Chapter 9
Materialities on the Move: Identity and Material Culture Among the Forest Finns in Seventeenth-Century Sweden and America

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Introduction

> The differences in language, culture and economy were so great that it is reasonable to suggest that the forest Finns, despite Swedish citizenship, had their own nationality. Their situation can therefore to some degree be compared to that of today's immigrants (Stenman 2001:135, translation by the author).

Early modern Scandinavian colonialism is an area of study largely under development. While the idea of Scandinavia as a colonial space has grown stronger within the past few decades of research, gradually focusing on both political expansion and situations where cultural similarities and differences are expressed and negotiated, there are still research areas with a tendency for an essentialist view of culture and peoples. One of these is the research on the so-called forest Finns who migrated from eastern Finland and settled in central and northern Sweden in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Members of this group were later included among the settlers of the colony *New Sweden* in America in the early seventeenth century. The introducing quote above may be taken as representative of the general idea of forest Finn ethnicity and identity prevalent in much ethnographic and historical research, as well as the widespread view on their relationship with other groups. The issue of ethnicity and cultural identity has been central to the research on the forest Finns from the onset (cf. Jordan and Kaups 1989; Pikkola 1990; Norman 1995; Jordan 1995; Wedin et al. 2001; Welinder 2003). The features traditionally considered underlying the ethnic identity of the forest Finns were a common cultural origin in eastern Finland, the Finnish language, their agricultural practice, their mode of building houses, as well as their experience of

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Fig. 9.1 *Under the Yoke* (Sw. *Trälar under penningen*) by Eero Järnefelt (1893). The painting's iconic depiction of the toil and hardship of slash-and-burn agriculture in the nineteenth century has become part of the forest Finn myth, even with regards to the seventeenth century. (Ateneum Art Museum & The Central Art Archives, Helsinki, Finland. Foto: Hannu Aaltonen)

migration and outside pressures from others, such as the Swedish Crown. However, the inference of these characteristics has up until recently been based largely on retrospective evidence, such as written sources and architectural remains dating to the mid-eighteenth century or later. This has at times led to a kind of reversed ethnocentrism, where the forest Finns appear as a timeless, ingenious and resilient frontier people represented by an unchanging repertoire of cultural traits (Fig. 9.1; cf. critique by Talve 1986; Aronsson 2000; Bladh 2000; Welinder 2003).

Although a complex area of research, the forest Finns provide us with a challenging case study for exploring the issues of the materialities of early modern Scandinavian colonialism and migration, cultural interaction and the consequent dispersion, use and transformation of material culture (e.g. Welinder 2003). In the following I will approach this subject by discussing the seventeenth-century Finnish colonisation of the woodlands of central and northern Sweden as well as along the Delaware Valley in North America. By comparing the relatively well-known situation of the forest Finns in Sweden with the materially unexplored colonisation of the Delaware Valley, I will problematise the impact of interaction and integration on material culture and identity construction. How can one approach the Finnish settlers materially, focusing on material culture in the broadest sense, and how is the material culture to be understood, considering the indicated colonial situations where peoples and cultures intermingled and transformed?

Ethnicity and Material Culture

Ethnicity has always been a controversial issue in archaeology and material culture studies. Although some scholars refute the possibility of establishing past ethnicities based on material culture (cf. Jones 1997:x), archaeologists are still very much bound to assigning identities to the objects of past peoples. However, the centre of attention has shifted in recent years and scholars have become more mindful of the complexities of identity construction. Instead of viewing ethnicity as essential and unchanging properties, manifesting themselves through specific cultural features, modern scholars approach the issue contextually. In both anthropology and archaeology, ethnicity is thus generally considered to be the process of generating and maintaining self-conceptualisations relative to external categorisations of people and based on perceived cultural discrepancies. This process is, as such, a form of social organisation, and therefore both situational and mutable. It is through the cultural interchange with others that ethnic identities are created and transformed (cf. Barth 1969; Banks 1996; Jones 1997; Johnsen and Welinder 1998; Eriksen 2002; Werbart 2002; Welinder 2003; Hillerdal 2009). In other words, ethnicity is an aspect of social practice, which in turn is constructed in dialogue with material culture (cf. Ehn 1990; Werbart 2000:185). As Sam Lucy puts it: "One of the most powerful ways to reproduce feelings of ethnic belonging is to make use of symbolic resources, especially material culture and everyday practices" (Lucy 2005:96). By studying the material culture patterning, we may thus identify divergences in cultural practice that were the basis for the creation and transformation of ethnic identities (Ehn 1990:84; Lucy 2005:87).

The Forest Finns in Sweden

Between the years 1580 and 1650, an estimated 12,000 forest Finns migrated from the eastern parts of Finland (which was part of Swedish kingdom at that time) and settled in Sweden (Fig. 9.2), particularly in the provinces of Dalarna, Västmanland and Värmland (Paloposki 1980:29–30; Tarkiainen 1990:133; Wedin 2001:35–42). This coincided with the ambition of the Swedish Crown to increase its revenues by promoting new settlements in the large forests covering the interfluves between already-settled valleys. Forest-dwelling Finns from the Savo-Karelian area of Finland were thus invited to colonise these regions of Sweden, and they were given seeds, cattle and a few years of tax exemption as incentive for their efforts (Tarkiainen 1990:142–144, 148; Wedin 2007:207–238). With them they brought their characteristic slash-and-burn technology by which they turned the coniferous forests into arable land. This practice, which appears to have been the dominant form of agriculture in eastern Finland (Orrman 1995:95–96), was a prerequisite for their colonisation of the Swedish interfluves. Thus, it is often regarded as one of the material practices that singled them out as an ethnic group in their new land (Wedin 2007:137–204; cf. Jordan and Kaups 1989).

