

DIANE L. RICHARD LOOKS AT THE ONLINE RESOURCES FOR RESEARCHING YOUR ANCESTORS FROM FINLAND

Need to “Finnish” Your Genealogy Research?

THREE YEARS AGO WHEN discussing Finnish research, we could talk about two major online resources whose content was exclusively about Finns. Three years later, we will talk about several more exciting resources. As with US research, the increased availability of online records makes it easier than ever to do Finnish research from the comfort of your home. And, the ability to speak Finnish and Swedish is not required - I'll share some great resources that will help you navigate the non-English elements of the documents we'll talk about.

Also, previously one had to research Finnish family via micro-filmed Finnish records or write letters to the local parish. These were great when you knew what parish your ancestors were from and they conveniently constrained themselves to being born, marrying and dying in that parish, and it quickly became more challenging if your ancestors had the nerve to marry elsewhere and/or have migrated into that parish from elsewhere. The ability to do searches countrywide or regionally, makes it much easier to locate those more mobile individuals.

Let's talk about the five major resources for Finnish records.

HISKI CHURCH RECORDS

www.genealogia.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=109&Itemid=286&lang=en

Short Summary: A free extensive collection of transcribed and searchable countrywide collection of church records (HisKi -- christening, marriage, burial, movement, communion, etc), Finnish Cemetery records, Biographical indexes, records of Finnish com-

munities in the US, etc. Good English interface.

Details: Though I will focus on the church records, do not overlook the other resources available on the website: The Parishes of Finland (nice overview information of the parishes, location and the available records),

to late 1800s. (Note: for more modern records, you will need to contact the church or a local researcher.) The provided link takes you directly to the HisKi project. Once on this page, I suggest you first read the “brief” titled “instructions and examples”. Once you've done that, click on “search program for history books”. This brings you to a page that, on the left, has an alphabetical list of parishes and on the right has a coun-



Emigration Articles and Books (many in Finnish and Swedish and some available in English), Biographical Indexes, Personal Names, Finnish Cemeteries (many records of cemeteries in Finland with photographs!), Churches (Finnish Churches in America) and a Picture Gallery (worldwide)!

There is a pretty good English-language interface available where you can readily access HisKi, the drop down menus to get to the other mentioned resources, etc. You will find that the news items and any “error” messages will not be in English.

For most parishes, the Church records available cover from the parish formation to about the mid-

try map showing provinces and other regional elements.

First, let's explore the list. I had many generations of the Kujanpää family, previously named Lammi and many allied families who were from Ylistaro, Vaasa, Finland. To search on these records, one scrolls down the list till we see Ylistaro and then highlights it. Next, click “selected” and you will be taken to a page that lists the Ylistaro records available, states during what time period they are available and gives you a list of the neighboring parishes (as in the US and Canada, it was not unusual for individuals to marry in adjacent parishes, so, if you do not find a baptism, marriage or

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burial entry where you expect to, check out the neighboring communities, especially for marriages and burials!). Note that the database does not include the records for all parishes nor are the records complete for the included parishes. So, understanding what records are or are not included is very important.

Each search screen asks for versions of basic information — names, dates, places. Basically, you can enter as much or as little in the search screen as you know. You can put one piece of information, you can put a partial piece of information (say the first three letters of a name), or you can fill in every box! This is a very powerful search tool! I have used the first initials of first names, last names and patronymics and been able to find information!

Though the HisKi database does not contain original documents, these are what some of the entries, identified through such a search, would look like in the original records.

Now let's go back and explore the map on the HisKi main page. This feature is handy if you only happen to know that your family came from some place like Vaasa Finland, since Vaasa is both a parish and a county located in the Province of Ostrobothnia (or you only know what province). We happen to know that the city of Vaasa/Vasa (Finnish/Swedish) is in Region #15 on the map. When you click on a region, the left-hand menu then lists out the communities in the region. You can then either click "all" to search in all of these communities or you can highlight one or more (use control, left-click for a PC mouse) and then click "selected".

Now you see a table that summarizes what records are available for each community. You can then select a community or do a global search across the records of the identified communities.

