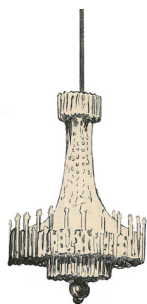


DETAIL from an illustration of the Academy of Sciences' Annual Meeting in 1877. ▶



The Annual Meeting

Jenny Beckman

On 14 April 1877, *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* [New Illustrated Journal] published an account of the recent “Annual Meeting of the Swedish Academy of Sciences”. Among those who had had “the privilege of listening to lectures about scientific progress, which at the Annual Meeting were given by the Academy’s professors and curators at the Swedish Museum of Natural History”, were the members of the Academy, the crown prince and his younger brothers – and two-thirds of the room was occupied by “the general public, for whom this gathering has long been a favourite event”.

All of these people were visible in the picture in the journal – mostly in tailcoats, but there were also some women – lined up in Stora Börssalen, the Great Exchange Hall, each with their assigned role and place. The crown prince’s brothers, representatives of the state that provided the Academy with funding, commissions and status, were on the royal stand. The crown prince shared the podium with Academy officials, who resembled their colleagues at universities and public authorities in rank and occupation – and, in turn, the university professors, in their capacity as Academy members, were placed in a semi-circle around the presiding committee. A large audience sat listening behind the railing, as consumers of scientific and technological progress and as educators of future Academy members. Half a century earlier, the public were instead correspondents and the suppliers of scientific observations.

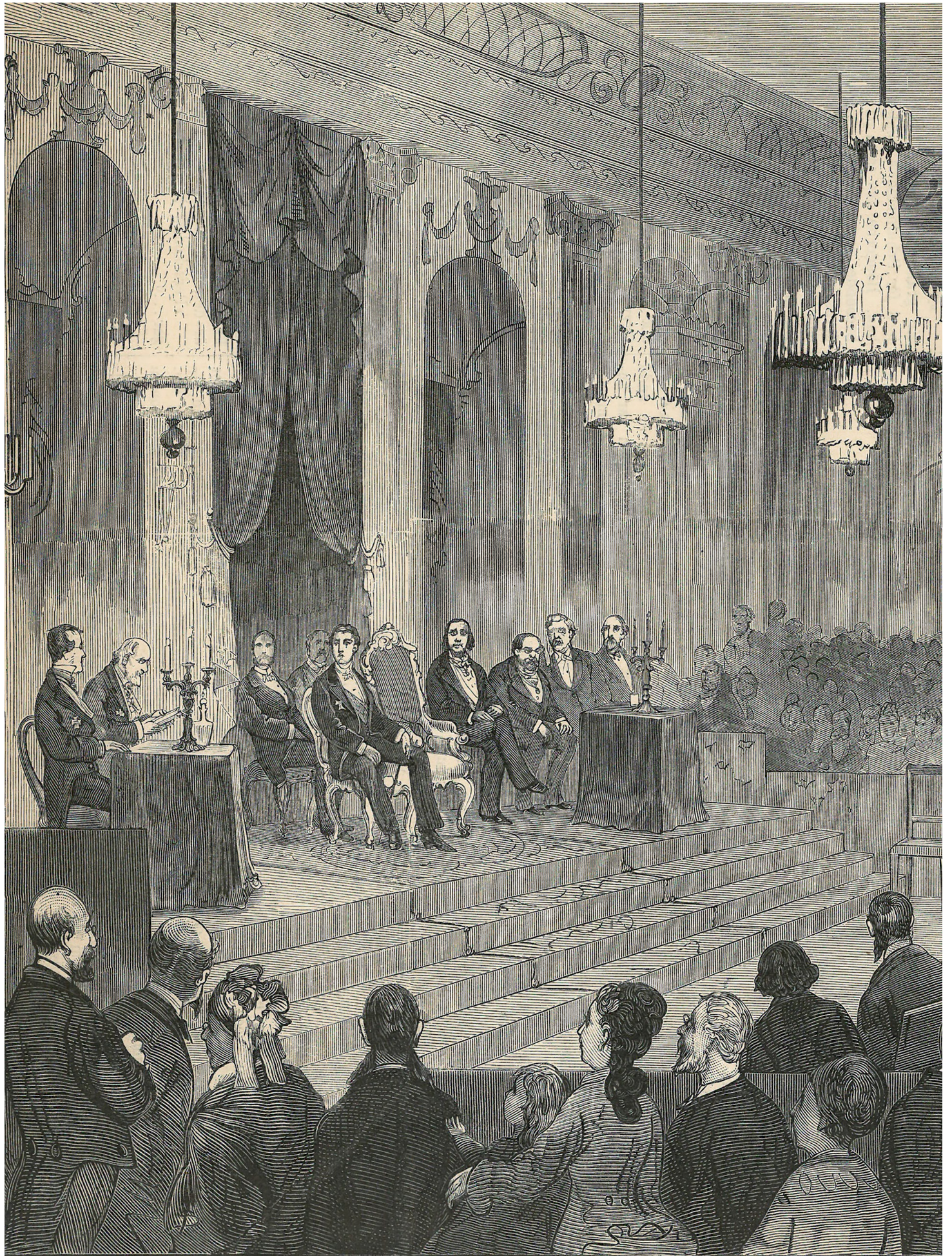
By 1877, the Academy of Sciences’ Annual Meeting had been celebrated for more than fifty years, first in the Academy’s own building, but eventually in the larger and more splendid Stora Börssalen on Stortorget, the square in the middle of Stockholm. The Annual Meeting had been established in 1821 by the permanent secretary, Jöns Jacob Berzelius. Every year, on 31 March,