As an agricultural technique, the slash-and-burn practice was not unique to the Savo-Karelians. However, the so-called *huuhta* technique, i.e. the extensive,

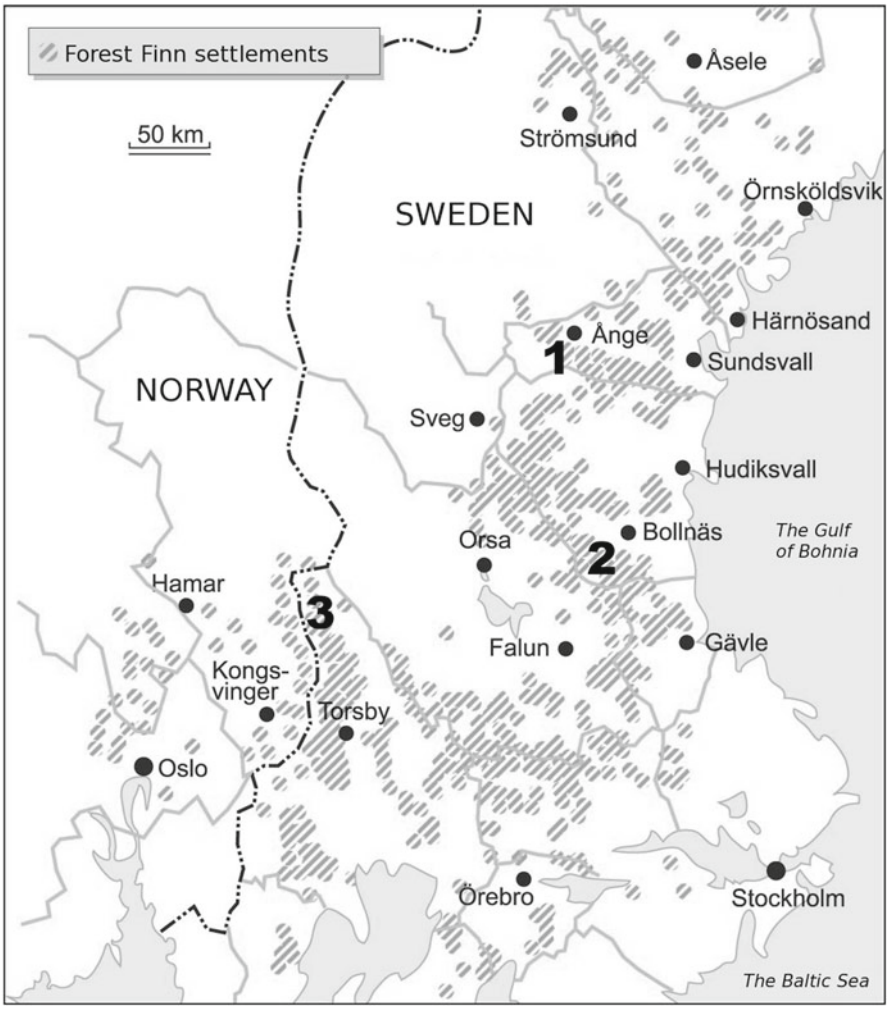

Fig. 9.2 Map of forest Finn settlements in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Sweden and Norway. The archaeological sites mentioned in the text are 1 = Råsjö, Borgsjö parish, Medelpad; 2 = Grannäs, Alfta parish, Hälsingland; and 3 = Gammelvallen, Södra Finnskoga parish, Värmland. (Adapted after Wedin 2007:104, Fig. 4:2)

migratory cultivation of rye in the ashes of burned spruce forests, differed from other known Scandinavian practices in the seventeenth century and is regarded as a forest Finn innovation. This technology allowed for a large harvest of grain, which was an important factor and a reason why the Swedish Crown invited the Finns to settle the state-owned land. However, it generally took 3–4 years from the time the forest was burnt until the rye could be harvested, after which the open field was used for haymaking and grazing cattle. It would then take several decades for the forest to renew itself before it could be burnt again (Wedin 2001:44–45). For this practice

to be sustainable, it thus required several concurrent *huuhtas* in different stages of progress. Another, oft-mentioned, slash-and-burn technique was the so-called *kaski*, meaning the burning of the broad leaf forest that established itself on the abandoned *huuhtas*. The trees were cut in the late summer and left to dry, and the clearing was then burnt the next year and rye, turnips and grain sown in the ashes (Bladh 1992; Tvengsberg 1995:279, 281–282; Aronsson 2000; Wedin 2001:44–49; Welinder 2003:110).

