

Helsingin VUOSAARI NORDSJÖ



VUOSAARI-SEURA ■ VUOSAARI-SÄÄTIÖ

Vuosaari, Suburb by the Sea



Some of the major factors influencing Vuosaari's history have been present for a very long time. The sea and the livelihoods it provides have always been strongly associated with Vuosaari. Ancient sea and trade routes that passed via Vuosaari changed by the end of the 16th century. Afterwards, the ships started to sail through the outer archipelago and no longer used the route via Vuosaari. Trade connections and peasant sailing trips to Estonia continued until the Second World War. Now Vuosaari is once again becoming part of an important trade route. A new deep-water channel is currently being dredged for the future mega-harbour.

Big cities have often influenced Vuosaari's development. In the Middle Ages Stockholm and Tallinn were the main trade centres for the inhabitants of Vuosaari. The building of St. Petersburg in the early 18th century had many ramifications for Vuosaari.

The contacts between Vuosaari and Helsinki began when the Swedish King Gustaf Wasa founded Helsinki in 1550. From then on the development of Vuosaari (named variously in documents as Nörsö, Norsby, Norsoby or Norssöö) has closely followed the growth and destiny of Helsinki. Helsinki became the main competitor to Vuosaari in trade. Peasants were forced to participate in the building of the new town's royal manor. Fishermen were ordered to fish for the manor and the king of Sweden was sent a gift of 100 000 dried herrings. For centuries the fishery was, along with farming, an important profession in the area but by the end of the 1960s it had been transformed into a hobby for the local inhabitants.

There have always been harbours and docks in the area from its earliest days. The first "industrial company" on the docks, Nörsö Bankstad, had already been founded by the 1540s in Kortlahti, Ramsinniemi. During its 50 years of existence, it managed to build dozens of ships for the Swedish Royal Navy, some of which were large warships.

Another dock has played an important role in Vuosaari's history. The state-owned Valmet dock functioned in the Niinisaari area from 1974 to 1987. It built dozens of ships, mostly for sale to the Soviet Union. A special feature of this Vuosaari shipyard was a dry dock into which big ships could directly glide. This dock area also hosted a vocational school.

Vuosaari's native Swedish-speakers have had a significant impact on the area's culture for over 700 years. After the Second World War the majority language in the region gradually became Finnish but it did not diminish the influence of the Swedish-speaking Finns. Today Vuosaari contains a school as well as a cultural centre, a parish and many associations for Swedish speaking inhabitants. Vuosaari's culture later incorporated Estonian, German and Russian elements. Immigration has often played a major part in Vuosaari's history. Many ethnic groups have passed through or settled in Vuosaari. Since the 1990s, when Vuosaari experienced a construction boom, it has received inhabitants of many different nationalities. The largest group consists of Ingrians from Russia. Another significant group of new inhabitants arrived from Estonia. Of Vuosaari's 31 948 inhabitants (at the end of 2004), 3 609 are of foreign origin. Of the newcomers, 1 435 originate from elsewhere in Europe, 470 are from Africa and 446 are from Asia.

During the past few decades many foreign workers employed by Finnish and international companies have made Vuosaari their home. The workers and their families include a very active group of English speakers who organize various activities and have founded an English day care centre to serve their families' needs.

Prior to the era of Swedish rule people tended to migrate inland from Vuosaari. During the periods of Swedish and Russian rule people immigrated more to the cities, especially to Helsinki. Today the new construction areas in Vuosaari are designed so that the inhabitants will want to live their whole lives here and, instead of moving out of Vuosaari, will move within it, often to the new areas in Kallahti and Aurinkolahti.

In the early 20th century a number of people built villas, designed for summer use only, that were close to nature but not far removed from the city. The next step was to build single-family houses that became very popular in the 1930s. Soon after the Second World War over 100 families acquired homes as a result of the state's housing program. Later on, the construction of single-family houses was made possible by both state-guaranteed and regular bank loans. The guiding principle in all construction was to have one's own yard and garden and for the homes to have some proximity to nature.