Since the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has

microfilmed most of these records, you can access copies of the original records locally to verify what you found. And, increasingly, through the Finland Family History Association, to be dis-

tains almost 1 million entries! The two largest databases are passenger records (Finnish Steamship Company, 1892-1910, 318,000 records) and passport records (1890-1950, 189,000 records). You will also find: References to books and newspapers (19,000 records), Register of Australian Finns (3,800 records), Register of New Zealand Finns (1,100 records), etc.

In addition to the Emigrant Register, which we will explore further, the website also contains: a database of its library (over 9,000 publications), a sample of photos (several hundred of the over 12,000 in the collection) and the Migration and Ethnicity Research Network. You can access all of these by looking under the heading "Online Databases" in the left-hand navigation.

Let's take a quick look at "Passenger Lists" since this is one of the largest databases and so one is more likely to have success!

Your search options are basic — Name search (Last name, First name) or Sounds like search (Last name, First name). Like the HisKi database, you only have to enter as much data as you want to. So, if you have a surname that

can be misspelled (or you don't want to deal with the special character letters), you can just enter the first few letters of a last name or first name (no special characters are needed). For example, if I put in Raj for the last name, the surnames that come up are Raj, Raja, Raja-Aho, Rajahalme until you come to Rajala (the last entry). My father's great-grandmother, Ida Rajala, emigrated in 1907. We have found her in the Ellis Island database. Let's see if she is listed in this database and what we learn.

When I searched on Ida's passenger record in this database, I learned some new information not found on the New York Passenger Manifest, such as how much she paid for her ticket, what ship she



These are some of the ways that the family members "signed" their signature throughout the 200+ year history of the family farm.

cussed later in this article, many of these documents (and more) are becoming available as online digital images.

EMIGRANT REGISTER
www.migrationinstitute.fi/index_e.php

Short Summary: A computerized database containing over 550,000 entries, including passport records (1890-1950), passenger records of the Finnish Steamship Company (1892-1910) and more. You can search for free, but full access requires payment and registration.

Details: The Emigrant Register available through the Institute of Migration has been around for several years and currently con-

took from Finland to her port of departure (England) and the dates she departed from Finland and then from England. And, if we had not already had her Ellis Island information, this would have given us the information to pinpoint which ship and on what date she sailed to facilitate getting the associated Castle Garden, Ellis Island or other passenger record.

In late 2010 or early 2011, it will be adding more databases, such as the records of tens of thousands of Finnish emigrants through the port of Gothenburg. These are very important as the mentioned Kujanpää family were not found in the online passenger records and they were found listed in the port of Gothenburg records.

Note: This website was found to be in a state of flux as we went to press and so the navigation and the service options may be different by the time you read this article and access the site. Feel free to contact Diane with any questions should this occur.

FINLAND FAMILY HISTORY ASSOCIATION

www.digiarkisto.org/sshy/index_eng.htm

Short Summary: Website contains images of original church records (e.g., communion books). This project was started in 2004 and they have put a tremendous amount of material online since then. There is an English interface, though think of it more as online digitized microfilm. You need to use the menu to find the community and records you seek and then manually scroll through them as you would a microfilm. And, they are well worth the effort! All the digitized material is available to everyone for free though paying members and donations are appreciated.

Details: A great and growing repository of digitized Finnish

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Photo of Ida Rajala, front, and possibly Amalia Pontinen, whom Ida traveled with from Soini Finland to Boston.

church records. Besides the fact that you will be looking at digitized images of documents, this collection is great as it doesn't limit itself to baptism, marriage and death records. It also includes communion records, movement records and other records kept by the parish, which can really provide some interesting details about your ancestors.

Basically, click on "church records" and you'll be taken to an alphabetical list of the parishes. Select a parish of interest and then there will be a list of the available records organized by record type and listed chronologically. Click on a record type and you will be taken to a list of what is available. Do bring your patience with you. Remember that the interface lists the records in Finnish and in the

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manner in which they were kept. This most often means that it helps to know what parish and what farm name is relevant. If you do not have this basic information, I suggest you first use the HisKi records with its global search engine, to try and identify at least the parish and hopefully the farm. For example, if I didn't know that Kujanpää became the family surname and that for many generations they were known by their farm — Lammi, I would never have found the older records!

To give you a sense of the richness of what is available online, for Ylistaro, there are communion records back to 1727-44 and baptism, marriage and death records go back to 1718. I'm sure I don't need to bore you with the details of how much more time consuming and challenging it was to access such records before 2004!