Archaeologically, the burning and cutting of vegetation in order to create arable fields is indicated in pollen and macrofossil samples from a number of historically known forest Finn sites. At the Råsjö farm in Borgsjö parish in Medelpad, which according to written accounts was founded by Finnish-speaking migrants ca. 1620 (e.g. George 2004:5), the pollen samples indicate an establishment phase through an incipient rye cultivation coupled with a decrease in spruce. The macrofossil samples of spruce, pine and birch together with charred branches from a burnt layer under the infields appear to confirm the initial clearing phase in preparation for the fields. The landscape around the farm gradually opened up, giving room to grasses and herbs. The decrease of spruce continued over time while the presence of coal increased, which may be interpreted as evidence of an intensified human activity in the area. After about 20–30 years, the cultivation of rye in burnt clearings appears to have been substituted by the growing of barley in permanent, fertilised fields (George 2004:11–12, 2005:18–19; Wallin 2005).

Similar changes in agricultural focus are also attested in contemporary tithe records in other parts of Sweden (Bladh 1995:155; cf. Lööw 1985:43–48). Although macrofossils and pollen samples from other historically known forest Finn sites testify to burnt clearings and expanding fields as well, indicating the use of a rudimentary slash-and-burn technology (e.g. Welinder 2003:118, 128; Regnell 2005), using such samples to argue for the iconic *huuhta* or *kaski* practices is questionable. The samples are generally small, sometimes hard to directly link to the historically known farms, and they do not offer datable sequences with enough resolution to verify the recurring burning associated with a large-scale and systematic slash-and-burn practice. Furthermore, the traces of coal in some of the samples might originate from any number of sources, including charcoal production (which was usually located in the deep forests) as well as ordinary fireplaces (Welinder 2003:118). A number of analyses seem moreover to indicate that the farms were not established in primeval, non-cultivated forests and did not cause any major changes of the landscape. Rather, the Finnish-speaking settlers arrived to a fairly open forest of both broadleaf and coniferous trees, cultivated by the Swedish farmers through forestry and summer pastures. The land then appears to have then been fairly rapidly burnt, cleared of vegetation and transformed into permanent infields (Welinder 2003:113–118, 121, 128–129; cf. Aronsson et al. 1993; Regnell 2005). This shift in agricultural focus may be attributed to a number of factors: For instance, the *letters of permission* (Sw. *nedsättningsbrev* or *torpebrev*) as well as the years of tax exemption awarded to the Finnish settlers were conditional upon the Finnish settlers establishing permanent (i.e. taxable) fields. Also, the slash-and-burn practice was severely restricted through a number of legislations from the mid-seventeenth century onwards (see below).

The forest Finns also brought with them a number of building traditions that, at least initially, would have set them apart from the Swedish farmers: the smoke cabin (Fi. *pirtti*), the grain-drying shed (Fi. *ria*) and the smoke sauna (Fi. *savusauna*). What separated this group of buildings from the Swedish farms was not so much their outer log construction, being built in the tradition of notched timber cabins found in central and northern Sweden, Norway, the Baltic countries and parts of Russia. It was rather their system of heating, using a chimneyless smoke oven, which sets them apart (Erixon 1982:404–407; Nesholen 2001:96; Gustafson 2005). Although buildings interpreted as smoke cabins, drying sheds or saunas are mentioned in the Swedish and Finnish written sources of the period (Welinder 2003:96–97), we do not have any clear contemporary literary evidence of these smoke ovens in Sweden. And of the extant farm buildings of attested forest Finn origin in Sweden, only four have been dated to the seventeenth century, mostly on the basis of oral tradition (Östberg 2001). Furthermore, all of them have been moved, remodelled and/or added to over the years. Thus, there is no reliable and contemporary comparative material for buildings with smoke ovens. In spite of this, the existence of smoke ovens in the seventeenth century has never been doubted, and their absence in the Swedish literary sources has been attributed to the misconceptions of the contemporary writers (cf. Wedin 2007:161). Based on extant structures of a later date (eighteenth and nineteenth century), the smoke oven was constructed out of fieldstones (with or without mortar) and chimneyless, allowing the smoke to escape through the oven opening and out through a hole in the roof. The oven in the smoke cabin was large, sometimes taking up as much as one quarter of the floor space, while the ones in the saunas and the drying sheds were smaller in size (e.g. Talve 1960:316; Nesholen 2001:96; Gustafson 2005; Wedin 2007:161–167).

Archaeologically, ovens of this type have been identified on three sites dated to the seventeenth century: Råsjö in Borgsjö parish, Medelpad (George 2006, 2007); Grannäs in Alfta parish, Hälsingland (Welinder 2005; Blennå and Gustafson 2011) and Gammelvallen in Södra Finnskoga parish, Värmland (Bladh et al. 1992; Aronsson et al. 1993) (Fig. 9.2). At the Råsjö site, the remains of two, partly overlapping, seventeenth-century buildings were excavated close to the lake, possibly representing the earliest phase of the farm (Fig. 9.3). One of them had the remains of a large smoke oven built of fieldstones in one of the corners. Due to the oven, the building was interpreted as either a smoke cabin or a grain-drying shed (or possibly a multifunctional building), and it was most likely the first building on the site. High amounts of grain from earth samples taken close to the building are possibly the remains of thrashing. The other building, also constructed with a smoke oven made of fieldstones, was a younger structure interpreted as a sauna (George 2006, 2007). On the terrace above the lake, the remains of a third building was partly excavated and dated to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. This was a larger, double house (Sw. *parstuga*), with one room housing a smoke oven and the other an oven with a chimney (George 2005).