the Academy opened its doors to provide the public with a glimpse of its scientific activities in the form of annual reports and prize ceremonies.

The Annual Meeting was one of several changes in the procedures of the Academy that were introduced in the first decades of the 19th century, several of them with Berzelius at the helm. One such was the change to the procedure for electing new academy members. Previously, all Academy members could nominate candidates, regardless of qualifications or in which of the classes places were available, and decisions were then taken by the Academy in pleno. Berzelius disapproved of the way in which social status and congeniality were able to trump scientific reputation, the final straw coming in 1813, when the pastor of Stockholm's reformed congregation ("a respected man of letters, but lacking all real scientific training", according to Berzelius) gained more votes in the selection of foreign members than renowned scientists, such as the astronomer William Herschel and the chemist William Wollaston. "Is this an academy of sciences?" exclaimed Berzelius, "loudly, in a state of great consternation". The following year he succeeded in carrying out reforms that gave each class greater responsibility for nominating members that fulfilled its requirements for scientific knowledge and expertise, thus making the Academy's classes more specialised and autonomous.

As part of this reorganisation, the Academy also ended the practice of announcing 'prize questions', where anyone could compete for awards by submitting answers to questions about everything from beekeeping to spotted fevers. Instead, prizes were generally awarded within its own circle, with gold medals given to authors of scientific works of "exceptional value", such as Göran Wahlenberg's *Flora Suecica* and Sven Nilsson's *Skandinavien fauna*.

As Academy members became a more homogeneous group of teachers and scholars, the public was granted other roles in its activities. The main feature of the Annual Meeting was annual reports on scientific progress, delivered by the Academy's officials. Berzelius' express intention was to make the world's scientific knowledge more accessible – and more serviceable – by gathering it in one place and explaining it in Swedish. "It shows due respect to the public to, at least once a year, describe what has been achieved, and this presentation can become an incentive to achievement." From 1844, summaries of lectures and announcements made at the Academy's meetings were printed in *Öfversigt af Kongl. Vetenskaps-akademiens förhandlingar* [Overview of the Proceedings of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences], in addition to the specialist essays published in *Vetenskapsakademiens handlingar* [Transactions of the Academy of Sciences].



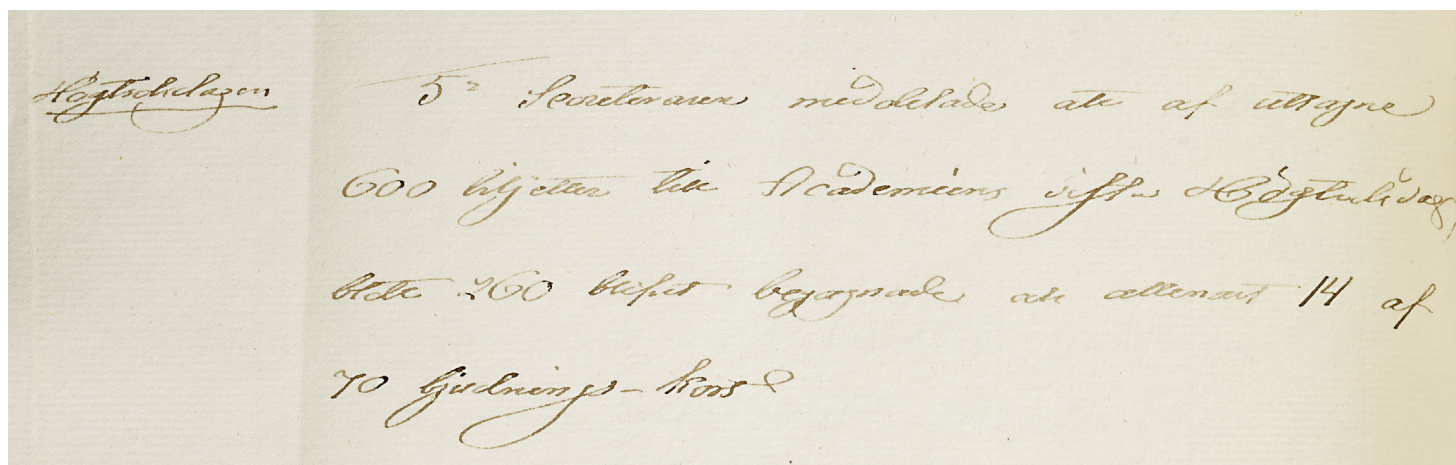
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SVENSKA VETENSKAPSAKADEMIENS ÅRSHÖGTID. Sammankomsten p



