



**Siirtolaisuusinstituutti
Migrationsinstitutet
Institute of Migration**

The Dynamics of the Finnish Migration to America and the Development of Emigration Databases

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The Extent of Finnish Migration to America

Finland has traditionally been a country of emigration (Figure 1). During the past one hundred years over 1 million people have moved to other countries. Depending on the time and country, 20-40 % of the emigrants returned to Finland. Without any emigration there would be 6-7 million inhabitants in Finland (now 5.2 million) (The Genealogical Society of Finland 2004).

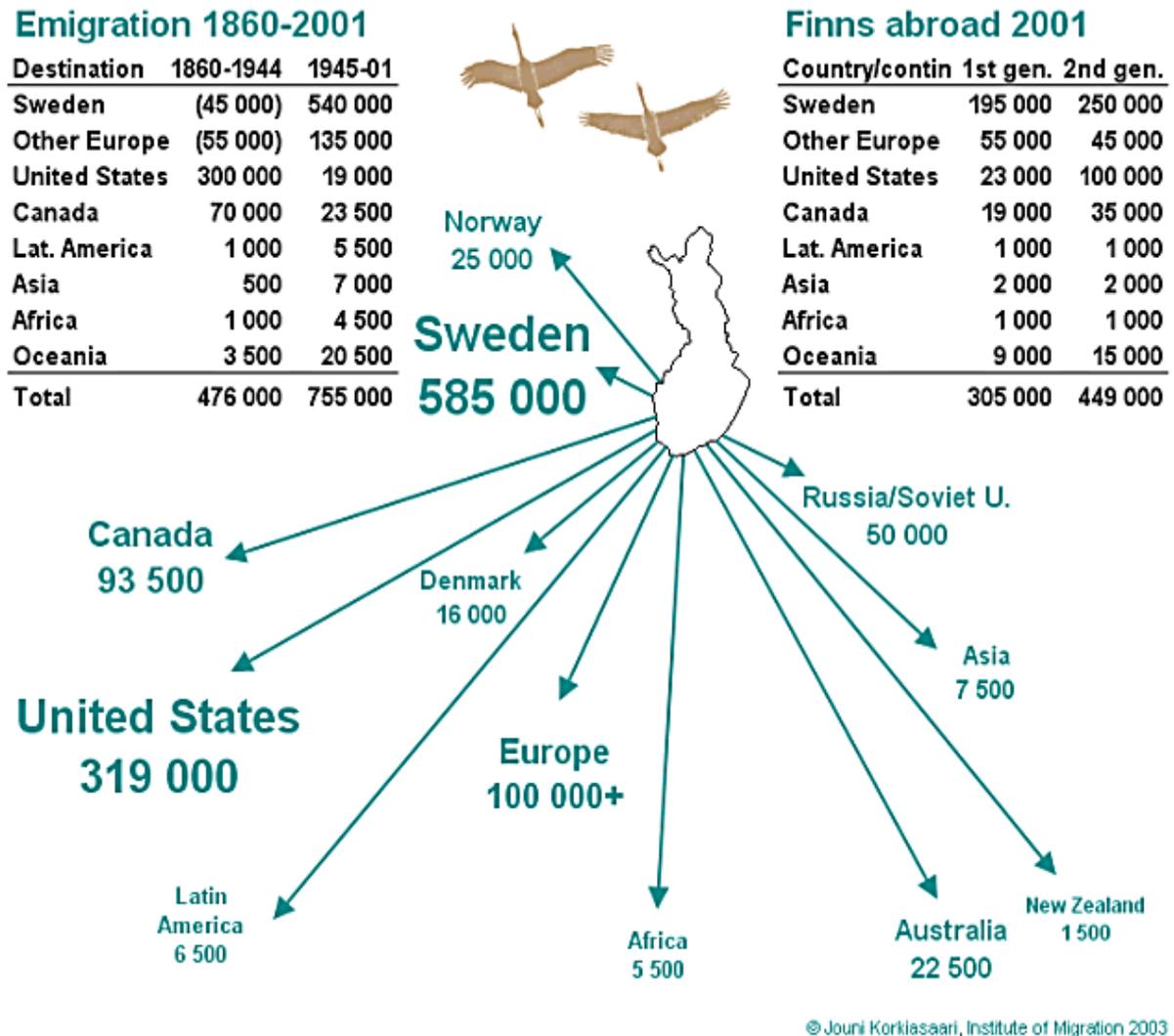


Figure 1. Emigration from Finland 1860-2001 and Finns abroad 2001.

The first Finns and Swedes came to America in the 1600's when Finland was still a province of the Swedish Empire. The first Swedish expedition landed at the mouth of the Delaware River in 1638, and in 1640 a few Finns arrived. About 500-600 Finns moved to New Sweden, Delaware's Swedish colony. Some came from the Finnish forest areas of Sweden and some came from Vasa and Korsholm in Ostrobothnia. In the beginning of the 19th century a few hundred moved to Alaska. There are known instances of emigration from Munsala in the 1840's and 1850's, but it is not known how many emigrated to Alaska nor who jumped ship (Niemi 2003:1; Kero 1996).

