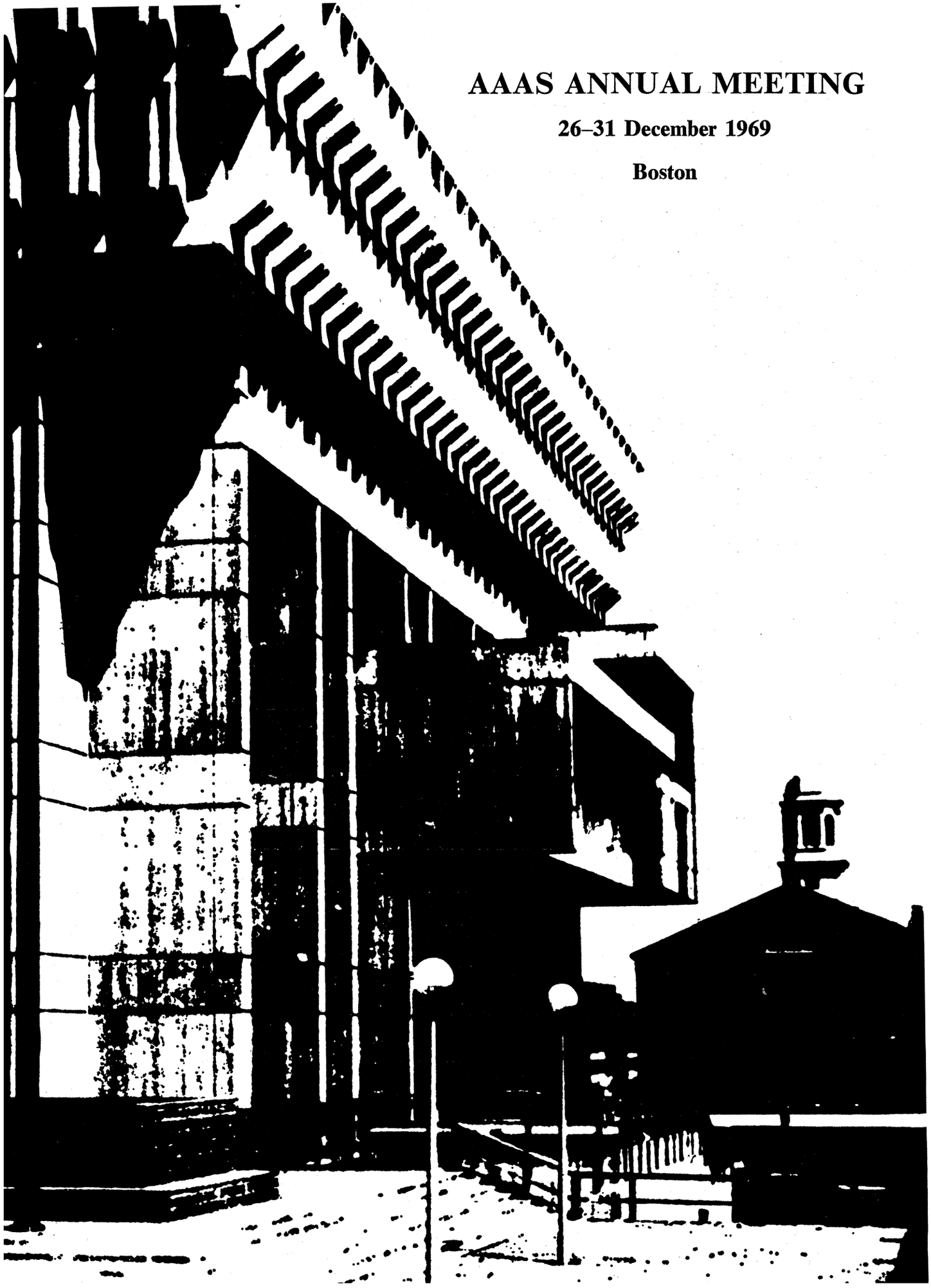
AAAS ANNUAL MEETING

26–31 December 1969

Boston



Perspectives on the Promise of the Present

Walter G. Berl, Meeting Editor

". . . It is imperative that the present dispersion and complication of scientific labor be counterbalanced by the complementary kind of scientific activity, striving toward the concentration and consolidation of knowledge. . . . The destiny of science is at stake."