In the 1960s and 1970s, suburban areas with blocks of flats and row houses were designed to be part of the surrounding forests. Some of these houses were constructed using labour contributed by the future inhabitants in partial lieu of purchase price. It was also very important to ensure that recreational and natural environment were close to residential areas. In the late 1980s, construction has followed a different kind of vision; it contained city-like blocks that were often close to the sea or nature. New areas with single-family houses and small blocks of flats have followed the same pattern.

ANCIENT VUOSAARI

From a geological point of view, Vuosaari exhibits evidence of almost all historically important geological eras. The rock bottom dates back some two thousand million years and bears the marks of ancient mountains that, over time, have been reduced to hills and rocks. There are also traces of volcanic activity on Vuosaari's land. The last Ice Age left its mark with large, sandy eskers and roches moutonnées. Vuosaari was an island up to at least the 17th century but due to the slow land rise process since the last Ice Age it has become part of the mainland. Although most of the Vuosaari area remained sea bottom until the end of the first millennium A. D., the highest peaks in the Rastila area formed islands long before that. The first inhabitants most likely came from Estonia about 7000 years ago. The Bronze Age brought people from Sweden to the Rastila area around 2800 B.C. Finno-Ugric peoples such as Lapps, Estonians, Karelians and people of Häme followed suit. Based on the place names in the Vuosaari area, the people of Häme inhabited the area until the end of the 12th century.

Vuosaari's popularity was due to its location on the trade routes. Aside from the route linking Finland and Estonia, there was also (by the 7th century) a major sea trade route east from Sweden that followed the Finnish coastline. Swedes and people from Germany's coastal areas were the most frequent users of this route, which later became a sea route for the Vikings. The Finno-Ugric peoples, some Slavic people, as well as traders from even further East also travelled along this route. During the Viking era traders came from Karelia and from such faraway places as Novgorod and Byzantium.

UNDER SWEDISH RULE

During the Viking era (800- 1100 A.D.) the Swedes had a strong influence on the development of the western parts of Finland. There were permanent Swedish populations on the southern coast by 1200 A.D. and soon afterwards, the whole of Finland was annexed by the Swedish

kingdom. Vuosaari became known by its Swedish name Norsö, meaning a small island that is separated by a sound. Vuosaari's prior name, given to it by the Häme people, has been lost to posterity. Immigrants from the region of Helsingland in Sweden named the whole area of Helsinki after their home region. The people of Häme were forced to move further north as the 700 years of the Swedish rule began. The new immigrants maintained their contacts with Stockholm and worked out trade deals with the Estonians and Tallinn. Furs were replaced as the main item of trade by dairy products and timber.

Helsinki's very first church was built within Vuosaari in the 1100s. From 1350 onwards Vuosaari belonged to the Helsinki parish. The Roman Catholic faith remained the main denomination until the end of the Middle Ages in spite of its slow growth among the Finnish population. During the Middle Ages the Scandinavian social structure was adopted in Finland and the main language used was Swedish, in spite of the mixed cultural heritages of the other inhabitants.

The Lutheran Reformation swept over Scandinavia during the 16th century. During this time the Swedish kingdom was militarily strong and began to expand its territory towards the Baltic countries, Russia and Denmark. All this radically changed the lives of people living in Vuosaari in the 17th century. There was a near-constant series of wars and farms were slowly given to the upper classes and to soldiers in order to pay for their war efforts. Peasants became farm hands or had to pay rent for the right to farm their own land. The Great Northern War (1700-1721) signalled the end of Swedish military expansion.

Vuosaari's farmers and its other inhabitants benefited financially from the building of the Sveaborg fortress (1750-1790), which was intended to protect Helsinki and all of Finland. There were many opportunities for labour and the manors founded two brick factories and excavated sand from their lands for the construction. The bay of Porvarinlahti had a limestone quarry which shipped much of its product to Sveaborg.

