

# Immigration from northern Finland and Sweden to northern Norway in the 19th century

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is mainly a summary of the author's treatise on the Finnish (or "Kvaenish") migration from Finland and Sweden to the urban and rural districts of Vadsø in Finnmark, northern Norway, from 1845 to 1885. <sup>1</sup> The treatise was written for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Oslo, Institute of History. Some of the results of this study are of interest for all of the Finnish migration to Finnmark and the north-

ern part of Troms (Finnmark and Troms are the two northernmost counties in Norway). Most of this paper concentrates, however, on the migration to Vadsø. The municipality of Vadsø is chosen, partly, because of its vigorous immigration and the settlement of Finns there during the 19th century, partly, because of the good source material available for migration studies, and, partly, because of the character of the area itself — it has urban as well as rural immigrant settlements. Today Finnish cultural elements are still alive in this area.



Krampenesin kylässä Varangerissa asuu kveenejä.

The village-like settlement of Krampenes, Varanger, partly inhabited by Kvaens (Photo Tromsø Museum).

## SOURCE MATERIAL

Finnish and Swedish source material has been used only to a limited extent, partly because of their incomplete character for this study (e.g. the church registers), partly because of language and other practical problems. The passport lists in the archives at Uleåborg were briefly examined, but they were of little or no help at all. In analysing the structure of this migration I have depended on parish registers in Finnish Lapland and Swedish Tornevalley. In addition to these, reports from the governors of Uleåborg and Norrbotten including statistical data, and some other Finnish and Swedish statistics on economy and demography have been used.

There exist no satisfactory statistics of the 19th century immigration to Norway. The registration was done in the censuses or the local church was obliged to register the immigrants. The census lists seem to be a reliable source for analysing the number, structure and assimilation of the immigrants. The lists of immigrants in the church registers are far from complete. Generally the number of immigrants in the census lists is bigger than that in the church registers, at least in the year of the census and the years preceding it. The censuses were taken at the turn of the year, and because most immigrants arrived in April those who settled down in Norway were registered in the census lists.—I have also received information about the Finnish migration from some unprinted sources, such as annual reports from the bailiff and his men, annual medical reports from the local physician and reports from the visiting bishop.

The printed material is voluminous. In the 1860s the Finnish immigrants in Northern Norway and especially those who settled in the border districts in Finnmark stimulated political interest. Consequently, "the Kvaenish problem" was widely debated in Norway, also in the National Assembly (the STORTING), and the debates are reported in different publications. The quintennial reports from the governor of Finnmark, based on local reports from the bailiff and

his men, give much data about economic matters, and also some particular immigrant problems are dealt with. The official statistics have, of course, been applied, too. Contemporary newspapers, both local and those published in the capital, contain much information and give views on the subject as do certain periodicals. These sources concentrate especially on the ethnic and political aspects of the immigration.

Scientific literature in Norway about the "Kvaens" is scarce in spite of the interest in them. In the 1920s there appeared a couple of shorter studies of which the one by Just Qvigstad still ranks as the best. Even today it is the basic study of Finnish immigration to Northern Norway, even if Qvigstad didn't manage to analyse deeply enough any of the problems involved. From the 1920s until the early 1970s very little was produced on this subject. But now, in the 1970s, a couple of studies on Finnish immigration to Norway have appeared and, evidently, new interest has been taken in this subject in all three countries involved. Probably this is due to today's general interest in migration, minorities and social and demographic history at large.

