

Scolt village archives handed over to Sámi Archives
3 April 2012
Jussi Nuorteva, Director General, National Archive

Mr. President, Programme Manager Mrs. Haukio, Chairman of Sámi Parliament, dear guests,

In 2006, the Finnish Committee for the Nordic Archive Day decided to award the Archival Deed of the Year title for handing over the archives of **Matti Sverloff** to the National Archives Service of Finland. A long-term spokesman for the interests of the Scolt Sámi, Matti Sverloff also fostered the Scolt Sámi culture. Matti Sverloff, who died in the very same year, decided to hand over the archives provided that they are deposited in the Sámi archives if such archival facilities are completed in the Sámi area in the future. The idea of establishing Sámi archives had been raised in discussions between the National Archives Service of Finland and the Sami Parliament shortly before this. The joint aim was to preserve the documented cultural heritage of the Sámi in the Sámi area. To this end, Sámi archives similar to those already existing in Kautokeino, Norway, should be established.

The symbol of Sámi archival traditions is the almost legendary ancient archives of the Scolt Sámi, which were found in Suonikylä, Pechenga. The oldest document in the archives dates from 1601 and the most recent one from 1775. The most valuable documents bear the signature of Russian Czars. Topics discussed in the documents include the position and rights of the Scolt Sámi in Suonikylä and Pechenga. The documents had been carefully glued to each other, wrapped into a roll and stored in a wooden case. The case had been replaced several times over the centuries. The year 1865 has been carved into the pine case, which must be the year when the case was made.

The archives of Suonijoki Scolt village were a carefully kept treasure, the charter of the rights of the Scolt Sámi. The story has it that only three trusted men at a time knew the location of the archives. When one of them died, the remaining two chose a new trusted man. The location of the archives thus remained secret for centuries.

Suonikylä's archives became more widely known only in the late 1920's. This is largely thanks to **Väinö Tanner**, a geographer who had chaired the exhaustive work of two inter-governmental

reindeer grazing committees in the 1910s. Tanner had been living in the reindeer husbandry area in Lapland for years and had learned to know and appreciate the Sámi culture. The broad report of the reindeer grazing committee and the material collected when preparing the report are immensely interesting documents that tell about reindeer grazing, the migratory dwelling cycle related to grazing, and other grazing practises.

Since 1923, Väinö Tanner acted as state geologist and was responsible for ore prospecting in Pechenga, which was joined to Finland in the Treaty of Tartu 1920. On his journeys he learned about the life of the Scolt Sámi in Suonijoki, Pechenga, Muotka, Näätämö and Paatsjoki, for instance. Based on his experiences and observations, a Swedish-language study of the life of the Scolt Sámi in Pechenga, more than 500 pages, was published in 1929.

Suonikylä's archives became known in research in the early 1930's. In 1931, **F.W. Planting**, bailiff of the crown, lent the archives, which were still inside the wooden case, to **Niilo Solja**, Deputy Minister of the Interior, who was visiting Pechenga. The Minister took the archives to Helsinki for further research. Phosphate copies were taken of the original documents, which were then returned to Suonikylä a couple of years later together with the wooden case.

The inhabitants of the Scolt villages in Pechenga were evacuated during the Winter War. The Scolds of Suonikylä were first transported to Tervola and from there later to Sevettijärvi. It was thought that the archives had been lost in war. However, this was not true. Major **Matti Tiitola**, who was posted in Pechenga during the war, said in a letter he wrote to former State Archives, now the National Archives Service of Finland, on 9 March 1942 that he had gained possession of a Scolt village's archives, which were stored in a wooden case, when carrying out the evacuation in December 1939. The archives were sent to the Border Guard in Rovaniemi, Lapland, where they were kept in a safe until the end of the war. In his letter, Tiitola wrote that if Pechenga remains part of Finland, he will return the archives to the village elder of Suonikylä. However, if Pechenga is lost, he will hand over the archives to State Archives. The archives ended up in State Archives, as Pechenga was lost for good.

The Scolds of Suonikylä did not know that the archives of Kolttakylä were deposited in State Archives, so they were forgotten for decades. When Siida, the Sámi Museum, began to collect material for the exhibition 'Life of the Scolds' in 1996, **Kalevi Rikkinen**, Professor of Cultural Geography at the University of Helsinki, told that the Scolt village archives were deposited in the

National Archives. He had realised this when studying the life of Väinö Tanner for a work on the history of science in Finland. The Scolt archives had caught his eye at that point. Therefore, in a way we also owe thanks to Väinö Tanner, who began his work among the Sámi a hundred years ago and who also greatly appreciated their culture and form of life, for finding the archives.

Thanks to the valuable discovery, the wooden case containing the Scolt village archives and the copies taken of its documents was on display in the exhibition opened in Siida on 1 April 1998.

Pekka Fofanoff, spokesman for the Scolts, also asked whether the original archives could be brought to Sevettijärvi so that they could be blessed in a Scolt Sámi festival. The National Archives Service granted permission to do so, and Father Ambrosius blessed the archives after liturgy in Sevettijärvi Church in connection with the pilgrimage festival for Saint Tryphon of Pechenga on 29 August 1998. In the Saa'mi Nu'ett of the Scolt Sámi, the occasion was described in the following way: *'This was the first time since we left Pechenga in 1939 that the legendary Suonikylä archives, which we thought had been completely lost, were actually on display, including documents signed by the Russian Czars. It was an emotional, solemn moment.'* After the exhibition the National Archives Service donated the wooden archive case to Sámi museum Siida. The original documents, in turn, were returned to the National Archives Service in Helsinki.

Dear guests: On this date, the Suonikylä's Scolt Sámi archives have been returned to the Sámi area. The National Archives Service of Finland has decided to deposit the original Scolt Sámi archives permanently in the Sámi Archives that were opened in the Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos at the beginning of this year. May I now ask **Klemetti Näkkäljärvi**, Chairman of Sámi Parliament, xxx, representative of the Scolt Sámi, and Suvi Kivelä, Senior Researcher of the National Archives Services of Finland, who is responsible for the Sámi archives, to accept these unique archives. I would also like to mention that the private archives of **Matti Sverloff**, which include the Scolt Sámi's cultural heritage and stories from Suonijoki, will be moved from the Provincial Archives of Oulu to Sámi Archives.