European emigration to America has been divided, mainly on the basis of the emigrants' land of departure and of the timing of the emigration, into old and new. Finland is usually consid-

ered to be one of the new immigration countries. This new immigration didn't occur in force until the end of the 19th century (Kero 1974:22).

The lure of migration to America spread to Finland partly from northern Norway, partly from Sweden, and partly by means of Finnish sailors who had begun migrating to California at the time of the Gold Rush or shortly thereafter. Emigration from Norway started already in the 1820's, Sweden got along strongly in the 1840's and Finland 20-30 years after Sweden (Kero 1996:55).

North America suffered a labor shortage in the 1860's and 1870's, and the influx of immigrants helped to solve the problem. A continuous stream of emigrants began in 1867. During the period of 1870-1929 around 350 000 persons emigrated to the countries across the sea and the largest emigration was during the period 1899-1913 with over 20 000 emigrants during the peak years. Emigration decreased after 1923, when authorities started to regulate immigration. About 38 million people emigrated from Europe to the United States during the years 1821-1929 (Figure 2) (Kero 1974:16; Kero 1996:54-56).

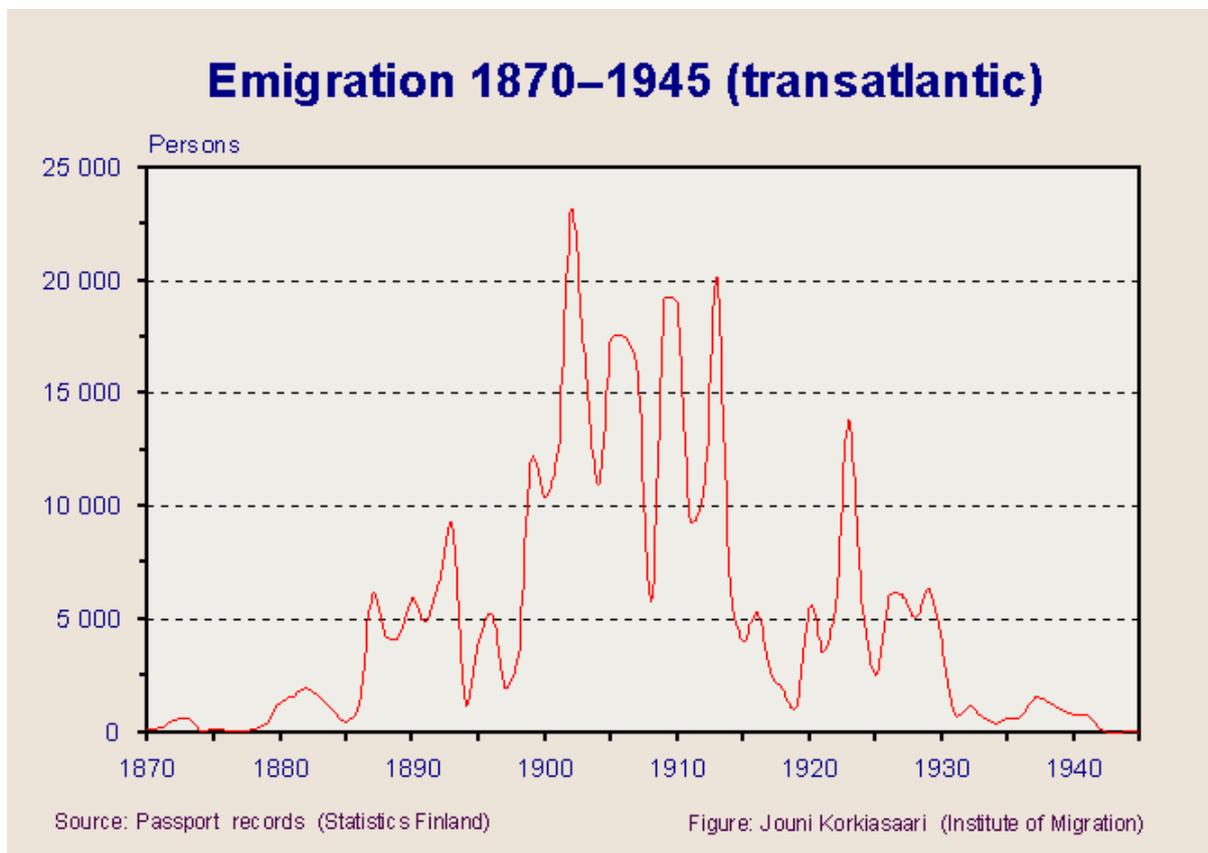


Figure 2. Transatlantic emigration from Finland 1870-1945.

The emigration to North America has been characterized as an Ostrobothnian phenomenon – e.g. during the period 1870-1914 52 per cent of the emigrants came from Vaasa province and a third from Southern Ostrobothnia (Figure 3). Other remarkable provinces have been Oulu (15.8 %), Turku-Pori (14.5 %) and Viipuri (5 %) (Kero 1996:56, 58).

