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Maintaining the Family: Community Support for Merchant Sailors' Families in Finland, 1830–1860

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ABSTRACT: After the Napoleonic Wars, Finnish ship owners increasingly contributed to the global trade by selling their tonnage capacity internationally. In spite of its peripheral position as a Grand Duchy within Imperial Russia (since 1809), Finland played an important part in the high seas trafficking during the late age of sail, largely due to the ready availability of labour. In this chapter, I study how the long-distance trade affected sailors' families in Pori on Finland's west coast between 1830 and 1860. I show how boundaries of biological kinship were crossed in housing arrangements the families made for ensure social and economic security and how the community support dealt with families. The chapter bases on qualitative close reading of the local officials' documents.

KEY WORDS: Merchant seamen, Families, Housing arrangements, Community support, Finland, Nineteenth century

Between 1808 and 1809, during the Napoleonic Wars, Russia wrested Finland from the Swedish Realm and it became an autonomous grand duchy within the Russian Empire. There was an initial drop in foreign trade for a couple of decades after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, but after that merchant shipping became the engine of the Finnish economy. From the 1830s, ship owners took advantage of the gradual liberalization of customs policies in Britain, and started exporting timber. Meanwhile, the French conquest of Algiers in 1830 put an end to the raids from Ottoman corsairs from North Africa that had prevented trade in the Mediterranean and Black Sea. This meant Finnish merchants could now import salt from there and store it in any of the Russian Baltic ports. Before long, Finnish shipping companies responded to this growth in international trade by building larger wooden vessels suitable for high sea voyaging. What made merchant shipping profitable in Finland was the fact that labour costs were inexpensive. As elsewhere in the Nordic countries, early nineteenth-century Finland witnessed a population boom among the landless poor. In the merchant navy, unskilled labour was especially in demand and employment at sea, with a regular monthly wage, became an inviting occupation for men of a lower social standing.¹

¹ Kaukiainen, 'Foreign Trade and Transport', pp. 127–164.

The working conditions of Finnish merchant sailors were similar to those in other fleets in Europe and the North Atlantic, with one exception: the seaman's oath. This oath, dating back to early modern Swedish legislation, obliged crew to stay on board from the moment their ship left homeport to the moment it returned - no matter how long that might take. This meant that families could not predict how long the male members of their household would be absent once recruited. The minimum duration would be about a year, but profitable commissions, shipwrecks, wartime, illnesses, or accidents could extend their time away from home or even render it permanent. Compounding this was the growing number of seamen who deserted their ship in a foreign port. Scandinavian sailors tended to jump ship to either join a British or American vessel (where they could earn more), or migrate to North America, Britain, Australia, or New Zealand. For Finns, jumping ship was the sole means of entering the international maritime labour market, since it was illegal for them to seek employment on foreign ships.²

Across Europe and the Americas, social roles within maritime families and communities were distinctly gendered by the nineteenth century. Being a sailor was clearly a man's job, while wives, daughters, and mothers were expected to stay at home. Indeed, the emerging ideals of the bourgeois nuclear family, with the man as sole breadwinner, had begun to erode women's independence and their active role in the seafaring world, restricting them to the private sphere of home. In her seminal studies Lisa Norling demonstrated how, in New England whaling communities in the late eighteenth century, the spouses of captains were actively involved in the family business. However, by the nineteenth they were being excluded and increasingly confined to roles where they were expected to provide emotional support for their husbands in addition to carrying out domestic duties.³ This change, coupled with the idea that the male breadwinner was also supposed to prioritize his household and be a 'family man', is seen as one reason why mobile occupations such as seafaring became seen as undesirable for married men.⁴ Yet, this bourgeois ideal did not apply across

² Ojala, Pehkonen and Eloranta, 'Desertions in Nineteenth-Century Shipping', pp. 123, 130.

³ Norling, 'The Sentimentalization of American Seafaring', pp. 164–178; Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, pp. 223–261.

⁴ Burton, 'The Myth of Bachelor Jack', pp. 179–198; Nutting, 'Absent Husbands', pp. 329–345.

