

OPENING SPEECH

My dear relatives and friends!

Here today, at the Sami Museum, researcher Marja Riitta Vehviläinen's genealogical study on Antti Hannunpoika Kitti (born 1786) is being made public.

During the last few years an increasing number of Sami people have evinced an interest in their roots. On the Norwegian side meritorious books have been written about family trees in the municipalities of Kautokeino, Karasjoki and Pulmanki. 'Where did I come from and where do I belong?' are questions that today occupy the minds of many Sami. An awareness of their own background transports Sami people back to their roots and brings them more courage to survive in a globalising world. In Finland recently, in addition to genealogical studies, tangential issues like dialect and tribal studies have begun to interest people more generally and the home region spirit is also rearing its head here and there. The bravest of all even embark on name changes based on an original Sami or Lapp name.

In my case, interest in my roots was awakened in the various branches of the Kitti family as long ago as during the 1970s. After numerous stages, a family society was established in 1998 as a link between members of a family scattered all over Finland and Scandinavia, as well as elsewhere in the world, and as a springboard for research. The intention is to strengthen contacts with our own family through meetings of various kinds. I would surmise that this common interest will most likely bring new acquaintanceships and hobbies.

When I began my study on the Kitti family in the 1970s, it became apparent that a study on one's family tree is, in short, a search for previous generations. At its narrowest, it appears to follow an ancestral line based on the father. When investigating the Kitti family I observed how my research expanded and for a start branched off wildly in a vast variety of directions. The information compiled by Marja Riitta Vehviläinen may even one day appear in published form. Whatever, the researcher's need to search and discover is satisfied. For me the time spent on researching my family tree has also meant an enlargement of my own view of the world and my concept of the past.

While engaged in my study, I have also had to familiarise myself with historical events. I have been obliged to learn about different kinds of handwriting and styles of writing, not to mention foreign languages, specifically Swedish, in which official sources have frequently been written. To my surprise, I have also discovered how the history of the Sami people and world events have been reflected in the life of my own humble ancestor.

I began tracing my family by interviewing living relatives and acquaintances, and by sifting through archives. I noticed how this sort of thing also strengthens ties between close family members and establishes completely new dimensions for visiting relatives, especially on the Norwegian side. Once the first discovery, i.e. Antti Hannunpoika Kitti (born 1789) had been made, church records formed the first, easiest and most reliable archival source, but also one with many ramifications. Aside from these, the Sami family register files held by The Society for the Promotion of Sami Culture rewarded my search with some entirely new perspectives.

In church records, the clergy recorded the earthly and spiritual lives of parishioners from the church's standpoint. Depending on the mobility and place of residence of the Sami mother or father, by tracing these in relation to my family I arrived at the abovementioned 1789 in Finland. After

this, we have to transfer to the Norwegian side. On the other hand, the tax records continue beyond this right up to the second half of the 1600s, throwing light more on material life from the standpoint of both State and church. Court documents form a special field in themselves which already calls for familiarisation with handwriting and old Swedish. Archives have also arisen from border crossings and house establishment inspections.

Compiling house histories, as with other old information, is basically the collection of tiny crumbs in order to construct larger entities. Only rarely does one discover large parcels of information from which one can glean the data one seeks. Newspapers and old photographs make events real. Even though it is impossible to go backwards, one can achieve depth in the lives of one's forebears from a large number of different sources.

As with all research, tracing a family tree calls not only for patience, but also for time. Genealogical studies resemble the work of secret police. The overall picture is pieced together from tiny fragments. A long study may lead one nowhere, but turning things up gives one a wonderful feeling. The researcher also needs to be critical, but at the same time to have plenty of imagination. Evidence must be reliable or, in the lack of any evidence, an event has to be admitted as presumed.

Many unpleasant things also become apparent from archival material. However, it has to be said that we are not responsible for the work of past generations, nor for work left undone.

Research material becomes increasingly more available once one knows of the existence of all possible archives. Museum archives offer, for example, catalogued collections of photographs, while one can study original texts and books in provincial archives. Guides have appeared, and continue to do so, and assistance is also obtained from both researchers and the published results of other family tree studies. On these grounds it appears that the various stages of the Kitti family will continue to be elucidated.

I sincerely hope that the connections severed due to the closure of the borders for relatives living on both sides of the border, here in Finland and in Norway, will improve and contact between them and others will become a natural everyday event. In order to further this idea we formed an Antti Hannunpoika Kitti family society in 1998 and I have acted as the society's chairman since its inception. By forming a family society we have sought to take care of the Kitti family's history and its Sami links, together with the Sami language.

One purpose of the society is to determine the various stages in the lives of Antti Hannunpoika's descendants and to construct and maintain contacts between family members by arranging, for example, reunions. This, then, is our family's second reunion. The first was also held here in Inari on the 7th and 8th July 2000. On behalf of our family society I bid YOU ONE AND ALL a hearty welcome to this reunion. Once again – WELCOME!

Jouni Kitti
Chairman of the Antti Hannunpoika Kitti Family Society