Emigration 1870 – 1914

Per mille

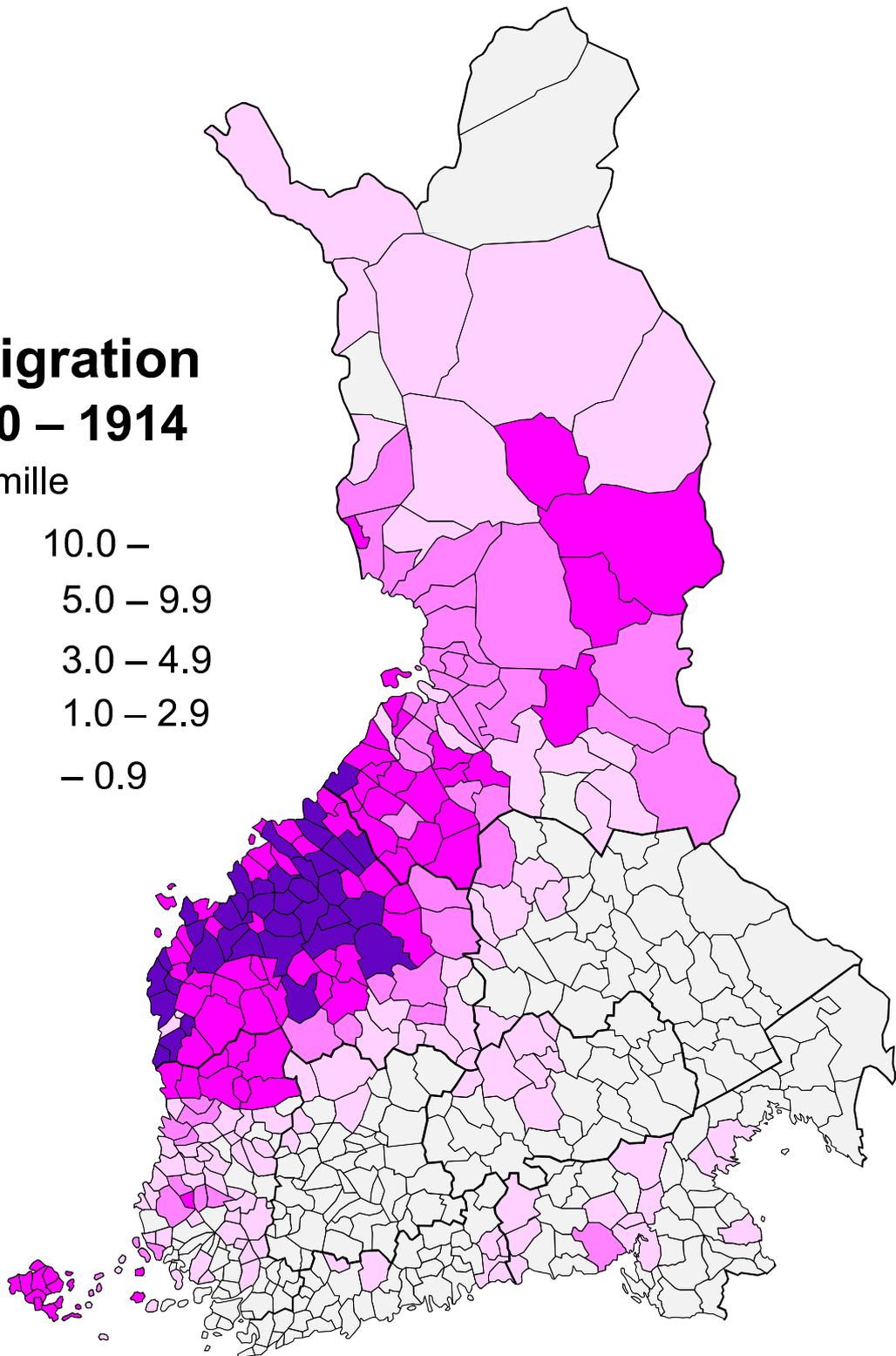
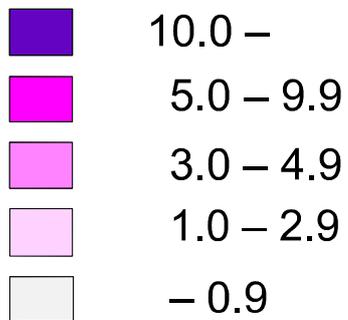


Figure 3. The volume of emigration from Finland by municipality, 1870-1914 (%) (Kero 1974:51).

The Journey from Finland to America

Two-thirds of the emigrants had to borrow ticket money from Finland or from someone who had emigrated before them. If they couldn't scrape up the money, they couldn't emigrate. Once they had the money, it was necessary to get a passport. They needed a church-issued birth certificate and a certificate of non-objection from the police authority. After 1903 men of conscription age had to submit proof of military service. When they had the required documents they went to the port of departure. Some steamship companies checked the health of the passengers because the United States refused to admit sick immigrants, and the ship companies had to return them to their home country at no charge. Four percent were rejected at point of departure. The most common reasons for rejections were the eye disease trachoma and tuberculosis (Niemi 2003:2).