Nordic countries in the period discussed in this chapter because of the late emergence of industrialism and urbanisation (that in theory would have offered landward working options for a man with a family). In the mid-nineteenth century seafaring in Finland was not yet seen as a job best suited to unmarried men only and, according to rough estimates, about 20–40% of the maritime workforce were married.⁵

Recent research has identified early modern Nordic families as predominantly relying on a ‘two-supporter model’ in which both spouses took part in breadwinning and securing their family’s welfare. This occurred despite patriarchal Lutheran ideals and the subordinate legal position of wives and children in the household.⁶ Continual separation was not a universal feature of maritime families for, as Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh point out, in many communities, such as eighteenth and nineteenth-century Salem, seafarers spent a lot of their time home, influencing the culture and social life of their coastal towns. Yet, families in Finland were generally separated most of the time.⁷ There was high likelihood of sailors’ wives becoming single parents, or living without their husbands for long stretches of time. In this kind of seafaring communities women often became the major breadwinner and sometimes assumed a greater role in the land-based side of the shipping business.⁸ This chapter introduces mid-nineteenth century Finnish seafaring families as an example of the model of shared breadwinning still going strong, except when the merchant seaman never returned. I demonstrate that such families relied on a combination of the husband’s maritime earnings, a local system of transmitting wages home, and the contributions of wives and children. The latter consisted of both paid and unpaid work – a concept at the core of the ‘two-supporter model’ where work is seen as the time and effort invested in lots of different temporal and spatial circumstances rather than simply activities in a workplace during working hours. Work, then, is something resulting in goods or services as well as or instead of monetary wages.⁹ Additionally I lean on broad concept of work and livelihood introduced by Rachel G. Fuchs,

⁵ Frigren, *Kotisatamassa*, pp. 101–106; Ojala, Pehkonen and Eloranta, ‘Nuorten miesten ammatti?’, p. 40.

⁶ Ågren, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–23.

⁷ Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea*, pp. 1–6; See also Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, p. 229.

⁸ Polónia, ‘Women’s Contribution’, pp. 269–285; Van der Heijden, Schmidt and Wall, ‘Broken Families’, pp. 223–232; Abreu-Ferreira, ‘Neighbors and Traders’, pp. 581–587.

⁹ Fiebranz, Lindberg, Lindström and Ågren, ‘Making Verbs Count’, pp. 273–293; Schmidt and van Nederveen Meerkerk ‘Reconsidering the “First Male-Breadwinner Economy”’, pp. 69–96.

showing how nineteenth-century working-class women cooperated with neighbours and promoted their own issues within a local community that, in return, provided them with support.¹⁰

This qualitative case study is based on the analysis of minutes from poor relief meetings, and magistrate and poll tax records. These records include information on housing provided to families as well as documents from the local *sjömanshuset* (the Seamen's House). The Seamen's House was a state institution dating from 1748 – when Finland was still under Swedish rule – that continued to exist in every port handling foreign trade even after Finland joined the Russian Empire. Seamen's Houses were instrumental in hiring maritime labour, distributing mutual aid to seafarers, their widows, and orphans. My analysis is geographically focused on one of the most important shipping centres on the west coast of Finland at that time – the port of Pori (known also by its Swedish name *Björneborg*, see the maps in Raisa Toivo's chapter).¹¹ To date, similar studies have for the most part concentrated on the geographical and temporal context of the Atlantic seaboard for the period 1500–1800.¹² In looking at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when this part of Finland became part of the global economy, this chapter focuses on the period when deep-sea sailing began to have a real impact on those left on dry land.

In this chapter I describe the typical maritime family in Finland before exploring the strategies such families employed in order to survive and stay together when men were absent for long periods or never returned. Specifically, I ask how women used the various means at their disposal to handle family separation (both economically and socially): how families arranged their livelihood, housing, and the care of children and the elderly; and how sailors' wives accessed the support of institutions in the local community in order to ensure the survival of their families.

The Maritime Household in Finland

¹⁰ Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty*, pp. 5–7, 129.

¹¹ Finnish ports were typically small (2000–5000 inhabitants). In Pori, the population grew from c. 3000 to c. 7000 between 1830 and 1860.

¹² Van der Hejden and van den Heuvel, 'Sailors' Families, 296–301; Herndon, 'The Domestic Cost of Seafaring', pp. 55–69.

