

Markku Rauhalahhti

The Finnish Forest History Society

The first decennary 1995–2005

The history of Finland and the Finns is closely connected with forests. Throughout history, Finns have lived in and from forests. The very national identity of Finns is largely based on them, and they have been and still are an important source of both economic and psychological well-being for Finns. Against this background, it seems peculiar that, coming into the 1990s, Finland still did not have an association for those interested in the history and traditions concerning the forest. Our country also still lacked a national forest museum, plans for which had, however, been launched in the mid-1980s.

As the national forest museum project was about to be realized, the idea was raised among forest history enthusiasts to establish an association in which people interested in the history of forests and forest traditions could share their knowledge, experiences and thoughts as well as join forces in promoting the research and general interest in the field. Some five months after Lusto, the Finnish Forest Museum, had been opened, the constitutive meeting for the Finnish Forest History Society was called. The Foundation for the Finnish Forest Museum, the background organization behind Lusto, acted as the convenor.

The constitutive meeting was held in the Lusto conference room in Punkaharju, south-east Finland, on 7 December 1994. Twenty

persons were present at the meeting. Juhani Huittinen, the then chair of the Lusto executive committee, chaired the meeting, and Markku Rauhalahhti, who was the museum director of Lusto at the time, acted as secretary. The first general meeting of the Society was held on 28 March 1995, and the by-laws were registered in the association register on 1 November 1996.

According to the by-laws, *'The aim of the Finnish Forest History Society is to promote, from a wide perspective, the research, documentation and public attention of forest history and tradition, to arouse people's interest in it, and to encourage communication between those interested in the theme. In order to fulfil this purpose, the Society will arrange meetings, lectures, discussions and excursions, publish material regarding the field, make proposals, and keep in contact with field organizations both in Finland and abroad.'*

The by-laws also determine that the Society works in close cooperation with the Foundation for the Finnish Forest Museum as well as Lusto, the Finnish Forest Museum.

During its first eleven years, the membership of the Finnish Forest History Society has grown continuously. At the end of 2005, the Society had 294 ordinary and 9 supporting members. The ordinary members are private individuals and the supporting members are organizations. The ordinary members range



Photo: Markku Rauhalahhti 2005

Lumberjack's traditions and culture are one of the interests of the Society. Performance of a lumberjack tradition group.

from forest tradition enthusiasts with quite varying educational and professional backgrounds to forest researchers. The average age of our membership is quite high, and more than half of the members are retired. It is clear that history and tradition begin to interest people as they grow older. Our membership is very stable, and few have resigned from the Society.

The annual general meeting is held in March or April. The affairs of the Society are managed by an executive committee with chair and four to six members. The first chairman of the executive committee in 1995–2000 was Matti Leikola, Professor Emeritus of Forest Management Science at the University of Helsinki. He was succeeded by Markku Rauhalahhti in 2001–2005. Both of the first chairmen have sat on the executive committee throughout the existence of the

Society. Starting in 2006, Juhani Huittinen was elected chairman, having also been active in the establishment of the Society. Timo Kukko, who has acted as the Director of Lusto since 2000, is also a member of the executive committee, and the secretary of the Society, Leena Paaskoski, is also a Lusto official. Contact with the forest museum has thus also been ensured through seats in the executive committee. The Society does not employ any people, since the practical management is handled by the chairman and secretary as well as by the other executive committee members on a project basis.

The activities of the Finnish Forest History Society are organized as volunteer work as far as possible. Various stakeholders have provided financial and other material support on a project basis. A particularly significant financier for the Society's research



Annual excursions to various parts of Finland, occasionally abroad as well, belong to Society's activities.

and publishing projects has been the Metsämiesten Säätiö Foundation. Office services and accounting have been arranged in cooperation with Lusto, the Finnish Forest Museum. The expenses of various excursions have been covered by participation fees. The Society's membership fee in 2005 was 15 euros for ordinary members and 45 euros for supporting members.

