

<https://ernie.uva.nl/viewer.p/21/56/object/122-250803>

Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe

Sociability and networks: The Saturday Society and the Kruununhaka Circle

Associations Finnish

Cultural Field: Society

Author: Eiranen, Reetta

During the first half of the 19th century, important parts of the cultivation of Finnish culture took place in informal societies and networks. Personal relationships (kinship, friendship) were significant, with women often also playing an important role; the context was often that of Swedish-speaking literati, many of whom were engaged in supporting the Finnish cause.

The Saturday Society of the 1830s and '40s has a special position in the Finnish historical imagination: here the nation's "great men" gathered as young adults at the beginning of their careers. Among its most famous members were the future "national poet" J.L. [Runeberg](#) and the future "national philosopher" J.V. [Snellman](#). The group also included men, who, without having achieved national canonicity to the same extent, were prominent at the time; e.g. the physicist J.J. [Nervander](#) and the critic Fredrik [Cygnaeus](#), both aspiring poets. Other original central members were early-career academics such as the philosopher A.A. [Laurell](#), the theologian B.O. [Lille](#), the legal scholar J.J. [Nordström](#), the physicians M.J. [Lindfors](#) and L.I. [Ahlstube](#), and the mining engineer Fredrik [Tengström](#). Mutual friendships, many dating back to student days, were important in the group's formation. The composition varied over the years, with a gravitation towards academics. Johan Jacob [Tengström](#), for instance, had been associated with the [Turku Romantics](#).

The Saturday Society broadly discussed academic and literary issues. In later recollections the Society has been depicted as a place for witty conversation where disagreements were not avoided but eventually defused in good-natured bonhomie. In the early years, the members paid a fee for the acquisition of books from Sweden, including Swedish Romantics like [Atterbom](#), [Geijer](#) and [Tegnér](#), and translations of German classics. The group neither had a fixed meeting day nor a regular agenda.

In the national narrative, there has been a tendency to connect prominent national figures to these key social circles and institutions. Elias [Lönrot](#), for instance, an incidental guest rather than a regular member, has in posthumous representations been associated with the Saturday Society; and the Society has been erroneously linked to the establishment of the [Finnish Literature Society](#) in 1831. Some of the members were individually involved in such initiatives, of course, and also in the founding of the Helsinki [Lyceum](#).

The Saturday Society's membership was male, but after a few years a wife or sister of the host could act as a hostess for a separate women's meeting held in a different room. While the women met separately, the topics discussed by the men were communicated to them; these were discussed by the women amongst themselves and the results were passed on to the men. Also, on many evenings some of the men of the Saturday Society met while the women visited each other elsewhere. This smaller group was called the *Kruunuhaka*, after the Helsinki neighbourhood where many of them lived. Among these women were Fredrika [Runeberg](#) (née Tengström, the poet's wife and novelist; she has written about the Society in her memoirs), Fredrika's sister Carolina [Tengström](#), who married the aforementioned Johan Jacob Tengström (her cousin), and Fredrika's school friend Augusta [Lundahl](#).

Around the turn of the 1840–1850s, a new, nationally inclined Kruunuhaka Circle formed around the household of J.J. and Carolina Tengström. A second generation (the Tengströms' grown-up and married children) now formed the nucleus of a network where friendships and marriages intertwined with shared commitment to the Finnish cause.

The son, Robert [Tengström](#), was a leading figure in Finnish cultural nationalism in student life; but he died early (in 1847). Three daughters, [Sofi](#), [Helene](#) and [Natalia](#), took an interest in national issues and found their spouses in the family's Finnish-minded academic social ambience. Sofi Tengström married Herman [Kellgren](#), her brother's best friend, scholar and entrepreneur, and future Professor of Oriental Literature. Helene Tengström's spouse was the journalist Paavo [Tikkanen](#), business partner of brother-in-law Kellgren. Natalia Tengström married the prominent linguist and explorer M.A. [Castrén](#), whose ties with the family dated back to the 1830s Saturday Society.

The Tengström sons-in-law had joint projects in book-selling and book-printing, with publication activities ranging from small booklets and albums to the important Finnish-language newspaper *Suometar*. The sisters ran a convivial study group in Finnish language. The men and the women were all affiliated with the [Finnish Literature Society](#), though active membership was open to men only.

Other members of the Kruunuhaka Circle included old Saturday Society associates like J.V. Snellman (now with his wife Jeanette) and Carolina Tengström's brother Fredrik [Tengström](#). Other couples were the physician K.F. [Willebrand](#) and his wife Sofia [Willebrand](#), E.A. [Ingman](#) (physician and Finnish translator of Homer and Anacreon) with his wife Eva [Ingman](#). The Borgströms, a neighbouring merchant family, also attended the meetings. In addition to these couples, the group included young academic men such as August [Schauman](#), August [Ahlqvist](#) and Fredrik [Polén](#). Many of these were active in the Finnish Literature Society and *Suometar*.

The circle's Finnish national-mindedness led a cousin – of a different political opinion – to call it, sarcastically, “the constituent national assembly”, while noting the important role of the women: they

were both prominent and popular. The **language struggle** between Finnish and Swedish had not yet culminated, but bearing in mind the members' later political stances, most of the group (though not Snellman) wanted to advance Finnish language and culture while rejecting strict monolingualism.

Direct URL: <http://show.ernie.uva.nl/fin-17>

Eirinen, Reetta; *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi. Aate, tunteet ja sukupuoli Tengströmin perheessä 1800-luvun puolivälissä* (doctoral thesis; Tampere: Tampere University, 2019).

Eirinen, Reetta; "Emotional and Social Ties in the Construction of Nationalism. A Group Biographical Approach to the Tengström Family in nineteenth-century Finland", *Studies on National Movements*, 4 (2019), 1-38.

Havu, Ilmari; *Lauantaiseura ja sen miehet* (Helsinki: Otava, 1945).

Strömborg, J.E.; *Biografiska anteckningar om Johan Ludvig Runeberg. III Runebergs vistelse vid universitetet i Helsingfors* (Helsinki: G.W. Edlunds förlag, 1889).

Sulkunen, Irma; *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 1831–1892* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004).



All articles in the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* edited by Joep Leerssen are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <https://www.spinnet.eu>.

© the author and SPIN. Cite as follows (or as adapted to your stylesheet of choice): Eirinen, Reetta, 2022. "**Sociability and networks: The Saturday Society and the Kruununhaka Circle**", *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. Joep Leerssen (electronic version; Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms, <https://ernie.uva.nl/>), article version 1.1.1.1/a, last changed 16-03-2022, consulted 30-05-2022.