In Nordic society, all those not owning land, running their own business, or working as civil servants, burghers, or artisans were regarded as the ‘estate’ (or class) of people dependent on their master’s supervision. Controlling the mobility of labour was one of the cornerstones of social order.¹³ Sailors’ families were thus under the supervision of ship owners and captains. Unlike domestic servants and artisan journeymen, however, sailors lived in a different household to their masters and therefore their relationship with the employer was seldom personal. Thus, sailors’ families were independent as regards their welfare, housing, and aspects of citizenship such as judicial representation, commercial contracts, taxes and consumption.¹⁴ The fact that sailors’ households relied on paid-labour was relatively atypical for a country where over 90 percent of the population lived from agriculture and which did not witness industrialisation until the late nineteenth century. Although married women were legally under the guardianship of their husbands until 1930 in Finland, the fact that sailors’ families were half-tied and half-rid of the prevailing servant-master system meant that a sailor’s wife needed to take the initiative to get her husband’s wages home.¹⁵ As she did not usually have a direct relationship with her husband’s employers, she could not assume that the ship owner would automatically forward her husband’s wages to her. However, a system had been set up whereby she could claim a half or third of her husband’s wages. In order to be able to do this, she had to have been given a certain ‘power of attorney’ (*dragsedel* in Swedish) by her husband before he went to sea (comparable to the ‘sailor’s ticket’ or ‘chose in action’ used in the British Royal Navy).¹⁶ There is evidence that powers of attorney were used in relationships other than marriage. For example, an unmarried woman could be given one by a sailor as a token of generosity or trust, or simply as a sign that they were soon to be engaged.¹⁷ Prior to 1920, when this system was officially legislated, it operated as a custom promoted by local employers and authorities to allow ‘husbands’ to participate in supporting women and families from afar.

¹³ Haapala. *Tehtaan valossa*, pp. 60–69.

¹⁴ Häggman, *Perheen vuosisata*, pp. 54–58.

¹⁵ Unmarried women were regarded as minors requiring a male guardian until 1864. Married women were under their husbands’ direction until 1930 (wives were independent actors in terms of property and what they could inherit, though) Widows were fully independent.

¹⁶ For more on payments in the Royal Navy, see Hunt, ‘The Sailor’s Wife’.

¹⁷ Pori Magistrates Records, 6 March 1837; 26 August 1837; 28 August 1837; 3 September 1838. In these cases unmarried women were accused for vagrancy and indecent lifestyle and they excused themselves by saying that they are going to be married with a sailor once he has returned from his voyage.

Presumably, this system worked quite well as there are only a very few cases which were referred to the Seamen's House and city magistrates. These involve women complaining about difficulties in getting their pay, or cases where captains have advised ship owners to stop payments because the husband has jumped ship in a foreign port.¹⁸ Although sailors' wives were entitled to some of their husband's pay, not all were provided with power of attorney. In some cases, a sailor's wages could go directly to local merchants or others, due to debts the family had incurred. In such circumstances, where this income was not guaranteed, families needed to find other ways of surviving. Living frugally and sharing housing arrangements were coping strategies that maritime families used.

Sharing and Caring Housing Arrangements

Many sailors' families had migrated from rural parishes to coastal ports and not everyone had a supporting network of relatives around them. Many lived in the port itself because they were the only places licensed for foreign trade where merchant vessels were likely to hire labour. For these families, a single household was not the same clearly defined productive unit as it was for peasants, artisans, merchants or other independent self-employed people. Often the physical location of a household might be just a temporarily rented room shared with other families. After the fires of 1801 and 1852, people in Pori lived in various kinds of temporary dwellings, outhouses, barns, saunas, and even dugouts within and outside the city perimeters. Only 30 percent of sailors' families were house-owners, and they often took in other sailors' families as their lodgers.¹⁹ The lodgers in turn would take in subtenants. There were also cases where a sailor's wife paid for the rent by doing domestic work for the house-owning family. Maria Lindgren and her daughter, for instance, lived in the same room with the landlady, burgher's widow Eva Fleisser under this kind of arrangement in 1837. When the husband Jacob Lindgren was home, he too lodged in this small apartment paid for by Maria's labour.²⁰ This blurs the boundaries of what

¹⁸ For instance, in 1854, sailor's wife Mathilda Grönlund complained to the magistrates about the ship owner Carl Martin who had withheld her husband's payments for many months. Pori Magistrates Petitions, 7 July 1854.

¹⁹ Pori Poll Tax Records, 1830–1850.

²⁰ Pori Magistrates Records, 1 July 1837.

constituted a household in the usual sense of the term, as lodgers working for their keep through domestic service were in a situation that was closer to that of a servant's than an independent householder's.

