

Fellow Estonians,
Dear Friends,

The Estonian National Museum finally has a home of its own.

With the completion of this building, our debt to those individuals who cared deeply about the preservation of Estonian culture and language and who built a foundation for our independence has been repaid.

More than 100 years ago, vision and bold ideas from people like Jakob Hurt, Oskar Kallas, Villem Reiman and Jaan Tõnisson, and Kristjan Raud and Matthias Johann Eise paved Estonia's way to statehood. Alongside them stand countless legions of Estonians whose efforts to collect artefacts and folklore, much of it on a volunteer basis, helped furnish the museum with content.

The Estonian National Museum's new home is also a debt of gratitude to those who kept Estonia alive in darker, more difficult times and nurtured our hopes. In spite of the vagaries of history and others' dark designs on Estonia, we did not forsake our ideals and our determination.

Dear Friends,

This museum and these halls here in Raadi were built to honour the Estonian people and the country itself. It was built to honour our national consciousness and independence. The construction process lasted a long time, like many projects here in Estonia, but certainly the outcome is all the more distinguished and imaginative for it.

It's symbolic that we are opening the museum building in the same year that we marked the 25th anniversary of the restoration of independence. I would like to thank Tõnis Lukas, Jaanus

Plaat and Krista Aru for keeping the dream of the National Museum going for all this time.

The Estonian National Museum will support us in coping, enduring and growing in the modern world. Museums have long ceased to be mere repositories for antiques. A museum is a centre for learning and progress. In the same way, every culture and language must develop if it is to last.

In this, we have an answer a question Jakob Hurt asked right here in Tartu, at Estonia's first national song festival 40 years before the Estonian National Museum was founded. Referring to emancipation from serfdom, he asked: "How can we make truly good use of our valuable freedom?"

And of course, this museum is also a centre for our kindred Finno-Ugric peoples, a gateway to the free world for peoples whose windows and doors have been closed to it. The Estonian National Museum is a place where stateless peoples' cultural heritage is preserved, and hopefully a wellspring of new vitality.

I would like to thank all of those many, many people whose efforts made it possible for us to be here in Raadi today.

Long live the Estonian National Museum.
Long live Estonia.