RUSSIAN ERA

Sweden fought another war against Russia in the years 1808 – 1809. Sweden lost this war and, in the ensuing treaty, Finland was annexed to Russia. Russia designated Finland as an autonomous grand duchy and Helsinki was selected as its capital. This led to a substantial boost in the number of inhabitants in the whole Helsinki region, Vuosaari included. The city and its garrisons were maintained by products from the surrounding areas and local farms supplied the city with dairy and meat products in particular. Vast quantities of sand were shipped to the new construction sites for over a century.

Finland's cultural and economic life changed substantially from the 1860s onwards. The standard of living rose steadily. The well-to-do upper and middle classes began to purchase summer villas in the countryside. When legislation concerning the partition of land was liberalized and the steamboats began to operate in the 1880s, Vuosaari became a very popular location for villas. Nearly 100 villas were built in just a few decades. The new inhabitants changed the life in the village and, in the summer months, they gave Vuosaari an almost suburban atmosphere.

Vuosaari had become closer to the city in other ways as well; the railway line between Helsinki and Hämeenlinna improved the connection from Vuosaari to Helsinki and, later, to the rest of the country. Technological inventions continued to alter life in Vuosaari. Some manor houses had obtained telephones by the end of 1880. The roads were improved and finally, in 1919, a bridge was built from Kulosaari to Helsinki that made travelling by road to Helsinki from the east much faster. The labour force was able to move about more easily and many actually moved into the city. The farms' ownership changed more often than before. Gradually Vuosaari gained more Finnish speaking workers and the population in the area drifted from being monolingually Swedish to a mixture of Finnish and Swedish.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Early in the 20th century, municipal leaders envisaged that Vuosaari's development would continue along the lines of farming and fishery although the importance of the local villas was steadily increasing. Some businessmen in Kulosaari came up with plans for developing Vuosaari in 1916-1917. They wanted to build a seaside spa with a casino and a hotel in Kallahti. This would have meant building a tram track or even an electric railway track leading to it. The Russian revolution, and all the economic and social upheaval following the First World War in Europe, however, buried these plans.

During the First World War, many projects were started to build land fortifications in Vuosaari, augmenting the Sveaborg sea fortress, in order to protect both Helsinki and St. Petersburg. Huge caves to be used for storage and bases for land fortresses were built in Mustavuori. The Skata peninsula received coastal artillery with strong bunkers and Broända obtained additional artillery. The construction of these involved thousands of workers and soldiers. Part of the work force was local but it also involved Russian minorities and forced labourers from China. Although the fortification work was never finished, it left a permanent mark in the Vuosaari scenery.

Regular bus routes were extended to Vuosaari by 1929. Around the same time the area received its first power lines. The new highway to Porvoo was built between 1932 and 1938, which shortened the drive from Vuosaari to Helsinki to less than one hour.

In the 1920s city of Helsinki was already planning to annex the neighbouring villages, including Vuosaari. This was mentioned in the report by Yrjö Harvia in 1936. A meeting of Vuosaari citizens accepted the annexation unanimously because the village had suffered badly due to the 1930s economic depression. Even the number of inhabitants in Vuosaari had decreased by one quarter.

SASEKA FACTORY AND VUOSAARI

Following the great depression, both the municipal leaders and the inhabitants of Vuosaari felt that the establishing of the Saseka factory was a stroke of luck for the area. Construction of the factory and of its associated neighbourhood was started in 1938. It provided work for locals and brought many new inhabitants to the area. The factory's main product was porous "Siporex" construction tiles. The number of people living in Vuosaari quintupled in a decade. This also changed the linguistic proportions, making Finnish the majority language. The whole village now became a factory town. During the Winter War (1939-1940) and the Continuation War (1941-1944) the factory functioned only periodically.

Vuosaari was used as a decoy location to draw enemy bombers away from Helsinki during the Continuation War. Huge bonfires imitating bombing damage were set on the lands of Nordsjö manor. They were meant to fool the Russians into dropping their bombs there instead of on Helsinki itself. After the war the people of Vuosaari did not pay attention to the fact that the government had excluded Vuosaari from the list of regions that were slated to be annexed to city of Helsinki in 1946. This decision was based on language issues. Vuosaari remained a village for another two decades.