## COURSE AND VOLUME OF MIGRATION

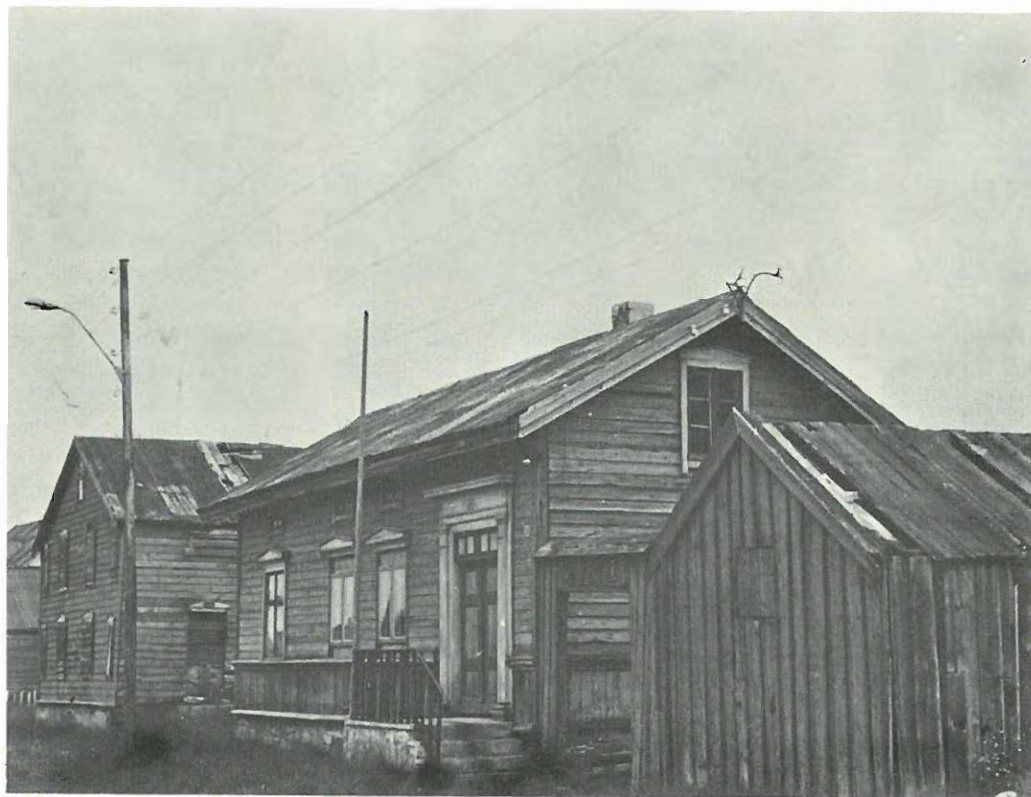
For centuries there had been lines of communication between the northern parts of Sweden/Finland and northern Norway. The old trade routes ended on the coast and along them seasonal migrants found their way to the rich fisheries, e.g. in the Varanger fiord. The actual migration which resulted in settlement, started probably not until the first decades of the 18th century. The first important destinations for the pioneering migrants who were going to settle down were the districts of Alta (Finnmark) and Lyngen (Troms). Throughout the 18th century and up to the 1830s the pattern of immigration was largely the same though the Finnish immigrants also settled down in small numbers elsewhere.

From the 1830s up to the middle of the century the stream of migration definitely changed its course. The western districts lost their attraction while the eastern parts of Finnmark became the new dominating Finnish immigration area. This change is partly due to the decline of the copper mining industry at Kåfjord in Alta (which had employed several hundred Finns), partly to the hunger for land (the "old" immigration districts now tended to be filled up, and partly to the rich fisheries in Varanger which now were prosperous after a long period of slump. The relatively good agricultural possibilities in Varanger had not been exploited earlier; in this field the Finns became pioneers on the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Land could easily be, acquired at that time. Until the 1860s it was allotted free, to the immigrants. Later (as a consequence of "jordloven" for Finnmark in 1863) land was sold for a small sum of money. Finnish colonies

were established in several places around the Varanger fiord, but it was the Vadsø district which became the greatest magnet for the immigrants.

Restrictions were not put on the allotment of land (apart from the law of 1863, which didn't discriminate ethnically) until the last decades of the century. The border districts were regulated first, and the final result was that allotment was restricted to Norwegian-speaking people. National and political interests became decisive for the state's agricultural policy in Finnmark.

In no other area did the Finnish immigration reach such proportions as in the Vadsø district. Some of the settlements were totally dominated by Finns, and in a certain period more than half of the total population of the municipality consisted of Finns. No wonder that Vadsø was named "the Finnish capital of Norway".