In its long history of more than 100 years, the AAAS Annual Meeting has faithfully mirrored current needs and practices. For most of these years the direction was toward larger meetings and increased specialization. This trend has now come to a halt. New objectives, deeply embedded in the purpose of the AAAS but not exploited heretofore with great vigor, have come to the fore. The strongest strains are (i) an obligation to present to the public, with whatever tools are currently available, a report on the opportunities and the problems arising from the intensive cultivation of scientific research; (ii) to interpret, at a sophisticated level, to scientists the relevance of the advances in each branch of science to the others; (iii) to assist new groups with novel interdisciplinary points of view during the difficult early stages of their growth; and (iv) to build bridges to other human activities—to the arts, architecture, the law, business—that have been profoundly affected by the insights of science.

How are these objectives to be carried out? First is content: to discuss the most exciting, the most puzzling, the thorniest questions so that their significance is accessible to all. Second is form: to fashion an interplay with the city in which the meeting is held, with its people and with its institutions. Third comes method: to make use of all communication methods so that the proceedings become available to the widest audience.

The summary of topics of this year's Meeting (pages 1151–1155) groups them under ten major headings. Listing by traditional disciplines is inadequate for subjects that fit into conventional categories only with great difficulty. Major issues are illuminated from as many vantage points as possible, so that their complexities can be explored in both depth and breadth.

An extraordinarily stimulating interaction with the host city is in sight. Many establishments that can ordinarily be seen only with great difficulty will open their gates and welcome visitors. Throughout Boston and Cambridge exhibits on a wide variety of topics will be on view. If current plans materialize, the traditional commercially oriented exhibit will be supplemented by exhibits of ideas, of work in progress, of research under way. The Boston Symphony Orchestra will play. There will be a special discussion on Science and Music at the New England Conservatory of Music. In subsequent issues of *Science* a number of symposia will be described in more detail, as will be the Tours, Exhibits, and Special Events. It is hoped that they will appeal to a broad audience and, particularly, to young people who, at the beginning of their careers, should have an opportunity to see a picture of the current contributions of science broadly, clearly, and without distortion.

Continuing with the efforts of the past 2 years, arrangements are being made with the Boston Educational Television Station WGBH-TV, with the Eastern Educational Network, and with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to telecast, in color, major segments of the more general programs during the day, supplemented by five 1-hour periods in the evening. In this way, issues and points of view will be presented to a public that would normally not be expected to attend a AAAS Meeting in person. The more recent effort to audiotape a substantial number of symposia for later distribution (see *Science*, 11 April 1969, pages 113–117) will be expanded and speeded. These undertakings, supplemented by extensive coverage by science writers and the normal process of publication, are intended to make the substance of the discussions widely known.

Two matters remain largely for future exploration. One urgent need confronting the scientific community is to filter out from the enormous annual output those relatively few contributions that add new basic insights, fundamental interpretations, or stimulating suggestions and to present them lucidly to an audience. The 21 sections of the AAAS, covering the entire spectrum of science and technology, are considering how to carry out this difficult assignment. If successful it would be an admirable résumé and forecast of important trends, useful on many levels of the scientific endeavor.

A second matter for the future is to make contact with people, both in this country and abroad, who would profit by attending the AAAS Annual Meeting. For the first time this year, the British Association will send three young observers to Boston. This number could easily be increased by more than a hundredfold with students, teachers, science administrators, and others whose needs for broad perspectives cannot be met solely by the professional societies to which they owe their primary allegiance. If the AAAS Annual Meeting concentrates its efforts on matters that transcend specialized interests it will play a vital role of unifying, and critically interpreting, a function for which no other institution is as adequately organized.

These, then, are the prospects for the 1969 Boston Meeting and beyond. For its success, it will require the sympathetic understanding and critically alert attention of the members of the AAAS and of the larger public on whose support ultimately depends the future.