

Nomination form

International Memory of the World Register

ID Code [2014-21]

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The archive of the Skolt Sámi village of Suonjel Suenjel (Sámi: *Suõ'nnjel*; Finnish: *Suonikylä*) in the Pechenga region forms a unique body of documentation of an indigenous community. Preserved for centuries, the archive consists of documents joined together with glue made from bones, eventually forming a nine metre-long scroll. The scroll was kept inside a casing carved from a tree trunk and stored in a secret location known only to three trusted men, who all came from different families.

The documents are official edicts issued by the Russian Emperor and the Imperial Government (gramota), which confirmed the rights of the Skolt Sámi community to their fishing and reindeer herding territories. The oldest preserved document dates from 1601 and the latest from 1775. The preservation of the documents started as early as the late 16th century but the oldest documents have not survived. The collection shows that the Skolt Sámi, who depended on fishing and reindeer herding for their livelihoods, understood at a very early stage the significance of written documents. These documents were proof of their rights to land and water territories and were therefore of crucial importance to the community.

The Skolt Sámi population was evacuated and the archive moved from Pechenga during the Second World War in 1939. The archive was placed in the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki until it was returned to the Skolt Sámi community in 2012, which donated it to be preserved at the Sámi Archives, a unit established the same year under the National Archive of Finland and operating in Inari at the Sámi region. Skolt Sámi is listed as an endangered language by the UNESCO. The archive forms a crucial part of the community's identity and it has wider symbolic meaning for other indigenous communities as well.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

The National Archives of Finland

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Keeper of the documentary heritage

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Director General, Dr. Jussi Nuorteva
National Archives of Finland
POB 258
FI-00171 Helsinki
Finland

Tel +358405925131
jussi.nuorteva@narc.fi

Sámi archivist, Mrs. Suvi Kivelä
Sámi Archives
Sajos
FI-99870 Inari
Finland
Tel +358505623676
suvi.kivela@narc.fi

2.4 Contact details

Name	Address	
CONTACT DETAILS GIVEN IN 2.3.		
Telephone	Facsimile	Email

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

In this part of the form you must describe the document or collection in sufficient detail to make clear precisely what you are nominating. Any collection must be finite (with beginning and end dates) and closed.

Archive of the Suenjel indigenous Skolt Sámi community (1601 – 1775)

3.4 History/provenance

Describe what you know of the history of the collection or document. Your knowledge may not be complete, but give the best description you can.

The archive of the Skolt Sámi community of the Pechenga Suenjel region consists of edicts issued by Russian Emperors and the Imperial Government regarding the rights to pasture land and the fishing territory of the Suenjel Skolt Sámi community, a Northern European indigenous people. The oldest preserved document dates from 1601 and the latest from 1775. The compilation of the archive began as early as the late 16th century, but the oldest part of the body of documentation was destroyed in 1589 in the war between Sweden and Russia. The compilation of the documents was discontinued in 1775.

The Suenjel Skolt Sámi community kept the archive, valuable from the perspective of their rights, in their village until 1939. In the early 1930s, however, the archive resided in Helsinki for two years, during which the documents were duplicated as photostatic copies. Based on these, Professor J.J. Mikkola published a monograph on the archive in 1941 entitled *Kolttakylän arkisto* [The archive of the Skolt village] (1941).

The archive was moved from Suenjel during the Second World War, first in 1939 to Rovaniemi and in 1942 to Helsinki, where it was placed in the State Archives of Finland (from 1994 the National Archives of Finland). The archive was returned to the Suenjel Skolt Sámi community in 2012, which donated it to the Sámi Archives, established the same year in the Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos located in the Inari Sámi region as a unit under the National Archives of Finland. The casing, which dates from 1865 and in which the documents were kept, has been placed on display in the nearby Sámi museum centre Siida, together with a copy of the original scroll. The provenance and history of the archive has been completely established.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address	
The National Archives of Finland	P.O. Box 258	
	FI-00171 Helsinki, Finland	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email
+358295337000	+3589176302	arkisto@narc.fi

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
The Sámi Archive	Sajos	
	FI-99870 Inari, Finland	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email
+358295337042	+3589176302	arkisto@narc.fi