In one town house there could be several families living together. As men were absent, women and children formed micro-communities among themselves, and women were able to leave town without telling anyone. In July 1836, for instance, after the usual thorough investigations made following a minor fire in Pori, it was discovered that one sailor's wife (Maria Raumolin) and her children had been living in a house with another sailor's wife and children because both husbands had stayed abroad after they jumped ship. Three years before the fire, the other family had left and in evidence Maria claimed that the upkeep of both houses had become too much of a burden for her.²¹ Ruth Wallis Herndon made similar observations regarding whaler's wives living together in eighteenth-century Rhode Island. When an event such as a fire occurred, local authorities often discovered that families other than those registered on official documents were in residence. Often these families were co-habiting with women and children who were in the same situation as them.²²

Another typical way in which the borders of the biological family unit were blurred was when poorer townfolk, such as sailors' families, took on foster children, the elderly, and the disabled (who would be recorded in poll tax records as household members). As Finnish poor houses were small, few and far between (they only became a statutory institution in the latter half of the 1800s), such care was often the only form of social security for those who did not have relatives to look after them.²³ Sailors' families could earn income by taking such people in because the local parish poor relief, mutual aid funds, or employers (depending on the case) would compensate them for it. Cohabitants could also provide care if the house-owner herself was old and/or disabled. For instance, Helena Langén was a crippled 46 year-old sailor's widow who lived in a Pori townhouse with: her daughter Fredrica and her two children; Lovisa Söderling (another disabled widow) and her children; Brita Björklund and Lisa Johansdotter (unmarried women); and Stina and Christian

²¹ Pori Lower Court Minutes, 20 July 1836.

²² Herndon, 'The Domestic Cost of Seafaring', pp. 55–69.

²³ Markkola, 'Changing Patterns of Welfare', pp. 207–230.

Eissenhart (a married couple). Besides Eissenhart, who was a sailor and thus presumably oftentimes away from home, there were no men living in the house.²⁴ It is likely that in this small female community those women who were younger and more able-bodied took care of those who were older or disabled.

Sailors' wives, widows, and children were often 'additional' members in various extended household constellations of lodgers and their families. Those caring for a sailor's family could claim his wages. For example, a sailor could give power of attorney to a nanny or carer so they could withdraw part of his pay to cover the costs incurred in looking after his family. As they were familiar with the system, sailors' wives were often the most active in claiming compensation for the childcare they provided for others. Christina Bergelin, for instance, came to Pori harbour in April 1834 when the brig *Adolf Fredric* was hiring its crew before setting sail. She had heard that Johan Rosendahl was going to enlist as first mate, and so she came to ask him for power of attorney over his son Carl Julius, whom she had agreed to look after.²⁵ Bergelin and Rosendahl made a contract, and later on in May, when the ship was on its way, Bergelin withdrew the first part of Rosendahl's salary – 15 silver roubles. She came to the ship owner's office again in July and September so that by the end of that summer she had earned a tidy sum of almost 30 roubles, the equivalent pay of an able-bodied sailor at that time.²⁶ Cases recorded in the minutes of the Seamen's House and the local poor relief meetings reveal that if a carer could not access a sailor's wages, these organisations would support her. Moreover, sailors' children could also be collectively cared for by several women. For instance, in September 1853, Charlotta Sundbäck, Lovisa Tallgren, and Lisa Nordström (all sailors' widows) appealed to the board of the Seamen's House because they had not received compensation for looking after the underage daughter of the sailor, Matts Churberg. The problem was that Churberg had jumped ship in Quebec in 1847 and nobody knew where he was.²⁷ In another case, a 28 year-old sailor's wife called Maria Sofia Sandelin had died in September 1856 leaving behind her four-year old daughter. Because the little Maria Emelia Sandelin's father (Johan Sandelin) had

²⁴ Pori Poll Tax Records, 1840, House 105 ½.

²⁵ Pori Magistrates Records, 2 April 1834.

²⁶ Pori Magistrates Records, 5 May 1834; 2 July 1834; 6 September 1834.

