



Franking privileges

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◀ NYKÖPING'S
FRANKING STAMP

In the spring of 1820, the permanent secretary of the Academy of Sciences, Jöns Jacob Berzelius, was taken to court. The issue was the Academy of Sciences' franking privileges, as the deputy director-general of the Swedish Post Office suspected the Academy's members and correspondents of abusing the privilege of free postage for letters and parcels relating to scientific activities. The Academy won in that instance, but the franking privileges were a recurring source of contention in contacts with authorities, and the line between work-related and private correspondence was not easily drawn. Shortly afterwards, when a package to the curator of zoology, Johan Wilhelm Dalman, was retained by the post office because it contained more insects than described in the accompanying documentation, he became "anxious as a botanist" and went to his superior for help. Once again, Secretary Berzelius took action to set things straight and, even if he believed that the entire business of Dalman's insects was itself a "negligible issue", the matter of the franking privileges concerned both the position of the Academy within the Swedish state and the practical conditions for its activities.

Knowledge exchange was the focus of the newly formed Academy of Sciences. In the "Preparation" for the first edition of *Vetenskapsakademiens handlingar 1739* [*Transactions of the Academy of Sciences 1739*], Anders Johan von Höpken emphasised that the sciences must be saved from the "impermanence to which they are subject whilst they are hidden and guarded by the few" – and with a broader distribution across land and people, "new findings and inventions" could come to "public use, public instruction and service". In many ways, the *Transactions* were both the focus of, and the glue that held together, the Academy's activities; they were an incentive to create knowledge, a means

PAGES from the Academy's ledger for recording franked letters. ▶

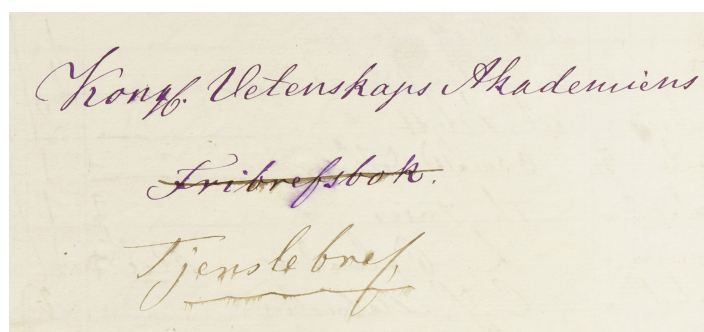
Juli				Augusti	
Uppsala	23	T. R. Thelen		2	
"	"	M. v. Paal		1	
Franck	"	O. Heer		2	
Hamburg	"	V. Gorden		1	
Wien	"	E. Fenzl		1	
Amsterdam	26	C. A. Frank	dekonamul	1	78
Baltimore	25	D. R. Uhler	de	6	48
"	"	de	de	6	68
London	26	Cl. Markham	x	2	
Filipstad	"	G. Ekman	x	2	
Göteborg	"	Njellman		3	74
Göteborg	27	Th. Neovius		1	
Sölvisborg	"	C. Fathin		1	
Abo	"	C. M. Reuter		1	50
Göteborg	28	F. R. Njellman		2	50
Wien	29	C. Bounner von Meltnorff		1	24
Wien	30	C von Litrow		1	24
"	"	Loge 2 brfa Samerka		2	24
Wien	31	O. Heer		2	68
<u>Augusti</u>					
Wien	1	A. Bahgute		1	
Maidelberg	"	R. H. Huncer		1	36
ostre Esby	2	A. G. Nathorst		1	
Estaf	"	A. Westelius		1	
Lulea	"	H. A. Medmark		1	
Katrineholm	"	Th. Chenkrona		1	48
Calelas	"	Th. Chelmer Masen		1	24
Göteborg	"	A. W. Malm		1	
Wien	"	E. Fenzl		1	
Finsbury	4	Th. C			
Wien	"	A. C			
Cambridge	"	H. A			
Wien	"	A. T			
Christiana	"	H.			
Wien	"	N.			
Bremen	6	N. &			
Wien	"	F.			
Wien	"	K.			
Linköping	7	E. M.			
Wien	8	R. T.			
Wien	"	R. T.			
Cambridge	"	A. v.			
Katrineholm	"	Th.			
London	10	H. c			
Petersburg	"	H.			
Christiana	"	F. Caeta			
Wien	"	F. Caeta			
Wien	"	117			
Chateaufort	13	Cher			
Wien	14	A. c			
Falun	"	H. v.			
London	"	(A.)			
London	17	W.			
Färöarna	"	H.			
Wien	"	Sten			
Wien	"	O.			
Breslau	"	F.			
Breslau	"	F.			