Although the ovens of these buildings may be interpreted as smoke ovens of Finnish type and thus used to align a specific form of material culture to the ascribed forest Finn identity associated with the farm through the written sources, the material culture in general at Råsjö did not specifically distinguish itself compared to that

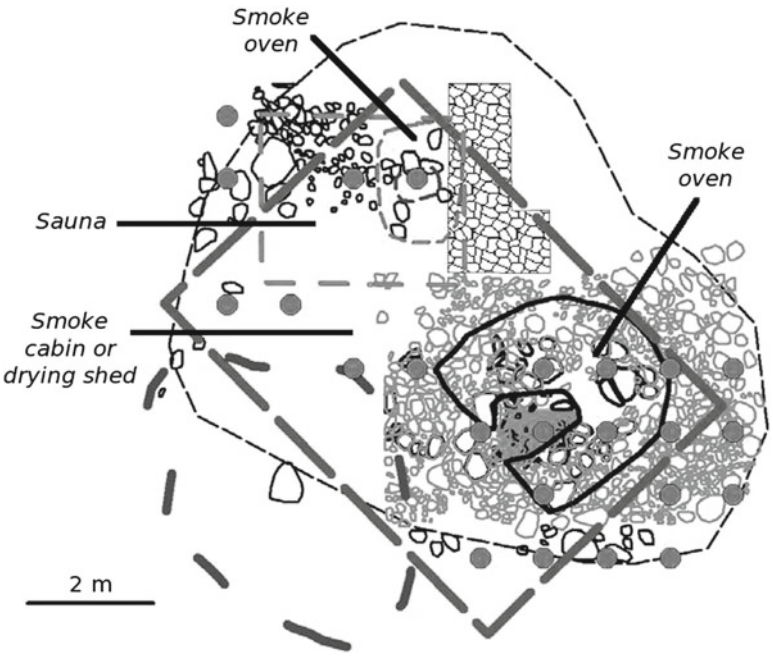

Fig. 9.3 Plan over the two overlapping seventeenth-century buildings with smoke ovens excavated at the lake Råsjö, Borgsjö parish, Medelpad. (Adapted after George 2007:12)

found on contemporary Swedish woodland farms. The excavations yielded material such as a late seventeenth-century coin (Charles XI), window glass, Swedish and German redware pottery dated to 1650–1750, small pieces of clay tobacco pipes, iron objects (e.g. knives and nails), fragments of a soapstone pot and animal bones (George 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). A similar pattern is observable at the early seventeenth-century cabin of Grannäs in Alfta parish (Hälsingland), which material remains included Dutch and English clay tobacco pipes, early seventeenth-century Dutch and German redware pottery, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century coins, as well as window and vessel glass (Welinder 2004, 2005, 2006; Andersson and Welinder 2010:179–180; Blennå and Gustafson 2011:6–7). These examples show that there was a high degree of cultural mobility among at least some of the Finnish settlers and that they had access to a wide national and international market (Pentikäinen 1995:295; Andersson and Welinder 2010:179–180; Blennå and Gustafson 2011:7).

The double house at Råsjö further demonstrates this flexibility. The double houses, with their symmetrical layout of two large gable rooms separated by a small entrance hall and a recessed chamber, were a typical Swedish form in the seventeenth and eighteenth century among both gentry and peasants (Erixon 1982:286, 288, 291). They became common among the Finnish settlers, and documents confirm the increased Swedish characteristics of the forest Finn settlements beginning at the end of the seventeenth century and continuing over the course of

the eighteenth century, both with regard to the layout of the farms and in the types of buildings they included. However, they differed from the Swedish forest farms in one respect, in that they kept the smoke cabin, the drying shed and the sauna as part of their repertoire of buildings. And while the smoke oven disappeared in parts of Finland due to the introduction of the Swedish double house, the smoke ovens on the forest Finn farms were instead frequently combined with chimneyed fireplaces in the same fashion as in the double house at Råsjö (e.g. Talve 1986:73, 1997:39; Gustafson 2005). These changes in architecture and layout of the farms have in turn been associated with the agricultural transition from the relatively mobile slash-and-burn practice to more permanent fields, which are also discernable at the Råsjö farm (Hämäläinen 1945:18; Talve 1953:53; Gustafson 2005).

By the end of the seventeenth century, many of the forest Finn settlements in central and northern Sweden had transformed into more or less Swedish homesteads. The farms were built in Swedish style, the settlers were bilingual, many had married into Swedish families, and the homesteads were not singled out as specifically *Finnish* in the written accounts any more (Lööw 1985:77–78; Welinder 2003:60–61). Even if this transformation is not applicable to all forest Finn settlements in Sweden, it nevertheless shows the level of cultural and material integration initiated already at the end of the principal colonisation phase in the mid-seventeenth century. One must neither forget that the Swedish farmers over time appropriated practices and material cultures generally associated with the forest Finns, such as the slash-and-burn cultivation of rye and the construction of grain-drying sheds (Nordmann 1994:41–42; Welinder 2003:109; Nesholen 2001:92, 130).

