

# THE JOURNEY OF THE WOOD

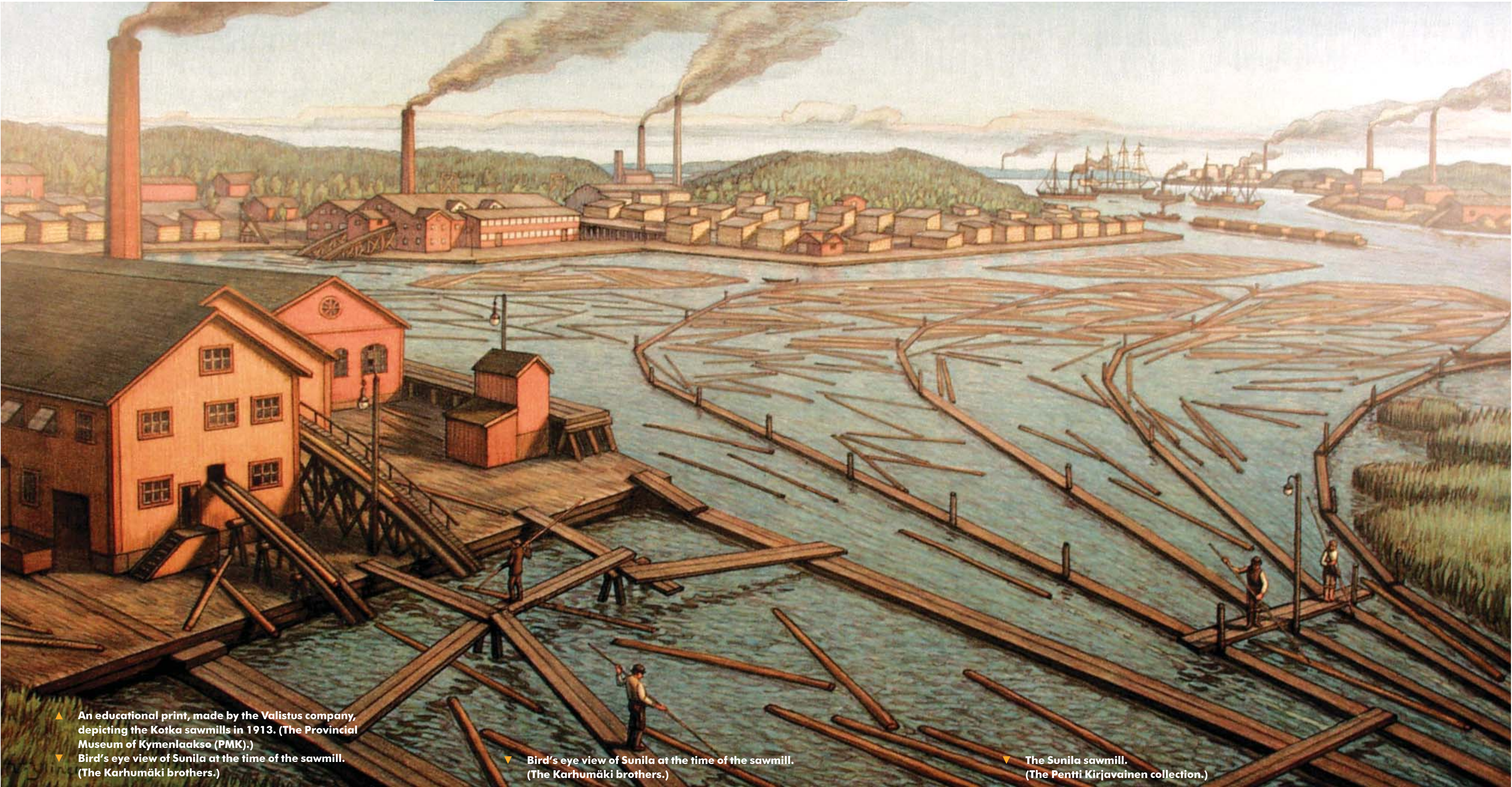
It was all based on waterways. The River Kymi waterway system was an excellent transport route from the inland forests to the coast, and the sea linked Finland to the rest of the world. The River Kymi delta area, the present-day city of Kotka, went through unprecedented industrial growth between 1871 and 1876, when nine steam-driven sawmills were founded. Their capacity totalled just over one fifth of the production of the whole country.