Halosen vanha kauppatalo Vadsössä.  
The old Halonen merchant's house at Vadsø (Photo Tromsø Museum).



The immigration to Vadsø came in three waves: 1) from the 1830s to the first part of the 1850s, 2) In the 1860s (especially the second half of the decade), 3) in the first half of the 1880s. In about 1890 the immigration as such had run dry. It culminated in the 1860s, not only in Varanger, but also in the "old" destinations which now experienced a revival, for the last time. Especially in the years 1865 and 1866 the number of immigrants to Vadsø increased greatly. The census of 1865 shows that 10% of the total population of the municipality were Finns who had arrived in that year.

Let us look at some statistical data. Here only "pure" Finns are taken into consideration (persons who are Finns themselves or children of Finnish parents). The figures show the Finnish population grew in Vadsø from 1845 to 1885:

#### URBAN DISTRICT:

1845:	134 Finns	i.e. 35% of population		
1855:	353 "	" 40% "	"	"
1865:	710 "	" 53% "	"	"
1875:	1025 "	" 59% "	"	"
1885:	1371 "	" 62% "	"	"

#### RURAL DISTRICT:

1845:	6 Finns	i.e. 1.3% of population		
1855:	83 "	" 12 "	"	"
1865:	328 "	" 34 "	"	"
1875:	460 "	" 42 "	"	"
1885:	788 "	" 51 "	"	"

During the same period (1845-90) the number of Finns increased in southern Varanger (the largest Finnish colonizing municipality after Vadsø) from 77 persons (11% of total population) to 337 (20%) in 1865 to 862 (44%). The number of Finns in both Finnmark and Troms culminated in 1875 with respectively 24.2% and 7.7% of the total population. Still in 1900 the Finnish population element is clearly seen in the statistics: 13% of the rural and 16% of the urban population of Finnmark was born in Finland

## MIGRATION ROUTES AND STRUCTURE OF MIGRATION

The migrants from geographical Finland came from almost all over the country, even if most of them came from the county of Uleåborg (which at that time covered most of northern Finland). The central parishes of the country, both those along the coast and those inland, gave the largest number of emigrants (parishes in Kemi *härad* and Uleå *härad*). From the northernmost border districts few migrants settled down in Norway. — Those from Sweden came mainly from the Torne Valley.

The migrants followed the old routes to the Arctic Ocean. One of the main western routes went up the Torne Valley and ended at the old market place Skibotn in Lyngen. The central route went to Alta. The main eastern route, followed by the majority of migrants heading for Vadsø, went via Inari to Neiden and Bugøyfjord on the southern coast of Varanger. There the migrants crossed the fiord by boat and landed at Vadsø. Many were emigrants by stages. In the census lists it is possible to follow the families' routes to their final destination by registering the different places of birth of the children. One example shows that the family lived for a time at Kåfjord and for a while at Hammerfest before it ended up at Vadsø. Other examples prove that one migration route went from Kuusamo via Kola to Vadsø.

Most migrants used their own feet to reach their destinations. Often 600 kilometers were covered on skis without skis. Those who could afford it rented horses or reindeer for shorter or longer distances. Migrants often assembled at central places, e.g. at Kittilä, before they started for the coast in groups of maybe 20 or 30 individuals. As mentioned, the main migration took place in late winter or early spring because of the seasonal fisheries, among which the richest by far was that of cod (or LODDE) from April to June. Thus the migrants hoped for a "flying start" in their new country.

Statistical analysis shows that at the early stages the migration of families was most common. Even if the number of individual migrants increased later, still in about 1870 60% of the immigrants came with their families. From 34–40%<sup>2</sup> of the migrants belonged to the freeholder farmer class at their home places. The rest were mainly servants or cottagers, crofters or workers.

The high percentage of women among the Finnish immigrants to Vadsø is remarkable. In 1865 women counted 47.6% of the total number in 1885 50.0%. Vadsø could offer good possibilities for work e.g. as house maids. Because of the high mobility of the population and the constant influx of people, the prospects for marriage were probably also regarded as good.