Thus, through the archaeological and historical sources, we may draw an image which contrasts the stereotypical conception of the forest Finns as poor peasants of a simple backwoods culture, largely isolated from the rest of the world. Likewise, the idea of clearly distinguishable ethnic markers in the material culture must be moderated, although some features, like the smoke ovens, may be ascribed particularly to the immigrants. In other words, the cultural boundaries between the two groups may not always have been so distinct, at least when material culture was concerned.

The Creation of *Otherness*

During the rivalry and disputes that may have caused part of the above-mentioned transformation, the material practices of the forest Finns became significant. In the 1630 s and 1640 s, a series of legislations and court decisions were issued that prohibited the extensive, forest-destroying, agricultural practice of the forest Finns. This was largely due to the growing complaints of the Swedish farmers, who saw the Finnish presence as an encroachment on their lands, as well as the claims of the developing copper and iron industries in the Bergslagen District who were in need of large supplies of wood for their production (Johnson 1911:148–151; Tarkiainen 1990:173, 189, 194–195; Tvengsberg 1995:280–201; Bladh 1992:8, 1998; Stenman 1998:59; Welinder 2003:107–108, 148).

These conflicts and ensuing restrictions in Sweden coincided with the advent of *Finn* as a collective and derogative label used to describe a troublesome and unfavourable group of people. Before this, *Finn* was more commonly used to signify the origin or language of the individual, particularly those of the first generation of migrants. For the second generation of settlers, the label *Finn* was much more uncommon as an individual designation (Welinder 2003:40, 148–159). In other words, the ethnic construction of *the Finns* as a group distinguished from the Swedish farmers or the metal industries was enhanced as the disputes increased. However, the Crown's discontent also applied to the very mobility of the Finns generated by the migration as well as the slash-and-burn practice. The colonisation was a gradual process carried out in waves, where newcomers as well as second- and third-generation settlers moved along a network of relatives and friends who had arrived before them. In this process, the established settlements functioned as conduits for further migration to new territories (e.g. Wedin 2007:232, 239). Because of this, a forest Finn settlement could house not only the tax-paying farmer and his family but also a fairly large number of other people. One group was the so-called *house Finns* (Sw. *husfinnar*), i.e. lodgers and their families who worked on the farm for an extended period in exchange for room and board, before finding their own land to settle (Wedin 2007:251). The other group was called *vagrant Finns* (Sw. *lösfinnar*), which consisted of individual seasonal workers who assisted in the laborious slash-and-burn practice and who moved freely between the Finnish settlements wothout settling; a labour system common in eastern Finland (Wedin 2007:252–253). These vagrant Finns also took advantage of the woodlands for hunting and fishing, without seeking permission to do so, which encroached upon the resident farmers' traditional rights to the backwoods. This further increased their strained relationship with the Swedish farmers and the Crown, and in 1636 the system of housing vagrant Finns was declared illegal and all Finns who had not established permanent, taxable, settlements would be deported back to Finland or drafted as soldiers (after Nordmann 1994:46–48; cf. Lööw 1985:52; Tarkiainen 1990:180). One solution to the Crown's problem with vagrant and forest-burning Finns would later be found in the colony of New Sweden in America (cf. *Handlingar* 1848:213–216; see below).

Thus, in the process of portraying the encumbering and nonprofitable migrants and settlers as *the other*, the word *Finn* was imbued with moral connotations. And in this competitive situation, their cultural background and material practices played a role in enforcing this *otherness*. While particularly the *wasteful* and *damaging* slash-and-burn practice was used in the law texts and written complaints to encapsulate the negative attitude towards the migrants, the same cannot be said for other material culture, such as the smoke cabins, smoke ovens, drying sheds and saunas. Instead, these are featured in more mundane accounts, such as estate inventories, and do not appear as ethnically charged as the slash-and-burn practice appears to have become by the middle of the seventeenth century. It was not until the nineteenth century when the forest Finn regions had become proletarianised, as the historical accounts portrayed these buildings as iconic and exotic. These descriptions were then used in the early forest Finn research to conjure up memories of the earliest colonisation of the Swedish backwoods (Welinder 2003:170).

Tradition and Change Across the Atlantic

The colony of New Sweden in America offers an interesting comparison to the excavated forest Finn settlements, but the extant material culture is scant to say the least. Instead we have to look to the written sources for insights into what material culture traditions were brought to the New World and what part they played in the identity production of the Finns.

When the colony was established in 1638 along the Delaware River on the East Coast of North America (see Ekengren et al. this volume), new possibilities opened for the forest Finns who found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with the Swedish Crown regarding taxation as well as land and forest rights. Even though they are not always easy to identify in the records of the colony, since the sources often regarded the entire population as Swedish, it is estimated that somewhere around 30 % of the colonists arriving between 1638 and 1654 were forest Finns (Carlsson 1995:179). Occasionally they appear bearing patronymic names, converted from their original Finnish family names, but with an added *the Finn* or *a Finn* to mark their distinction (e.g. Dunlap and Moyne 1952:81–83). They migrated from the provinces of Medelpad, Dalarna, Västmanland, Närke, Värmland and possible also Ångermanland (e.g. Johnson 1911:239; Gothe 1945:125–126), and their arrival in the colony was in part due to the propaganda and active recruitment by the Swedish Crown as well as the intensifying judicial restrictions on slash-and-burn agriculture in Sweden (Johnson 1911:149–150; Norman 1988:121; Tarkiainen 1990:208–215; Nordmann 1994:150; Tvengsberg 1995:283–286).