## THE NOTABLE WOOD-PROCESSING SITES OF THE KYMENLAAKSO AREA

- 1 Korkeakoski industrial area, Kotka 1564–, 1887–
- 2 Myllykoski Ltd, Anjalankoski 1700s–, 1905–
- 3 UPM Kymmene Ltd, Kymi factories and environs, Kuusankoski 1870s–
- 4 Verla historical factory environment, Jaala 1872–1964
- 5 Stora Enso Ltd, Anjalankoski factories 1872–, 1936–
- 6 Stora Enso Ltd, Kotka factories 1872–
- 7 Karhula industrial estate, Karhulanniemi, Kotka 1874–
- 8 UPM Kymmene Ltd, Halla sawmill, Kotka 1876–1986
- 9 UPM Kymmene Ltd, Voikkaa factories, Kuusankoski 1896–
- 10 Stockfors factory and Kläsarö power station, Pyhtää 1902–
- 11 UPM Kymmene Ltd, Hovinsaari former paper mill area, Kotka 1906–
- 12 Sunila Ltd, factory and Sunila residential area, Kotka 1936–
- 13 Stora Enso Ltd, Summa factories, Hamina 1953–

Source:  
Kymenlaakson liitto:  
"Kymenlaakson teollisuusperinteen kartointi"  
[Kymenlaakso industrial heritage survey], 2003.



▲ An educational print, made by the Valistus company, depicting the Kotka sawmills in 1913. (The Provincial Museum of Kymenlaakso (PMK).)  
▼ Bird's eye view of Sunila at the time of the sawmill. (The Karhumäki brothers.)

▼ Bird's eye view of Sunila at the time of the sawmill. (The Karhumäki brothers.)

▼ The Sunila sawmill. (The Pentti Kirjavainen collection.)





# FROM A SAWMILL VILLAGE TO A PULP COMMUNITY

The Sunila sawmill company got its production running in 1875 with backing from Swedish capital. An industrial community run by the factory owner was created, with its attendant wooden dwellings, primary school and library.

The journey, coloured with several changes in ownership, losses and smallersuccesses, continued until 1928 when, as a result of a business deal, the sawmill ceased operating and the workforce of almost 300 people was laid off. It was the beginning of a quiet period that lasted for almost a decade and ended only with the economic boom of the 1930s.

The Sunila sawmill and its surrounding area came under the ownership of the Kymenlaakso forest industry in 1928. Buyers in the ground-breaking joint venture were the companies **Enso-Gutzeit, Halla, Aktiebolag Stockfors, Kymi, Yhtyneet Paperitehtaat** [United Paper Mills], **Karhula**, and **Tampereen Pellava- ja Rautateollisuus** [Tampere flax and iron industry]. The acquisition of the area seems to have been aimed purely towards future strategic goals.

After the mid-1920s the emphasis of the forest industry began to move from the dominance of sawed timber products towards the production of pulp. The percentage of products derived from the sawmill industry then accounted for 45% of total Finnish exports, whereas the percentage of pulp and paper industry products was under 30%. However, within ten years the figures had changed; sawmill industry products accounted for 25%, and pulp and paper industry products for 40%.