²⁷ Pori Seamen's House Minutes, 30 September 1853.

deserted ship abroad, the Seamen's House and the local poor relief negotiated which one of them should cover the price of caring for the girl.²⁸

Other situations in which sailors' children were taken into foster care were when the father was absent and the mother either destitute or working away from home. Although families tended to organize foster relationships informally between themselves, the local poor relief could sometimes intervene. Children and old people could, for instance, be sent out to a farm in the countryside where they would earn their keep by working for the farmer. Cases like this illustrate how it was sometimes not just the socioeconomic conditions of sailors' wives, but who was given custody of the children, that determined whether a family would stay together or not. If a woman had small children to take care of, then this affected the kind of community support she could receive. But in the encounters between families and the port authorities there were also several other factors that determined whether they could receive help or not.

Community support

As long-distance trade grew, it became clear to all who attended meetings after church on Sundays, to administer poor relief under the governance of the church board, that maritime work was dangerous and highly prone to economic fluctuations. As poverty and work-related accidents affected more sailors' families, magistrates and shipping officials were approached by an increasing number of desperate sailors' wives and widows. In Pori in 1850, widows and wives marked as heads of their households (indicating their husband had been away for a very long time) accounted for as many as 25 percent of all sailor households (excluding those of ship's officers). Most of the Pori women who had lost a husband were sailors' wives, often in their 30s and 40s with small children.²⁹ Although single women with children were usually judged as deserving poor relief, in the case of seamen's wives and widows, their husband's professional reputation was also taken into account. This meant they were regarded by the authorities as part of a marriage relationship and/or household unit

²⁸ Pori Seamen's House Minutes, 23 March 1857, Pori Poor Relief Board, letter 18 December 1856.

²⁹ Pori Poll Tax Records, 1850.

rather than an individual. The only benefit was that wives, although legally subordinate to their husband, could use their marital status and husband's good reputation when appealing to the authorities. The religious poor relief offered by the local evangelic Lutheran congregation, the Seamen's House and the city magistrates formed the triangle of authorities that dealt with these appeals.

Poor Relief and the Seamen's House: negotiating institutional responsibilities

As mentioned, sailors' wives and widows caring for poor and destitute persons turned to local community support institutions. However, they also often contacted the authorities in relation to their own needs, especially after losing a husband. This indicates, unsurprisingly, that seamen's wages were crucial to the family's economy. Because the idea of the deserving poor was strongly gendered and socially defined, working-class women who lacked an adult male member in their household formed the majority of poor relief recipients. Due to their gender and status they were seen more vulnerable than men. The loss of a spouse signified that a woman's poverty was not the result of her own doing. Elderliness and any disabilities that made it harder to work also increased the likelihood of being entitled to aid.³⁰

The position of a sailors' spouse compared with other poor needy women was not simple. In the eyes of the communal poor relief – a last resort for those who lacked all other safety nets – the strength of an individual's links to the parish was crucial to their application. Thus women who were both 'bare-foot locals' and widows were more likely to be helped than newcomers to the area. This meant sailors' families were at a disadvantage because sailors were seen highly mobile. Those who had active careers at sea were not always registered to the local parish nor had they ever paid the taxes, which covered poor relief expenses. Because of this, poor relief authorities claimed that the local Seamen's House should be responsible for alleviating poverty among mariner families.³¹ However, despite the perception that sailors and their families were highly mobile and not part of the local community of parishioners, the majority of marine families had settled permanently in Pori and were

³⁰ Israelsson, *In considerations of my meagre circumstances*, pp. 4–14, 23–44.

³¹ Imperial Senate (Senaatin Talousosasto), Petitions 1849 (Eb: 971) no. 169/133.

considered part of the parish. Poor relief records and poll tax registers indicate that despite the demarcation imposed by the authorities, poor relief was in fact provided to many sailor's families. What is more, in 1852 the Poor Relief Act stated for the first time that able-bodied people were also occasionally entitled to relief, as long as they would not become wholly dependent on the support of other parishioners. Numerous sailors' families availed themselves of this new legislation during the Crimean War (1853–1856) when the remarkable loss of tonnage and consequent recession caused widespread unemployment in the merchant navy. Indeed, sailors and their families formed the largest group among recipients of this occasional poor relief during the 1850s.³²