New Sweden proved a suitable place for disposing of these unwanted citizens. However, because of the initial lack of interest in migrating across the Atlantic, the Crown had to use diverse strategies to promote settlement of the colony. One of them was offering petty criminals, such as the forest Finns who were found guilty of breaking the forest laws, a reduction of their severe sentences to a few years of indentured labour, if they agreed to go to New Sweden (*Handlingar* 1848:213–220; Stiernman 1747:55; Johnson 1911:239).

Certain of the stereotypes and misconceptions about forest Finns in Sweden also migrated to America (e.g. *Report of Governor Rising*, 1654:149) and affected the way they were treated in the colony. The attitudes towards Finnish-speaking settlers, labourers and freemen seemed to have been sharp, especially during the governorship of Johan Printz. In two petitions against Printz and his abuse of power written in 1653 and 1654, several cases of unjust treatment and physical violence towards Finns are quoted (Craig and Williams 2006:11–14, 22–23).

Despite hard-handed treatment, the forest Finns were allowed to continue their practices, such as slash-and-burn agriculture. This opportunity was certainly advertised in letters and messages sent back to Sweden. In the wake of harsher laws introduced in Sweden, large numbers of Finnish-speaking immigrants decided to board the ships bound for America in the 1650 s (Norman 1988:121; Tarkiainen 1990:211–215).

The forest Finn homesteads spread expansively throughout New Sweden, and mostly they appear to have settled apart from other groups. Some regions of the colony developed into regular Finnish-speaking areas. One of them was aptly named *Finland* and located between Chester Creek and Marcus Hook in Pennsylvania (Ferris 1846:133; Acrelius 1874:68, 1959:69; Dunlap and Moyne 1952:84).

A large contingent of Finnish-speaking colonisers also settled in present-day New Jersey (Norman 1995:199). During his travels in this area in the mid-eighteenth century, Pehr Kalm noted a dispersed settlement pattern consisting of single homesteads:

> Single farm houses were scattered in the country, and in one place only was a small village: the country was yet more covered with forests than cultivated, and we were for the greatest part always in a wood (Kalm 1770:333).

Further on in his account he writes:

> Sometimes there appeared, though at a considerable distance from each other, some farms, frequently surrounded on all sides by corn-fields. Almost on every corn-field there yet remained the stumps of trees, which had been cut down; a proof that this country has not been long cultivated [—]. The farms did not lie together in villages, or so that several of them were near to each other, in one place; but were all separated from one another. Each countryman lived by himself, had his own ground about the house, separated from the property of his neighbour (Kalm 1771:107).

Accounts like these have been interpreted as indicative of a settlement pattern familiar from the Finnish areas in central and northern Sweden (e.g. Jordan and Kaups 1989:58–59, 127–128), and the mention of fields with the remaining stumps of trees may be a reference to the slash-and-burn practice. In some sources, the colonial observers remarked on the destructive use of the forest in the New Sweden area, where dead trees were left on the fields and some fields in turn abandoned for new clearings after just a few years. In other instances we encounter specific references to burnt clearings sown with rye and barley (Acrelius 1874:147; Fernow 1877:143; Johnson 1911:528–529; Jordan and Kaups 1989:59; Tvengsberg 1995:283, 286; cf. Craig and Williams 2006:24). In the area around Philadelphia, Pehr Kalm noted what he called "[—] Swedish fields, which are formed by burning the trees which grew on them" (Kalm 1770:146).

While some scholars have argued that these sources demonstrate a *kaski* crop regime (rather than the *huuhta*) practised by the forest Finns in the colony (Jordan and Kaups 1989:104–105), it is impossible to discern any agricultural details from the accounts, as well as determining the ethnic and cultural identity of the people to which they are referring. The terms *Swede* and *Swedish* were often used as collective labels, comprising both Swedes, forest Finns from central Sweden and Finns from the Swedish provinces of Finland. Given that slash-and-burn techniques were known and practised, at least to some extent, among Swedish farmers as well in this period, we cannot be certain that the farming described in the sources was conducted by forest Finns. The same goes for the settlement patterns, although the correlation between the historically known areas of forest Finn settlements in the colony and the noted scattering of isolated farms is tantalising.

