

Kaustinen Church – The Long Road to an Independent Parish

A Long Journey to Their Own Church

During the Middle Ages, the people of Kaustinen belonged to the parish of Kaarlela, and the journey to church was more than 50 kilometres. The first attempt to build a church in Kaustinen was made in the seventeenth century, but the project was abandoned because permission was not granted. The chosen site, Kappelinkangas, still bore the visible foundations of the unfinished church well into the eighteenth century.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Kaustinen had grown into a village of nearly 800 inhabitants, making the need for its own church increasingly apparent. However, the proposal faced strong opposition from both Kokkola and Veteli.

The King Grants Permission

As a final measure, local farmers Matti Matinpoika Kuorikoski and Erkki Matinpoika "Parta-Kettu" ("Bearded Fox") Kettu travelled to Stockholm to petition King Gustav III for permission to build the church. They presented the royal family with a traditional spinning wheel from Kaustinen and, while awaiting an audience, carved wooden toy horses for the king's children.

On 12 September 1776, King Gustav III signed the permit authorising the construction of the church. Queen Sophia Magdalena donated a chandelier, which still hangs in the church chancel today. During the same journey, three church bells were commissioned, the smallest of which was paid for by Parta-Kettu.

The First Church, 1777

The first church was built in 1777 under the leadership of Matti Kuorikoski. Although lower than the present building, it occupied almost the same footprint. The following year, an impressive Renaissance-style bell tower was completed and has survived in a remarkably original form. For centuries, it also served as the parish mortuary. Kaustinen received its first resident priest in 1778, and parish life officially began the following year.

Beautified Through the Generations

Over the generations, the parish enriched the church with chandeliers, wall sconces and other furnishings. In 1794, the Vaasa-born artist Immanuel Alm painted the triptych altarpiece, which remains the church's most valuable original work of art. Additional paintings were later added, including the famous "Hell Painting", which was eventually removed because parishioners found it too frightening.

In 1832, the church's **poor man statue** was erected, with a collection box in its hand for donations to those in need.

A New Church on the Old Site

Between 1859 and 1860, the church underwent a major reconstruction under the direction of master church builder **Jaakko Heikinpoika Rauma**. The building was raised, the windows enlarged and much of the structure rebuilt. The project has often been regarded as, in effect, the construction of an entirely new church.

The church has also been restored several times during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Major restoration work was carried out in 1969–1970 and again in 2006, when many of the church's original colours and decorative details were revealed and restored. Between 2012 and 2014, the church received a new wooden shingle roof.

A Young Parish

Although the first church was completed as early as 1777, Kaustinen did not become an independent parish until 1866, by decree of the Senate of Finland. Today, the church seats around 550 people and remains one of Kaustinen's most important historic buildings, as well as a lasting monument to the region's distinguished tradition of church building.

Photo: Interior of Kaustinen Church. Photo: Veli-Pekka Harju.

Photo: This church has been cared for by generations. Photo: Veli-Pekka Harju.