourselves to those names actually documented in Sweden, and occurring in the same form as that found in the relevant Swedish sources such as the tithes rolls for Västmanland and the parish register for Fryksende. Observation of this precaution is likely to avert many mistakes.

The foundation of New Sweden in 1638 coincided with the adoption of harsher attitudes towards the forest Finns by the Swedish authorities. The search for military deserters in the forest areas inhabited by Finns, documented by a poster from 1636; the 1639 ban on burnbeating; the first Forest Decree, issued in 1647; these and other official moves all had the effect of hampering the freedom of the Finns to pursue their way of life in the great coniferous forests of central Sweden. At the same time, however, the supply of land for burnbeating began to run out, and Finns began to move in large numbers to Norway, whose forests they had beceome familiar with during the "Hannibal Purge" in the 1640s.

An old smoke-cottage in Vermland, Sweden. Photo: Vermland Museum. (SI/VA 0317/Ruotsi)

The first mention of America as a possible location for the settlement of forest Finns occurs in a Minute of a discussion in the Swedish Council of State dated July 30th, 1640. The Councellors resolved on this occasion to deport four burnbeating Finns to New Sweden "with their wives, children, and all their tools". These Finns, whose names are known, were from the parish of Sunne in Värmland.

On the same day that this decision was taken, a letter was sent from the Royal Chancellery in Stockholm to the Rector of the parish of Närke, stating that the ship the *Kalmar Nyckel* (the "Key of Calmar") was soon to sail again to New Sweden, and additional Finns should be recruited as emigrants. Similarly, soon afterwards, a letter was also sent to the Governor of the Province of Dalecarlia to the effect that Finns

should be recruited in the province "to settle the land of New Sweden in Virginia". Soon thereafter, the first recruiting agent, one Måns Kling, was sent to travel around the Finnish areas in Bergslagen; and with the support of the provincial Governors, he succeeded in gathering a group of Finnish settlers, who sailed for America with the fourth expedition in 1641.

There were two ships on this expedition: the *Kalmar Nyckel* was joined in Gothenburg by the *Charitas*, which had sailed from Stockholm. Unfortunately the passenger list only survives for the sailing from Stockholm. This lists 35 names: artisans, tailors, former soldiers, etc., from the Stockholm region, Uppland, and Södermanland. There are two names on this list which could be interpreted as Finnish: Måns Svensson Loom, and Per Kock. Both of these names were recorded on departure from Sweden, and had therefore clearly been adopted prior to arrival in America.

"Loom" is the Swedish name of a bird, the diver, and therefore could be a translation of the name of the Finnish Kuikka clan from Värmland, while the name Kock could represent the Kokkoinens, also from Värmland. In fact, however, this is not the case; Loom's patronymic, Svensson, rules out forest–Finnish origins, while Kock is specifically identified as a soldier who had deserted and who had been held prisoner at Smedjegården in Stockholm. In 1693, moreover, Kock's son wrote that his father had come from the parish of Bångsta in Södermanland. These examples serve to illustrate how difficult it is to identify Finns simply on the basis of names.

There were, however, many forest Finns who sailed across the Atlantic on the Kalmar Nyckel, which joined the Charitas in Gothenburg. No passenger list is extant, but since freemen who settled in the colony could pay for their crossing in arrears by working on the tobacco plantations in New Sweden, their names can be traced in the accounts books of the Company. The list of plantation workers for a year later includes many names which could well be Swedish translations of Värmland Finnish surnames, such as Geting (for Ampiainen, 'wasp'), Höök (for Haukkainen, 'hawk'), Räf (for Kettuinen, 'fox'), etc. It is on the other hand difficult to interpret last names referring to American wildlife, such as Kalkon ('turkey') or Mink ('mink'), as Finnish.

There are other names in the Company's accounts which could well also be Värmland Finnish, such as Wass (for Vaissinen), or Jeppe (for Jäppinen), etc. It is striking that no examples of these names, common among the Finnish population in Värmland, are found in the later records of the colony; one explanation could be that these were lone men who had left their families behind to follow on later, but that with the loss of contacts this became impossible.

One of the workers recorded on the tobacco plantation at Fort Christina in 1643 was one Mårten Mårtensson, who had probably sailed from Gothenburg on the *Fama*. He has the unusual title "Glasbeter", the meaning of which is not certain. The passenger list says, that he was from Jomala parish in Åland.In 1654, another Mårten Mårtensson arrived in the colony aboard the Örn; subsequently, following his death at the age of nearly a hundred in 1706, Pastor Rudman wrote in the (now lost) parish register that he had been born "in Finland in Sweden". This man, thought to have come from the Finnish parish of Rautalampi, probably belonged to the Savo–Finnish clan of Marttinen in Värmland, and he has been called "Rautalampi's gift to America", for his grandson, John Morton, was one of the

delegates who cast their votes for American independence.