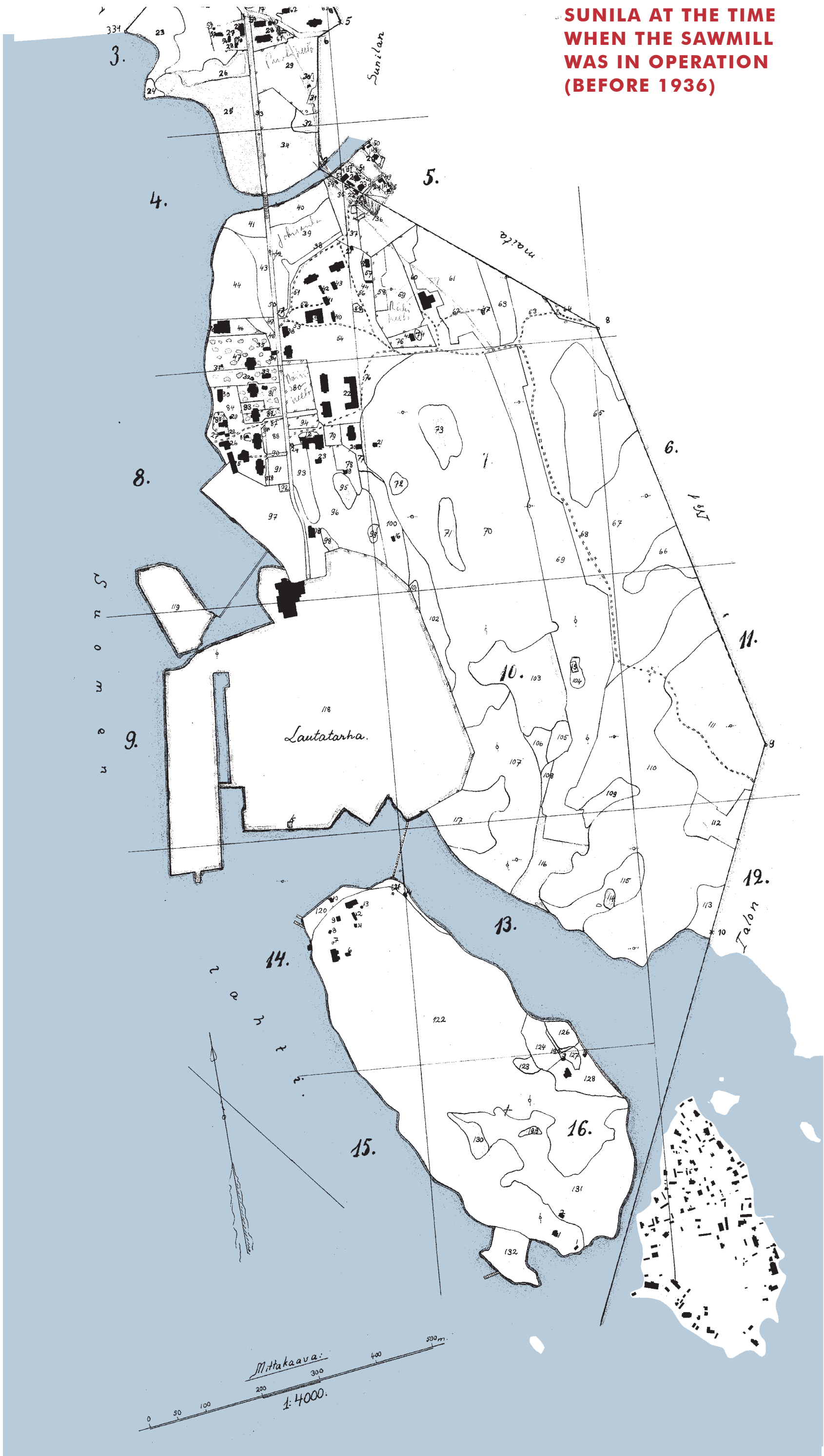
With the beginning of the economic boom in the 1930s Sunila's time had

arrived. The five joint company owners, A. Ahlström, Enso-Gutzeit, Kymi, Tampella and Yhtyneet Paperitehtaat [United Paper Mills] decided in 1936 to found the Sunila sulphate cellulose factory, the production capacity of which would be 80,000 tons per year.

The design stages and construction, the quarrying of the rocky building plot on the island of Pyötinen, the completion of road and rail connections, as well as the harbour jetty took only two years. The completion of the first pulp bail was celebrated on 16th May 1938.

The future, however, is always unpredictable. Economic fluctuations, variations in demand and changes in the global situation with the heavy war years gathered obstacles in the path of bold development. The aimed-for production capacity wasn't achieved until 1951.

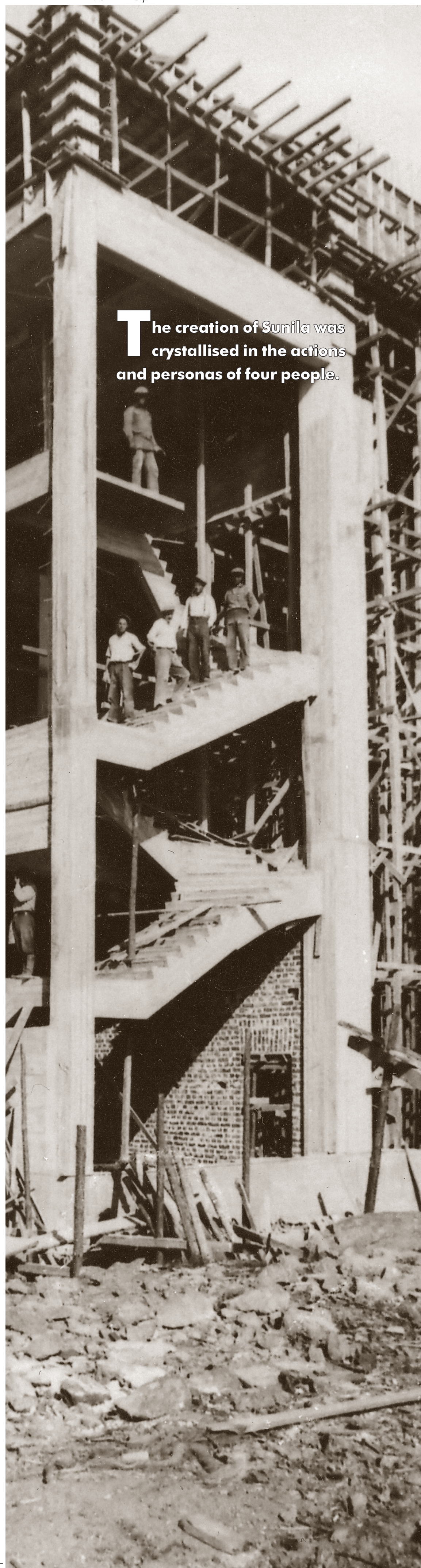
Construction of the housing area began at the same time, and proceeded at the same brisk pace, as the factory. Housing for the factory management, office clerks, foremen and part of the workforce was completed in 1937.





