

Abstract
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The Regulation of House-to-House Peddling in Finland during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

House-to-house peddling was the topic of numerous discussions and debates in Finland during the second half of the nineteenth century. Newspaper articles from the period show the concern caused by consumption and house-to-house peddling on the countryside, especially the illegal peddling by Russians. By tempting the poor and uneducated with goods and items usually out of reach, the Russian peddlers were thought to cheat the Finnish peasants of their hard-earned money. Evident from the newspaper articles is the confusion about the acts and decrees regulating house-to-house peddling. Who were allowed to engage in this activity and which items were they allowed to sell? In this short abstract, I will outline the regulations surrounding house-to-house peddling in Finland during the late nineteenth century.

The regulation of house-to-house peddling dates back to the thirteenth century, when trade on the countryside was forbidden in Swedish law. Throughout the revisions and changes in the laws on trade, house-to-house peddling was forbidden, but through different stipulations certain goods and people from certain parts of the realm were exempted from the prohibition. With Finland being a Grand Duchy under Russia in the nineteenth century, the laws regulating house-to-house peddling changed several times. The division between farmer and commercial goods was fundamental in the regulation. In 1842, house-to-house peddling was allowed to neighbours with farmer goods and handicraft, and in 1859, handicraft was completely exempted from the laws prohibiting house-to-house peddling. In 1867, the exemption was extended to books printed in Finland. The law catered to the Lutheran church, as it was believed that the only way to spread the message of the church was by personally bringing the books to the homes.

The Russian farmers from the areas of Archangelsk and Olonets were of particular concern, and their stay in Finland was heavily regulated from the 1850s onwards. Besides having to notify the county sheriff every time they travelled from one district to another, they were only allowed to use the main roads and they were not allowed to be in larger groups than five. There were also regulations on the local level, as some parishes tried to prevent illicit trade by Russian peddlers by fining people who bought their goods.

The acts on trade and commerce of the 1860s and 1870s that introduced freedom of trade further liberated but also regulated house-to-house peddling. In 1868, Finnish handicraft and earthenware vessel were exempted from the prohibition; however, the peddlers should be Finnish citizens and granted permission by the governor. In 1879, commerce on the countryside was only prohibited when goods were passed “from home to home”, all other forms of commerce on the countryside, such as village stores, were free. Again, the governor could grant a Finnish citizen permission to peddle, provided that there was no cause for concern that the person would abuse their right. The governor also decided which items were allowed to peddle

The changes in the regulations on house-to-house peddling also changed the mentality surrounding peddlers. While newspaper articles from the 1860s and 1870s only presented peddling in a negative light, articles from the 1890s call for compassion towards peddlers, and try to explain the function filled by house-to-house peddling. Are the newspaper articles a reflection of the discussions in the Finnish senate and parliament? This is the question that I will investigate in this study on the regulation of house-to-house peddling that I will now undertake.