Resolutor	1	
V. Hoffmeyer	1	
Gray	1	
H. Crottingius	2	
Mahn	5	
Hoffmeyer	5	3 22
Siedmen	1	
Holt	1	
...	1	60
Agensler <u>ans. Paket</u>	9,20	170
Helm	2	
Helm	2	
Newton	1	82
Comprova Rec.	1	30
Scott	1	
Weld	1	
...	1	
...	1	
...	1	251
...	1	37
Wybander	3	86
Chhtröm	1	12
Boucard	1	34
ight	1	
Müller	1	
berg	2	
Fleen	1	77
Römer	4	
Römer	1	100





FRANKED LETTER with Nyköping's franking stamp, sent to the county governor in Gothenburg.



POSTAGE REGULATIONS were changed in 1873 and franking privileges were replaced by the “official letter”.

of disseminating it, and an enduring archive of the achievements of Swedish and Academy scientists. The knowledge exchange depended on members being able to benefit from the knowledge of scholars and the public at home and abroad, through subscriptions to foreign journals, book imports, library activity and, not least, a vast network of correspondents.

It also required significant resources. Prior to 1810, printing privileges as well as the import of both printing paper and foreign publications entailed fees and restrictions. Postage was expensive and, in wartime, postal services were slow, hazardous and limited to certain countries and routes. The circulation of knowledge thus required considerable financial assets and good relations with the state authorities, from the King in Council and the main postal directorate to local post carriers, printers and customs officers.

When, in 1739, the newly founded Academy of Sciences placed advertisements in the newspapers, inviting provincial residents to correspond with the Academy about useful arts and sciences, three of the six founding members donated a total of two hundred daler in silver coin to cover the cost of this correspondence. However, a few years later the Academy succeeded in obtaining franking privileges. Letters to or from the King in Council, the collegium and others who were part of state authorities had long been sent for free and, over time, a number of people and institutions, more or less linked to the state apparatus, were granted franking privileges. The Academy of Sciences received particularly advantageous treatment, since the privilege applied to both incoming and outgoing post; the Academy's officers and its members and correspondents, inside and outside the country, could send letters and packages relating to scientific activities free of charge. Letters from abroad often had to be paid for on collection and inspection at the *Cancellie Collegium*, but fairly soon the Academy also received franking privileges for its foreign correspondence, which could then be slipped into the diplomatic mail. The franking privilege was announced in both the Academy's own *Transactions* and in other newspapers, so that the cost of postage would not make the public hesitate about whether to send findings and questions to the Academy.

Those who wanted to use the franking privilege had to present the correspondence at the nearest post office and have it sealed with the office's stamp. The Academy used its own stamp and registered its freely franked letters in special ledgers. In 1873, when franking privileges became the "official letter", the Academy and the other institutions that were entitled to use official letters could buy special official stamps, for which they received compensation after presenting their accounts. But the process was arduous for everyone involved, and from 1920 the Post Office instead received payment for official letters via state funding, calculated as a proportion of the postal service's total income from stamps. This percentage increased in accordance with regular and extensive reviews of official letters.

The franking privilege and official letters were therefore both expensive and labour-intensive, and it was in the Academy's best interest to cultivate its relationship with the postal service. Director-general of the Post Office, Leonard von Klinckowström, was elected a member in 1750, just after the Academy had received free postage for foreign correspondence and, almost a century later, it was still deemed prudent to remain in the good graces of the Post Office's franking privilege scribe by awarding him, as a Christmas gift in 1839, an annual gratuity of ten riksdaler banco, "as recompense for his trouble with the Academy's letters". In fact, franking privileges had been a stumbling block for the postal service since the 17th century, both when it was contracted to individual profit-driven leaseholders and when the royal

Post Office attempted to avoid financial losses in state administration. The many non-public institutions that were given privileges were particularly controversial. Even if franking privileges were primarily for official letters from various state agencies and authorities, they were eventually expanded to include medical institutions, insurance offices and voluntary defence associations, as well as a fairly mixed bag of learned societies, scholarship foundations and charity organisations. In contrast, institutions that essentially served the public, such as state pilotage services and the Geological Survey, had to pay for their correspondence themselves. In association with the new postal charter of 1873, in which franking privileges were replaced by official letters, the Post Office Board complained about the system's enormous cost and lack of consistency. Despite this, the number of institutions that were entitled to official letters continued to grow, along with the expanding state administration and with the state's approval.

