

ON THE HISTORY OF THE LENIN MUSEUM IN HAKANIEMI SQUARE

The existence of the Lenin memorial museum at the former Kustaa Rovio apartment in Hakaniemi Square was rather short – it lasted from 1976 to 1995.

Originally named a “memorial room”, the museum was opened in a small flat on the 5th floor at Sörnäisten rantatie 1. Here, in August-September 1917, Chief of Helsingfors Police Kustaa Rovio sheltered Lenin for several weeks while he was hiding from the prosecution of the Provisional Government for being a “German agent” due to his uncompromising anti-war stance. Rovio's apartment in Hakaniemi was Lenin's last hideout before the revolution. Here, Lenin conducted the theoretical work, prepared the uprising, and finished the book *State and Revolution*. There is a short memoir of Rovio about the period, entitled *Kak Lenin skryvalsa u Gelsingförgskogo Polizmeistera* (“How Lenin hid at Helsingfors Chief Policeman's”).

After the Finnish Reds' defeat in the Civil War in 1918, Rovio moved to Soviet Russia. He lived in Petrograd (then Leningrad, since 1924), and then in Petrozavodsk, involved in teaching and administrative work. Before he left Helsinki, he charged his friend with looking after his flat and belongings, as it obtained memorial value after Lenin lived there. In 1929, with the help of Nikolay Burenin, the Soviet Trade Commissioner in Helsinki, Rovio managed to transport the furniture to Leningrad through Sweden, and passed it to the Museum of Revolution (opened in 1919 in The Winter Palace).

As many other old Bolsheviks and Lenin's comrades, Rovio was repressed during Stalin's purges. Charged with being involved in an alleged anti-Soviet conspiracy, he was arrested in 1937 and executed in 1938.

In 1939, the furniture and belongings from Rovio's Helsinki apartment were passed from the Museum of Revolution to the just-opened the Leningrad branch of the Central Museum of Lenin (in fact, the name of the branch, located at that time at The Marble Palace, was “Museum of Stalin”). In the 1980s, these objects were a part of the museum's permanent display. With the arrival of post-Soviet times, in 1992, The Leningrad Branch of the Central Museum of Lenin was disassembled, and the building of The Marble Palace was given to The Russian Museum. The objects were passed to the Memorial museum “Smolny”, where they have been preserved in archival storage until the present day.

The museum-apartment of Lenin at Hakaniemi Square in Helsinki was opened in 1976 on the initiative of the Finnish government, as a part of president Kekkonen's politics of “good neighborhood” in the relationship with the Soviet Union. Rovio's apartment that had by that time become property of another private person was bought by the Finnish authorities and passed to the Finland-USSR Society, to be turned into a museum. In the following years, the museum functioned as a Helsinki branch of Tampere Lenin Museum, subordinated to the Finnish Ministry of Education.

The work on the museum-apartment display started in 1975. Christina Porkkala, the secretary of the Finland-USSR Society, and Paavo Jokela, director of Tampere Lenin Museum, approached The Central Museum of Lenin (Moscow) with a request for help in the creation of the new museum. Research and preparation work lasted around one year and was fulfilled mostly in Moscow. The Soviet museum specialists involved in it were Alexander Shapin, an artist and designer at The Central museum of Lenin, and Lydia Naumova, a historian, the senior researcher fellow at the same museum. On the Finnish side, the key figure responsible for the coordination of the work was Matti Lind, a member of the Finland-USSR Society, who had studied in Moscow and spoke fluent Russian. During the period of research and the production of the display, Finnish specialists visited Moscow several times, maintaining constant contact between Finnish and Soviet museum fellows.

It was not possible to pass Rovio's authentic furniture from The Leningrad branch of The Central Museum of Lenin to the new museum in Hakaniemi, and therefore, the decision was made to produce exact copies of those objects.

The furniture was measured and then copied in workshops in Moscow by highly qualified specialists. All details, such as the ornaments of the furniture upholstery, were copied scrupulously.

Copies of the furniture set (five chairs, two armchairs, sofa), the bookcase, and the pier-glass dresser were made in this way. To make a copy of the metal bed was of special difficulty. Mass production of such beds had already stopped by that time, and therefore, the only option was to have it made by hand. The copy was commissioned in a small workshop in Moscow specializing in office furniture. According to Shapin, the job was done at a highly skilled level, the result was very close to the original, but cost an incredibly sum for that time – around 1000 rubles (to compare, the average monthly wage for Soviet qualified workers at that time was up to 150 rubles).