Most of the Finns emigrated to North America through England (Figure 4). Only a small part of the Finnish emigration went through Germany. It was also possible to travel directly to America through Norway, a possibility that many emigrants from North Finland used. Some Finnish emigrants chose to board an ocean liner in Copenhagen. In the 1920's a great many Finns took the route from Gothenburg in Sweden directly to New York.

The Journey from Finland to America

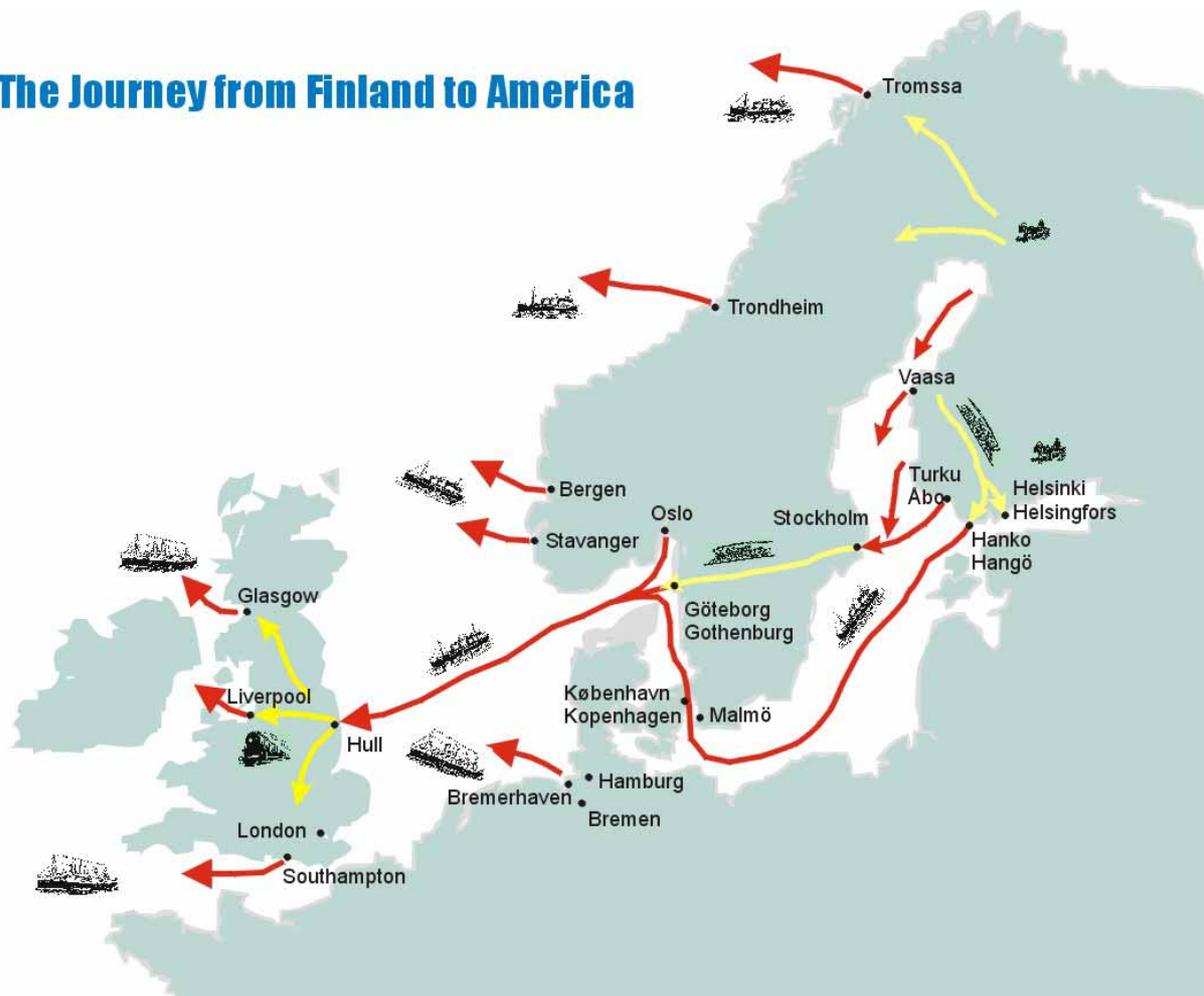


Figure 4. The journey from Finland to America.

Those emigrants whose journey went through England started in the 19th century at first with coastal vessels to Sweden, mainly to Stockholm, from where it was possible to take a ship directly to England or Germany. In 1874 the Wasa-Nordsjö Steamship, Inc. sailed few times per summer from Vaasa to Hull, England. The most popular option, however, was to take the train from Stockholm to Gothenburg and continue with a ship to England. It was also possible to board a ship in Malmö.

The travel route changed substantially at the end of the 1880's when the German shipbrokers Norddeutscher Loyd and HAPAG started trafficking from Hanko, the southernmost harbor in Finland, to Stockholm, Copenhagen and Lübeck and further to Hull in England. In the autumn of 1891 the Finnish Steamship Company started regular traffic between Hanko and Hull. The company also made an agreement with the Companies running the Ocean Liners from England to America. From the beginning of the 20th century most of the emigrants from Finland traveled with the Finnish Steamship company. During World War 1914-1920 no ships went from Hanko and the emigrants had to leave through Sweden again.