## CAUSES OF MIGRATION

In most of the literature treating the Finnish migration to northern Norway, poverty, hunger and bad crops have played a dominating role in explaining the phenomenon. To a large degree the pattern of causes has been simplified and also dramatized. The pattern of causes is naturally a complex one where both the "pull" and the "push" forces should be analysed together with the close relationship between them – too often they have been regarded as alternative explanations.

The explanation of the Finnish migration to northern Norway must, of course, be based on an analysis of a combination of demographic, economic and social factors in both the "push" and the "pull" areas. The most important key to the explanation of mass migration in the 19th century is probably the demographic development in the northern parts of Finland and Sweden. The population growth far surpassed the growth of economy. The main trade – agriculture – could not absorb the growing population, "odlingsgränden" had reached its limit. One reason why the years of famine in the 1860s became such a catastrophe for northern Finland, is the fact that agriculture had expanded to areas extremely exposed to

climatic changes. The Great Famine does not explain the emigration as such; it only made the crisis worse propelling the emigration. In such periods the expectation of improved conditions through emigration must have played an important role in the decision to emigrate. And when people faced a choice between social declassing and emigration, many chose the latter.

In addition there are several other causes to explain this migration. One is probably the traditionally high MOBILITY of population in northern Sweden and Finland. INFORMATION about northern Norway in this respect is good because of the seasonal migration and the wanderings of the Laestadian preachers. Also the prospect of emigration via the harbours of the Arctic Ocean to AMERICA incited people to go north. Many Finns crossed the Atlantic both from Alta (Kåfjord) and from Vadsø. However, it is impossible to decide how many of those Finns who had once started from their native places with America as their final goal settled down in Norway. – In this way some of the pioneering Finnish emigrants going to America passed through the harbours of northern Norway. As early as 1863 and 1864 Finns from Kåfjord and Vadsø started their voyage to America.

Maybe also RELIGIOUS factors played a certain role in the migration to Vadsø. There are indications that the early Laestadians in Finland didn't always lead an easy life. One of the first important Laestadian congregations in Norway was established at Vadsø. At least in the early phases of Laestadianism there were no hindrances for religious activities. Laestadianism in Vadsø became to such a degree Finnish dominated that it was often called "the Kvaen religion".

As already mentioned, the "PULL" FORCES were very important. The abundant fisheries and the possibilities of acquiring land of their own were the greatest attractions for the immigrants. From this point of view Finnish immigration to some districts in northern Norway might be regarded as a result of the expansion of Finnish agriculture, adapted to new conditions.

One cause which traditionally has been heavily stressed is the supposed fear of enlistment in the military forces. The reality behind this fear is to be doubted because as a whole the Finnish migration to northern Norway had ended before the real Russification policy had been launched.

Generally, northern Norway, and especially Finnmark, in the 18th and 19th centuries should mainly be regarded as an immigration area which could offer space for colonists. To a certain extent it was not an exaggeration when Finnmark at that time was described as a "land of opportunities".



Heinäntekoa Pohjois-Varangerin vuoristoniityillä. Pitkävärtistä vanhaa suomalaismallista viikatetta käytettiin. Haying in the marshes in the mountain regions of Northern Varanger. Long-handled scythes of old Finnish type is used. (Photo Tromsø Museum).

## THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS

An analysis of the assimilation process in Vadsø (both urban and rural) up to the second half of the 1880s (i.e. about two generations after the first wave of Finns who settled down in the town of Vadsø) suggests the immigrants' slow integration into the Norwegian society. Different levels of integration have been investigated and some of the results will be presented below.