Some of Rovio's personal belongings were copied as well. In particular, Alexandr Shapin himself made the copy of the toy building blocks, presented by Lenin to Rovio's son in 1921 (the originals have been preserved in The Leningrad branch of The Central Museum of Lenin). That copy was exhibited in the museum-apartment in Hakaniemi as well.

When all the preparation work was finished, the Soviet specialists came to Helsinki to mount the exhibition. According to Shapin, the schedule was very tight: they did all in ten days only, working from early mornings until late evenings.

The copies of the original furniture brought from Moscow made the base of the museum interior. Smaller objects – the desk lamp, chandeliers, textile, the vintage wall telephone, as well as the Art Nouveau writing desk – were arranged by the Helsinki City Museum.

Helsinki City Museum specialists were also responsible for the kitchen interior; since there were no original objects preserved, they composed the display of “the kitchen of a wealthy worker of the 1910s”.

The opening of the museum-apartment took place on December 7th, 1976, and was very solemn. Finnish and Soviet officials, representatives of the Finland-USSR Society, party organizations, and museum specialists attended. For the occasion, a lavish banquet in a hotel restaurant nearby was arranged. After the dinner, guests were invited to a public sauna in the hotel.

There were numerous reports about the opening of the museum both in the Finnish and Soviet press.

In the following years, the museum functioned by appointment or phone call only, due to its location in a residential house. The Finland-USSR Society was responsible for organizing events and exhibitions; members of the Society, as well as independent enthusiasts, conducted lectures and excursions.

The museum fulfilled a 'representative', diplomatic function. It had become an almost compulsory point of the schedule of Soviet officials while they visited Finland, the same was true to the official guests from the Socialist countries. M. S. Gorbachev, D. F. Ustinov, E. K. Ligachev, N. V. Ryzhkov, G. V. Romanov, the head of the DDR E. Honecker visited the museum.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, The Finnish Ministry of Education decided to close the museum. This was done in 1992-1995; the flat was sold to a private person. The display of the museum-apartment was disassembled; the exhibits passed to the archives of Tampere Lenin Museum and Helsinki City Museum.

The apartment on the 5th floor at Sörnäisten rantatie 1 is now a private flat. A memorial plaque to Lenin still preserved at the entrance to the building reads “V.I. Lenin asui tässä talossa vuonna 1917” (“V.I. Lenin lived in this house in the year 1917”).

Matti Lind has passed away. Alexander Shapin has retired; he lives in Moscow and works as an independent artist and architect. The friendship between him and the Finnish colleagues involved in the creation and maintaining of the museum continues.

Text: Ilya Orlov

In 2017, artist Ilya Orlov rented an apartment in the same building, recreating in it the main room of the museum for three weeks in October 2017. The exhibition is commissioned by Checkpoint Helsinki within the frame of the project *Uncanny Interdependence. Remembrance and Disremembrance of October Revolution*, curated by Joanna Warsza.

All furniture items shown in the *Museum of the Museum* exhibition are the very pieces used in the original display of Lenin ‘memorial room’ in 1976-1993. The chairs, the dresser, the bed, and the bookcase are ‘authentic fakes’ – exact copies of Rovio’s belongings, manufactured in Moscow in 1975-1976 and now owned by Lenin Museum (Finnish Labour Museum Werstas, Tampere). The writing desk, the wall telephone, the ink well, and the chandelier are likewise from the original ‘memorial room’, and are now in the collections of Helsinki City Museum.

Consultants: Alexander Shapin, Mia Heinimaa, Aimo Minkkinen.

Acknowledgments (alphabetical order):

Aimo Minkkinen, Alexander Shapin, Anna Rawlings, Eetu and Sini Mäkelä, Elina Kallio (Helsinki City Museum), Joanna Warsza, Jyrki Siukonen (Uniart Helsinki’s Academy of Fine Arts), Lassi Patokorpi, Mia Heinimaa (Werstas Museum), Mika Elo (Uniart Helsinki’s Academy of Fine Arts), Minna Henriksson, Natalia Nikonova (Smolny Museum), Nikolay Tretiakov (Smolny Museum), Saara Karhunen (Checkpoint Helsinki), Sezgin Boynik.