Families could also appeal to the poor relief to monitor the Seamen's House. According to the original eighteenth century statutes, sailors who were elderly or disabled, and seamen's widows and their orphans, had an institutional right to receive 'mutual aid' from the Seamen's House funds. However, as the sums were modest, and proportionate to the social standing of a seafarer, they rarely provided an adequate pension to sailors or their families. Rather than being based solely on the recipient's personal situation, relief funding was based on the length of a sailor's career and the payments he had made when recruited and registered with the Seamen's House. Moreover, any criminal conviction of the recipient of funds could lead to their withdrawal. Poor relief authorities intervened in the operation of the Seamen's House not only to top up the pensions of sailors' wives but because the latter was much less professionally organised when it comes to social welfare. As the Seamen's House board was made up of captains and merchants who were often at sea, it rarely met. This may not have mattered when charitable activities involved giving alms to a few old and reputable widows every now and then. However, as more and more sailors went to sea, the Seamen's House was required to distribute larger amounts to more people. The poor relief authorities had to intervene on a case-by-case basis until eventually the two institutions were effectively collaborating. The result was that from the 1840s, families, who were not all personally known to the captains and ship owners, could apply for assistance every three months.

³² Pori Poor Relief Parish Meetings, 1817–1858; Pori Poor Relief Board Minutes, 1856–1866.

Women who wanted to lodge an appeal against either poor relief authorities or the Seamen's House required a knowledge of what kinds of poverty each of the institutions deemed 'respectable' (what Jennine Hurl-Eamon has called 'rhetoric play').³³ In the case of Seamen's House, this included being able to highlight the good works and long career of the late husband. In the case of poor relief, demonstrating humility, helplessness and reliance on male-breadwinning was more important. One burning issue was whether the wives of sailors who jumped ship should receive the same benefits from the Seamen's House as those whose husbands had proved reputable. In 1848, ten wives of sailors who had deserted appealed to the Governor of Turku and Pori County, claiming that local shipping officials had refused to help them out of their misery. Their appeal, supported by the Pori poor relief board, was successful, leading to a resolution stipulating that the wives of sailors who had jumped ship were also eligible for benefits. In 1849 the board of the Seamen's House in Pori lodged a counter-petition at the highest administrative level (the Imperial Senate), protesting that the wives of the deserted sailors could not be put in the same category as widows. Despite the fact that this failed, and the Governor's resolution remained in force, in 1852 another three women whose husbands had deserted were refused aid by the Seamen's House. One of them even claimed having been beaten by a captain who thought that providing support to women like her would encourage more men to jump ship and abandon their families.³⁴ This case shows how the local welfare institutions were gradually on their way in acknowledging and responding for the side effects of the shipping business, instead of just rewarding the most loyal employers and their families in their old days.

Often the parish poor relief argued with the Seamen's House also about the issues such as who would cover expenses such as the hospital fees of sick sailor's wives, funerals, and other non-recurring costs. As sailors' families kept appealing to both of these institutions, they promoted a local forum for debate where social issues related

³³ Hurl-Eamon, 'The Fiction of Female Dependence', pp. 481–501: For more on the deserving poor in early modern Nordic countries, see Israelsson, *In considerations of my meagre circumstances*, passim.

³⁴ Imperial Senate (*Senaatin Talousosasto*), Petitions 1849 (Eb: 971) no. 169/133; minutes IV 1849, 13 October 1849 § 2; Pori Seamen's House Minutes, 27 April 1852 (Amanda Samulin, Maria Elisabeth Granholm, and Wilhelmina Fredrika Dahlström). Pori Magistrates Records, Governor's Circulars 1841–1865 (Ez: 1) 'On the support of deserted sailors' wives' ("*Om förrymde sjömanshustrurs understöd*"), 12 May 1852.

to seafaring could be discussed and where the moral responsibilities of the community could be reassessed.

Work Licenses

Rather than simply receiving monetary relief, many able-bodied wives and widows were encouraged to run small-scale businesses and do odd jobs that were licensed by the town magistrates. Tavern-keeping, selling goods, baking, lodging Russian soldiers, herding animals in the summer, and cleaning public places were all deemed suitable employment. While producing and selling goods were activities generally controlled by privileged merchants and artisans' guilds, women could obtain special licenses from magistrates to ply trades on a small-scale. Magistrates reinforced the concept of the 'deserving poor' by reserving such licenses for reputable local women of few means who were sole head of their household.³⁵ Competition over these licences was fierce, and magistrates clearly favoured those women they had awarded the license to previously. One consequence was that the jobs deemed suitable by the magistrates became progressively more clearly female-defined.