One of the most long-lived passenger steamers at the Hanko-Copenhagen-Hull route was the Arcturus, a 2155 gross ton vessel, built by Gourlay Bros & Co, Dundee in 1898 for the Finland Steamship Company (Figure 5). She sailed between Hanko/Turku and Hull until the second World War and took 67-1:st and 72-2:nd class passengers. She was in Steamship's service for 57 years. The major incidence was when she collided with and sank the Oberon, owned by the same company on 19th Dec. 1930 in the Kattegat. Oberon sank almost immediately with the loss of 40 lives. The commanders of the two ships were brothers. Arcturus was damaged on 13th Jan. 1940 in a Soviet air raid at Turku. It arrived from Antwerp on her last voyage on 22nd Oct. 1956 and was sold to Lübeck in 1957 to be scrapped.



Figure 5. The Arcturus passenger steamer.

In England, the Finns arrived in Hull and continued by train to Liverpool, Southampton or Glasgow. They continued their journey with ocean liners to North America, arriving in New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia or Portland. In Canada the arrival ports were Halifax, Quebec, Montreal and St. John. Totally the journey from Finland to North America usually lasted an average of two weeks.

The greatest number of the immigrants in the United States settled in a narrow area south of the Canadian border (Figure 6). They settled in the states of New York and Massachusetts, and in the Midwest near the Great Lakes states of Michigan and Minnesota. Later the settlement spread far westward to Montana, California, Oregon and Washington. Very few settled in the southern states. In Canada, they followed the same pattern as in the United States: close to the border between the two countries and from east to west. The bulk of them settled north of the Great Lakes in Ontario, in mining towns, centers of railroad and logging industry and large cities. Many moved on from Ontario to British Columbia.

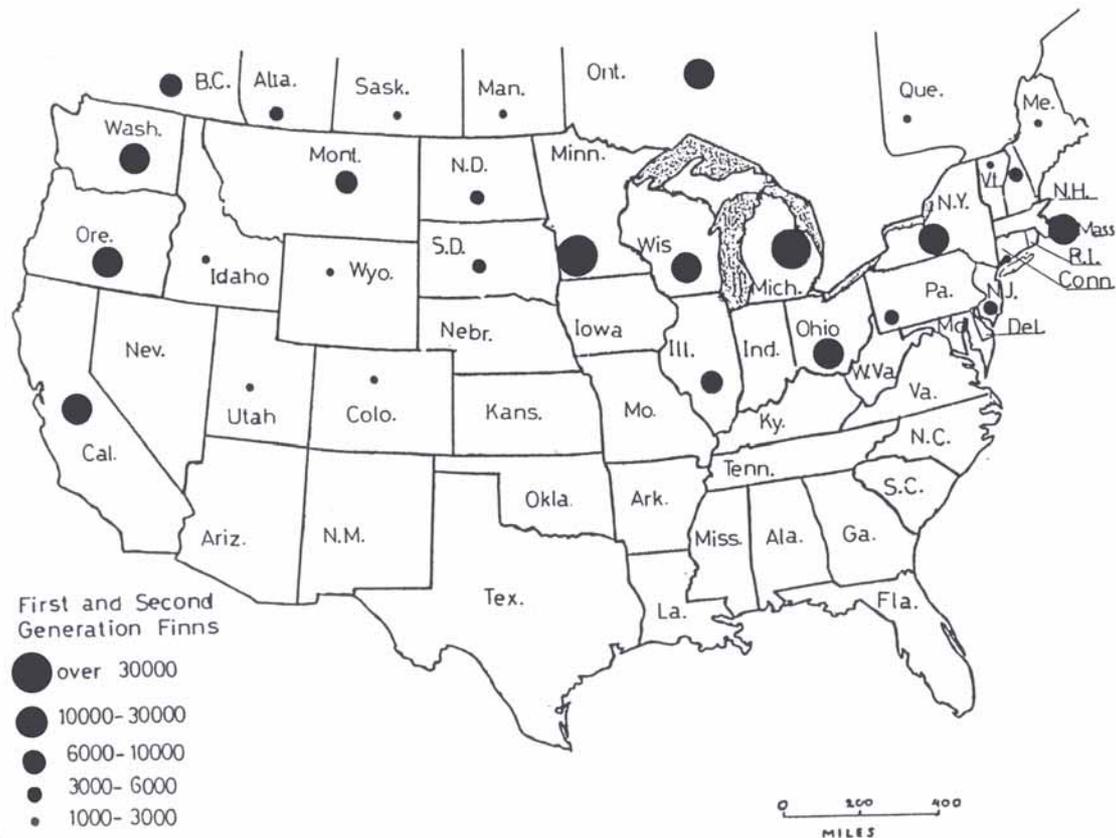


Figure 6. The location of the first and second generation Finns in the United States and Canada during the early 1900's.