All through the period, on the average, areas dominated by Finnish settlers had MORE HOUSEHOLDS per inhabited houses than areas where Norwegians were in the majority. The houses were crowded and this is probably one explanation why Finns in particular were exposed to epidemic illnesses

The number of ethnically MIXED PERSONS (persons with one Finnish and one Norwegian parent) increased relatively slowly throughout the period, from 94 persons

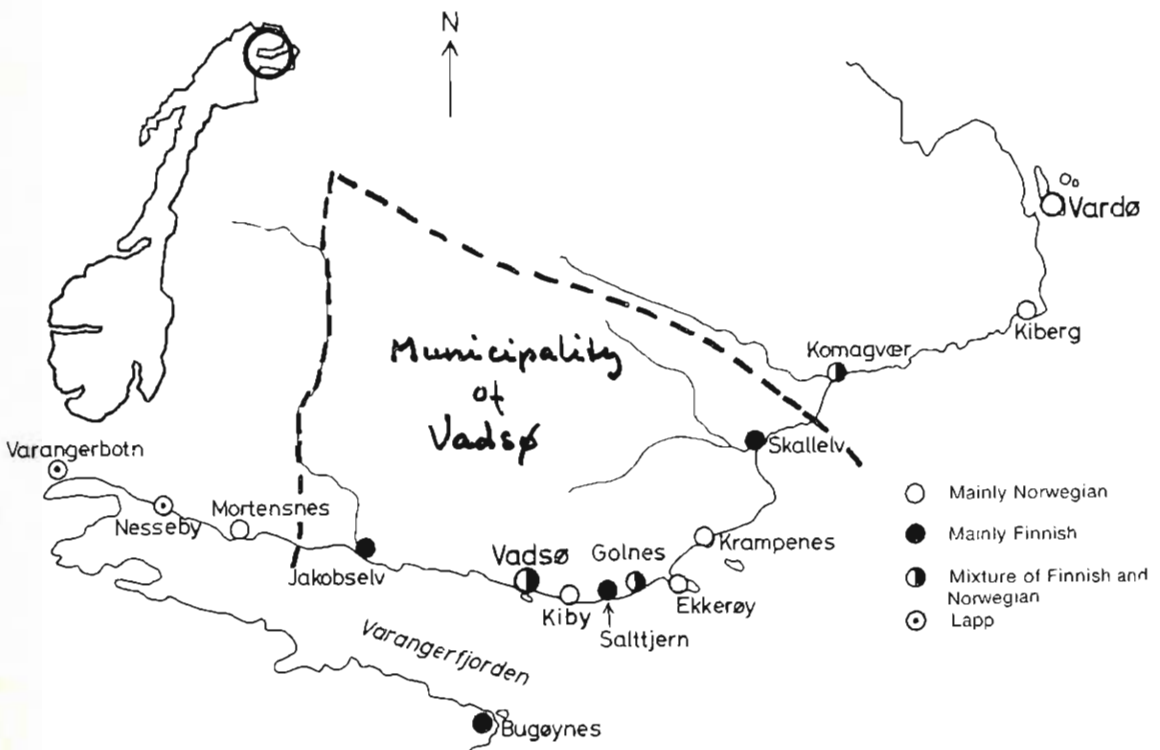
(4% of the total) in 1865 to 297 (7.9%) in 1885. Of the total number of marriages contracted in 1853–63 8.2% were mixed Norwegian–Finnish and in 1885 10% of the married couples in the municipality were mixed. In most such cases the man was Norwegian while the woman Finnish.

Still in 1886 there were no Finnish students in the town's high school though about 70 % of the children who went to elementary schools were Finns.

The Finnish LANGUAGE is still alive in the Vadsø area. In Finnmark there was seen some progress in the Finns' capability to speak Norwegian. But this is not the case in Vadsø. In 1860 a minimum of one person in 54 % of all Finnish families was reported to understand Norwegian, in 1887 the percentage had gone down to 44. In 1869 the vicar

of Vadsø wrote that hardly more than 10 % of the Finns in his area understood Norwegian so well that they could profit from a Norwegian sermon.

One principal explanation why the Finnish language so easily survived in northern Norway is the settlement pattern. The Finns in Vadsø usually settled in colonies of their own, in the urban as well as in the rural districts (cp. map). Some of the village-like settlements (called "vaer" or "strandsteder") were in 1885 inhabited exclusively or almost exclusively by Finns. A result of this was more or less isolation, especially for the married women. The males had better possibilities of getting into contact with Norwegians, e.g. in the fisheries.



