

*Laila Lehikoinen (Helsinki, Finland)*

### ***Finnish House Names and Their Connection with Surnames***

Very little research has been carried out on human settlement names in Finland. The studies that have been made have focused principally on house names. This is understandable, because it is individual houses that have formed the main focal points in Finnish rural life and culture. Eastern and Northern Finland, for example, have been characterised by sparsely populated areas in which isolated houses were located amidst forests or on remote hillsides. This pattern developed as a result of the hunting and fishing subsistence and the swidden ('slash-and-burn') practices, which did not favour the growth of village communities, although official documents show that individual houses were designated as belonging to particular villages. The village life typical of agrarian communities has long been dominant only in the provinces of Varsinais-Suomi, Satakunta, Häme and Ostrobothnia, that is to say in Western Finland. Nevertheless, here too, house names have been more important than village names in everyday social interaction, because houses have constituted the fixed points within the village landscape with which people can orientate themselves and describe the locations of other places.

The study of house names has, in fact, been regarded as one of the most important areas of Finnish onomastics research. An abundance of documentary sources exists to aid in this research, at least for the period since the start of the modern age. This allows more reliable conclusions to be drawn than is the case with, for instance, the names of natural features. The study of house names can also be of benefit to other areas of onomastics research, such as family surnames, village names and settlement history. Despite this, even house names have been surprisingly little studied in Finland: only one doctoral thesis has so far been produced (LEHIKONEN 1988), along with a number of articles in compiled works (e.g. NISSILÄ 1975: 97–112, KESU 1987) and several Master's theses, though none of them published (for more information, see LEHIKONEN 1988: 2–3). Besides onomasticians, house names have also attracted some interest from historians (e.g. JUTIKKALA 1958: 128–137 and 1968: 1–7, SUVANTO 1987: 21–151).

The study of Finnish house names has concentrated on the names of houses (and later subdivisions of them) that can be traced back through historic records, as far as the 1720s, when house names began to be entered in tax records, i.e. the land register. The term *talonnimi* 'house name' has sometimes been used synonymously with *asumuksennimi* 'dwelling name' (e.g. LEHIKONEN 1988), but the latter often has a broader meaning, referring not only to independent residen-



tial property but also to, for example, tied or rented cottages and cabins, or various types of temporary dwelling. Unlike houses, these were not independent units but premises on municipal, parish or private land, for which the occupants paid a rent. The names of these places would often differ from house names, especially in Western Finland. What follows below therefore refers principally to actual house names.

The function of house names is the same as that of other proper nouns: to distinguish the referent from other referents of the same type. In the case of houses, this purpose is well served by a reference to ownership, because each house in a village would normally have a different owner. Research results from all over Finland show that ownership was the most common naming criterion for houses in both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking areas (e.g. ZILLIACUS 1966: 279 and 1968: 110 and 208, VIROLAINEN 1968: 137, HENRIKSSON-LEHTINEN 1986: 176, LEHIKONEN 1988: 260–262).

The most common method of composing a Finnish house name that indicates ownership was to take the name of the male (very occasionally the female) head of the house and to add the suffix *-la* or *-lä*, thus: *Mattila* 'Matthew's house' (< *Matti* 'Matthew'), *Aatamila* 'Adam's house' (< *Aatami* 'Adam'), *Junila* 'John's house' (< *Juni* < *Johannes* 'John'), *Yrölä* 'George's house' (< *Yrjö* 'George'), *Liisala* 'Elizabeth's house' (< *Liisa* 'Elizabeth'). If the owner's occupation differed from that of other villagers, the house name could alternatively be derived from the name of this occupation, with the addition of the suffix *-la* or *-lä*, thus: *Seppälä* 'the blacksmith's house' (< *seppä* 'blacksmith'), *Lukkarila* 'the parish clerk's house' (< *lukkari* 'parish clerk').

House names ending with *-la* or *-lä* are found in all parts of the country, leading this suffix to be known as a house name suffix. The following rhyme about common suffixes, penned by A. V. FORSMAN, the pioneering Finnish researcher of personal names, demonstrates this: "Male is *-nen*, female *-tar*, lackey *-kka* and house *-la*." (1894: 182). The regions of South-West Finland, Satakunta and Central and South-East Häme probably formed the heartland of the *-la* and *-lä* house names, and the heyday of their use was the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. From these areas, the use of such names spread to Southern Ostrobothnia and the coasts of Central and Northern Ostrobothnia, and subsequently to Eastern Finland, with the spread of settlement there (JUTIKKALA 1958: 130–132, NISSILÄ 1962: 91–92, KEPSU 1987: 61–72). The acclaimed Finnish onomastics scholar, VILJO NISSILÄ, posited that among the specific reasons for the popularity of dwelling names ending in *-la* or *-lä* in river valleys and flatlands in particular, was the lack of other distinguishable landmarks after which houses could have been named.



