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Eesti Kultuuriühing Kanadas (Society for the Advancement of Estonian Studies in Canada)

### **Archivist's Description**

**Creator/Compiler Name:** Eesti Kultuuriühing Kanadas

**Acronym:** EKÜK

**English Name:** Society for the Advancement of Estonian Studies in Canada

**Acronym:** SAESC

**Activity:** 11.12.1980 -

**Status:** Not-For-Profit Organization

### **Tasks and Areas of Activity:**

The Society's goal at the time of establishment was: to promote Estonian culture, language, literature and history in the Canadian community; to encourage cultural activity in British Columbia; to support the study of the Estonian language, literary history and Estonian-Canadian Ethnic Studies; to assist in and support the study and teaching of these subjects with stipends, salaries, scholarships, and donations. A major goal was to establish a Chair of Estonian Studies at Simon Fraser University for research and scholarship on Estonian topics. Professor Dr. Laurence P. Kitching played a key role in the Chair's establishment by acting as the mediator between the university and the society and by assisting in raising funds for scholarships. Book donations to SFU on Finno-Ugric, Estonian and Baltic topics were organized by SAESC. Items of ethnographic significance, handicraft, folkart and the fine arts were collected.

Through the financial support to SFU by SAESC the following Estonian-themed lectures took place at Simon Fraser University from 1983-1987, being the first of their kind at a Canadian university:

- Estonians in Canada and their Cultural Heritage (Spring 1983)
- Estonian Folklore in its European Context (Fall 1983)
- Studies in Estonian Culture, Language and Literature (Spring 1984)
- Survey of Estonian Literature (Fall 1984)
- Estonians in Canada and their Cultural Heritage (Spring 1985)
- Ethnography of the Estonian & Balto-Scandinavian Regions (Fall 1985)
- Estonian Language and Linguistics Structures (Spring 1986)
- The Eastern European Presence: the Canadian Experience of Jews, Poles and the People of the Baltic States (Fall 1987)

The lectures took place under the direction of Dr. Jüta Kõvamees Kitching (6 courses) and—during her sabbatical—postgraduate Toomas Hendrik Ilves (2 courses).

The funds for the establishment of the Chair and the courses were raised by the Estonian community in Vancouver. Lecture evenings with both local and guest lecturers were organized by SAESC to raise money—every week at first, later biweekly and then once a month. On the occasion of Tartu University's 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary \$10 000 CAD was donated to Simon Fraser University, a long-term teaching schedule was proposed and course outlines presented, a scholarship by the Society for the Advancement of Estonian Studies in Canada was established and a 300 volume book donation made to the Simon Fraser University Library.

In 1983, Evi Piik Saarnok and Leo Saarnok donated to the “Endowment Fund of Estonian Studies,” which guaranteed the funds for one course that year and one stipend.

The idea to create a Chair was abandoned in BC in favour of Toronto instead, as funding from the Canadian Government could be granted only one time. The relationship with Simon Fraser University was ended in 1987 when contact was made with the University of British Columbia (UBC) in order to

create Finno-Ugric themed courses in the linguistics department with the financial support of SAESC. During the years 1986-1990 the following lectures took place at UBC:

- Introductions to Finno-Ugric Linguistics
- Estonian as Research Language in Field Methods
- Directed Studies Pertaining to Finno-Ugrics and Estonian
- Directed Reading in Topics Related to Estonian Linguistics

The lectures took place under the direction of Dr. Jutta Kõvamees Kitching (3 courses) and Dr. Zita McRobbie (1 course).

It should be mentioned that the creation of the Chair and the courses at SFU and UBC had their beginning at Laurentian University (LU), where during the years 1975-1979 the Dean Dr. J. Barry invited Drs. Laurence and Jutta Kitching to develop Finno-Ugric and Finnish language “minor” and “major” accredited bachelors programs as well as to direct the associated courses. In addition to the establishment of the program, a book donation of about 1500 volumes was donated to the university library from the Sudbury Estonian community along with a stipend, the Mirjam Kallas Memorial Award.

The Society for the Advancement of Estonian Studies in Canada organized the Forest University on the West Coast (Metsaülikool Läänekaldal, MÜLK) in 1987, 1990 and 1997.

Among some other larger projects by SAESC, besides the creation of university courses, are funding the recording of Estonian music, funding the publishing of Estonian books and their translations into English, and carrying out the erection of rear-admiral Johan Pitka’s monument in B.C..

### **Structure:**

All who supported and attended the Society establishment meeting are considered SAESC founders/directors, total 34 individuals. The total number of members has been 120-130 people. The original Board was made up of the following founders/directors:

Jutta Kitching – President; Lembit Pütsep – Vice-President; Juhan Eilau – Treasurer; Editor and other directors Hilja Hansson (Secretary), Laurence Kitching, Mart Laanemäe, Paul Lepik, Olga Männik, Irene Olljum and Mara Pütsep. The changes in directorship over the years can be found in the records.

In 1988 an independent statutes committee was added to SAESC – The Estonian Heritage Society Abroad in Vancouver.

In 2000, the Estonian Archives in Vancouver was added to the SAESC. Its largest project in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the creation of this archive with the aim to preserve the life stories of the Estonians who settled in Vancouver and area after the Second World War and of the organizations they created.

### **Information about the Description:**

Overview of the organization's activities provided by Jutta Kõvamees Kitching and Hilja Maisma Hansson – summary written by Tiiu Kravtsev