FINNISH HISTORICAL
NEWSPAPER LIBRARY
<http://digi.lib.helsinki.fi/sanomalehti/secure/main.html>

Short Summary: Helsinki University Library is digitizing all newspapers published in Finland 1771-1900. This website is only for the bravest since the newspapers are entirely in Finnish/Swedish, with no English translation! Though, you can search on place/family names and look for connections. There is a very good English interface to use for searching.

Details: The National Library has digitized all newspapers published in Finland 1771-1900. The Newspaper Library contains approximately 1.7 million pages. The Historical Newspaper Library is continually being expanded with newspapers from the turn of the 20th century.

Access the material via browse, search, advanced search or an article index. Note that the index was compiled during the late 19th century and indexing

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does not follow modern principles. The Index is in Finnish and Swedish and the references are in Finnish or Swedish, depending on the original language of the article. There is a link to the newspaper if it has been digitized.

The English language version of the site is very understandable and the search engine uses fields you are familiar with, such as what words you want to search on, if you have a date range limitation you want to impose, if you want to limit your search to a specific newspaper (long drop down menu of included newspapers), etc.

As with US newspaper research, remember that not all newspapers were in existence for all periods of time. And, the site itself shares a version of the following:

1. The quality of the pictures via search are inferior to those found via browsing.
2. The text has been read with an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) program and there may be misspellings and errors depending on the condition of the originals.
3. The basic search is a fuzzy search, which means that it includes words that resemble the search terms. Because the words do not have to be correctly spelled, this makes it possible to find words with e.g., old spelling. If the resulting list isn't what you want, try an advanced search using search words suggested by the fuzzy search program.

A search on Ylistaro gave over 500 results. I then narrowed the search by asking it to search on Ylistaro and Lammi. Remember the fuzzy search information — it also pulled entries for Ylistaron, Ylistarossa, Ylistaroon, Lammit. This still gave over 200 entries when I limited the search to pre-1850. Next, I set the upper year as 1800 and six articles were found.



Here is a section of an article found in the 14 May 1773 edition of "idningar Utgifne af et Sällskap i Åbo" which was written in Swedish.

FINNISH NATIONAL ARCHIVES
www.arkisto.fi/

Short Summary: The National Archives of Finland provides information on Finland's history and access to archives of its records. Some records and photographs have been digitized and can be searched via online databases. Most of the site is in Finnish or Swedish.

Details: From the main page, the English-language interface will

only give you an overview of Finland's National Archives. You need to delve into the Finnish interface (by selecting the Finnish flag at the top (the word Suomi will show up under your cursor)) to really get to the records of most interest to family historians.

After quite a bit of wandering around the website, this is the English-language interface to the Digital Archive of the Finnish National Archives, http://digi.narc.fi/digi/index.ka?lang=en_US, and a basic "how to use" page, <http://digi.narc.fi/digi/instructions.ka>.

To actually search the holdings, on the main English-language page, choose "search engine". The search engine is very basic and employs a free word search methodology. On this page, there is also reference to a "tree view" which allows you to browse the holdings.

Via the "tree view", I could pick Ylistaron seurakunta — which means Ylistaro Parish. When I chose that, I then saw a heading for Ylistaro Parish Archive (Arkisto). It then laid out in a linear fashion, a lot of the same records discussed under the Finland Family History Association. The difference is that these records are presented by record type and digitized sections

Untamala	Kammarenluoma N:9 (nytt 1753)			
	nytt horta öfver ähru och äng med beskrifning	Ullman	1710-17	1
	Horta öfver 4 styck nytt bygg ähru och äng med beskrifning	D*		1
Bauter	nytt Horta öfver ähru och äng, se			
Lammis	Lehmäjohti by i Sterbyse socken			
Somppi	B:27 1-15 (1753)			
Untamala	Horta öfver Heisala nytt ähru			
Kiemi	och äng med beskrifning	Ahman	1771-75	1
Hovista	N:1 Heisala, horta öfver odlade			
Heisala	ägor med beskrifning	D*		1
Järvelmä				
Untamo				

Uudistushakemisto document showing the Lammi farm enumerated under Untamala — date not known.

with no further breakdown into farm.