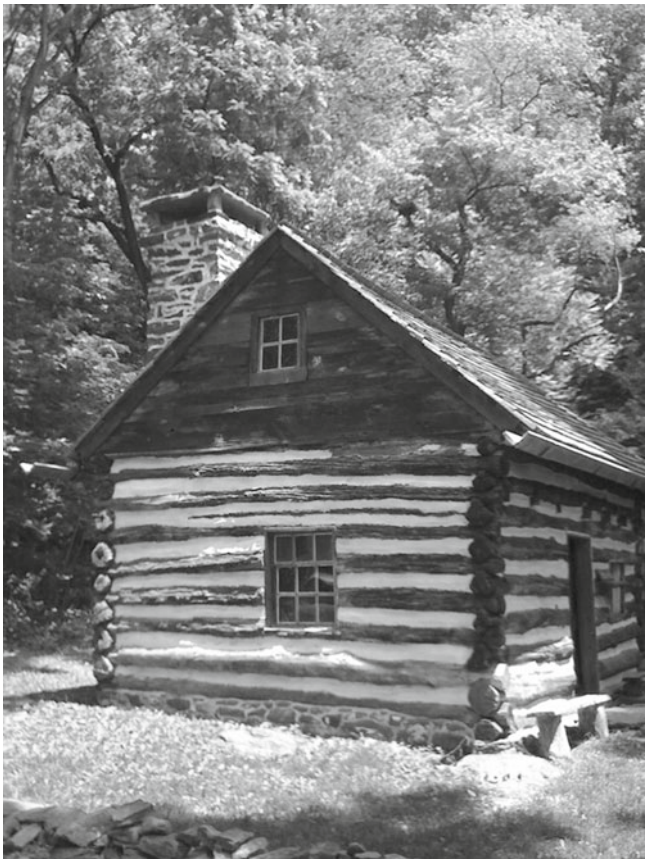

Fig. 9.4 The *Lower Swedish Cabin* located on Creek Road in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania. This is one of the extant seventeenth-century cabins in the New Sweden area which have been attributed to the forest Finns due to its log construction (Jordan and Kaups 1989:151). (Photo by Ulla Isabel Zagal-Mach Wolfe)

We encounter the same difficulties when we search for building traditions in the colony. Some have argued that the forest Finn system of smoke cabins, saunas and grain-drying sheds was transplanted to North America and came to further influence the frontier culture on the continent (Weslager 1952; Jordan and Kaups 1989; Jordan 1995; Immonen 2011:373; however, cf. Glassie 1972 for a different view). Indeed, log cabins are a well-attested feature of the colony, and some of them have survived standing to this day (Fig. 9.4; Ambrose 2002; e.g. Immonen 2011 for a recent review). But again, assigning a specific cultural or ethnic identity to these structures proves more of a challenge, and many of the previous studies have been overly dependent upon retrospective evidence because of the scarceness of contemporary material culture in both the Nordic countries and in America.

Some late seventeenth-century sources mention log construction as a technique associated with the Swedes (e.g. *Letter from Thomas Paschall*, 1683:250–251; cf.

Ekengren et al., this volume). In an account by Andreas Rudman, who was a Lutheran minister serving the Swedish congregation in the late 1600s, it is mentioned that the houses in the area were "built after the Swedish manner" (Holm 1834:102). In the mid-eighteenth century, Pehr Kalm wrote:

> The houses which the Swedes build when they first settled here, were very bad. The whole house consisted of one little room, the door of which was so low, that one was obliged to stoop in order to get in. As they had brought no glass with them, they were obliged to be content with little holes before which a moveable board was fastened. They found no moss, or at least none which could have been serviceable in stopping up holes or cracks in the walls. They were therefore forced to close them, both without and within, with clay. The chimneys were made in a corner, either of grey sand, a stone, or (in places where no stone was to be got) of mere clay, which they laid very thick in one corner of the house. The ovens for baking were likewise in the rooms (Kalm 1771:121).

Kalm's account is one of the few where the structure of the cabin is noted. Although the English translator of the text used the word *chimneys* for the fireplaces, the Swedish version uses the less specific word *spisarne*, simply meaning the *stoves* or *fireplaces* (Kalm 1915:56). Thus, Kalm may have referred to either an open hearth with a mantle and a chimney or a chimneyless smoke oven. But the description is not detailed enough to offer a clear identification.

Besides a possible, but weak, reference by Kalm to an oven made of fieldstones, the written sources describe what appear to be conventional log cabins of a style common in many parts of the Nordic countries. This is interesting enough, but does not help us in linking particular structures to the traditions of a specific group of people. A further problem is that most of the descriptions of buildings, such as those referred to above, were made in the late seventeenth century when the colony had fallen under Dutch and then English rule, and thus may not be valid for the initial Swedish period of colonisation. And if we look to the eight extant log cabins in the New Sweden area along the Delaware, all of them dating to the second half of the seventeenth century or early eighteenth century, they have fireplaces with chimneys constructed out of either fieldstones or brick, possibly a result of later modifications (Ambrose 2002).

While smoke ovens, and indeed smoke cabins as such, are absent from the extant material, a number of written sources mention *bathhouses*. In a written complaint against Governor Printz dated to 7 July 1654, a number of settlers protested against the hard labour forced upon them; among other things, the erection of a bathhouse on the governor's estate on Tinicum Island (Craig and Williams 2006:22). Another reference is made in the Upland court records of the late seventeenth century, which describes a fight taking place in the *badstoe* (bathhouse) of a certain Lace Colman, his surname being an English rendition of the Finnish *Kolehmainen* (Armstrong 1860:79; Dunlap and Moyne 1952:82, 88). Furthermore, Pehr Kalm, writing nearly a century later, recounts that "[a]lmost all the Swedes made use of baths; and they commonly bathed every Saturday" (Kalm 1771:123; cf. Johnson 1911:357).