Lecture seminars and excursions

The Finnish Forest History Society organizes seminars, lectures and excursions for its members. The first lecture seminar was arranged in September 1995 at Lusto. The theme was *The Finns and the Forest from the 1850s to the 21st century*. There has usually been one lecture seminar per year,

arranged typically in connection with the general meeting and lasting half a day. The following introduces a few examples of the themes covered: *what is forest history?*, *the history of mechanizing forest work*, *forest professionals in the changing society* and *early forest history*. The lectures are principally directed at our members, but representatives of relevant stakeholder groups have also been invited to attend some of the seminars. The seminars have attracted 30 to 50 participants and have been free of charge.

The first excursion of the Finnish Forest History Society was arranged in May 1996. The destination was the traditional Evo school of forestry where Finnish forest instruction was born as well as the area around Evo. On this excursion - as on all excursions arranged by the Society - participants received a thorough introduction to



Photo: Lusto/Enso collection

In 1999–2002, the Society carried out a comprehensive history project concerning the changes to the work and lives of the people working in forestry. Forest foremen at a timber landing in 1977.

the history of the forests as well as the general cultural history of the area. The custom has been to arrange one excursion per year and two when one of the excursions has been made abroad. The participants remit a participation fee relative to the costs of each excursion in question.

The excursions have taken us to various parts of Finland from Lapland to the southern coast and from the eastern frontier to the west coast. The excursions in

Finland have invariably lasted two days. A carefully planned programme with tours of various destinations as well as guidance and briefings by experts make each excursion a well-balanced and informative event. A short seminar is occasionally included in the excursion programme, which includes local experts and enthusiasts. During the coach rides and evenings, the participants have time to immerse themselves in discussions and simply enjoy each other's company.

The excursions are also meant primarily for Society members, and the participants have numbered 30 to 50.

The Finnish Forest History Society has organized four excursions abroad: to Sweden and Norway in 1997, to Russian Karelia in 1999, Estonia in 2003 and Germany in 2005. The international excursions have lasted 2 to 4 days and usually attracted roughly 30 participants.

Research projects and publications

An essential part of the mission of the Finnish Forest History Society is to promote research on forest history and traditions. The Society has made several proposals for research projects and acted as an expert organization in many research projects in addition to conducting research activities themselves.

In 1996–1999, the Society realized a wide-scale project for collecting material on forest traditions. References to forest history collections in various archives were stored in the ForestTree database of the University of Helsinki Library. More than 1,000 references were stored. They entail information from the archives of the businesses, cooperative bodies and trade organizations operating within the field. Furthermore, the database includes references to material collecting projects, interviews and questionnaires concerning field traditions, in addition to unpublished student theses. In 2001, the Finnish Forest History Society compiled a publication of the reference data called *Metsähistorian arkistolähteitä Suomessa* (“Forest History Archive Sources in Finland”), which was edited by Katri Kaunisto.

In 1999–2002, the Finnish Forest History Society carried out a national forest traditions recording project entitled *Forest professionals in the changing society*. In connection with the forest traditions collection project mentioned above, it was concluded that little information had been collected on the fates

of individuals wrapped up in the rapid developments within the forestry field since the 1960s. Information on foresters, forest officials and the women working within the field as well as on the impacts of mechanization on the work of forest professionals was particularly scarce. The forest traditions recording project launched in 1999 sought to address these holes in our forest knowledge. In this project, the Finnish Forest History Society was partnered with the Institute for Cultural Research at the University of Helsinki in addition to the Lusto, Finnish Forest Museum. The project was financed by the Metsämiesten Säätiö Foundation with a total of 2.4 million Finnish marks (400,000 euros). Docent Hanna Snellman, PhD, from the University of Helsinki acted as the scientific director of the project, and the principal researchers were Katri Kaunisto, MA, and Leena Paaskoski, MA.