Map of North Varanger showing the settlements mentioned in the text and distribution of the ethnic groups. The inset shows the position of Varanger on a map of Norway (Research in Norway 1975).



## CONCLUSION

The Finnish immigration to northern Norway contributed in many ways to the development of this area, especially in the economic and cultural fields. The Finns were an important source of labor (besides working as fishermen, farmers, many Finns made a living as carpenters) at a time when there was a severe lack in this area. They seem to have contributed most in agriculture. In that way the Finns played an important part in making the economy more flexible and more differentiated in northern Norway. The cultural influence of the Finns can still easily be seen in language, in religion, in agricultural technology and in daily usages. Research on the Finnish culture in northern

Norway has been neglected but the last few years have shown great interest in this field. Tromsø Museum, for instance, has undertaken an extensive comparative study of Varanger covering several aspects and concentrating on the mixed cultural landscape of the area. This new interest is emphasized by the fact that for the first time a public report (financed by the Norwegian state) on Finnish culture in northern Norway has been published.

- 1) The migrants from Sweden were mainly Finnish speaking (most of them came from Tornedalen), therefore also they are called "Finns" in this paper.
- 2) 34 % - Torne Valley.  
40 % - Finnish Lapland (of today).

# Siirtolaisuus Pohjois-Suomesta ja -Ruotsista Pohjois-Norjaan 1800-luvulla

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Vadsö Finnmarkissa, Pohjois-Norjassa, tarjoaa edullisen kohteen tarkastella Pohjois-Norjaan 1800-luvulla suuntautunutta voimakasta suomalaista siirtolaisuutta. Runsaasta lähdemateriaalista mainittakoon Suomen Lapin ja Ruotsin Tornionjokilaakson kuntien kirkonkirjat, samoin kuin Oulun ja Norrbottenin läänien maaherrojen raportit. Varsinaisia tilastoja 1800-luvun siirtolaisuudesta Norjaan ei ole. Väestölaskenta ja paikallisten kirkkojen ilmoitukset ovat melko luotettavia, vaikka tavallisesti siirtolaisten lukumäärä väestönlaskennassa oli suurempi kuin kirkonkirjoissa kausisiirtolaisuuden takia.

Tieteellinen kirjallisuus Pohjois-Norjan suomalaisista oli vähäistä aina 1920-luvulle saakka, jolloin aiheesta ilmestyi muutamia lyhyitä tutkielmia. Niistä paras oli Just Qvigstadin suuntaa antava tutkielma. Vasta nyt, 1970-luvulla, on mielenkiinto asiaan herännyt uudelleen.

Suomen, Ruotsin ja Norjan pohjoisosat olivat vuosisatojen ajan olleet yhteydessä toi-

siinsa. Kausisiirtolaiset löysivät tiensä rikkaille kalavesille vanhoja kauppareittejä pitkin. Varsinainen siirtolaisuus Pohjois-Norjaan ei kuitenkaan alkanut ennen kuin 1700-luvulla. Ensimmäisten siirtolaisten määränpääntä olivat Altan alue Finnmarkissa ja Lyngen Tromsössä. 1830-luvun puolivälissä siirtolaisvirta muutti suuntaansa läntisten seutujen kadottaessa viehätöksensä. Tämä muutos johtui osittain kupariteollisuuden rappeutumisesta lännessä, osittain Varangerin alueen rikkaista kalavesistä ja osittain siirtolaisten halusta saada omaa maata, joka oli vielä mahdollista idässä. Vasta 1863 asetettiin maapalstan saamisen ehdoksi norjankielisyys. Suomalaisia siirtokuntia perustettiin useisiin paikkoihin Varangerin vuonon ympäristöön, mutta Vadsøn alue muodostui siirtolaisten kannalta varsinaiseksi magneetiksi. Jotkut alueista olivat täysin suomalaisten asuttamia ja aika ajoin yli puolet koko kunnan asujaimistosta oli suomalaisia.

Muuttoliike Vadsøon tapahtui kolmessa