

Finland: 470 Years of Cadastral Information

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Today, cadastral information is registered to secure land ownership and the rights related to land. Data stored in numerical format can be accessed easily using a computer. The cadastre was completed on 17 October 1994, when Kuusankoski was entered as the last municipality into the computer-based register. However, Finland has a long tradition in cadastral registration.

The crusade conducted by King Eric IX of Sweden and Bishop Henry of Uppsala brought Finland under Swedish influence. In the Middle Ages, no written contracts were made on the sale of land or real estate. Instead, trading was based on traditions going back centuries.

Nevertheless, simple cadastral registers were already in use in Swedish towns, where a charter was written on the sale of real estate. In Sweden, the oldest document on the sale of real estate is from 1227. The unification of the Kingdom of Sweden was initiated by Gustav Vasa, who was elected regent in 1521 and king in 1523. The king realised quite soon that the Crown did not have a sufficient understanding of its taxes. The Crown depended almost entirely on land tax for income. In 1524, the Swedish parliament decided to create a land book to ensure the correct and fair collection of taxes. Indeed, the first land book was a catalogue of peasants and their taxes.

King Gustavus Adolphus made it his personal goal to develop central administration in Sweden. The mathematician Andreas Bureus was given the task of establishing a Land Survey Office in Sweden and producing accurate maps of the entire country. Bureus also began to train surveyors. Olof Gangius was appointed as the first surveyor in Finland in 1633. The oldest Finnish land books are from Tavastia, dating back to 1539.

Geometrical land books were produced in 1635-1654. They compared the actual productivity of land to the number of tax units.

In the 17th century, taxation became based on land survey, which was calculated using square measure instead of field width used in the open field system. The letters of appointment issued to land surveyors in 1633 ordered the measured land to be converted into tax units and compared to the previously used number of tax units, and to inspect abandoned farms and tax deductions. The archives of the National Board of Survey contain 14 maps surveyed in 1643-1654.

According to the 1662 rules of provincial treasurers, the land book was to contain records of buildings, detached land, mills, fishing and other taxed or taxable property. According to the 1689 instructions, a complete land book was to be produced once in every six years.

As the tax unit was now the farm instead of the peasant, the name of the farm became its identifier. In Eastern Finland, the names of farms appeared in land books as late as in the 1820s. To better distinguish between farms of the same name and farms without a name, all farms were to be numbered by village from 1696 onwards by the king's order.

Land Reform: The 18th century was an era of enlightenment and social reform. Economists began to favour physiocracy, which emphasised the role of agriculture as the source of national wealth. The open field system was considered as the biggest obstacle for agricultural development. The proponents of a land reform hoped to speed up agricultural development by consolidating the scattered strips of land into separate farms.

In 1746, the head of the National Land Survey of Sweden, Jacob Faggot, published a work titled *Svenska lantbrukets hinder och hjälp*, which described the general features of the land reform. The Swedish parliament passed the Land Reform Act in 1757. Finland received its own land reform act in 1762.

The open field system had not been in use in all parts of Finland, but during the implementation of the land reform, the taxation of farms was reviewed and adjusted. The land reform continued for almost 150 years. When Finland became a part of Russia, the land reform was extended to Old Finland, the area annexed to Russia in 1721 in the Treaty of Nystad. In Northern Finland, the land reform continued well into the 20th century.

The land reform also aimed to promote the settlement of the wilderness. Indeed, in some areas the advancement of settlement became a more important project than the land reform. Consequently, 11 000 new farms were built in Finland between 1721 and 1875.

Period of Russian Rule: Sweden lost Finland to Russia in 1809. As Finland had not had its own central administration during the Swedish period, it had to be established at this time. The first government office to be established was the Real Estate Office. Its first Director was Carl Ludvig Engel. The Real Estate Office began to plan the construction of the new capital, Helsinki. The fifth government office to be established was Land Survey. The regulations of the Head Survey Office of the Grand Duchy of Finland were ratified on 14 November 1812. The first Director of Land Survey was Abraham Nordenstedt, who had been employed by the Land Survey Office during the period of Swedish rule. The Board of Land Survey was established in 1848.

The establishment of a land register began in 1895 following an imperial proclamation. The land register was produced based on the division of real estate in existing land books. This information was mainly obtained from completed land surveys. When the land register was completed in 1904, it contained 121 684 registered farms.

Era of Independence: During the first decades of independence, the redemption of leased areas, settlement activity and the right to partition land greatly increased the number of real estate units. More than 100 000 farms were lost in the 1944 cession of territory, but a corresponding number of new farms were established based on the Land Acquisition Act. The development of a computer-based real estate registration system began in 1968.

In less than a century, the number of real estate units had grown twenty-fold, and the data content of the register had also been expanded. Operations and costs had grown, while the usability of the register had deteriorated. The total number of land register books was 3 500, which equalled hundreds of metres of shelf space. Up to 200 000 extracts were written from the register each year. The computerisation of real estate registration was initiated to remove overlap between different registers and to facilitate customer service.

The process took 700 person-years to complete, and its direct costs amounted to over 15 million euros. The cost of transferring records from the land register to the cadastral register was 4.37 euros per unit. Today, the nationwide cadastre contains a total of 2.1 million valid register units. The quality and accuracy of the cadastre are being developed continuously.