Work licenses soon became an important feature of the urban economy, and more than just a substitute form of poor relief. As the port town grew, so did the demand for the wider range of goods and services that these women provided. Baking was a good example of this. According to artisan privileges, women who were granted a baking license from the magistrates were only allowed to bake rye bread for sale exclusively to poorer folk, whereas members of the baker's guild had permission to bake bread made from wheat and fancier goods like pastries. Women's businesses were not allowed to employ anyone, however, in practice, the wives, widows, and daughters of sailors, soldiers, workers, journeymen, and others from the lower social echelons of society cooperated so that some would bake and some would sell. Cooperation was necessary, as only a few lived in houses with a baking oven. They also broadened the range of baked goods on offer and then, if sued by magistrates, they would describe their business in as modest terms as possible. Helena Holmsten and Ulrika Nordman

³⁵ See also Simonton 'Gendering Work', pp. 29–47; Vainio-Korhonen, *Käsin tehty*, pp. 30–36. For more on parallels with Sweden, see Bladh, *Månglerskor*, p. 49; Ling *Konsten att försörja sig*, pp. 17–19.

were among the sailors' wives who were sentenced to pay a fine for violating artisanal privileges in this way in the late 1830s and early 1840s.³⁶ Conflicts such as this show that there was a demand for more bakers than the privileged guild could actually provide.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how, as the population of Finnish ports grew, the long-distant and migrant nature of sailors' work shaped the understandings of family and its boundaries in the local communities of ports such as Pori's. Sailors' families could not conform to the ideal emerging at this time that men should be the only breadwinners in a household consisting exclusively of parents and their biological offspring. They relied on paid-labour, which was still relatively atypical in Finland in this period. However, although families received a share of the sailor's monthly wages when he was away, both spouses were breadwinners and women provided for their families in many ways. As I have shown, their coping mechanisms were complex and involved various domestic strategies implemented by the sailor's wives, as well as appeals to local institutions.

What makes the Nordic two-supporter model distinct from established perceptions of an early modern *das ganze Haus* is that family members took on different duties and roles as and when the situation required it. I suggest that, because separation was more likely to occur and eventually rupture the household, the two-supporter model is even more apparent in them than in households that were less vulnerable to falling apart. The documentation recording such ruptures reveal how families were coping prior to the loss of a spouse. Such records show that sailors' families were flexible with regard to whom they turned to for support and where they lived. The vitality of a social network and the support of friends and neighbours would imply that the two-supporter-model was actually a multi-supporter one. Most typically, the family lived in a rented flat that was shared with other families of lodgers. These included subtenants, foster children, the elderly, and the disabled. Sailors' wives and widows

³⁶ Pori Magistrates Records, 13-27 February 1837; 10 April 1837; 5-12 February 1840; 11-13 March 1843. Artisanal privileges were abolished in Finland in 1868 and the general freedom of trade came into force in 1879.

cohabited with other women with children while men were away. The records indicate that, not only were cohabiting families able to save on housing expenses, they were also able to access a variety of domestic and social support services on a flexible basis. Indeed, it is significant to note the massive amount of (often invisible) care work undertaken by women in the absence of formal institutions designated for this purpose. This meant that the daily practices in such 'families' often crossed the biological, marital and social boundaries of what was legally defined as a 'household'. It is also noteworthy that when families were separated, women and children could become additional members in other people's households. Sailors' children were, for instance, cared for by other townsfolk when the child's biological parents had both died or were unable to provide for them unassisted.

Although the fragility of sailors' families meant they were forced to appeal to local institutions for economic support, this study reveals that getting aid from local institutions was not automatic and women often had to actively appeal and make suitably convincing arguments. Their appeals for poor relief, and to town magistrates, and the Seamen's House prompted discussions about the extent to which local communities should be morally responsible for the poor. As poor relief at this time was evaluated in terms of the recipients' ability to work, their age, position in the family, marital status, and gender, impoverished sailors' families did not resemble the traditional early modern archetype of the deserving poor. In forcing institutions to acknowledge both their need and their worth, sailor's wives (who were often young, able-bodied mothers, with a reputation unknown to the magistrates and ship owners) clearly forced a rethink on how welfare should be distributed in order to keep families. This, and the fact that work permits that enabled women to provide for their family by way of a small business had an effect on the local supply of goods and services, means that a closer study of how women gained the right kind of knowledge about legislation and petitioning institutions – while keeping their families in the seafaring world – is clearly needed.

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