4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The National Archives of Finland is owner and custodian of the documentary heritage with full and exclusive rights. The documentary heritage is kept at the Sámi Archive, which is a Unit under the Division of Research and Development of the National Archives of Finland. The Sámi Archive is located in Inari, in the Sámi region and is responsible for permanent preservation of the governmental documents originating from the Sámi Parliament and other bodies of Sámi public administration, as well as those private collections that have been donated to the Sámi Archive. The Sámi Parliament is the highest political organ of the Sámi in Finland and has wide-ranging autonomy in matters of its own regime. The rights of the Sámi languages are protected by a special law (1086/2003). The documentary heritage of the indigenous Sámi people is to be kept in the Sámi region. The Skolt Sámi population has its own language and culture. There is also a special law safeguarding the life and culture of the Skolt Sámi community in Finland (253/1995). The Archive of Suenjel village is the most important expression of the documentary heritage of the indigenous Skolt Sámi community. The archive has been donated to the National Archives of Finland to be permanently kept in the Sámi Archive.

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

All original documents have been digitised and they are freely accessible on the Internet from the Digital Archive of the National Archives of Finland:

(<http://digi.narc.fi/digi/dosearch.ka?sartun=185032.KA>).

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

There are no restrictions.

Encouraging accessibility is a basic objective of MoW. Accordingly, digitization for access purposes is encouraged and you should comment on whether this has been done or is planned. You should also note if there are legal or cultural factors that restrict access.

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

There are no limitations for usage of the digital copies of the archive. The National Archives of Finland is following the Open Data-policy of the Finnish government. Therefore all digitised

documents in the Digital Archive are available free of charge and high resolution images can also be downloaded and used for further purposes without written permission only by mentioning their provenance.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

Is the documentary heritage what it appears to be? Have identity and provenance been reliably established?

The authenticity of the records (gramota) was confirmed for the first time already by the Russian Imperial Government at the end of the 17th Century following a dispute between the Skolt Sámi community and a local Monastery. The records of the Skolt Sámi were approved authentic legal documents confirming the rights given by the governmental authorities to the community.

A thorough study of the documents was made by professor of Slavonic Languages at the University of Helsinki, Dr. J.J. Mikkola in the 1930's. The results were published in 1941 in a book written by professor Mikkola. The archive that is now kept in the Sami Archive is without any doubt the original archive of the community in every detail. There is also a reliable description of how the archive was found and evacuated by the Finnish Military from the village at Suenjel during the Winter War in 1939. It was first taken to the Border Guards Station in Rovaniemi and sent three years later, in 1942, to the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki.

5.2 World significance

Is the heritage unique and irreplaceable? Would its disappearance constitute and harmful impoverishment of the heritage of humanity? Has it created great impact over time and/or within a particular cultural area of the world? Has it had great influence (positive or negative) on the course of history?

The archive of the Skolt Sámi community of the Suonjel village of Pechenga region is a unique expression of how documented decisions of the government were understood already centuries ago as safeguarding the fundamental rights of the community. The whole existence of it was based on the rights for fishing and reindeer herding in the regions that had been owned by the community since ancient times. The documents, awarded by the Russian Imperial Government, confirmed these rights and the community developed a unique way to preserve these vital records. They were kept in a case, carved from a trunk of a tree and new documents were added to a scroll with glue made from bones. Finally the scroll grew to a length of more than nine metres.

The awareness about the rights of the indigenous people is, in most cases, of a much later date. It is truly amazing, that this kind of understanding about the importance of documentary heritage developed among a reindeer herding community already in the end of the 16th Century. The documents are also evidence of a government recognising the fair claims of a native community to the lands and rivers that formed its livelihood.

The documented evidence of rights given to the indigenous Sámi community has a great significance to all indigenous peoples worldwide today. We want to express, that the documentary heritage of the Skolt Sámi community needs to be seen in the light of the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly during its 61st session in September 2007. This is why the proposal to include the Skolt Sámi archive to the UNESCO Memory of the World register has raised much attention not only among the Finnish Sámi people. The proposal has a much wider symbolic value for the indigenous peoples of the world in general.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

Is the document evocative of its time (which may have been a time of crisis, or significant social or cultural change)? Does it represent a new discovery? Or is it the “first of its kind”?