To address the needs of families displaced by post-war peace treaties, by which many former Finnish areas were handed over to Russia, as well as to compensate the returning war veterans, the Parliament enacted a special law that awarded housing lots to these families and individuals. The Saseka firm made available 40 lots as part of this program in 1946-47. In the 1950s the same number of lots were given from the Rastila manor lands. Saseka also sold over 20 lots for housing.

Petter Forsström, the head of Saseka's parent company, had already begun planning in 1940 to build a harbour on the Skata peninsula. The plans included building a railway from Vuosaari to

Savio where it would have joined the main rail lines. This was the beginning of the Vuosaari harbour project.

Saseka also prepared its own town plan for the factory lands and constructed many buildings and blocks of flats that were part of the factory community. Due to the fact that Saseka owned the vast lands of the Nordsjö manor, it was in a good position to start developing the whole Vuosaari area. The villa inhabitants became year-round inhabitants and the importance of farming was diminishing. The city of Helsinki became interested in Vuosaari and bought the Rastila and Uutela manor lands for recreational use for its citizens. In 1955 the first plans for a metro (underground rail system) were made and Vuosaari was included in them.

In the mid 1950s Saseka began to plan a more extensive industrial complex for Vuosaari and the municipal leaders participated in making these plans. However, the plans for the Vuosaari-Savio tracks met resistance from the government and therefore the planned industrial complex was never built. Following this period, there were plans for a combined housing-industrial complex, which changed into plans for developing blocks of flats by 1960. Although the Helsinki region had a severe housing shortage, Vuosaari did not play any role in the minds of the municipal leaders who concentrated on building in the Kaivoksela area. Saseka itself marketed the lots until the Jussi Ketola construction company purchased most of them in 1962.

SUBURBAN VUOSAARI

The conversion of Vuosaari into a suburban housing area was largely managed by the Asuntosäästäjät ry. It started by constructing row houses in 1963. In December of the same year, Jussi Ketola and other construction companies laid the foundations for dozens of blocks of flats. In April 1964 Asuntosäästäjät ry announced their plans to build over 3,300 flats during the next few years. It had purchased lots from Saseka and other companies. The suburb, planned initially for 22 000 inhabitants, was completed at the beginning of the 1970s. The number of inhabitants did not, however, exceed 15 000. The big housing area near the Nordsjö manor, which had been included in the 1963 plans of Saseka, was never built.

Many row houses of Asuntosäästäjät ry, as well as six blocks of flats, were largely built in the 'pay by building your own house' method. Much other construction was performed on a voluntary basis with local residents getting together to build sports arenas and pools.

In the early days there weren't many public services available for the inhabitants so they were forced to provide these services for themselves. The bridge and high school were built without financial support from the city. To enable such projects, the Asuntosäästäjät ry and the new residents founded the Vuosaari-Säätiö (Vuosaari Foundation), which oversaw the development of many features of municipal planning and services. All this furthered the common cause and sense of togetherness for Vuosaari residents. The fact that Vuosaari resembled an island community also gave people the same feeling. Many people had moved to Vuosaari in search of inexpensive housing, some because of the seaside environment. All stayed because of the charms of the nearby nature. This strong commonality became part of the Vuosaari identity and has played a role in the area's development.

Vuosaari was finally annexed to Helsinki in 1966 and this led to new plans by the city. Municipal services and other features such as schools were not built until the 1970s. The city of Helsinki focused on planning major industrial projects in the area such as the harbour, docks, oil- and coal depots, power stations, nuclear power station, sewage treatment plant and garbage dump, in addition to plans for building metro, railway and major highway extensions.

Due to opposition by Vuosaari inhabitants against the government's plans, only some of these projects materialized from 1960 to 1980: the docks, the sewage filtration plant and the garbage dump. The beautiful areas of Uutela, Rastila and Mustavuori were conserved as natural resource

sites for recreational use. The harbour project resurfaced every now and then during these decades but was shelved due to the opposition by the inhabitants and the government. The Saseka factory ended all production in 1978 and the city purchased all its lands. The city also purchased the lands of the dry docks when it finished its operations in 1987. Thus most of the lands of Vuosaari were now owned by the city and it could continue making its plans for the area which included raising the number of inhabitants to 60 000.

