

Opening Ceremony of the J.V. Snellman Bicentenary Year on Tuesday, 3 January 2006 at 6:00 p.m.
at the Kuopio Music Centre

Welcoming speech by Chairman of the Bicentenary Year Local Committee, Mr. Matti Mänttari

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The City of Kuopio has the honour of hosting this opening ceremony for Snellman's Bicentenary Year. At least 12 cities and municipalities in Finland can claim some connection to the life of J.V. Snellman, and Kuopio is one of them.

Snellman lived in Kuopio from 1843 to 1849, a short but extremely significant period in terms of Snellman's life and work and the development of Finland as a nation. According to Raimo Savolainen, the author of Snellman's biography, Kuopio was the "ideas factory" for Snellman's practical programme. The clarion call heralding the Finnish renaissance rang out from Kuopio – almost literally.

Contrary to myth, Kuopio was no refuge for Snellman. In fact, he was delighted to come here, home to some of his relatives and friends, while the office of principal of the upper elementary school provided him with the opportunity to elaborate on his pedagogic ideas. Above all, there was the printing house of Major J. A. Karsten, which facilitated publication of the newspaper, *Saima*. As we all know, Snellman's work as a journalist played a key role in the achievement of his main goal, the awakening of national awareness.

Snellman married Johanna Lovisa Wennberg in November 1845, and starting a family had its own influence on his thinking. He also met the revivalist leader, Paavo Ruotsalainen, spiritual and ecclesiastical questions gaining a place in his writings.

Kuopio has fostered Snellman's memory in many ways. As early as 1886 the bust of Snellman by Johannes Takanen was unveiled, being inner Finland's first public sculpture. Later, a street, park and school were named after Snellman. Snellman's home museum was inaugurated in 1981, and the very same year saw the University of Kuopio name its central building 'Snellmania'. A couple of years later the city council founded the Snellman Institute to promote the disciplines represented by Snellman. Ever since, this Institute has been a very active publisher.

The City of Kuopio has honoured Snellman's achievements in many ways: in 1982 Kuopio was among the bodies that made a proposal to the Government to publish Snellman's complete works in their original languages. In 1997, the City of Kuopio took the initiative and made a proposal to the Government to publish Snellman's complete works in Finnish plus a new academic biography while in 1998 Kuopio proposed a special national Committee for the bicentenary celebrations in 2006. All of these initiatives have borne fruit.

The local committee for the Snellman Bicentenary, appointed by the City Board of Kuopio, has already spent the last couple of years organising Kuopio's jubilee year events. There is a substantial number of events: the opening week will see several seminars on the arts and sciences as well as exhibitions related to Snellman's life. There will be dozens of events throughout the year, and we have tried to involve people from as many walks of life as possible, in which, may I say, we have succeeded well.

The theme of the Bicentenary Year is the concept of civilisation. In my opinion, this was the right choice, given the continuing topicality of Snellman's views on the role of civilisation in the development of a nation. We should now examine the ideological importance of Snellman's legacy as a European, as the Finnish nation seeks new paths and success in a unifying Europe and the world in general.

Honoured guests, on behalf of the J.V. Snellman Bicentenary Local Committee, I wish you all a warm welcome to Kuopio and the opening ceremony of the Snellman Bicentenary Year.