Another vexation for the Post Office was the distribution of newspapers and journals. Practices and funding were complicated and the subject of continual renegotiation. The Academy of Sciences had received the benefit of postage-free subscriptions to foreign journals as early as 1810, and also obtained free postage rights for all Swedish citizens for journals "in the practical Sciences" – but with a number of exceptions in order to avoid abuse. This made the Academy a communications centre in the field of scientific journals, partly as the agent for its members' subscriptions, partly through its continually expanding library, where anyone – at least in theory – could read about the most recently published research in the outside world.

But the distribution of printed matter was not just an issue for the Academy of Sciences. In the years following the new Freedom of the Press Act of 1810, the Swedish Riksdag made a number of decisions about varying degrees of free postage for all daily newspapers – not solely the state's own *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* – for "the growth of Literature and promotion of public enlightenment". In 1815, this benefit was extended to publications that were considered to "contribute to the dissemination of both economic and scientific subjects".

In theory, printed papers (newspapers, journals and magazines) thus had free postage, but subscriptions were associated with numerous charges and regulations. The Post Office consistently complained about all the extra work and all the charges that the franking privileges caused, but the King in Council turned a deaf ear. The rapidly growing number of printed papers increased this discontent – in the 1870s, the Post Office Board calculated that these constituted around 60 per cent of the total weight of all distributed post. The official letters made up another 12 per cent which, from the perspective of the Post Office, meant that it did not receive proper payment for more than 28 per cent of the post it handled.

The Post Office persisted in its attempts to remove or at least limit official letters, but without success. After an enquiry in 1973, the Riksdag decided that non-state institutions should lose their franking privileges, but so slowly and cautiously that nothing happened. It was only when the Swedish state imposed significant savings measures in its finances in the 1980s that limitations were imposed on official letters, which led to the undoing of the entire system. Official letters, as had been stated in 1973, amounted to a hidden subsidy, and should appear in budgets and accounts in the same way as all other expenses. Regulations for the distribution of newspapers and journals also changed in the 1980s. The special interest the state had shown in the circulation of knowledge, through regulations, privileges and subsidies, finally seemed about to be dismantled.

The Academy of Sciences lost the right to official letters in the same period as it lost the almanac monopoly, and its position as review body for conservation issues was taken over by the newly formed Environmental Protection Board. This can be considered indicative of the Academy's changing societal role, with its function as an unofficial scientific state agency being watered down. In a wider perspective, it can be seen as part of a wider change in Swedish public administration, in which old institutions were replaced by new ones, and by discussion that increasingly questioned the performance of public administration.

However, the history of franking privileges does highlight the crucial importance of the circulation of knowledge, both for the state and for the Academy of Sciences. This is also apparent in the contents of the letters that were sent free of charge, in Sweden and around the world, by the Academy's members and correspondents. Strikingly, they often deal with this circulation itself: with delivery problems, with Dalman's insects that were held at the post office, with books that were searched for and sent on loan, with rock samples on the way to analysis at German chemists, with scientific illustrations journeying between photographers, scholars and publishers.

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The Academy of Sciences' use of the franking privilege can be followed through its franking privilege ledgers, and later its official letter ledgers. The frustrations about the system felt by the Post Office and its predecessors are described in Magnus Linnarsson, *Postgång på växlande villkor: Det svenska postväsendets organisation under stormaktstiden* (Lund, 2010) and Nils Forssell, *Svenska postverkets historia* (Stockholm, 1936), and finally in the enquiry *Begränsning av tjänstbrevsrätten: Betänkande*, published by 1973's official letters' review board (Stockholm, 1974). The special problems associated with newspaper distribution – from the Post Office's perspective – are described in Olov Bergling's *Posten och pressen: Postens distribution av tidningar fr o m år 1645 med tonvikt på tiden 1955–1986* (Stockholm, 1988).