Residents already living in Vuosaari thought that the building of the new housing would be detrimental to the nature parks and to the generally appreciated tradition of having considerable green space between buildings. These citizens got together and formed various associations to oppose such plans. They tried to influence the local politics and lobbied to reach their goals. To achieve the greatest efficiency the citizens formed a Residents Committee (Vuosaaren asukas-toimikunta), which sought greater influence through representing greater numbers, which was then a novel approach. Their activity bore fruit in the early 1990s and consequently all important plans concerning Vuosaari have been run through this committee. The committee was particularly successful in planning the new local business centre.

SECOND CONSTRUCTION PHASE BEGAN IN 1989

Due to the opposition demonstrated by local residents, construction of the seaside region of Meri-Rastila in Vuosaari was not begun until 1989. The planners of this, and later of the Kallahti area, tried to apply the latest urban planning trends and to avoid the mistakes made in building suburbs during the previous decades.

The harbour project resurfaced in the urban plans made for 1992. The City Board considered development of this harbour as necessary for the continuing economic growth of the entire Helsinki area. It is likely that the city had by this time obtained promises of financial help from the government. Thus began the final phase of the harbour project. The harbour plans were linked to a projected Vuosaari population of 40,000. Without the harbour, the projected population was 60,000.

The residents of Vuosaari responded to these plans by forming an interest group called "Save Vuosaari" in May 1990. In just a couple of months it managed to collect 16,000 names opposing the construction of the harbour and the new housing. In spite of the opposition campaign and lobbying, the harbour was made part of the city plan in 1992 and the final decision to build it was made official in 2002, 60 years after the initial plans. Concurrently with these plans, the development of the centre of Vuosaari began. The city decided to extend the metro to Vuosaari in 1994. The inhabitants of Vuosaari had made use of the system since 1982 when it was first built (extending as far east as Itäkeskus).

About this time the Paulig Group became interested in the plans for the construction of central Vuosaari, which hastened their fruition. Due to its participation it also ensured being able to function in its old factory building in the present site as well as the promise of a new site elsewhere in Vuosaari. In a unique collaboration, Paulig Group also became involved in planning and constructing the new shopping centre adjacent to the new metro station and the Albatross building, which houses multiple social services. It also staged an international design competition for a landmark building at this site. The winning design was for a block of flats that will have 26 storeys and will reach a height of nearly 100 m. Paulig Group was also involved in the planning of the Aurinkolah-ti neighbourhood, employing an international competition for architects. Finnish architect Timo Vornala submitted the winning plan that included a 700 m long canal to be finished by 2006. The canal will border the Uutela nature park. Paulig Group's role in the present-day Vuosaari and harbour project has been quite substantial.

21ST CENTURY VUOSAARI

Aurinkolahti represents quite a new type of neighbourhood for Vuosaari. Paulig Group facilitated the involvement of four different construction companies. They devised plans for a southern European vacation city-style area that would have a seaside boulevard, a beach and a central plaza.

The new constructions in Vuosaari are scheduled to continue until the beginning of the 2020s. The plan is to return to a modern version of living in villas, i.e. having upscale residences in blocks of flats close to nature as well as the one-family houses and row houses which have been characteristic of Vuosaari's urban landscape for a long time. In the near future there will be 3000-4000 new inhabitants in single houses built in the areas of Porslahti, Kurkimoisio, Ramsinranta and in northern Vuosaari.

The urban plans for the beginning of the 21st century have nearly been realized. These plans include such areas as Meri-Rastila, northern Vuosaari, Uutela, Kallahti and Ramsinniemi. The city has invested considerably in recreational areas. In the heart of Vuosaari there will be a sports area offering opportunities for participating in various sports; future plans include building a hockey arena and a hall for playing floorball (bandy). There are centres for cultural activities, such as Vuotalo, which contains, among other things, a library and an exhibition hall. The new neighbourhoods composed of blocks of flats also have additional, smaller community centres for use by their inhabitants. These features, the natural resources provided by the sea and the local environment as well as all of the businesses that have been attracted to Vuosaari ensure quite a viable new urban centre.