Given this, I suggest using the search engine directly. Recognize that if you put two words, it will treat them as “word 1, word 2”. When you put in one word, it treats it as a fuzzy search and so any word that has, say Lammi, in it, will be listed in the results.

I again searched on Ylistaro. Because of how the archival records are organized, it was important that I knew that Ylistaro was located in Vaasa Province (Vaasan Lääni). I came across an 1899 document for Ylistaro filled with names and labels (e.g., Torpari). There are many familiar family names ...Sippola, Rautio, Rantala, Plummi (became Blom upon emigrating) and finally Kujanpää. This is significant since, in 1900, the family emigrated to the US, never to return to Finland, and by 1901, they were using the surname Acey. Looking further, it appears that it was some form of petition. I also came across something called a “reform index” (*Uudistushakemisto*) under the aegis of the Land Surveying Board. I found an entry covering the Lammi farm — now I just need to figure out what these documents are telling me!

I know what website I will be spending a bit more time delving into. As you can see, the Finnish National Archives is posting digital material and some of it is unique in that it's not just church records, which are covered quite well by websites already discussed.

TRANSLATING FINNISH DOCUMENTS
By now, your head might be swimming a bit with all the options available for Finnish research. And, I can also imagine that after looking at a few handwritten documents, you are not sure whether you want to try and tackle doing research in Finnish and Swedish language documents. Before you decide not to do this, know that it is possible, with a little bit of perseverance (and most of us wouldn't be genealogists if we didn't have that tendency), and some helpful guides to at least learn the

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skeleton information included in any of the documents identified. Yes, you may not get the full meaning of an entry or perhaps find words that you cannot translate, etc., but, I can tell you that, even with those gaping holes, you still have the opportunity to learn something about your Finnish ancestors in the records of their homeland!

So, don't let those Finnish and Swedish terms frustrate you! There are enough tools available to help us understand Finnish documents. They will not give you a full translation, but enough that you will know the person's name (and with patronymics the first name of the father), occupation, social status, marital status, age at death, what someone died of, etc. Note that all of these resources list the Finnish, Swedish and English terms. It was not unusual for records to have a blend of Swedish and Finnish terms used, and then history played a part in deciding which language was used for records, when!

1. Occupation abbreviations used in HisKi, www.engr.uvic.ca/~syli/geneo/abbreviations/occupation.html
2. Finnish Genealogical Word List, https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Finnish_Genealogical_Word_List
3. Swedish Genealogical Word List, https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Swedish_Genealogical_Word_List

Note that each of the Word Lists has an upfront piece that talks about the language and its rules — very helpful, especially to know the order of the alphabet, since after “z”, you then have ä for Finnish and å, ä and ö for Swedish!

I have found that Google Translate from Finnish to English, <http://translate.google.com/?hl=en&tab=wT#fi|en|>, works pretty well and it's faster and easier than trying to decipher a word list. It might not give you a “perfect” translation, but for the purpose of achieving a basic understanding of what information is in front of you, it should do the trick. Genealogy terms are not necessarily the forte of any online translator, so I do suggest having the

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already-mentioned work lists handy, just in case!

To help you with Finnish accent marks, diacritics, etc., use this online Finnish keyboard from TypeIt, <http://finnish.typeit.org/> (other language keyboards are also available). I highly recommend doing something like this, over downloading language packs to use with your software — my computer never fully recovered from a Japanese language one I downloaded years ago! Granted, your computer probably comes with a character map, so by the time you find it, search on the character you need and cut and paste it into your document, the TypeIt keyboard could have done it faster — I speak from experience with writing Kujanpää for the last 23 years in documents (I still just copy and paste it from an old document each time I use it the first time in a new document!).

CONCLUSION

Let me reiterate that these are wonderful resources for Finnish research. You can now sit at a computer and delve into Finnish records covering from the early 20th century back to the early 1700s, if not earlier. You can do this using an easy-to-use English-language interface. You do not have to understand a word of Finnish or Swedish to learn about when your ancestors were born, baptized, married, died/buried, emigrated, etc. Though, if you want to learn about their status (e.g., farm owner or laborer), occupation or cause of death, the suggested word lists will tell you the meaning of about 95 percent of the terms that you will come across.

Happy hunting those Finnish ancestors!

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