

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	Petäjävesi Old Church
<i>Location</i>	Province of Central Finland
<i>State Party</i>	Finland
<i>Date</i>	1 October 1990

**Justification by State Party**

The Petäjävesi Evangelical Lutheran Old Church is a building of considerable global importance as an example of northern timber church architecture. It fulfils criteria i and iv for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

The church is uniquely representative of log construction in the northern coniferous area and of the skills of the peasant population. European architectural trends have influenced the external form and the ground plan of the church, but they have been applied masterfully to traditional log construction. The church combines the layout of a Renaissance central church conception and older forms derived from Gothic groined ceilings.

The interior with its hand-carved log surfaces and silky patina on the seasoned walls has a unique atmosphere, which is enhanced by the slightly irregular placing of the floor beams and the pews with their mirror-surfaced, softly profiled sides.

Petäjävesi Church has strong structural and historical authenticity. It reflects in an impressive way the architectural beauty of a northern rural Protestant church.

**History and Description***History*

Petäjävesi Old Church was designed and built in 1763-64 by the peasant master-builder, Jaakko Klemetinpoika Leppänen. In 1821 his grandson, Erkki Leppänen, added the bell-tower at the west end.

Since a new church was built on the other side of the strait in 1879, less than 1 km distant, the Old Church has been out of use. It was not maintained for a considerable period, only the bell-tower and cemetery being used for their original purpose. Repair work began in the 1920s when the Austrian art historian, Josef Strzygowski, drew attention to its historical and architectural value. At the present time the church is mainly a tourist attraction, though services are held there during the summer.

*Description*

The Old Church is situated on a peninsula where Lakes Jämsä and Petäjävesi meet. The location was determined by the fact that the congregation would reach it by boat (or over the ice in the winter). At the present time there is no settlement in the immediate vicinity of the church, since the town of Petäjävesi has developed about 1 km away.

The ground plan of the church is cruciform, the arms being virtually the same size (17 m x 7 m). This form of church developed first in towns in the later 17th century, and only later spread into the countryside. The model was probably the stone church built in Stockholm in 1656 in a style derived from Italian architecture. The bell-tower at the west end of Petäjävesi church is connected to it by a narrow corridor; the vestry is similarly linked with the eastern arm.

The main structure is of horizontal log (*Blockbau*) construction, in the tradition to be found further to the east. The walls were not originally clad with planks, as at the present time. The four arms are covered by high, slightly angular vaults made of reddish pine planks, and there is an octagonal dome at the crossing. The circular design at the top of the dome derives from the classical *opaion* as interpreted in Renaissance architecture. The masking slats, the base, and the tie-beams of the vaults are decorated in red ochre.

The interior largely preserves its original form, as developed during the century (1764-1879) when it was in liturgical use. The distinctive features are the pulpit, the pews, the balustraded galleries, and the chandeliers, the elaborate carving of which is entirely the work of local craftsmen and artists. There is no heating inside the church. The exterior is characterized by the steeply pitched roof, reminiscent of Gothic architecture. One of the doorways and the window of the choir have preserved their original triple arches.

The lowest tier of the bell-tower is in *Blockbau* construction, the walls and lantern being built of timber framing with clapboard cladding. The bell trestle is supported on a sturdy log frame. Unlike the rest of the church, the bell-tower is painted in different colour.

The church is situated within a graveyard surrounded by a stone wall.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The church is owned by the parish of Petäjävesi.

### *Management*

Maintenance of the church is the joint responsibility of the parish and the National Board of Antiquities and Historical Monuments. It is included in the national church restoration programme of the National Board. This work is financed by means of grants from the National Board and from the Ecclesiastical Board.

It is designated for protection in the Regional Plan. This forbids any activities in the vicinity of the church that might endanger its preservation and its setting.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Following the recognition of its historical and architectural importance in the 1920s by Strzygowski, work began to ensure its preservation and maintenance. An extensive renovation campaign took place in 1929 under the guidance of architect Elsi Borg, when the pews, stairs, and windows were carefully restored. In 1953-4 the shingles of the roofs, which were in poor condition, were renewed. Since that time there has been a programme of systematic monitoring and maintenance.

At the present time the general condition of the church is good. Brittleness in the joints caused by ageing of the wood inevitably results in structural changes. The traditional techniques used to counteract these permit natural movement of the building.