Ownership could be indicated in house names by means other than adding the suffix *-la* or *-lä* to the owner's first name or occupation. In Eastern Finland, in

particular, it was common enough for a house to be simply given its owner's first name or a hypocorism of it, or some other vernacular appellation, thus: *Antti* ('Andrew, Andrew's house'), *Matska* (< *Matti* 'Matthew, Matthew's house'), *Pekko* (< *Pekka* < *Pietari* 'Peter, Peter's house'), *Antinmatti* ('Anti's son Matthew, Anti's son Matthew's house'). In both Western and Eastern Finland it was also quite common for a house name to be derived from the surname of the owning family. The relationship between house names and surnames is, however, a very complex and interesting one, and a phenomenon that I shall examine more closely later in this article.

Houses can be distinguished from each other not only on the basis of their owners but also their location. Location has, therefore, been another very common criterion for house names. Location can be expressed lexically in many different ways. Firstly, the name of a place in or near which the house was located could be metonymically used as a house name. This could be either a natural or a cultural location. Examples include: *Pihlajamäki* ('house located on the hill known as Rowan Hill'), *Haapaniemi* ('house located on the headland known as Aspen Point') and *Pajukorpi* ('house next to an area known as Willow Wilds'). The use of lake and river names as house names was also natural, as Finland is famously 'The Land of a Thousand Lakes', and waterside areas have always been preferred locations to live. Riverside land was good for farming and easy to clear to make fields, and lakes provided convenient transport connections to places near and far. The adoption of farming words as house names was also logical: when larger farmhouses were divided into smaller units, the fields and meadows would usually also be divided so that each dwelling retained some land, and new houses would commonly be built near the fields and meadows.

Location can also be expressed in house names by simply using a terrain appellation or one to which the suffix *-la* or *-lä* is added, thus: *Harju* ('ridge; house situated on a ridge'), *Kangas* ('heath; house situated on a pine heath'), *Mäkelä* ('hill; house situated on a hill') and *Jokela* ('river; house situated by a river'). Phrases expressing location are also very commonly turned into house names: *Järvenpää* ('head of the lake; house situated at the head of the lake'), *Ojantaus* ('rear of the ditch; house situated to the rear of a ditch'), *Lähteenkorva* ('near a natural spring; house situated near a natural spring').

Attaching names to places is, above all, a way of distinguishing them from other places of the same type; the purpose of a house name is thus to distinguish the house from other dwellings. This is one reason why a fairly common house-naming criterion has been the relationship of the house to its neighbours. This can be in terms of location, such as *Alatalo* – *Ylätalo* ('situated lower down / higher up than the other house'); size, such as *Pieni-Hannola* – *Suuri-Hannola* ('the smaller / bigger of the two *Hannola* houses'); age, such as *Vanha-Seppälä* – *Uusi-Seppälä* ('the older / newer of the two *Seppälä* houses'), etc. Usually



these names form this type of pairing and were created when a residential property was divided into two units, each of which was then given a name. The relationship between two such houses was usually conveyed using nouns that express location, such as *ylä* 'upper', *ala* 'lower' and *perä* 'rear', or adjectives, such as *vanha* 'old', *uusi* 'new', *vähä / pikku* 'little' and *suuri / iso* 'big'.

Anyone studying Finnish house names will sooner or later find themselves considering the connection between house names and surnames. Throughout the country there are house names that are also family surnames, but which came first: the house name or the owner's surname?