The immigrant very often chose the area in which to settle according to the occupation he had in Finland. A considerable number of immigrants could choose a variety of occupations in the new country, mainly because of the great demand for labor in some occupations. In the beginning of the 19th century Finns settled in the cities on the east coast. Tailors and other craftsmen worked in New York, Boston (Massachusetts), Cleveland (Ohio) and Chicago (Illinois). The seamen during the 1860's and 1870's often became construction workers in harbor towns, while the stone quarries in Maine attracted hundreds of workers from Finland. Lumberjacks with Finnish ancestry were common in the northern states, and Fitchburg (Massachusetts), Detroit (Michigan) and Chicago (Illinois) provided jobs mainly to industrial workers. There were some Finnish fishermen in Washington and Oregon, with the Swede Finns mainly in Washington. One of the largest employers was the mining industry. Near the cities of Calumet, Hancock, Marquette, Ishpeming, Negaunee and Ironwood in Michigan,

there were mainly copper mines; in South Dakota gold and silver mines, and coal mines in Montana and Wyoming. In California the Finns worked in the gold fields or on the fruit farms. Women were popular as maids in wealthy families on the east coast and they were also employed by the textile industry (The Genealogical Society of Finland 2004).

Usually people from the large emigration areas in Finland tried to settle together in the same areas in the United States. Emigrants from Ilmajoki, Nurmo and Jurva settled in Worcester (Massachusetts), from Isokyrö in Ashtabula (Ohio), and from Evijärvi in Crystal Falls (Minnesota). Many Swede Finns from Ostrobothnia settled in Worcester, people from the Åland Islands in Norwood (Massachusetts), some from Uusikaarlepyy went to Coos Bay (Oregon) and people from the Åland Islands, Terijärvi and Närpiö settled in New York (The Genealogical Society of Finland 2004).

Migrants Profile and Motives for Migration

The Finnish great emigration (1870-1929) affected especially young uneducated men, who went across the sea to earn their living. According to the statistics, nearly 65 % of emigrants leaving Finland during 1869-1914 were men (Kero 1974:93).

Many emigrants returned to Finland. The majority of them went to North America to earn money for a house or farm and then planned to return to Finland. A general estimate is 20-23 %. More men returned than women, more wealthy people than poor ones, and more old emigrants than young ones. Most emigrants came from rural areas, with about 6 % from cities (Niemi 2003:1).

The majority of emigrants for example from Southern Ostrobothnia worked on farms in Finland. Emigration hit crofters, dependent lodgers, cottagers and hired hands who were affected more than landowners. Younger children who didn't inherit the farm decided to emigrate. In the early stages the rural population that had suffered economic hardship left, but later on emigration became a mass movement and other people also left to "whittle gold in America" (Niemi 2003:2).

The most important reasons of emigration were economic. The strong growth in the population in the 19th century created economic pressures in the Southern Ostrobothnia. The province of Vaasa had a surplus population which explains the large emigration. Crop failures and years of famine brought great hardship. The majority of southern Ostrobothnian farmers owned small farms and they had to struggle to make a living. According to inheritance practices, the oldest son got the farm and paid his siblings cash compensation and the other children had to go elsewhere to find work. The children of freeholders were landless so they had to seek a living elsewhere (Kero 1974:56-57; Niemi 2003:3-4).

Tar burning and shipbuilding were profitable industries. In the mid-1850's the world shifted from wooden ships which relied on tar to steamships made of steel. That created a "tar crisis". Another reason for emigration was the conscription edicts handed down during the Russian oppression years 1899-1917. Finland was a Grand Duchy under the Russian Czar until 1917. Many men avoided conscription which they considered unlawful by emigrating to North America (Kero 1974:59; Niemi 2003:4).

Sometimes marital relations broke down and the man emigrated rather than got a divorce which was frowned upon. The arrival of stepmothers or stepfathers drove children to emi-

grate. Some young men emigrated to avoid parental responsibilities and some had a powerful desire for adventure (Kero 1974:65; Niemi 2003:4).

Ostrobothnians had a strong sense of belonging and many left together in large groups. In the United States the Homestead Act of 1862 offered free land to immigrants. America needed workers so recruiters went to Finland to entice people to emigrate. Recruiting was prohibited by the United States in the 1880's but in Canada it continued into the 20th century. The recruitment effort helped spread "America fever". Also people who emigrated between 1860-90 wrote enticing letters to Finland which were published in newspapers. The news that there was work in America lured many to try their luck in a foreign country (Kero 1996:41-45; Niemi 2003:4).

Documents Related to the Journey

Passenger lists of Europeans arriving in North America have been made since 1820. The earliest passenger lists were written by the captain of the ship: Ship's Manifest or Customs Passenger lists. These do not yield much information: The name of the passenger, age, occupation, traveling class, nationality and country of destination. The catalogues are arranged by port, date and ship, so in order to find a certain person it is necessary to know the ship and arrival port.

The immigration laws became stricter at the end of the 19th century and arrivals were better documented. Immigration and Naturalization Service Passenger Lists became compulsory and they included US citizens who returned from abroad, guests and immigrants. Name, age, gender, marital status, occupation, domicile, port of arrival, destination, earlier visits in the country, relatives intended to visit and the address and relation to the relative. From 1903 the lists include race, from 1906 place of birth, and from 1907 name and address of close relative in the home country.

