

M. A. CASTRÉN SOCIETY

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The M. A. Castrén Society creates contacts and fosters dialogue between Finns and Uralic (generally Finno-Ugrian) speaking peoples in the Russian Federation. The Society also promotes knowledge of Uralic cultures in Finland and elsewhere in the world and supports the culture of the Uralic peoples as well as their native language development in today's mass media. The Society is named after Matias Aleksanteri Castrén (1813–1852), a pioneer in the research of Uralic languages and cultures.

The M. A. Castrén Society was founded in Helsinki on 22nd January 1990. Developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s called for concrete contacts between Finland and the Uralic speaking peoples of Russia. The Society strives to achieve its goals through collaboration with cultural organisations and authorities both in Finland and in other countries.

The Society depends on state funding, and its decisions are made by a nine-member board representing the fields of literature, culture, science and informatics as well as education and museum work.

The M. A. Castrén Society is a civil organisation that can be joined by any individual or organisation interested in the Uralic peoples as well as in Finland as in other countries.

Uralic Peoples

The Society provides assistance for the publication of literature in the Uralic languages in the Russian Federation. In addition to helping fund the publication of text books and fiction, the Society also subsidises the cost of subscriptions to native language publications for schools, libraries and preschools. The Society also provides monetary awards for translation, writing and journalism.

Another dimension of the assistance administered by the Society is directed towards national language media and civil organisations. For example, the M. A. Castrén Society helps procure necessary equipment, but the greatest part of funding to civil organisations in Russia is focused on arranging cultural events and congresses. Radio and television companies receive financial assistance for the development and realisation of native language programmes, the majority of which are language courses. Special courses are also arranged in Finland for radio and television journalists working in the national languages, text book writers and representatives of civil organisations.

The M.A. Castrén Society was the co-ordinating office for the national Uralic Peoples Programme, funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education, and was also responsible for its implementation. The Uralic Peoples Programme (the Kindred Peoples Programme), started in 1994, had its main interests in education and media collaboration, individual mobility, culture exchange, joint research projects and co-operation in cultural, museum and library networking.

Finland and Abroad

The Society organises lectures, theme events and cultural excursions to meet representatives of the Uralic Peoples. The most noteworthy of these events is the annual Uralic Cultures Day, held in Autumn. Here special efforts are made to inform the public about the Uralic peoples, their cultures and their present situation. The Society provides materials dealing mainly with native language instruction, i.e. exhibits, videos and sound recordings. The Society also operates as a consultant. It assists in the exchange of specialists and finds contacts for those planning collaboration in culture and education projects.

The Society has a news letter that appears four times per year. It informs of current events in Finland and abroad. The Society also has its own home page and e-mail list. There is also an information pack at www.ugri.net which provides answers to general questions and directs the visitors to more specialised sources.

The M. A. Castrén Society gives information for its membership, authorities, the mass media and schools in distributing and procuring information and materials. The Society also provides statements on matters concerning the Uralic Peoples.

Matias Aleksanteri Castrén

is known for his pioneer work in Uralic linguistics and ethnography as well as his extensive fieldwork. Castrén's expeditions to north-west, western and southern Siberia shared a central theme of interest as his contemporaries, who were meant to find the origins of the Finns. The materials gathered in Castrén's travels include over ten different languages and their speakers, also outside of the Uralic language family.

M. A. Castrén was born 2nd December 1813. He matriculated in 1830 and initially studied Oriental languages, but continued his studies in Finnish folk poetry. In 1836 he completed his Master's Degree at the University of Helsinki.

Castrén made his first expedition to Lapland in 1838 under the direction of C. R. Ehrström, the regional doctor. The following year he travelled to Finnish and Russian Karelia, where he collected language and ethnographic materials for interpretation of the Kalevala, and wrote his dissertation on the relationship of the Finnish, Estonian and Saami (Lappish) nominal paradigms, *De affinitate declinationum in lingua Fennica, Esthonica et Lapponica*. In 1840 Castrén was appointed docent of Finnish and other Nordic languages. His Swedish translation of the Kalevala was completed in 1841. His expedition to Norwegian, Finnish and Russian Lapland accompanied by Elias Lönnrot took place in the winter of 1841–1842. On the Siberian Expedition organised by the St. Petersburg Academy in 1842–1844, Castrén acted as a language specialist, collecting Nenets (Samoyed) and Komi (Zyrian) materials. In 1845 Castrén published his research work *Om Accentes inflytande i Lappska Språket* (A phonetic history of the Saami language), he completed a grammar of the Komi (Zyrian) language and began his study of the Mari (Cheremis) language. Castrén's most extensive expedition was conducted from 1845–1849, which he made via Kazan to the Samoyeds in Siberia. During his travels he finished work on the Mari grammar, studied the Khanty (Ostyak) people and language, the Tatars, the Evenki and Buryats, and finally arrived in China. In 1849 he completed his grammar of the Khanty language and in 1850 came Castrén's dissertation on the personal suffixes of the Altaic languages, *De affixis personalibus linguarum Altaicarum*.

M. A. Castrén was married to Natalia Tengström in 1850. The following year saw the birth his only child Robert, and Castrén was appointed the first Professor of the Finnish language at the University of Helsinki. This position he held only briefly; Castrén passed away 7th May 1852.

The research and instruction work by M. A. Castrén were so extensive that many of the national sciences today, e.g. language and heritage studies, were established at the time of Castrén and can regard him as their pioneer forerunner. The results of Castrén's research work have been published in a 12-volume series, *Nordische Reisen und Forschungen von Dr. M. Alexander Castrén* (1853-1862).

The graphic symbol of the M.A. Castrén Society contains the Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), which is found in the same areas travelled by Castrén. The raised body of the swimming bird can be seen to signify the Ural Mountains, whereas the neck symbolizes the Ob and Yenisei rivers: Castrén's expeditions crossed the Urals and followed the shores of both the Ob and the Yenisei. The water-fowl symbolises the Water-Fowl Peoples, i.e. that part of the Uralic family that Castrén studied.