The documents were used to protect the rights of an indigenous community against colonial interests with success as early as the 17th Century. They relate to the history of the colonisation of the Northernmost part of Europe and to the tensions that this raised between a native community and the newcomers.

2 Place

Does the document contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture? For example, was the location itself an important influence on the events or phenomena represented by the document? Does it describe physical environments, cities or institutions that have since vanished?

The archive is an extremely rare example of a very unique archiving practice of an indigenous community far up in Northern Europe. It is essential evidence of the history of the colonisation era in Lapland, divided between Kingdoms of Denmark (including Norway) and Sweden (including Finland) and the Empire of Russia. The documents and their usage to protect the rights of the village are vital from the point of view of the local community under huge pressure.

The Skolt Sámi community was evacuated during the Second World War from Suenjel area to Tervola and was later settled in Sevetijärvi in Finland. The traditional annual lifecycle of Suonjel was lost, but many of its characteristics are still part of the living Skolt Sámi culture and intellectual awareness of the community. Inclusion of the ancient archive on the UNESCO Memory of the World register would have great impact on the cultural and historical understanding of, in particular, the younger generations.

3 People

Does the cultural context of the document’s creation reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development? Or does it capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression? Does it illustrate the lives of prominent individuals in the above fields?

The archive of the indigenous Skolt Sámi community has the highest possible value for the Sámi people of the North.

4 Subject and theme

Does the subject matter of the document represent particular historical or intellectual developments in the natural, social and human sciences? Or in politics, ideology, sport or the arts?

The unique way the archive was kept scrolled to a wooden casing shows the intellectual understanding on the preservation of written records (gramota) among the Skolt Sámi community where practically nobody had received formal education.

5 Form and style

Does the document have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value? Or is it a typical exemplar of a type of presentation, custom or medium? Is it an example of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format?

The archive, kept on a scroll in a wooden casing, is a unique expression of archival “innovativeness” of the Skolt Sámi people. The practice was original, not copied from the neighbouring societies, but developed independently. The practice is known among other cultures, but not within one, that could have influenced the Sámi community in the far away Pechenga area.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or revered for its association with significant people and events?

(Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/ spiritual/ community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance.)

The spiritual significance and community value of the archive is best expressed in its most recent history. After the Second World War, the community living in exile was not aware that the archive was rescued from Suenjel village, but considered it lost. When it was detected in 1996 in the National Archives of Finland, it raised huge interest within the community. The wooden casket was displayed in the Inari Sámi museum Siida and the document scroll was borrowed for the community to be blessed and celebrated at the annual Orthodox Christian festivity (Praznik) of St. Trifon of Pechenga in August 1998.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

Authentic records were kept by the Skolt Sámi community in the Suenjel region of Pechenga from 16th Century until 1939. The archive is a unique and the oldest expression of awareness and understanding of the importance of documentary heritage among the indigenous Sámi people.

The practice to use scrolls in preserving invaluable documents or writings is known among different people of the world. However, there is no evidence, that the Skolt Sámi community of Suenjel might have been able to adopt the practice from any others. Also, keeping documents or other valuable items in a box carved from a wooden trunk is known in some cultures, but not in a culture that could have had any contact with the Sámi population of the Arctic region. The archiving practice of the Skolt Sámi community can without any doubt be seen as a unique expression of an originally developed technique to preserve and safeguard documentary heritage, that is considered of utmost importance for the community.

Copies of the documents are at least in some cases available at the RGADA, Moscow.

6.2 Integrity

There are early mentions of documents that have belonged to the archive in the beginning of the 16th Century. There have also been scrolls other than the one that has been preserved. It is known that similar scrolls were collected from the Sámi in the 18th and 19th century, but their later fate is unknown. The remaining scroll seems to be the only one of its kind.

The wooden casing that protected the old documents had to be replaced every now and then. The present casing is from the middle of 19th Century and was specially made for this purpose. The casket is in an arrangement between the National Archives of Finland and Foundation for the Sámi Museum displayed in the Sámi Museum Siida in Inari with a digital copy of the scroll made by the National Archives of Finland. The original records are kept in a safe in the Sámi Archive, just 400 metres from the Museum.