The passenger records are kept in the National Archives of the USA and Canada and they have been microfilmed. The Internet database of those who arrived in the US through Ellis Island, New York, contains 22 million names including thousands of Finns.

Finns in the Lists of Departures of Other Countries

Passengers from Swedish ports are listed since 1869. Most of the Finnish emigrants through Sweden can be found in the passenger lists from Gothenburg, but also among those who departed from Stockholm and Malmö.

The emigrants from Norway used the ports of Bergen, Fredrikstad, Kristiansand, Kristiansund, Larvik, Oslo (Kristiania), Sandfjord, Stavanger, Tromsø, Trondheim and Alesund. The emigrants from Finland commonly used the ports of Trondheim and Bergen. Norwegian harbour towns contain reliable information on the number of Finnish emigrants since 1870 (Kero 1974:25).

The passenger lists from Copenhagen in Denmark 1868-1940 include also some hundreds of Finns.

German ports used by emigrants were Bremen and Hamburg. The Bremen passenger lists were lost during the war, but the Hamburg lists for 1850-1934 have been preserved.

Finnish Emigration Database

The Emigrant Register of the Institute of Migration in Finland was established in 1989 as a service for genealogists and the descendants of the Finnish emigrants. The foundation of a computerized register was a part of the Delaware 350 Anniversary, to commemorate the beginning of the Finnish emigration to North America.

The data is mostly related to the migration event itself. The databases of the main sources of information are: official passport registers, passenger lists of the Finland Steamship Company and references to books and newspapers. These databases are also available through the internet in the web pages of the Institute of Migration. There are nowadays stored 317 800 data records from the passenger list, 163 000 data records from passport list and 19 400 literature and newspaper references. The web site of the Institute of Migration at <http://www.migrationinstitute.fi> provides also articles, statistics, useful links and other information concerning Finnish emigration.

Passenger Lists of the Finland Steamship Company

The Finland Steamship Company (Suomen Höyrylaiva Osakeyhtiö, Finska Ångfartygs Aktiebolaget/F.Å.A) started regular traffic from Hanko to Copenhagen and Hull in the autumn of 1891. Most Finns used this company's boats then leaving Finland. The lists are available from 1892-1896, 1899-1914 and since 1920 into the 1960's. The collection totals 145 folio-sized bound books and over 300 000 names arranged according to shipping company. There are numerous deletions and cancellations on the lists, remarks concerning no-shows, extra charges, comments on passengers not accepted on the grounds of a disease etc. The passenger lists are of the third class passengers, that is, emigrants. The first and second class passengers can be found on the lists if the third class passenger paid an extra charge to be able to travel more comfortably.

Passenger lists mainly contain the following types of information: name of the passenger, gender and age of the passenger, date of departure from Finland, name of the ship leaving Finland, ticket price, Ocean Liner Company, destination in North America and companions. From 1904 also the departure date from England and name of the ship is listed. The lists also inform whether the ticket was bought in Finland or prepaid, that is, sent by a relative or friend in America. The port of call in England and port of arrival in America is also listed (see an example in Figure 7).

Most of the F.Å.A.'s passenger lists have survived and are held by the manuscript collection of the Library of Åbo Akademi, the Swedish-language university. The Institute of Migration has computerized most of F.Å.A.'s passenger lists. The database is accessible on the internet at <http://www.migrationinstitute.fi>.

Birth dates and domicile were not recorded, so it might not be an easy task to identify the sought passenger among those with the same name. The spelling mistakes are numerous and the age might also be false. If the domicile of the emigrant in Finland is unknown, the passenger lists do not suffice, and the passport information is necessary.

Passenger's name:	Miina Laukkanen
Last name as stated:	Laukkonen
Age or age group:	Adult woman
Gender:	Female
Where from:	Hanko
Where to:	New York, New York, U.S.A.
Price:	32 Dollars
Ship from Finland:	Arcturus, 13 May 1903
Ship from England:	Cymric, 22 May 1903
Ship company:	White Star Line
Port in England:	Not stated
Destination port:	Not stated
Catalogue and page:	33/26
Remarks:	*

69487 / 317879

Figure 7. Passenger data record of Miina Laukkanen in the Emigrant Register.

Passport Lists

According to a regulation from 1862, all Finns needed a passport to travel abroad. Passports were issued by county government boards, borough administrators in towns, sheriff of the Åland Islands, sheriff of Lapland and the Finnish passport bureau in St. Petersburg. The oldest passport list is from 1810 and the lists are complete since 1893. In 1900 they were standardized and the same format was used by the entire country. The most accurate lists include the name of the person who received the passport, occupation, civil status, religion, date of birth, home district, date of passport issue, period of validity, destination and price of the passport and also dependent family members left behind.