Recent work in the surroundings of the church has been designed to divert access so as to avoid cars coming directly up to it. Access is on foot from screened car parking facilities. Unsightly overgrown trees have also been removed from the churchyard.

#### *Authenticity*

The period of neglect between 1879 and the 1920s may be deemed a blessing in disguise. When restoration work began the historical importance of the building had been recognized and so interventions for restoration and conservation were kept to a minimum and utilized traditional techniques and materials. As a result the level of authenticity is exceptionally high.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert visited Petäjävesi in May 1993 and had discussions with representatives of the parish as well as the National Board of Antiquities and Historic Buildings and the Ministry of the Environment.

##### *Qualities*

Petäjävesi Old Church is a remarkably well preserved and untouched example of the church architecture in wood that is a feature of this area of north-eastern Europe.

##### *Comparative analysis*

At its 15th Meeting in June 1991 the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee recommended the inscription of this property, but asked ICOMOS to submit a comparative evaluation of old wooden churches in northern Europe. This study was carried out by Dr Håkon Christie (Riksantikvaren, Norway), the leading expert in this field.

In his report, Dr Christie made a clear distinction between the frame-construction medieval wooden churches, represented on the World Heritage List by the Urnes (Norway) stave-church (No 58) and the later log-built churches, based on European church design in stone but incorporating features unique to this building tradition. He also distinguished between the Finnish tradition and that in northern Russia (represented on the World Heritage List by Kizhi Pogost: No 544), where both the design and the techniques applied derive from a different tradition, emanating from Russia. In his opinion Petäjävesi Old Church is "the best preserved of Finland's churches built in this cruciform tradition and is a worthy representative for the type ... It deserves a place on the World Heritage List where, together with Urnes stave-church, it will serve to represent the height of wooden church architecture in Scandinavia."

##### *Additional comments*

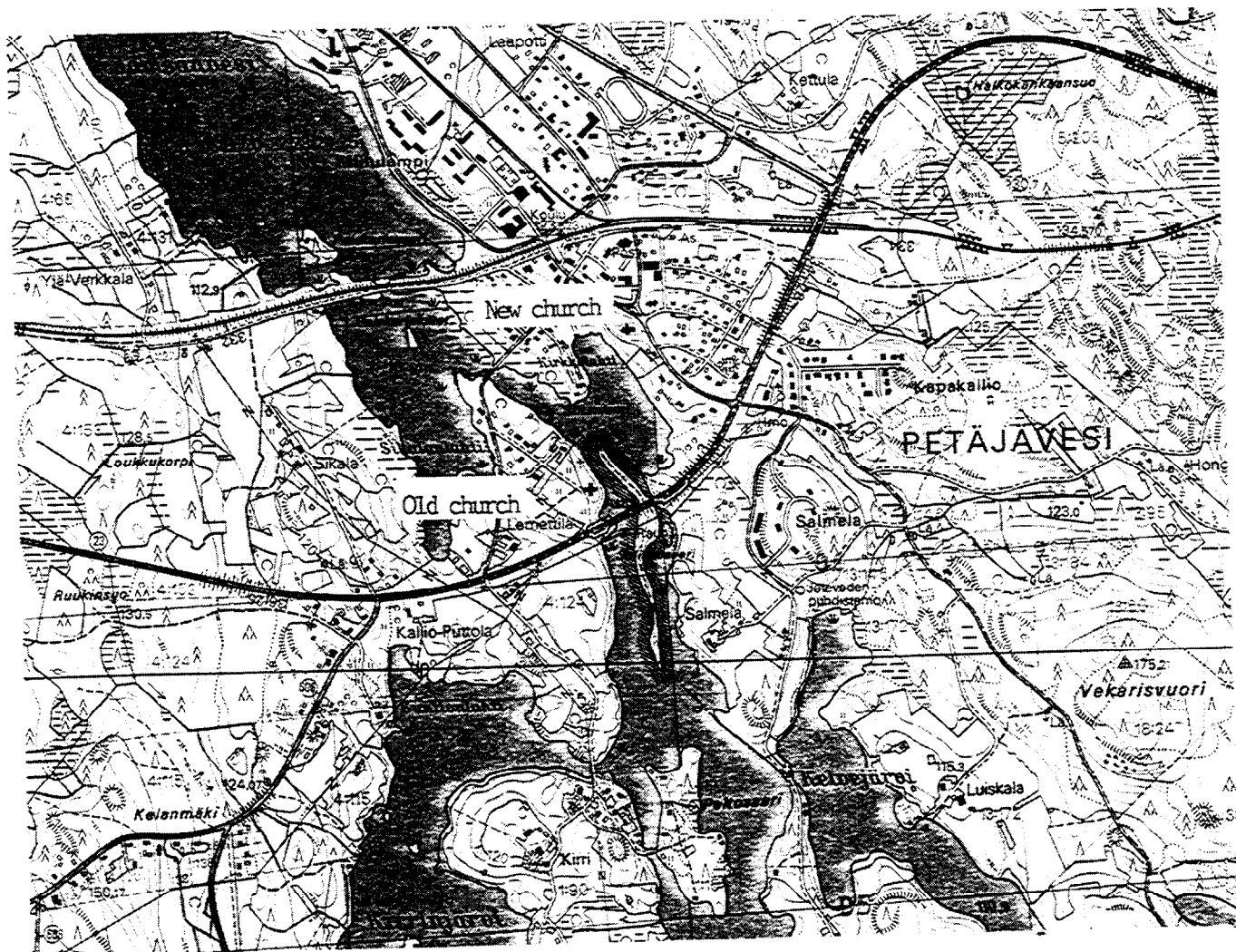
In making its recommendation, ICOMOS paid careful attention to the proposals regarding criteria for eventual inscription on the List made by the State Party (see above, "Justification by State Party"). It readily accepts the application of criterion iv (already approved in principle by the Bureau in 1991), but feels that the use of criterion i is not appropriate in this case.