å Stora Børssalen i Stockholm den 3 april 1877. Tecknad af C. LARSSON.

14.4.1877



IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY, there was no certainty that the Academy would succeed in disposing of all the tickets to the Annual Meeting, something that was occasionally mentioned in the minutes.

The collections of the Academy provided further evidence that the public should be entitled to insight into and participation in Academy activities. The natural history cabinet – the botanical, zoological and mineralogical museum of the Academy – had indeed been open to visitors a day a week since the end of the 18th century, but the situation changed in 1819, when King Charles XIV John tasked the Academy with managing the “Swedish Museum of Natural History” that the state had been gifted. As the number of specimens increased, the Academy continually requested new funding for housing and maintaining the collections and, in return, the government increased its demands that the museum be open and accessible to the public. After decades of extensions, most of the Academy building on Drottninggatan was occupied by the Museum of Natural History, and the Academy found itself housed in symbiosis with the state.

In 1873, the Academy of Sciences assumed responsibility for another institution, the Central Meteorological Office. The task of managing state institutions was just one of several expressions of the increasing strength of the Academy’s links with the state. When the Academy was founded in 1739, its purpose was to be a flexible, modern alternative to universities and public authorities, which were burdened with bureaucracy and the education of officials. However, over time, the Academy received royal approval – the almanac monopoly and royal patronage – as well as tasks. Between 1828 and 1866 it was furthermore entitled to send two representatives to the Swedish Riksdag, just like the universities in Uppsala and Lund, each of which also contributed two members of parliament. At the same time, the Academy’s

own officials also had their status as professors validated by the king and became equivalent – almost – to the universities. Increasingly, this was how members made their living, and universities turned into allies rather than competitors. In the 1820s, the Academy was given responsibility for formulating a proposal for regulating the Swedish system of measurement, and functioned as a review and consultation body on issues ranging from patents and inventions to rules for aquavit testing. Over the course of the century, the Academy increasingly began to resemble a scientific government office. Thus it appears to be a deliberate mistake that the Annual Meeting is not celebrated on 2 June – the date the Academy was founded in 1739 – but on 31 March, when its principles were ratified by the king in 1741.

The establishment of Annual Meeting in 1821 was not the result of a sudden desire to reach out to the public. It was part of a more extensive reorganisation of the Academy of Sciences in the 19th century, and can be regarded as an expression of its changing position – in relation to the state, to universities and public authorities, and to the public who were invited to its activities. Still, it took a while for the new order to become established, and for the Academy of Sciences to become part of 19th-century public culture. The Academy made efforts to encourage public interest through free entry tickets and invitations but, in the first few decades, the minutes recorded recurring comments of distress about ignored invitations and unused tickets. Visitor numbers started to rise towards the middle of the century and, in 1877, the Annual Meeting was an event worth documenting in the weekly press. The artist responsible for the woodcut in *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* was Carl Larsson, himself on the way to Paris and his own efforts, with Karin Bergöö, to reshape the image of Swedish public culture.

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Berzelius' own description of the origin of Annual Meeting is found in his *Självbiografiska anteckningar* (Stockholm, 1901), and his biographer H. G. Söderbaum has provided his version in "Ett hundraårsminne", *Kungl. svenska vetenskapsakademiens årsbok*, 1921. The Academy of Sciences' role as administrator of the state's Swedish Museum of Natural Science and everything this entailed in the form of property funding and relations with other state institutions is discussed in Jenny Beckman, *Naturens palats: Nybyggnad, vetenskap och utställning vid Naturhistoriska riksmuseet 1866–1925* (Stockholm, 1999). On the 19th century's illustrated weekly press, see Lena Johannesson, *Xylografi och pressbild: Bidrag till trägravvyrens och till den svenska bildjournalistikens historia* (Stockholm, 1982).