

Åland's first UNESCO honour - Gustaf Erikson's shipping company archive included in UNESCO's Memory of the World register

The autonomous island province of Åland has today received its first UNESCO heritage honour as the Gustaf Erikson's shipping archives were included in UNESCO's World Heritage Register, thus joining the same echelon of invaluable cultural heritage as England's Magna Carta, the French Declaration of Human Rights, the Gutenberg Bible and Isaac Newton's manuscripts.

Mariehamn, the capital of Åland, is dominated by the historic tall ship Pommern. The ship, which was bought by Gustaf Erikson on 23 May 1923, is a formidable symbol of Åland's strong and unbroken seafaring tradition. Today, 100 years later to the day, we can announce that the Gustaf Erikson Shipping Archive 1913-1949 has been included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

From the 1920s onwards, Mariehamn was the home port of the world's last fleet of commercial sailing ships, and Gustaf Erikson dominated the international market. Acquired from all over the world, his beautiful sailing ships attracted attention in every harbour they entered. This interest was further enhanced by the so-called Grain Races, unofficial sail racing between Australia and England. Gustaf Erikson himself was dubbed 'King of Windjammers' by British media, voyages were described in books, newspapers and magazines, and when Erikson's sailing ship Herzogin Cecilie sank off the coast of England in 1936, it became world news.

Erikson's windjammers sailed the world's oceans, but the business was run from the office in Mariehamn. The ships provided jobs and prosperity in Åland. Almost every family had at least one family member or relative who had sailed on Erikson's ships. The long voyages also broadened the world view and encouraged entrepreneurship, a spirit that is still strong in Åland today.

UNESCO's decision to include the Gustaf Erikson Shipping Archive in the Memory of the World Register is based on its international relevance. Gustaf Erikson carefully archived all information about the ships, such as financial material related to their acquisition and equipment, logbooks, and an incredible amount of correspondence with captains, insurance companies, shipyards, and many other operators. The archive is extensive, coherent, and unique. It is an unrivalled source of information for researchers worldwide. In addition to being an excellent resource for research in business and maritime history, the archive is also a unique source for climate research as it contains logbooks with weather information from the southern oceans, an area of the world where no other ships operated during the interwar period.

The Åland Maritime Museum Trust and the Åland Provincial Archives are responsible for the material included in the archive and, together with the Government of Åland, the National Memory of the World Committee of Finland and others, have been partners in the multi-year application process that has now reached its successful conclusion.

- Inclusion in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a fantastic recognition of the worldwide value and importance of the Gustaf Erikson Archive. Åland's cultural heritage as a seafaring nation is further strengthened by this and I am today extremely happy and proud," says Annika Hambrudd, Minister of Education and Culture at the Government of Åland.

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