Over the course of three years, a total of 1,053 forest professionals were interviewed for the project, with approximately 2,500 hours of interviews recorded. The interviewees consisted of men and women who were working or who had worked in various positions at forestry organizations from all over the country – lumberjacks, logging camp cooks, forest officers, forest machine contractors, transportation contractors, machine operators, office personnel, etc. The material provides a comprehensive picture of the changes which have occurred in the forest business during the latter half of the 20th century as well as the impacts such changes have had on the work and lives of the people working in the field. The interview material, which has been transcribed onto paper from the interview tapes, has been stored in the archives of the Lusto, the Finnish Forest Museum and may be accessed by authorized researchers. Based on the interview material, several academic theses are being composed, and the materials have also been used as reference material for numerous articles and presentations.

The Finnish Forest History Society was also involved in the forest music working group

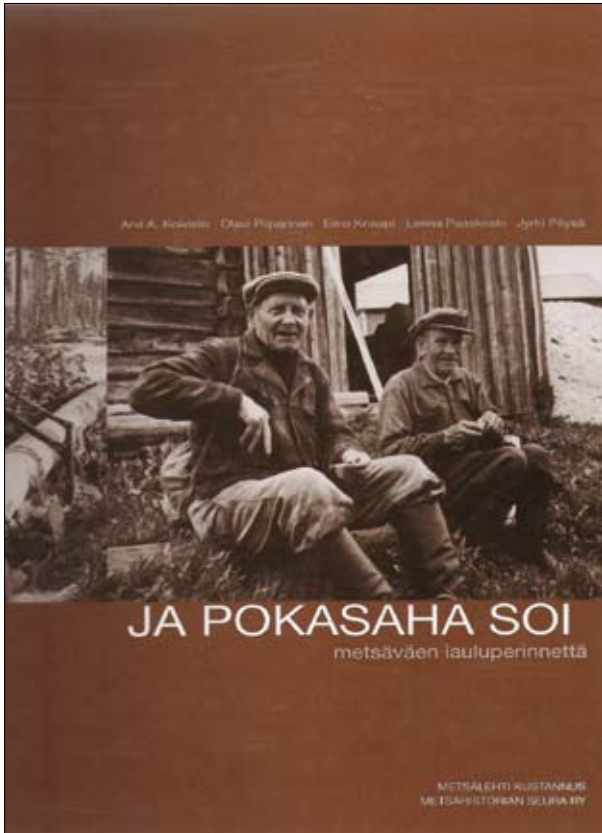


Photo: Lusto/Timo Kilpeläinen

In 2003, the Society published an illustrated book containing old forest songs with their music and background.

instituted by Lusto from 1999 to 2000. The working group collected lyrics and sheet music of old forest-related songs and tunes from archives and other sources. More than one thousand sets of song lyrics or versions thereof were uncovered. Based on the results of the working group, the Finnish Forest History Society in cooperation with Lusto launched the “forest songbook project”. The 300-page illustrated culture book *Ja pokasaha soi - Metsäväen lauluperinnettä*, which contained old forest songs with their music and background, was published in 2003. In 2004, two CDs of songs included in the book were released.

In cooperation with Lusto, the Finnish Forest History Society has also published the Vuosilusto (Annual Ring) journals of 1998–1999, 2000–2001 and 2002–2003, and in 2005, a manuscript for Vuosilusto 2004–

2005 journal in English was in progress. In addition to specialist articles, the Vuosilusto journals have demonstrated the operations and activities of the Society and Lusto over the years.

In 2003, the Finnish Forest History Society launched a literary project, the object of which is to compose an illustrated work on the history of Finnish forest use. In addition, the 10th anniversary meeting of 7 December 2004 decided to put together an expert working group to compile a comprehensive basic anthology on the history of Finnish forest utilization. The Society has also promoted other publishing activities in the field by drafting proposals and providing expert assistance in book projects, not to mention organizing traditional functions and festivals.

Collaboration and communication

The Finnish Forest History Society keeps in close contact with various traditional and historical associations as well as other relevant organizations. Our international contacts are first and foremost directed at the other Nordic Countries. The cooperation with the Lusto Finnish Forest Museum has been especially close. Society representatives act as experts in several history and tradition projects within the field.

