Out of the Ivory Tower

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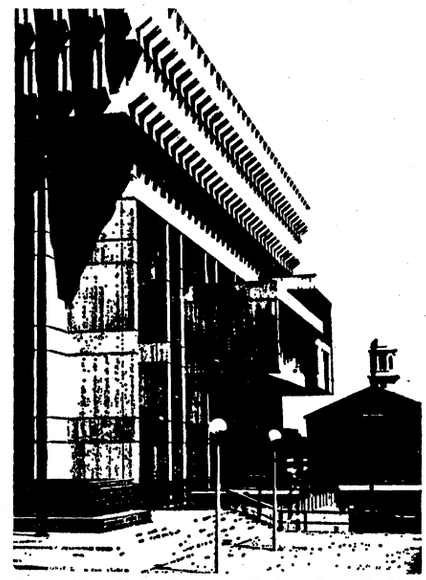

(Left) City Hall, Boston. (Right) Faneuil Hall.

Strong bonds of affection exist between Boston and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Two hundred years after the first covey of students enrolled in Boston and Roxbury Latin Schools, starting a love affair with knowledge of which the city has never tired, the American Association for the Promotion of Science (its old designation) was founded. The year was 1847, in an era of unassuming proportions, and the Association declared for itself a general and modest purpose "designed to embrace all labourers in Physical Science and Natural History."

Two proper Harvard Bostonians, the philosopher Benjamin Pierce and the universal genius Louis Agassiz, were the godfathers of the new association. William Barton Rogers, a Bostonian-to-be, was its real father. It was baptized in Boston by formal incorporation of the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1874. Ever since, the Association has returned to its spiritual home as often as its peripatetic wanderings around the country permitted.

The thread that runs through the scores of meetings held steadily since 1848 is the conviction that the exploration of the world through science would open doors for all who are willing to go on this perilous and exciting journey. All manner of men joined its ranks and contributed to its deliberations. The indomitable Captain John Wesley Powell, traversing the rapids of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon for the first time and not returning until his task was done, was one of its illustrious presidents. William Barton Rogers, continuing his good works by establishing the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, returned to the AAAS as its president, treating the Association to what must have been a memorable meeting in Boston in 1880, with Agassiz, Asa Gray, Benjamin Pierce, Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison in attendance. The Boston community periodically gave its best men to help with the Association's tasks—Edmund B. Wilson, Charles W. Eliot, Theodore W. Richards, Karl T. Compton, James B. Conant, Alfred S. Romer, Don K. Price.

What of the present and the future? More than at any time in the past, the Association's efforts are turning toward one of the functions deeply embedded in its charter: "To increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress." This is done from a conviction that a well-informed citizenry is vital to the future of our country and, in fact, of the world. It comes from a realization that the interpretation of the most subtle questions can be made accessible to anyone with a willingness to know. It rests on a belief that the interactions among the branches of science and the interconnections with all other important human endeavors have now become so intimate that only the large view will suffice.

What may seem like a bewildering array of topics under discussion at the 1969 Boston meeting falls quite readily into 11 large compartments: Hunger, Food and Malnutrition; the Design and Nature of Cities; Family and Population Problems; the Earth, the Solar System and the Cosmos; Health, Disease and Behavior; Social and Political Interactions; Ethics, Morals, Philosophy and History; Life and the Living Earth; Affairs of Technology, Economics and Business; Education, Learning and Communication; and the Interaction with the Arts.

Within each topic people with widely differing training and backgrounds will grapple with questions that will bend only under such a multi-pronged attack. They will speak and they will listen. The interested layman will be welcome to watch and to ponder.

From this intense effort, three general themes emerge: a widespread *concern* that massive problems are awaiting solutions—problems that have frequently arisen not because of previous failures but because of spectacular successes (the concern with the quality of life being one of them); an *impatience* to get on with the search to understand who we are, how we function and what we can do well together; and *hope* that the thirst for knowledge, kindled in the Boston Latin School so long ago, will not result in failure but that, without it, the wise husbandry of the earth will not be possible.

In this light, the AAAS meeting in Boston acquires a special significance. By reminding one of the past it helps to illuminate the present. By its concern for the present, it expresses its compassion for the future.