# FOUR BIG NAMES

Photo: Sunila Oy.



**T**he creation of Sunila was crystallised in the actions and personas of four people.

Photo: Sunila Oy / Foto Roos.



## **Lauri Kanto (1888–1966) – A master on his lands**

Lauri Kanto, who qualified as a machine engineer from Helsinki Technical University in 1911 was working as a technical director at Halla sulphate cellulose factory when, in April 1936, he was offered the task of preplanning the Sunila project. Kanto was, in other words, involved in the factory project from the very beginning, came to know it down to its smallest details and grew in time to personify Sunila.

Sunila became a close community which Kanto led with a patriarchal hand. Kanto promoted the leisure-time activities of the factory community; for instance, sports, camping and even photography. In this way social solidarity was formed.

Kanto and **Alvar Aalto** worked closely together in the planning of the housing areas. The good working atmosphere was enhanced by a common aim to raise the standard of housing and the social environment linked with it.

The period of Kanto's directorship was long and significant, and only ended in 1961 when he retired at the age of 72.

Photo: Archives of the Mairela Founda-



## **Harry Gullichsen (1902–1954) – An enlightened protagonist**

Economist Harry Gullichsen, the managing director of the huge **A. Ahlström** company, was a cultivated and socially aware industrialist. He was also chairman of the board of the Sunila company, a position he held for 26 years, until his death.

The choice of **Alvar Aalto** as architect of Sunila was probably due to the friendship between Aalto and Harry and **Maire Gullichsen**. For the same reason, Sunila received immediately after its completion excellent international publicity, for instance at the New York World Exposition in 1939. Those favouring the arts were also patrons of architecture.

Through the cooperation of the Gullichsens and Aalto, the company aimed for economic and cultural internationalism. The intentions extended all the way to the aesthetical principles of building in the factory society. The cooperation between the architect and industry in solving extensive social problems was ideal from the point of view of the Functionalist programme.

Photo: The Estate of Aulis Kairamo.



## **Aulis Kairamo (1905–1991) – A single-minded visionary**

Kairamo's engagement as the technical director of Sunila began with the actual designing of the factory, after which his task was to organise the actual construction work. Kairamo represented the young engineering generation, as compared to Kanto, which no doubt meant differences in views with regard to the arrangements of the factory and the acquisition of equipment. The work, however, was carried out independently: "Only four times did Kanto interfere with my plans, and each time it led to a mistake being made" recalled Kairamo almost five decades later.

The factory buildings were actually designed in Sunila and the magnificent overall form was due to the specific technical requirements, although the shape of the façade came about from Kairamo and Aalto's joint exploration. The solutions were arrived at by consensus. The magnificent window surfaces were determined by practical requirements, but the designs were by Aalto.

Kairamo later recounted Aalto's flexibility and readiness for honourable compromises: "There was a real architect, who was even able to listen. Alvar was the easiest architect to work together with (in my experience)."

Photo: Alvar Aalto Museum, picture archive.



## **Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) – The architect of time and space**

When Aalto came to Sunila in 1936 he was already a well-known architect and cosmopolite, who had already discovered his own design philosophy and way of expression, and had selected what he wanted from the doctrines of Functionalism. One central theme in his thinking was the close connection between dwelling and nature, into which it was natural to link points of emphasis central to Functionalism, such as hygiene, health and light.

"We'll make this a handsome factory" was Aalto's regular exclamation when visiting Sunila during the initial stages of the planning. His strongest influence, however, was in the creation of the housing area, where he was given basically a free hand to solve the overall functions and appearance, the placement of the buildings and their architecture. The final result can't be called a Functionalist design; it is rather the prototype for a 1940s forest town.