Two different theories have been presented on the age of Finnish house names. Author and genealogist JALMARI FINNE (1921: 33–35) and historian EINO JUTIKKALA (1958: 128–137) consider house names to be relatively recent, emerging in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as the Middle Ages receded and the modern age began. This conclusion is based on the fact that Western Finnish house names derived from personal names can generally be traced back to the names of occupants from this period but no earlier. This is supported by documentary evidence: house names only really begin to appear in official documents in the late sixteenth century (JUTIKKALA 1968: 6). However, many studies have found mention of Western Finnish house names from before this period, in sources from the Middle Ages (e.g. AULIS OJA 1944: 184–188, MATTI OJA 1970: 48–59 and 1976: 81–99). Most researchers do, in fact, consider Finnish house names to date from before the late sixteenth century, deriving from at least the Middle Ages. Indeed, as KIVINIEMI (1975: 44) points out, it is unnatural to assume that dwellings, which form the heart of the cultural landscape, would have been referred to merely by common nouns right up to the modern age. The simple explanation for the scarcity of house names in official documents prior to the mid-sixteenth century is that the principal sources of house names, namely tax records known as the land registers, were only begun in Finland in the 1540s (KERKKONEN 1967, 1968, SUVANTO 1987: 61–64, 150–151).

The use of surnames is considered to have developed for inheritance reasons: a surname is passed on from one generation to the next, as the Finnish word *sukunimi* 'surname; name of family line' suggests. However, dating Finnish surnames has proved to be perhaps even more difficult than dating house names. A.V. FORSMAN (1894: 119–132) believed that surnames must already have been in use in Finland in pre-Christian times. Many researchers (e.g. JUTIKKALA 1958) concur with this assertion, but reservations have also been expressed. It has been suggested that the social system of the relatively small Finnish population of prehistoric times would scarcely have warranted the use of surnames; a single identifying name would, it is said, have been sufficient to distinguish each individual from the others (e.g. NÄRHI 1972: 42, KIVINIEMI 1982: 41). On the



other hand, EERO KIVINIEMI (1982: 41) has tentatively suggested that in late heathen times, a single identifying name could have been accompanied by a descriptive epithet that was passed on to subsequent generations.

The dating of surnames is hampered by the very fact that many surnames have developed from epithets, and there are no linguistic identifying marks that allow epithets to be distinguished from surnames. For this reason, it can also be difficult to establish the connection between a surname and a house name. Epithets can take the form of an expression characterising the person, referring to his or her mental or physical features, but could also be, for example, the name of the person's father or mother, the name of the place where the house is located, or even the name of the house. If an epithet was inherited, being passed on from one generation to the next, it could then develop over time into a surname. House names used as epithets could thus eventually assume the function of a surname: if Antti, the occupant of a house called *Isotalo* 'big house', became known as *Isontalon Antti* 'Antti from the big house', the modifier *Isontalon* would have been used as an epithet; if this epithet were subsequently passed on to Antti's son and later his grandson, it would have taken on, or be in the process of taking on, the role of a family name or surname.

The process could equally well occur in the opposite direction, however. Since the most natural subject for house names, as noted above, is ownership (because houses are most easily distinguished from each other on the basis of their owners), it follows that houses could also have been named after their owners. Thus, after surnames began to be widely used, these could have been used as house names.

Another factor making it difficult to date Finnish surnames is that surnames and house names have developed quite differently in Western and Eastern Finland. In Western Finland, house names became of primary importance at least as far back as the end of the sixteenth century, and would be kept unchanged from one occupant to the next. Thus, if *Isontalon Antti*, the owner of the *Isotalo* house referred to above, sold the house and built a new one elsewhere with the name *Uutela* (< *uusi talo* 'new house'), he would no longer be known as *Isontalon Antti* but *Uutelan Antti*. In this way, many Finns from Western Finland were still without a hereditary surname as the twentieth century dawned. In 1921, a newly independent Finland passed the Family Names Act, which required all Finnish citizens to have a permanent surname. (More information on this can be found from e.g. FORSMAN 1894: 125, RAUVOLA 1958: 93–94, NISSILÄ 1962: 54, BLOMQUIST 1988: 17–22, 216–222.)

In Eastern Finland, on the other hand, hereditary surnames have been entered in official records since at least the sixteenth century. House names were never a dominating concern; instead, surnames were passed on from one generation to



the next and were retained even when moving house. Indeed, it was often the house name that was changed when a new owner moved in (VOIONMAA 1969: 187–188, 195–198, JUTIKKALA 1958: 59). In Finnish Karelia, for instance, house names have been found to be generally quite recent, having being frequently changed (LEHIKONEN 1988: 265–266).