In the passport lists usually only the country of destination is mentioned, not the exact place: America, North America, the United States, Canada or only abroad. Also passports issued for Sweden could be used for emigration to America. The emigrant was free to choose the time of validity for the passport, but it could not exceed five years. In the beginning a passport was issued only for one journey, but since 1888 the same passport could be used for unlimited travel. Usually the passport was issued a few days and weeks before the journey. Sometimes illness or lack of money delayed or inhibited the journey, so finding a person in a passport list does not guarantee that the person actually emigrated.

In principle the passport was necessary for traveling abroad, but all emigrants are not found in the passport lists. It was easy to cross the border to a neighboring country without a passport and it was no problem to continue the journey without any official documents. Additionally, those who left the country illegally, particularly men of age for Russian military service, traveled illegally without any passport at all.

The application for a passport was in general submitted to the home province either personally or by a trusted person. If the journey to the capital of the province was long and tedious, the passport could be acquired at some other place, at a provincial office on the way or at the port of departure at the borough administrator in Hanko. Between 20 and 30 % of the emigrants got their passport outside their own province.

The most important passport information for the genealogist is the home parish. It is not necessary the same as place of birth, but it helps to find the home parish of the family in Finland. Passports also give the original name of the emigrant; especially difficult Finnish last names were often changed abroad.

The original passport records are kept by the National Archives in Finland, but the oldest passport records up to 1920 are microfilmed. The passport records are being transferred to computer by the Institute of Migration and are available at <http://www.migrationinstitute.fi> The example of Miina Laukkanen is shown in Figure 8.

Passport records	
Emigrant's name:	Miina Laukkanen
Additional names:	Not stated
Occupation:	Dependent lodger
Birth date:	2 April 1875 (28 years)
Parish and province:	Rural parish of Iisalmi, Kuopio Province
Gender:	Female
Social status:	Not stated
Marital status:	Widowed
Religion:	Evangelical Lutheran
Passport issued by:	Kuopio Province
Passport date:	12 May 1903
Passport number:	346
Destination, years:	America, for 5 years
Microfilm number:	PL 61
Remarks:	Suomeen jäi 2 lasta.

19883 / 163564

Figure 8. Passport data record of Miina Laukkanen in the Emigrant Register. According to the remarks she left in Finland 2 children.

The Customers of the Emigrant Register

Thousands of searches are each week made in the emigrant register on the internet. Apart from this the emigrant register receives yearly more than a thousand inquiries from Finland and from abroad by mail, telephone and email. Except the passport and passenger records all information hosted by the institute is used in searches, i.e. written documents and card files and databases only with internal access.

During the years the customer base has broadened and become more differentiated. The register has been used e.g. for academic dissertations and master thesis. Genealogists form the biggest group. More than half of the inquiries come from Finland from genealogists who look for relatives who have emigrated.

Less than half of the inquiries come from abroad and mostly from North America (Figure 9). Some inquiries come from Australia, Sweden and other countries. Most of the foreign customers are descendants of Finnish emigrants who want to come in contact with relatives in Finland, but many are also interested in the history of their family and want to do research generations back into their family.

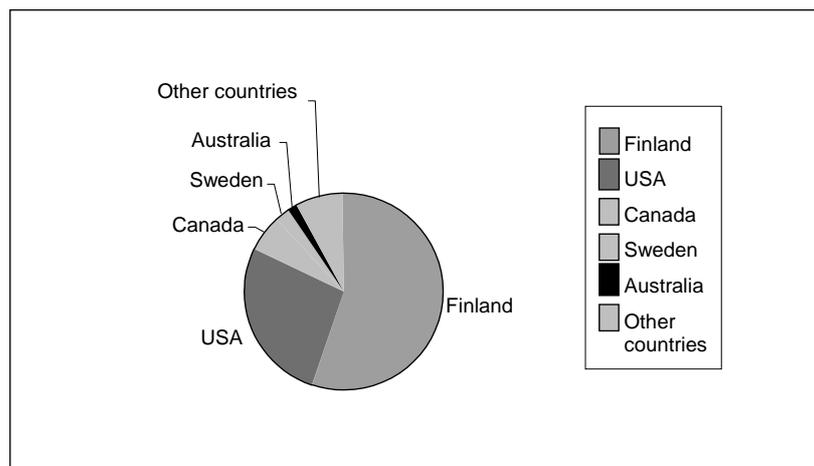


Figure 9. The inquiries to the emigrant register in 2003 according to country.

Finally

The america-emigrant of the recent decades has typically been between 26 and 30 of age, often well-educated woman. The reasons for the emigration to North America have been personal, like falling in love, getting married or self-development. The economic reasons which were typical for the earlier emigration have disappeared because the differences of the living conditions in Finland and North America have become even (Leinonen 2003).

Many want to return to Finland when they approach old age and be buried in their home country. Retirement from work brings the wish to stay part of the year in Finland, mostly during the summer months. Those who have not considered returning to Finland often give children in America as a reason (Leinonen 2003)

The US Census 2000 number for those claiming Finnish ancestry was 623 573 persons. Over half a million third, fourth, fifth and possible even a few sixth generation Americans recognize their Finnish ancestry at the polls. The following states had the biggest Finn-population: Michigan 101 000, Minnesota 99 400, California 56 500 and Washington 40 300 (Westerberg 2002:8).

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