

For release after 7 January 2006, 11.15 a.m.

## At the roots of national culture – Inspiration for cultural life in Kuopio

The opening speech by Permanent State Under-Secretary Heikki Aaltonen for the exhibition, “Headmaster J.V. Snellman from Kuopio”

7 January 2006, 11 a.m., Kuopio Museum of Cultural History

(Subject to changes)

The theme of the J. V. Snellman Bicentenary Jubilee is culture, whose power will be widely explored in the coming year through Snellman’s achievements. This message is tangibly conveyed through various exhibitions.

During the jubilee, several exhibitions will celebrate aspects of Snellman’s work in the 12 Snellman cities. The Finnish National Museum, the Finnish National Library, the Finnish National Archives, the Bank of Finland Museum, eight Transport Museums and the Mortgage Society of Finland will contribute with their own special displays.

Kuopio holds a special place in this group, since it is able to present a comprehensive picture of Snellman’s life. Here, the three key roles of teacher, campaigner and educator intertwine, in a man whose life’s work was to evoke the Finnish national spirit. In 1843–1849, it was in Kuopio that Snellman was engaged as a grammar school headmaster, the editor of *Saima*, *Maamiehen ystävä* and *Litteraturblad*, and founded his own family.

In Kuopio, we are well placed to portray the diverse sources of cultural inspiration which enabled Snellman’s clarion call to echo from here and nowhere else.

Having returned from his long travels in Europe, in Kuopio Snellman was able to delve down to the roots of our national culture. Within a few weeks after his move, Snellman expressed his satisfaction with his new working environment to his friend Tengström: “... the town seems open, happy and well tended. I hear that the sense of well-being in the town and region have improved

during recent times, thanks to new sawmills, the export of farm produce to St Petersburg, and the newly opened waterways... These external issues are most pleasing. In addition, the local residents' warm welcome has already made me feel at home." At the time, Kuopio was a town of around 2,000 residents, but it was able to provide Snellman with his ideal setting. Snellman even wrote a paean to a small town in the July edition of *Saima* in 1844. "It is a great pity," writes Snellman, "that so many people will never have a chance to experience the essence of a small town."

Snellman's decision to apply for the post of headmaster at Kuopio's grammar school was influenced by his many relatives and friends in the town's cultural and business elite. As well as enjoying their company and hospitality, Snellman gained access to Kuopio's rich music life.

Snellman's passionate campaigning for schools stemmed from new educational regulations, which came into force in 1841 and completely changed the Finnish educational system, replacing the regulations implemented during the Swedish reign. Although the new regulations merely comprised general principles and guidelines, putting them into practice proved difficult. This presented Snellman with an excellent opportunity to embark on exhaustive reforms in his school, and to introduce his educational and teaching principles in his newspaper writings.

The underlying reason for Snellman's move to Kuopio was his desire to become a newspaper editor. Founding a newspaper was facilitated by the printing press, the first to be set up inland, which had first attracted Snellman to Kuopio. Snellman felt that he had arrived in the midst of what was to all intents and purposes a re-enactment of classical civilisation. He said, "In ancient Greece and Rome, public debate was conducted in the market place. The European pagans had their Ting courts and in the Middle Ages there was the field of Mars. But in our pleasant age, all public matters are resolved in comfortable chambers, and the public would know nothing of its own key affairs, did publishers not print it out in black and white." Snellman felt that, in his time, newspapers provided an arena for public debate.

Snellman's work as a newspaper man in Kuopio greatly influenced the development of the Finnish press and the Finnish national awakening. In keeping with its European role models, *Saima's* content highlighted the importance of public debate to the conduct of national affairs. Snellman did not think the press was able to provide education, which he saw as the function of the school system, but believed that it could inspire various ways of using what had been learnt – it could mobilise people. This ability to participate in public affairs has become a prerequisite for intellectual life in

Europe. Snellman strove to demonstrate that the press had an obligation to galvanise people into action in public life.

Snellman's marriage to Jeanette Wennberg in November 1845 and the beginning of family life in Kuopio slightly changed his thinking. He told Tengström that, in the future, his motto would be "not books but children", "...growing cabbage and potatoes, looking for a better price for firewood etc. are quite enough worries at the beginning." A well-known socialite and a spirited raconteur, Snellman showed signs of turning into a dedicated husband and father when he agreed on a revivalist wedding ceremony. The birth of his first daughter greatly moved Johan Wilhelm, and he told his wife: "Man prepares for his own immortality through the spiritual growth of his children. By God, how great is this responsibility, and how it should oblige us to avoid anything dishonourable, and to seek that which can cultivate the mind and create true happiness."

Although several exhibitions, nationwide, are required to illustrate Snellman's daunting achievements, here in Kuopio we can focus on casting light on Snellman's intellectual and cultural life and his successes therein. This exhibition is an excellent way of further promoting Snellman's cultural heritage in Kuopio.

It was not for nothing then, that on 16 August 2004, the City Council decided to declare Kuopio the City of J. V. Snellman in 2005–2007. Here we have the first public statue of Snellman, the only Snellman house museum, and the unique research organisation, the Snellman Institute. Kuopio was also the originator of the initiatives to edit Snellman's work in its original language, translate it into Finnish, write a biography and celebrate the Bicentenary Jubilee.

Exhibitions form a tremendous communication channel. They can make a subject tangible, something that can literally be touched. Building an exhibition is a creative process: one must identify the essential elements, arouse interest through displays, and discreetly guide visitors to form their own insights. As vice-chairman of the J.V. Snellman Bicentenary Committee, I would like to thank and congratulate the builders and organisers of this exhibition, "Headmaster J. V. Snellman from Kuopio", for their successful work.

From a national perspective, Snellman's period in Kuopio was a genuine showcase of how powerful culture can be. Today, our exhibition will make this apparent to all comers.