

“The Recumbent Skyscraper” – the first terminal building at the airport

Helsinki Airport was opened to traffic just before the Summer Olympics in 1952. In addition to one runway, an air navigation building and a wooden passenger building – that was erected in three weeks and assembled from pre-purchased wooden elements – were completed for the Olympic Games.

The airport pavilion was meant to be temporary and was to be turned into construction site barracks when the final airport building was completed. The original length of the building was 117.5 metres, with a floor area of 1,623 square metres.

An unnamed ceramic relief by the ceramic artist Karl Heinz Schultz-Köln was placed in the customs area of the temporary terminal building. The modernist work, donated by Wärtsilä, is four metres wide and three metres high and consists of 54 ceramic tiles. Nowadays, the work is on display at the train station at Helsinki Airport.

In 1956, a new wing was built in the airport pavilion, housing a restaurant and kitchen facilities. Soon the building was known as “the longest recumbent skyscraper in the world”. All in all, the building was expanded three times to eventually have a length of 170 metres.

The permanent airport terminal building was completed in 1969. The old barracks building was not demolished when the new terminal was commissioned, as it was still used as a business air terminal and for cargo handling. The barracks terminal was finally dismantled during subsequent extension works. Its parts were resold. Today, they serve as part of a hotel building at the edge of Nummela Airport. The restaurant facilities of the “Recumbent Skyscraper” are still in use.

Finavia in collaboration with Finnish Aviation Museum.
Photo: Veljekset Karhumäki Corp.