If you ask people living in Vuosaari what they think of their home, they say that people here work together and form a community. This is partly due to the shared 'pay by building your own house' experience but also by the common cause of opposing the mega-harbour and other projects. For most inhabitants Vuosaari is not just a name for a neighbourhood but a place to call home.

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Lukijalle

On kulunut jo viisitoista vuotta siitä, kun Erkki Hiltusen toimittama kirja "Vuosaari – Nordsjö merellinen kaupunginosa" julkaistiin. Siinä kuvattiin Vuosaarta monipuolisesti vuoteen 1990 asti ja luotiin myös katsaus kaupunginosamme tulevaisuuden näkyisiin silloisten suunnitelmien valossa. Kirjan painos oli pieni ja loppui jo vuosia sitten.

Kirjan ilmestymisen jälkeen Vuosaaressa on rakennettu uusia asuinalueita ja lisää on rakenteilla. Vuosaareen on muuttanut paljon uusia asukkaita. Asukasluku on yli kaksinkertaistunut ja kasvaa vielä. Monia uusia asukkaita kiinnostaa Vuosaaren historia ja kehitys, nykytilä ja tulevaisuuden näkymät.

Vaikka Vuosaari on uusi kaupunginosa, on sillä vaiheikas historia. Vuosaarelaiset ovat tottuneet puolustamaan ja kehittämään omaa kaupunginosaansa ja kirjoittaneet näin omaa historiaansa. Täällä on meneillään monia valtakunnallisestikin merkittäviä hankkeita. Tietoa omasta kaupunginosasta tarvitaan myös kouluopetuksessa; kirjan toivotaankin kiinnostavan myös koululaisia. Myös täällä pidempään asuneet ovat toivoneet uutta Vuosaari-kirjaa. Kun sopivaa julkaisua ei enää ollut saatavilla, Vuosaari-Säätiö ehdotti Vuosaari-Seuralle yhteistyötä uuden Vuosaaresta kertovan kirjan tuottamiseksi.

Vuosaari-Säätiö päätti rahoittaa kirjoitustyön. Muihin kustannuksiin on saatu huomattavaa taloudellista ja muuta tukea yrityksiltä ja yhteisöiltä. Ilman tällaista yhteistä osallistumista kirjasta olisi tullut paljon suppeampi ja vaatimattomampi. Kiitämme tukijoitamme.

Suuren kiitoksen ansaitsevat myös kaikki nykyiset ja entiset vuosaarelaiset, jotka ovat antaneet korvauksetta valokuvia ja muuta materiaalia kirjaa varten. Vuosaarelaiden haastatteluista on saatu kirjaan lisää paikallisväriä. Kiitokset kuuluvat myös kirjan tukiryhmän jäsenille. He ovat osallistuneet kirjan sisällön suunnitteluun ja antaneet asiantuntevia neuvoja ja ohjeita.

Kirjan kirjoittajan Pertti Lammen tekstissä kerrotaan laajalti alueen historiasta, mutta erityistä painoa on pantu 1960-luvun jälkeen tapahtuneelle kehitykselle. Kirjan ulkoasun on suunnitellut Seppo Huunonen päämääränään visuaalisesti miellyttävä ja lukemaan houkutteleva kotiseutu-kirja. Jorma Koljonen on käsitellyt kirjan kuvat ja vastannut sivunvalmistuksesta. Kiitämme heitä hyvin tehdystä työstä.

Kirjan toimituskunta on vastannut runsaan kuvamateriaalin hankkimisesta ja valinnasta, samoin kuin tekstin viimeistelystä ja monista tarkistuskierroksista. Toimituskunnan jäsenet ovat nähneet paljon vaivaa ja käyttäneet runsaasti aikaa kirjahankkeen eri vaiheissa. Ilman heidän uhrautuvaa työpanostaan ja asiantuntemustaan kirjaa ei olisi saatu aikaan.

Vuosaaressa syyskuussa 2005

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