One register drawn up in New Sweden lists the settlers who had arrived in the colony during 1639–48, in their order of arrival. Only five freemen are unequivocally labeled as Finnish. It is undoubtedly possible that there were more forest Finns, but they had not yet arrived in large numbers at this time; the "America fever" did not break out in their midst until around 1649, when the Swedish government fitted out a large ocean–going ship for the voyage, the *Kattan* ("The Cat").

Mats Eriksson, representing the burnbeating Finns, submitted two undated applications to the Chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, requesting permission for 200 forest Finns to emigrate to America. In the Council of State, Councellor Bengt Skytte claimed that the true number wishing to emigrate was three hundred. It was resolved to send them all to New Sweden, "to promote the cultivation of the land", as it says in the Minutes. The Finns failed to reach the Kattan in time, however, for only one name in the passenger list, one "Jon Olfsson born in Värmland", could be interpreted as Finnish; and this was to their great fortune, for the Kattan was shipwrecked in the West Indies and none of her passengers ever reached the colony.

The America Fever continued to rage, however, in Värmland and in Dalecarlia. Some of the would–be emigrants managed to sail aboard the Örn in 1654, or in 1655 on the *Mercurius*, which took aboard 110 settlers in Gothenburg, mainly forest Finns. On the passenger list, dated August 17th, 1655, they are stated to have come from three areas: Fryksdalen in Värmland (49 persons, including both families and single people); an area called Lytestigen between Närke and Värmland (55 persons); and the parish of Brunsberg near Arvika (one family of six persons). There were as many again, however, left behind in Gothenburg harbor, and Lieutenant Johan Papegoja wrote that the situation of those who had not been taken aboard ship was desperate, for they had invested all their property in this venture.

The mechanisms operating in this emigration from the Finnish forest community are partly known. A copy survives of an emigration certificate issued in 1655 to one Dan Andersson, a Finn living at Lekvattnet in Värmland, which shows that the authorities insisted first that would–be emigrants must have paid all their taxes due, but that no polltax was levied for the actual year of emigration. This indicates that emigration was far from being as free as has earlier been assumed. Most forest Finns in Sweden already held an earlier permit to migrate from Finland, and the deeds to their new cottage, and this suggests that the migration of the burnbeating Finns from one part of the kingdom to another was relatively closely supervised.

In 1655, shortly before the departure of the last Swedish ship for America, the colony of New Sweden passed into the hands of the Dutch. This change did not diminish the forest Finns' interest in emigration, for they were unconcerned about political frontiers. The most massive emigration did not take place until 1664, when a large party of forest Finns from the parishes of Sundsvall, Torp, and Borgsjö in Medelpad (once again equipped with emigration licenses from the Ministers of the parishes) set out for America on their own account, traveling through Hälsingland and Dalecarlia into Norway, where in Christiania they boarded a Dutch ship for Amsterdam. Almost the entire route as far as Christiania took them through forests inhabited by Finnish settlers, and their journey thus remained completely secret from the authorities; not until these

140 forest Finns were already waiting for their ship for America in Waeterland, outside Amsterdam, were they visited by the Swedish ambassador, Peter Trotzig, who submitted a report to his government.

Two points in Trotzig's report arouse especial attention. He says that the emigration had been triggered off by a letter which one man had received from his brother in America in 1657, in which the country had been warmly praised. Secondly, Trotzig notes that the women and children spoke Finnish, but that the men were bilingual and could speak Swedish as well. The Ambassador's report thus demonstrates that the forest Finns were able to maintain effective communications, despite the enormous distances involved; and it also suggests that externally, since they could speak Swedish, they would have merged with the Swedish people around them. Later evidence also confirms that the Finnish settlers spoke Finnish only among themselves; if even one visitor was present, they would consistently speak Swedish.

These emigrants from Medelpad made a successful crossing to America, and joined the other settlers in New Sweden. I do not know whether any list of their names exists in the archives in Holland. By the 1690s, the Finns would clearly seem to have comprised a significant proportion of the population in the area of the former Swedish colony.