The Finnish Forest History Society is a member of the Finnish Forest Association, which is the cooperative body for the various parties in forestry as well as the relevant stakeholders. The Society is also a member of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, the membership of which covers all scientific societies in the country. Through these important contacts, the Finnish Forest History Society is provided with a vast network of contacts within the forest sector as well as the sphere of research.

Nordic contacts have been fostered ever since the mid-1990s. The cooperation is coordinated by a working group which includes the forest history societies of Denmark, Finland and Sweden and as well as the forest museums of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The chairman of the Finnish Forest History Society has been chairing this cooperation during the 2002–2006 period. Each country takes turns in arranging the annual Nordic Forest History Conference. In 2002, the Finnish Forest History Society organized a joint Nordic forest history excursion to Estonia, which attracted 31 participants from the Nordic Countries, and the Society is next in line to organize the conference in the summer of 2006. The Society has also conducted correspondence and exchanged information with other countries, such as Iceland, Estonia and Germany.

For the purpose of open communication, the website of the Finnish Forest History Society can be read in Finnish, English, German and Swedish. In the early years, the Society kept in touch with its members by

sending out member letters three to four times a year. Since the year 2000, contacts with the members have been maintained primarily via the *Susikko* member magazine issued three times a year. In addition to current issues and bulletins, the magazine publishes short articles, excursion reports, book reviews, etc.

The Society has also kept in touch with the media in connection with, for instance, lecture seminars and excursions as well as the various research and publishing projects. The activities and publications of the Society have been displayed each year in exhibitions arranged at the *Metsäpäivät* ('Forest Days') annual event organized by the Finnish Forest Association, as well as at the Forest Culture Days event arranged by Lusto.

The first ten years in summary

During the first decennary of the Finnish Forest History Society, interest and activity in forest history and traditions have been brisk, and the research and publishing activities in the field have even shown signs of increase in recent years. Some twenty historical reviews or memoirs are published each year. In recent years, several doctoral dissertations and other student theses have been composed with regard to the forest field. A variety of forest traditional events or functions where forest traditions are part of the programme are arranged in various parts of the country.

The Finnish Forest History Society has been active in promoting forest research as well as interest in and the visibility of the forest field, not only through its own research, publishing and communications activities but also especially through various proposals and cooperation. Contacts with other instances within or relative to the field have brought new kinds of inspiration into the activities of the Society, and international cooperation has widened the geographical dimensions of our activities.



Photo: Lusto/Vesa Anttila

The joint Nordic contact group for forest history in 2003. From left Yngve Astrup (Norway), Markku Rauhalahhti (Finland), Jette Baagøe (Denmark), Anders Paulsson (Sweden) and Olav Kaveldiget (Norway).



Photo: Markku Rauhalahhti

A joint Nordic forest history excursion to Estonia was arranged in September 2002. One destination was the Järvelja training and experimental forest of University of Tartu.



Executive committee of the Finnish Forest History Society in 2005. From left Matti Leikola, Esko Pakkanen, Leena Paaskoski (secretary), Juhani Huittinen, Jaana Laine, Esa Ihalainen, Markku Rauhalahhti (chairman) and Jarmo Tammenmaa.

Through the Finnish Forest History Society, many individuals interested in the field can form useful contacts and find new enthusiasm for their own hobby. For researchers, the Society opens doors and cooperation channels in addition to providing a platform for presenting research results and ideas. A good example of this is the forest traditions collection project *Forestry professionals in the changing society* alluded to above, the interview materials of which have provided material for several academic theses and topics for numerous lectures and magazine articles.

The first ten years of activities for promoting the forest field have shown that the Finnish Forest History Society plays a significant role as a guardian of Finnish forest history and heritage, in addition to acting as a cooperative body for people interested in the field. The activity of our members as well as the increase in and stability of our membership stand in evidence of the fact that the activities of the Society have met its members' expectations.



Photo: Lusto/H. Timgren collection/E. M. Andersen

Excursion of the Finnish Forest Association in 1907 in Punkaharju.