

Pien-Toijola - a unique group of buildings

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The farm of Pien-Toijola was established in 1672, when Lauri, the first member of the Toijonen family settled on a site situated by a small lake Laaro in the Lakeland area of the central Saimaa water course. The first dwelling was a smoke cabin. Since then the house has been lived in, and the site built gradually by 13 generations of the family. Most of the present buildings were built by the 10th and 11th generations. The late 19th century and early 20th century owners were keen on keeping the old-fashioned way of farming and living. In 1938, when the buildings were recorded for the first time, the site included two houses lived by two brothers, and 37 separate

buildings in total. To the visitors it looked more like a village than a house: "One would have imagined that this was a whole village, but it was just the country of Ville the Rich and his many buildings. There a town born would walk like in an open-air museum, wondering if a giant had playfully one day scattered the poor buildings astray on the hill by the clear Luaro, or if an organizing attempt of a human being had been involved." (Salme Setälä 1945) Until 1948 the area was part of the "water people" side of the municipality, due to the access by water only.



Most of the buildings of the Pien-Toijola farm are buildings for keeping domestic animals, for storing of various agricultural products and household goods, or for personal use as sleeping chambers during the summer. Among the buildings one can find sleeping chambers for the maids of the house, for Risto, Jussi, Uotu, and the old man, stores for fire wood, leather, hops, cloths, fish, game, meat and

flour, stalls for horses, calves, rabbits, ox and straw, a sauna, a threshing barn, a toilet, a jail, two main buildings, and a cow house. The site used to be closed, either with the walls of the buildings or with strips of wooden fences, originally to protect the yard from the animals to walk in. The way of building the site gradually has resulted in a free-form layout, where the natural forms and obstacles of

the ground and the socio-functional order of the buildings were prioritized above regularity. This yard and house pattern was typical of the peasant houses in Eastern Finland through centuries down to the modern times of the 20th century.

The prominent buildings of the group are the "new" main building, that was erected in 1803 opposite the old smoke cabin, the cow-house that was built in 1890 perpendicular to the new main building and the third main building that was built in 1939 higher and outside the existing group of buildings. The youngest of the buildings is the new cow-house from 1962. Since the 1930's the majority of the buildings exist today, some of the lighter wooden constructions and the granary have disappeared. The common habit of dismantling and moving log structures from site to site was not executed here before the latter part of the 20th century, on the contrary to the common habit.

Many of the economy buildings of today are the last representatives of their types in the region. Standing on the original places they form an authentic and unique peasant house presenting its history during more than 300 years. The buildings contain many examples of those layman building techniques and expression that have become rare elsewhere. In addition to the buildings, the house has also kept a large number of its utensils from the whole period of farming and living on the site.

Most of the buildings are built in exposed horizontal log and in other wood carving techniques. Only the main building from 1803 was clad in 1880 with hand-planed boarding and painted with oil paint by a local master painter. The cow-house from 1890 has a stone wall of local granite. The main attraction of the site has been since the 1930's definitely the many "malka" beam roofs.



History as a farm

The buildings are surrounded by small home fields and the house is situated by the small lake Luaro (the official name is Laaro). The

fields are typical small rocky slopes of the lakeland area. The core of the small fields around the house was cultivated permanently in the early 19th century, but the majority of crop was taken of the slash and burn fields

and hay collected from the natural meadows. In the 20th century the fields have been widened by taking the earlier meadows and edges of the slash and burn land into permanent cultivation. Partly surrounded by fences of stone and wooden poles the fields present a typical mosaic-like landscape of the barren lakeland area. In the forest one can find remains of the slash and burn cultivating in small heaps of collected stones and in some plants typical of the burnt land.

The oldest log buildings of the group and the forms of the yards present the way of building on a slash-and-burn cultivating farm of the coniferous forests. The big stone cow-house

and the cow alleys represent the buildings of the great milk and butter production period in the latter half of the 19th century. The new main building of 1939 and the new cow-house of the 1970s, adjacent to the museum site, present the phase of cattle-breeding in a small farm in the latter part of the 20th century. Cattle breeding ended in 1999 on the farm. All the main periods of farming history of the region to the present day are present in Pien-Toijola.

The farm used to have a water mill and five cotters' houses for seven families. They became independent houses in the early 20th century and have been demolished.



Protection status

In the 1960's the owners Mauri and Maija Toijonen started a private open-air museum on the site. In 1980 the whole group of the older buildings, 25 buildings in total housing the museum, was protected by the act on the protection of buildings of cultural historic importance. In 2001 the municipality of Ristiina agreed to maintain the protected site as a house museum. The present owner, Jarmo Toijonen, a descendant of the owner family, continues cultivating the fields of the farm.

The repairs of 2001-2004

Since 1999 major repairs have been done in the buildings, mainly due to the deterioration of the wooden structures, the beam roofs and the integrity of the group. Many of the objects of natural materials had been attacked by insects and rot due to poor storing conditions. The goal of the repairs was formulated as "to keep the group of buildings as a genuine one of the wood-carving period. And to take care of the authenticity of the whole group and of the building skills of the time when the particular building was built. The yards and the buildings are kept in use for tourism, but in the way that this use would not affect the necessary repair and maintenance work. And to conserve the objects in need of special treatment and to exhibit them in the house". A good background for the restoration has been available in the recordings of the 20th century.

The repairs affected every building on the protected site and covered works of a variety of traditional roofing techniques, beam constructions and fencing techniques. The felt roofs of the late 20th century were replaced by birch-bark and beam roofs. Traditional log replacement work ("shoeing") was done in six log structures. Modern concrete techniques are present only in stabilizing of stone foundations in one building on the edge of the rock, the cow house will keep its old felt roof. As a last one, a new birch-bark and beam roof was made on the clad main building in 2004. For repairing of the smaller building parts, like porches, individual beams and windows, the methods of small patchy replacements were used.

The repair work offered summertime building work for 2-4 builders and opportunities of learning and training of traditional techniques

for architectural students from different countries, a testing site for professional documentation and challenges for local workmen of the manpower services. The works were funded by the municipality, the state and EU structural funds. Most of the building materials were available from the forests and fields of the owner family.

Maintenance of the house museum

The house museum is open for visitors during summer months, when school children and students are available for guides. The temporary staff includes one part time administrator from the municipality. In 2005 the municipality established a board of advisors for a helping hand in administration and planning of the activities.

More information

See more about the museum at http://www.etelasavonmuseot.fi/museot/ristiinanmuseot/pien-toijolan_talonpoikaimuseo.html