There are historical and social reasons why house names and occupants' surnames have had a different status attached to them in Western and Eastern Finland. As noted earlier, cultural practices in Western Finland were based on farming and village communities, and the villages were usually fairly concentrated and populous, due to the long history of permanent settlement. Taxes were levied on farms and property in permanent ownership. By contrast, Eastern Finland was dominated by swidden agriculture and a system of rotating settlement that was still in use at the beginning of the modern age. Swidden agriculture was productive for no more than 10–20 years, after which the land would need to be left fallow and a new location sought. Here, a new house would be built and swidden agriculture would begin again. The ownership of such land was also, in a way, temporary: it began when someone marked out the swidden land as their own, and continued for as long as the land was cultivated (JUTIKKALA 1958: 18–19).

In levying taxes, the tax authorities were obliged to take into account the type of settlement. Farms and permanently owned property in Western Finland were taxed, and the house names entered in the tax registers. In Eastern Finland, where there was no permanent land ownership, taxes were instead levied on the peasants who cultivated the land, and so it was the names of the families concerned that were entered in the tax registers. Hence, administrative and legal practices also played a role in consolidating the early use of surnames in official documents in Eastern Finland, and in perpetuating the dominance of house names in Western Finland until the early twentieth century (JUTIKKALA 1958: 58–59, PIRINEN 1982: 50–54).

Evidently there were other factors besides the practices of the authorities that led to family names becoming more important than house names in Eastern Finland. One such factor must have been the needs of the community itself. With settlement being relatively impermanent, the swidden communities and the house occupants were more important than the buildings, and there would most likely have been a need to refer to the people themselves more often than to the individual houses.

The economic framework necessary to support swidden agriculture in Eastern Finland led to the creation of an extended family system in which the collective resources of several family units were pooled together. Felling and clearing swidden land and maintaining it for cultivation was tough, labour-intensive



work, and this was shared by the extended family. An extended family would typically comprise two or more brothers and their families, but could also include other relatives. Evidence of such an extended family system can be found from as early as the sixteenth century, and the system was still prospering in the late nineteenth century, even into the twentieth century (PIHA 1964: 29–30, SARMELA 1980: 180–183). For example, in 1815 more than 20 per cent of families in the Eastern Finnish province of Viipuri had 11 or more family members, and by 1875 this figure was still over 10 per cent (VOIONMAA 1969: 412). The size of extended families could be very large: the biggest extended families in the province of Savo consisted of as many as 100 people living together (SARMELA 1994: 29). Under such a system, the importance of the family and relatives was naturally emphasised. Moreover, in a system in which people were not tied to the land but instead followed a somewhat itinerant existence, there was a need for stability and continuity, which was met by emphasising family links through hereditary surnames (VOIONMAA 1969: 188).

A clear distinction between Eastern and Western Finland is characteristic throughout the country's cultural roots and traditions. The Western parts of the country developed as a farming culture and peasant society, while Eastern areas were known for practising swidden agriculture and for their strong sense of family (SARMELA 1994). The east–west dichotomy is evident in both the material and spiritual spheres. Differences are seen in, for example, villages, buildings, work tools and food, as well as in storytelling, beliefs and rites, reflecting the different circumstances and experience in the two parts of the country. The cultural framework that emerged in Eastern Finland can be seen as more people-centric than that of Western Finland: where the house and other assets became important in Western parts, the emphasis in Eastern areas was instead on family and relatives and on family reliance and support. As this article has sought to demonstrate, the duality also extends to the development and use of house names and surnames.

### References

- BLOMQUIST, MARIANNE (1988) *Från tillnamn till släktnamn i österbottnisk allmogemiljö*. In: *Arkiv för Svenska Österbotten* 18. Skrifter utgivna av Svensk-Österbottniska Samfundet 44. Vasa.
- FINNE, JALMARI (1921) *Kerrostumat paikannimissä*. In: *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 19. Suomen Historiallinen Seura ja Historian Ystävien liitto, Helsinki, pp. 31–38.
- FORSMAN, A. V. (1894) *Tutkimuksia Suomen kansan persoonallisen nimistön alalla* I. In: *Suomi* 3/10. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki.