These accounts indicate that bathhouses were an established feature in the building tradition of the colony, from the early periods well into the Dutch and English

rule. Some scholars take them as descriptions of Finnish smoke saunas (e.g. Johnson 1911:357–362; Jordan and Kaups 1989:59), and they consequently propose that the Finnish sauna culture was transplanted into America by the forest Finns. This interpretation has then turned into one of the classic tropes in the story of the New Sweden colony. However, I would argue that the available accounts do not support this claim. Bathhouses were a common feature in seventeenth-century Sweden, both on peasant farms, at rectories and at the residences of the gentry (Talve 1960:161–185, 200–201). Granted, these buildings were generally for tub baths rather than steam, but since the construction of the buildings are absent from the colonial accounts we cannot determine whether we are dealing with smoke saunas or regular bathhouses of the Swedish kind.

The written sources also comment on the cultural transformations that occurred under Dutch and English rule. While the Swedes, including the substantial number of forest Finns who migrated to the area just after Sweden had lost the colony, enjoyed a large degree of independence under the Dutch and the English, their traditions were slowly beginning to change. Characteristics, such as the Swedish and Finnish languages, which had first marked their difference, began to dissipate and were replaced by new customs (cf. Acrelius 1874:360; Norman 1995:194, 199; Craig 2000). Pehr Kalm noted that:

> [—] before the English settled here, they [i.e. the Swedes] followed wholly the customs of Old Sweden; but after the English had been in the country for some time, the Swedes began gradually to follow their customs (Kalm 1771:123).

This transformation probably explains the colonial blending of features visible in some of the extant New Sweden cabins, where Scandinavian and Anglo-American features are melded together (Ambrose 2002; see Ekengren et al. this volume).

Colonising the In-Between

What has this comparison between early modern Sweden and America shown, besides the complexities in discussing cultural identity and ethnicity based on the present evidence? If we approach the archaeological and written sources guided by the notion that ethnicity is not a bounded and timeless construct but situational and must be studied contextually, then it becomes apparent that the traditional view of the forest Finns as an unchanging ethnic group must be revised.

What we see is that the cultural scenery of the forest Finn regions in Sweden as well as the New Sweden colony was in no way static. The excavated settlements in Sweden indicate that certain cultural traits were retained in the new environment, buildings with smoke ovens being the most evident material traces. At the same time, the results also indicate that the Finns were not such an isolated group as is sometimes suggested (cf. Welinder 2003; Andersson and Welinder 2010). They settled in a landscape already characterised by the outland use of the Swedish farmers, and their initial slash-and-burn practice seems early

on to have shifted to the use of permanent fertilised fields. Furthermore, the finds of window glass as well as imported objects show that the everyday life of the Finns was part of a larger cultural and economic network than often presumed. Thus one could argue that it was primarily through the written sources of the seventeenth century that the stereotypical image of the forest Finns was created. These accounts were written by others and often as a result of economic conflicts where material practices such as slash-and-burn farming were recharged as markers of ethnicity and difference.

The materialised identity of the New Sweden forest Finns is equally multifaceted. One could expect the Finns, especially those who were displaced by force, to materially accentuate their sense of Finnish identity in the New World. But the available sources give no indication of this, at least not of the type of clear-cut identity often expected by previous scholars. Even if some of the sources on the colony refer the Finns as a group, these accounts were also written by others. Occasionally they distinguish between Swedes and Finns, primarily on the basis of language and in periods of conflict, but more often they refer to the entire population of the colonial area as Swedish. Some of the written accounts indicate that groups of Finnish-speaking migrants settled in specific regions and that their farmsteads lay scattered in the landscape, but whether this should be attributed to an extensive slash-and-burn practice or not is impossible to say. Also, even if there are scattered references to slash-and-burn farming and the growing of rye, these practices are characterised by the writers as Swedish in contrast to the Dutch and English, rather than something particularly Finnish. Furthermore, it is difficult to see the straightforward division in the building traditions between Swedes and Finns as argued by some scholars. This is partly due to the lack of well-preserved and comparable seventeenth-century buildings in both Sweden and America. The characteristic smoke ovens, which are one of the most tangible forest Finn features in the archaeology of seventeenth-century Sweden, are not featured in the written accounts of the colony and are completely missing in the extant log buildings in America. The same goes for the characteristic buildings that accompanied them: the smoke cabin, the drying shed and the smoke sauna. On the other hand, considering the cultural transformations that the forest Finns of Sweden underwent in the course of the seventeenth century, it is perhaps not surprising that the material boundaries between Finnish and Swedish in America are not more tangible.

These patterns suggest that while certain material practices may have been used to inscribe the new environment with a sense of familiarity and tradition, perhaps as part of a conscious strategy to retain the link to a perceived cultural background, this was likewise an amalgamation where old practices blended with new ones (cf. Ehn 1990; Stewart and Strathern 2005; Naum 2008; Turan 2010). We are in other words not dealing with simple conservatism but rather a process where material practices of different origin functioned as resources in creating a sense of identity and belonging to a particular place. The forests Finns were thus living within a field of tension between difference and hybridity—a testament to the diversity of early modern Sweden and America.

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