The most important source of information on this point consists of a letter from Lars Riddermarck and Johan Thelin, dated October 1st, 1691, based on information received from Anders Printz. The identity of this informant is, as mentioned earlier, unknown, and the validity of the information has therefore been questioned. I would argue, however, that this letter represent a relatively reliable source. The letter states that the Finns and Swedes in the area still live apart from each other; "If a Finn proposes to a Swede, or a Swede to a Finn, he must know the other's language; for otherwise the two groups live strictly apart." The authors of the letter estimate that 20 Finnish Bibles and about 200 Finnish hymnbooks would be needed; the corresponding figures for Swedish are for 50 Bibles and 300–400 hymnbooks. This suggests that the Finnish–speaking population comprised at this time about 2/5 of the members of the congregation, i.e. about 400 persons, since Pastor Rudman states soon thereafter that the total number in the parish consisted of 1200 persons.According to other sources, however, the Finns did not actually need any Finnish books or clergy, since they could also speak Swedish. Pastor Anders Rudman, in a description of the language situation in the parish in 1697, comments on the purity of the Swedish spoken, and on the survival of dialects from Eastern and Western Götaland; he makes no mention of Finnish at all.

There has also survived an important list, dating from 1693, of the 971 residents in the area, of whom 40 were "old Swedes and Finns" surviving from the early years of the settlement. The names of these settlers are very interesting; many of them may well be of eastern Finnish origin, e.g. Keen (possibly Keinäinen), Fisk (possibly Kalainen, 'fish'), Hellm (possibly Helminen), Lokenij (possibly Loukehinen), Hoppman (possibly Huopoinen), Hallton (possibly Halttuinen), Ekorn and maybe Orrane (possibly for Oravainen, 'squirrel'), Kabb (possibly Kapainen), Tossa and also Tossava (Tossavainen), Rosse (possibly Rossinen), Skrika (possibly Närhinen, 'jay'), Parkom (possibly Parkkoinen), Kempe (possibly Kemppainen), Savoy (possibly Savuinen), Repott

(possibly Repoinen), and Kuckone (Kukkoinen). These are all names found in the Finnish areas in Sweden.

Unfortunately the sources at my disposal report very little about the way of life of the Finns in America; there is for example no description of burnbeating. Possibly burnbeating was such an everyday event that no one bothered to write about it, although there are extensive descriptions of almost everything else, such as the way the Indians used forest fires in hunting.

The parish registers survive from the communities at Penn Sneck and Raccoon Creek from 1713 onwards. These observe the Swedish format, and comprise lists of baptisms, marriages, and funerals. The families which occur here are no longer identical with those mentioned in the 17th–century sources. It seems likely that many of the earliest Delaware Finns were no longer represented, either because they had no descendants, living in a community dominated by males, or because they had moved away from the area. In comparison with the 17th–century registers, there is a marked reduction in the number of last names; the families are also strikingly large, and infant mortality lower than in Europe.

All in all, therefore, it is extremely difficult to say much about the Finnish settlers in New Sweden during the 17th century. What the surviving parish registers suggest is the peaceful coexistence of large families, marked by a dense network of intermarriage, and their gradual anglicization.Forenames became mixed at a very early stage. In 1714, for example, we can see that Åke Helm and Elias Fisk were appointed to take the collection in the parish at Raccoon Creek; and if they were in fact descendants of the forest–Finnish Helminen and Kalainen clans in Sweden, their forenames were at any rate no longer typically forest–Finnish. The names of godparents of children brought to baptism also reveal the same intermixture of Finnish and Swedish names; when this same Elias Fisk and his wife Christina had their daughter baptized as Rebecca (an English name) in 1714, the godparents were Johan Mullikka (of Finnish origin), Peter Rambo (of Swedish origin), and Maria Mattson Abigael (origin unknown). Similarly, the seating arrangements issued in 1717 in the Penn Sneck parish placed next to each other on the fourth pew Henric Geens (origin unknown), Seneck Seneckson (possibly a descendant of the Finnish Sinikko clan), Johan Henriksson (origin unknown), Johan Shagen (origin unknown), and Johan Savoy (probably a descendant of the Finnish Savuinen clan). And in 1720, when a batch of Swedish Bibles arrived in Delaware, they were eagerly bought by all those local families whose names suggest possibly Finnish origins.

Research into the history of the forest Finns in the Delaware settlement is thus confronted by major problems. Whereas we are relatively well–informed about the Finnish emigration, their fate on the other side of the ocean remains obscure. Did they assimilate fairly quickly into the population of European origin, or did some of them move off into the uncharted American interior? Did they first become Swedish and then English? Or did they become "white Indians", whose traces disappear into the wilderness? There can be no doubt that the forest Finns had the potential for both of these destinies: assimilation to either European or a primitive forest culture; and it is for this reason that the fate of the forest Finns in America remains so fascinating, but also, I fear, insoluble for all time.