

Isa Asp

1853 - 1872



Isa Asp

4.2.1853 – 12.11.1872

Statue of Isa Asp in Puolanka.
(Foto Mikko Moilanen, Puolanka)

Isa Asp was the first child of Jaakko Asp, an iron works clerk, and his wife Brita Liisa (Puhakka). She was born in the village of Niska in Utajärvi (now in the municipality of Vaala) on 4 February 1853. Jaakko Asp came from the Kinnunen family in Kivijärvi. Isa Asp was baptised Loviisa but was also known as Louise.

Isa also lived in Suomussalmi and Puolanka, besides spending one winter with her father in Sotkamo. She was particularly impressed by the beauty of the natural environment in Puolanka, as is evident in many of her poems and in a letter where she wrote:

“Quiet and modest stands our home [Parola] on a calm lake, surrounded by flowering meadows; high hills solemnly line the horizon in all directions.” (Setälä, p. 62.)

Isa was home-schooled at vicarages, by Reverend Lilius in Suomussalmi and Reverend Thauvön in Puolanka. She also attended a nursery school at the age of 6 and a girls' school at the age of 11 while living with her grandmother in Raahe. These schools were Swedish-speaking.

In autumn 1871, Isa entered the Jyväskylä teacher seminary. She was inspired by the Finnish language and the Finnish national identity. In order to write in Finnish, she was obliged to learn a completely new poetic idiom and mode of expression. While at the seminary, Isa was asked to write ceremonial poems for various occasions. These poems exhibited the young, fiery spirit of Isa, who believed firmly in a woman's right to contribute to her native land by means other than simple mundane labour.

Isa's idiom was at its most beautiful and flowing in Aallon keh-tolaulu [Lullaby for the waves], her best-known poem, which has been set to music several times. When Isa wrote this, she was already mortally ill.

Isa Asp has the distinction of being the first woman poet ever to write in Finnish. Although she died at the tragically early age of 19, she left a substantial literary legacy.

Isa has been the subject of biographies and other writings, such as the biography written by Helmi Setälä in 1912. The University of Jyväskylä, in the city where she is buried, pays her special tribute with a delegation of students visiting her grave every year on Flora's day, 13 May.



Isa Asp - Society

In spring 2004, the Kainuu Isa Asp Society was established in Puolanka to carry on the work of the Isa Asp statue committee established in 1997. A bronze statue of Isa by sculptor Niilo Rikula was unveiled in Puolanka Church Park on the 130th anniversary of her death in 2002.

The Society was renamed the Isa Asp Society in 2014. The purpose of the Society is to uphold the legacy of Isa Asp as a notable cultural personage of Kainuu and of Finland, and therefore to raise awareness of her life and her work.

Annual events of the Society in Puolanka

- 4 Feb, Isa's birthday: poetry and song evening at Kukkula house
- May Day Eve: student cap placed on Isa Asp's statue at 18.00
- 25 Aug, Loviisa's name day: rowing event from the church village waterfront to Parola and back
- 12 Nov, Isa's death day: candlelight procession of schoolchildren to Isa's statue and visit to Kukkula house to learn about Isa's life and work
- summer: Kukkula house open as and when possible, for an exhibition of Isa's life and the history of Kukkula house
- occasional art exhibitions at Kukkula house
- presence at various current event.

Society merchandise

(all books are in Finnish)

- Rauhaton ja vaahtopää. Biographical novel about Isa Asp. Jaakko Terettilä, 1951
- Kohise, villi aalto. Poems of Isa Asp. Toivo Hyyryläinen, 2003
- Kahdeksantoistavuotias sydämeni. Diaries of Isa Asp written in spring 1871. Toivo Hyyryläinen, 2004
- Perhostanssi. An allegorical, biographical novel about Isa. Jaana Janhila, 2005
- Lastenkutsut. Fairy tales and children's poems written by Isa Asp. Toivo Hyyryläinen, 2009
- T-shirts and canvas bags, biros and postcards

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*Sleep, O sleep, thou little wave,
fall asleep!
Softly hum the spruce afar,
dark and deep.
Hear them sing thy lullaby
—cease, O wave,
thy restless sigh,
fall asleep!*

Isa Asp, Aallon kehtolaulu (Lullaby of the waves)



Isa Asp - förening rf

To join the Isa Asp Society, fill out the form or send your contact details and pay the membership fee to the account of the Isa Asp Society, FI27 5366 0720 0274 54.

Annual membership is EUR 10, perpetual membership is EUR 100, and annual support membership is EUR 20.

www.isaaspseura.fi
www.isaasp.fi

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