## **Recommendation**

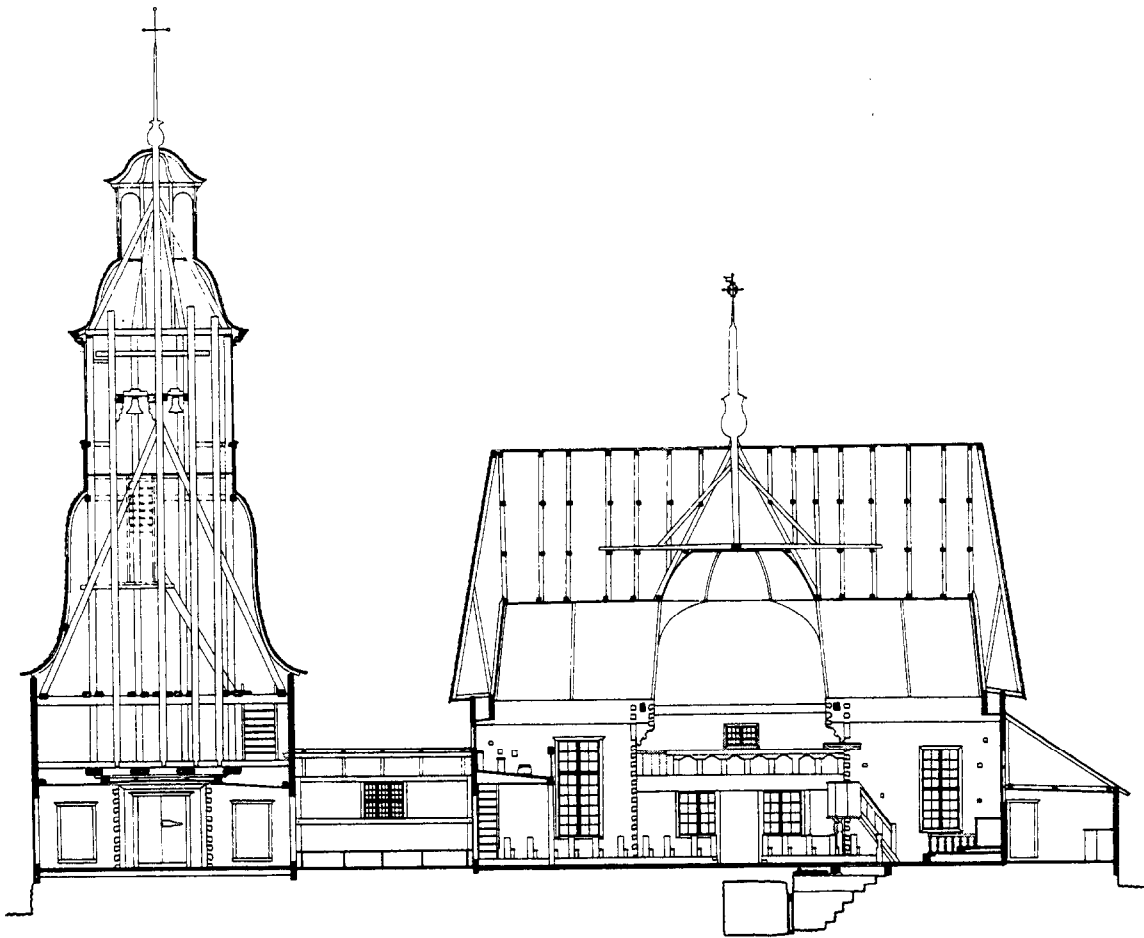
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion iv:

- ***Criterion iv*** Petäjävesi Old Church is an outstanding example of a wooden church in the architectural tradition of eastern Scandinavia.

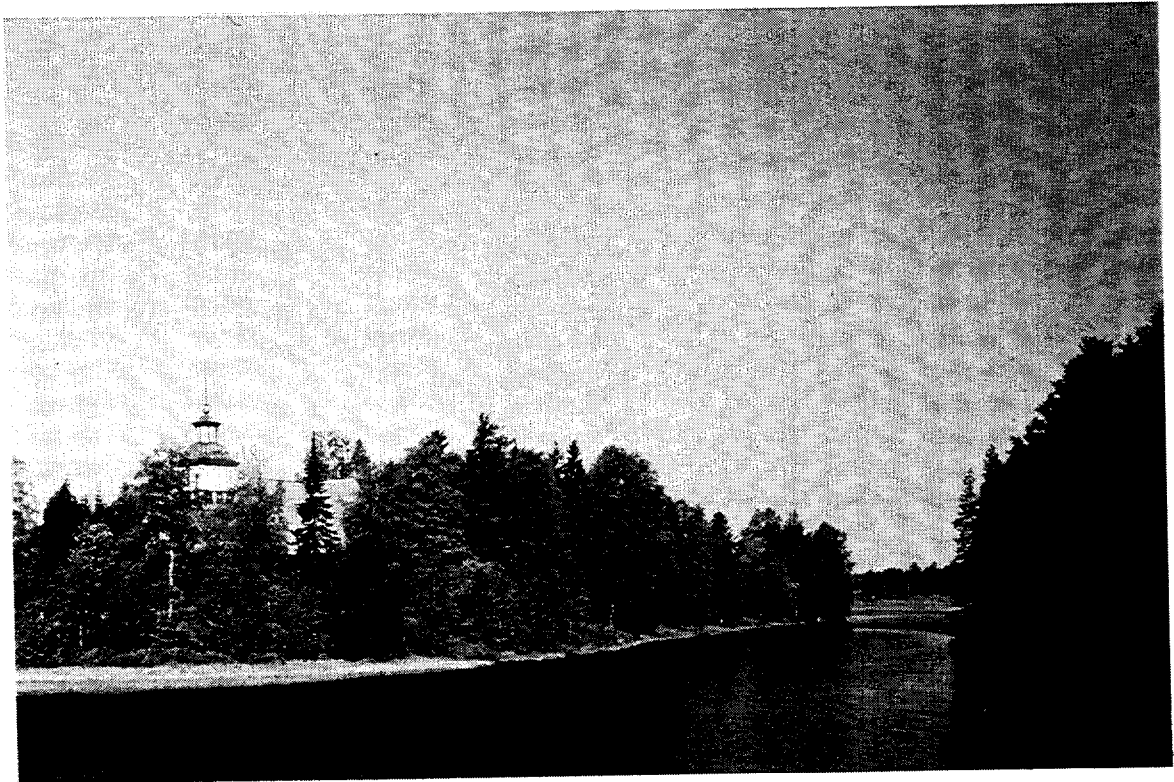
ICOMOS, October 1994



Vieille église de Petäjävesi : carte de localisation /  
Petäjävesi Old Church : location map



Vieille église de Petäjävesi : coupe /  
Petäjävesi Old Church : section



Vieille église de Petäjävesi : vue d'ensemble /  
Petäjävesi Old Church : general view