- HENRIKSSON-LEHTINEN, ANNE (1986) *Hattulan Vuohiniemen paikannimet*. Master's thesis; manuscript. Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskuksen nimitoimisto, Helsinki.
- JUTIKKALA, EINO (1958) *Suomen talonpojan historia*. Second, revised and extended edition. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 257. Helsinki.
- JUTIKKALA, EINO (1968) *Hemmansnamnen och jordeböckerna*. In: *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 52. Historiska föreningen, Helsingfors.
- KEPSU, SAULO (1987) *Talonnimien tutkimisesta*. In: *Kieli* 2. Ed. KIVINIEMI, EERO—PITKÄNEN RITVA LIISA. Helsingin yliopiston suomen kielen laitos, Helsinki, pp. 35–73.
- KERKKONEN, GUNVOR (1967) *Bönder — gårdar — byar i namnbelägg. Jordägare och jordägare i äldsta historiska källmaterial*. In: *Historiallinen Arkisto* 61. Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Turku, pp. 5–24.
- KERKKONEN, GUNVOR (1968) *Bondenamn, gårdnamn och hemmansnamn*. In: *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 52. Historiska föreningen, Helsingfors, pp. 108–112.
- KIVINIEMI, EERO (1975) *Paikannimien rakennetyypeistä*. Suomi 118/2. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki.
- KIVINIEMI, EERO (1982) *Suomen varhaisiin henkilönnimisysteemeihin liittyviä ongelmia*. In: *Suku ja tieto*. Suomen sukututkimusseuran julkaisuja 34. Helsinki, pp. 29–43.
- LEHIKONEN, LAILA (1988) *Kirvun talonnimet. Karjalaisen talonnimisysteemin kuvaus*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 493. Helsinki.
- NISSILÄ, VILJO (1962) *Suomalaista nimistöntutkimusta*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 272. Helsinki.
- NISSILÄ, VILJO (1975) *Suomen Karjalan nimistö*. Karjalaisen kulttuurin edistämisseuran julkaisuja, Joensuu.
- NÄRHI, EEVA MARIA (1972) *Ei susikaan sukunimestään suutu*. In: *Nimikirja*. Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja 52. WSOY, Helsinki, pp. 41–63.
- OJA, AULIS (1944) *Varsinais-Suomen kylän- ja talonnimien historiaa*. In: *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 42. Suomen Historiallinen Seura ja Historian Ystävien liitto, Helsinki, pp. 180–188.
- OJA, MATTI (1970) *Ristimänimistä johtuneet vanhan Tammelan kantatalojen nimet*. In: *Lounais-Hämeen Kotiseutu- ja Museo-yhdistyksen vuosikirja* 39. Forssa, pp. 20–64.
- OJA, MATTI (1976) *Ristimänimistä johtuneet kantatalojen nimet Humppilassa, Jokioisissa, Somerniemellä, Somerolla, Urjalassa ja Ypäjällä*. In: *Lounais-Hämeen Kotiseutu- ja Museo-yhdistyksen vuosikirja* 45. Forssa, pp. 69–99.
- PIHA, KALEVI (1964) *Suurperhe karjalaisessa työyhteisössä. Karjalainen suurperhe sosiaaliantropologian ja sosiaali-psykologian valossa*. Turun yliopiston sosiologian laitos, sarja B: 6. Turku.





- PIRINEN, KAUKO (1982) *Savon historia II: 1. Rajamaakunta asutusliikkeen aikakautena 1534–1617*. Pieksämäki.
- RAUVOLA, AARNE (1958) *Länsi-Suomen talonpoikaisista sukunimistä. Vain Johaninpoikia ja Eerikintyttäriäkö?* In: *Genos. Suomen Sukututkimusseuran aikakauskirja* 28. Helsinki, pp. 93–102.
- SARMELA, MATTI (1980) *Zur Kulturökologien der Grossfamilie*. In: *Congressus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum V. Pars IV*. Turku, pp. 179–190.
- SARMELA, MATTI (1994) *Suomen perinneatlas. Suomen kansankulttuurin kartasto* 2. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki.
- SUVANTO, SEPPO (1987) *Knaapista populiin. Tutkimuksia erilaistumisesta Satakunnan talonpojistossa vuosina 1390–1571*. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 142. Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Helsinki.
- VIROLAINEN, JOUNI (1986) *Hausjärven pitäjän Torholan kylän paikannimistöä*. Master's thesis; manuscript. Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskuksen nimitoimisto, Helsinki.
- VOIONMAA, VÄINÖ (1969) *Suomen karjalaisen heimon historia*. Second, unaltered edition. WSOY, Helsinki. (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1915.)
- ZILLIACUS, KURT (1966) *Ortnamnen i Houtskär*. Studier i nordisk filologi 55. Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Helsingfors.
- ZILLIACUS, KURT (1968) *Sydfinländska skärgårdsnamn I*. Studier i nordisk filologi 56. Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Helsingfors.